

## The Divine Warrior

God as Commander-in-Chief

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I thought I would give you something based on the book of Joshua as we have been going through it. My last couple of messages on the book of Joshua have covered a few of its major themes in the two sermons I gave about the miracles there.

Since Joshua is a book about Israel's **conquest** of Canaan, one major theme has featured prominently in all this, and that is warfare and all its associated topics and accoutrements, as the French would say. All but one of the four miracles in Joshua deal directly with battles, and even the one that does not deal directly with the battle, which would be the crossing of the Jordan River by the people of Israel, could be seen as a strategic advance or a military maneuver. Take it at face value. What it was was an invasion, a military invasion. They just took all the people with them. Especially we know there that when they crossed over, the people from Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, all their military men went over with them to fight. So even the crossing of the Jordan can be seen in a military way.

The only significant part of the book of Joshua that does not deal with war is the division of the land. It is a large section that runs between Joshua 13 and Joshua 21, and a lot of people skip right over that because it says, the borders of Ephraim are this tree and this rock and, you know, this other stream and does not seem to have much of interest in it. But it is actually very interesting and I think it has to do with not only God is going to use that somewhere probably in the Millennium to reallocate the land to the people, but it also shows a bit of their pride in their newfound territory because they had conquered it. They had achieved that goal of the conquest of the land.

Anyway, thinking about this theme of warfare, the squeamish and the liberal among the commentators find all this warfare and, as they would call it these days, ethnic cleansing of the Amorites, to be disturbing and unsettling because they cannot reconcile God with doing such things. They claim that it

is at odds with the character of the God of love and compassion that they see in the New Testament. Thus, they frequently claim that the Old Testament's substantial use of holy war and of God acting like a divine warrior is not intrinsic to God, not something that He necessarily advocates, but they say it is heavily influenced by the literature of other nations. So that is the way they kind of put it off to the side and say this is not really God's way. This was just the Israelites copying the Syrians or the Assyrians or the people of Tyre or Sidon or Egypt in their literature.

These other nations had warrior gods like Baal. Baal was a warrior God of the Canaanites. I do not know if you are aware of this, but the Egyptian god of war was one called Montu or Montu-Ra. You do not hear very much of Montu-Ra. He is connected a little bit with the god Ra, but you know, we hear about other ones like Isis and such. Ashur was the warrior God of Syria. He is actually in the Bible because he is the father of the Assyrians. And you have heard of Marduk of the Babylonians. He was their warrior god, and we know probably more prominently Ares of the Greeks and Mars of the Romans; they were also gods of war.

So to these commentators, they just look at the history of the ancient Near East and say the Israelites were just like all the rest and they had a war God and He was their divine warrior and they wrote about Him in the way that the countries about them did.

Now, this inability to understand this idea of God as a divine warrior and all the wars that happened under God's direction in the Old Testament, stands in stark contradiction to the fact that the Bible—and not just the Old Testament, but from Genesis to Revelation—is absolutely replete with statements, allusions, illustrations, prophecies, types, and narratives about God being a divine warrior.

That is how He presents Himself in many occasions. He is the warrior King of Israel. I mean, how clear can it get when Moses says in Exodus 15,

**Exodus 15:3** The Lord is a man of war [that is really quite upfront]; the Lord is His name.

And not only that, when you get to the Psalms, David writes in Psalm 18:34, which also appears in II Samuel 22:35, that God teaches my hands to make war.

So we are going to go for the next, hopefully about 50 minutes, to delve into this concept of God as a divine warrior, or as *the* Divine Warrior.

It is one of the most frequent images of Him in the Old Testament, and it is among the oldest images of God in the whole Bible. And unlike the progressive commentators, we need to understand this subject properly because it provides us insight into His righteous character, as well as His position over Israel, and not just Israel, but the church and the whole world in actuality. And as we will see in a moment, it should increase our godly fear because He is not a God to be opposed. And you know what? He never loses. When He goes to battle, He always wins, and you do not want to be on the wrong end of that.

Let us go to Exodus 14. This is one of the earliest places where we see God acting as a warrior for Israel. Now this is the Red Sea crossing. We are going to read bits and pieces throughout this whole chapter. We will start in verse 5 and read down through verse 10 to begin.

**Exodus 14:5-10** Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people, and they said, "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon. And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

Let us skip down to verse 13.

**Exodus 14:13-19** And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see them again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." And the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them.

Now down to verse 24.

**Exodus 14:24-28** Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty [I'll say]; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians." Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen." And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained.

Of course, the children of Israel were safely, then, on the other side and did not lose a person as far as we know.

It is for this very reason that we see in chapter 14 that in Exodus 15, verse 3, Moses said, "The Lord is a man of war." He saw Him at work, and he praised Him in this song of Moses as the great Warrior of Israel, who would fight for them and give them victory.

Now, this episode in Exodus 14 sets down several of the common factors that occur when God acts as a warrior. It is kind of a little template, we could call it, about how God works. And we will go into the reasons in a minute.

But oftentimes, as in this one, God allows His people to get into a situation that they cannot overcome, or maybe put it another way, where only *He* can overcome the situation. And then He promises to fight for them and tells them not to fear. "Don't worry, I'm here. I can fight your battles for you."

And He watches over His people. He is very mindful of them. He makes sure that they do not come to harm and gives them proper instruction. And then He leads the enemy into a trap that He springs, and He miraculously decimates them. And after that, His people come out on the other side essentially unscathed and free to carry on without fear of their enemy because they have been totally destroyed. He does this time and time again.

I do not know why they did not expect it all the time because He was very willing to do that in many cases.

Now verse 14, which we read, "The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." is the first instance in which God promises to fight for His people appears. So this is the first time we see this promise in the Bible. Moses somehow—probably because he had a better relationship with God and more intense than we understand from what we get in the Bible—but he understood this principle and knew that God's intervention would be the only way that they would survive against Pharaoh and his army, so he figured God had a reason He was leading them to Sinai.

He was going to give them His law, so God would have to get them out of this. And that is how it turned out. If you look, you do not even have to read

between the lines here, Israel did nothing for this victory to occur unless, well, I guess you could call walking nothing compared to actually having to fight or defend themselves and their property as they were escaping, but that is all they did.

They walked across the Red Sea and came out on the other side. God did everything else. He held off the Egyptians with the pillar of fire, and He let them come in to the Red Sea, to the dry land, and then He said, Moses, raise that rod, and the waters came back and killed all the Egyptians. So the Israelites did not have to do anything but walk across that dry land, that miraculous dry land, which it looked like it would fall in on them at any time. In faith they had to get through that. A little bit of test of faith, and God did all the rest.

The event which we see here in Exodus 14 is a type of Christ's victory over Satan. And how much did you have to do for Christ to claim victory over Satan? You did not have to do anything. He did all of that.

All we have to do when we accept Christ as our Savior is tantamount to what the Israelites did in walking across the Red Sea. We have to show a little bit of faith and move forward, and that is why it is very clear that the Red Sea miracle is a type of baptism. When we are initiated, if you will, into the Body of Christ and accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and our sins are put away.

So this has, of course, very much to do with us and understanding how God works so that we can apply this in our own lives in a spiritual way. God is still willing to fight for us just as He was for the Israelites back 3,500 years ago. So the writers of the Old Testament understood this, that this event in Exodus 14 was uber-significant to God's plan, and they speak about it frequently.

In the Psalms and in the Prophets they are always alluding to this Red Sea crossing because it was so significant in setting down a lot of the basic understanding of how God deals with our enemies and what He wants us to do. That is, God will fight for you. You shall hold your peace, and then He tells Moses, move forward. Just have faith.

Now, we did not read verse 31. I want to now, and we will see what Israel, even unconverted Israel at the time, understood.

**Exodus 14:31** Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.

So witnessing this divine act of deliverance, for which they did almost nothing, created in them godly fear. The right kind of fear. They understood, seeing all this happening right before them. And not just this particular thing, but all the miracles, the plagues of Egypt, the Passover and all that. They understood that their God was not a God to mess with. He was a good God, a great God, a powerful God, and you did not want to get on His bad side at all. At least that is probably how they looked at it as a physical people.

For us, of course, we do not want to sin and incur His wrath. But in this case, they learned that the proper fear of the Lord, the proper terror of God's judgment and wrath on the other end. And they also learned belief. They believed the Lord and His servant Moses. So they came out of it with more belief, more faith, more trust than they had when they had been in Egypt.

It did not last long. They were a very disobedient people and they lost their faith very quickly, but you know, as soon as their tongue got dry or their belly started to rumble, they lost their faith and began murmuring against God and Moses. But this particular situation did move them forward a bit spiritually, and it should move us a lot more spiritually. It should have a greater impact on us than it had on them even though they were the ones that actually saw it with their own eyes.

Let us go to Joshua 5. We are going to read verses 13 through 15. We have looked at this a few times in the past few months, but I think it is appropriate to consider it again under this subject.

**Joshua 5:13-15** And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord, I have

now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

What do we have here? We have a Man (capitalized in my Bible), but we know that it is the Lord because we just read the next couple verses and found out that the ground was holy there. But this Man is kitted out like a man of war. He is fully kitted out in soldiers' gear as a warrior of the 15th century BC.

And not only that, not only does He have a sword, but He has got it drawn in His hand, and this shows that He is ready to fight. I mean, normally you do not pull your sword until your enemies are close enough to hit. But He comes upon Joshua, and the impression that you get is that He came on him unexpectedly. Joshua was probably out scouting the area around Jericho. He was probably trying to figure out a plan of attack, trying to work out what he would do, where he would put his men, and suddenly, he is met by this Man who is ready to fight.

And so Joshua, I do not know, maybe he is trying to get a little time to think. He says, Are you for us or against us? But frankly, his question is a little perplexing.

Did the Lord in this occasion look so human that Joshua did not know it was his God that was standing there? And that actually makes the most sense when you think about it. At a glance, looking at Him and how He was dressed as a soldier, His appearance gave nothing away as to His loyalties. He just seemed like a soldier, a warrior who was there to fight.

The Hebrew, which is reflected in the New King James, they translated it quite literally. It reads, "A Man stood opposite him," which could imply that the Man stood opposing him, like He was keeping him from moving forward or would have done something had Joshua made a swift move one way or the other. So the impression then is what Joshua saw was this Man in full armor with His sword drawn, threatening him. It was a threatening stance.



And being in the neighborhood of Jericho, you would think that this might come to pass, that there would be something, somebody there to oppose him. And this might explain the question then, "Are you for us or against us? Who are you?" If Joshua recognized Him as the Lord, on the other hand, the question would imply, "Are You here to deliver us or to punish us?" He is really trying to find out what this Man's intentions are. You know, should I draw my own sword? What is happening here?

However, Joshua had had enough interactions with God throughout his time since leaving Egypt, more than 40 years of experience, to know that he should abase himself in God's presence. So why did he not abase himself immediately when he saw Him rather than ask this question? So I think the weight of the evidence leans toward Joshua being uncertain of the Man's identity at first.

Now, the Lord's answer here—to me, it is funny—He just says, "No." It is a bit perplexing. This word could in Hebrew mean "neither." Are you for us or against us? And He answers, Neither. That may be but that brings up questions too. But I think the flat no answer suggests something like, that is not important right now, Joshua. Or He is shutting down that line of questioning.

His answer could also be implying that as Commander of the Lord's Army, He was above partisanship. He was neutral, He was fair, He was just, and so He was not going to say, "I'm for you and against you" at this point. Maybe. He is sovereign and fulfilling God's will as Commander of the Lord's army was His purpose, and so He was not going to argue or discuss any of the details about who He is for, who He was against. He was going to do the Father's will in this instance.

So His appearance, if nothing else, reminds Joshua that God Himself is Israel's supreme military authority and not him. I mean, he was commander of the armies of Israel, but there was One above him, and that was Commander of the armies of God. And not to mention that this One was also the leader of the heavenly host. So not only was He over Israel, but He was over all the angels. And in this case, He had come to fight for them. He had come to command them in the next steps.

And in that instance, in the Man's or the Lord's reply to him as He identified Himself as the Commander of the army of the Lord, Joshua realized who that was and fell on his face and worshipped. And of course we have Him confirming this act of worship by commanding him to remove his shoes as that place was holy.

And I believe that there should not be a chapter break right here after verse 15. I think it should go directly into chapter 6 as the Commander giving commands about how to proceed to attack Jericho. In other words, He immediately fulfilled His exalted position as Commander, giving commands that would result in a decisive victory over Jericho.

Now, our discussion here leads us into a well-known title of the Lord. Let us go to I Samuel, chapter 1, verse 3. This is about Elkanah, who was the husband of Hannah, who were the parents of Samuel, but verse 3 is the only one we want.

**I Samuel 1:3** This man went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of hosts in Shiloh.

At this point, a couple hundred years after (or maybe 300 or so years) after Joshua, we have this as a title. He is the Lord of hosts, and they worshipped Him in Shiloh at the Tabernacle. It is obviously the Lord of hosts and the Commander of the army of the Lord and the Lord, Yahweh; they are all the same person. This is just a title by which He was known.

This title, the Lord of hosts, which is Yahweh Sabaoth. It is used 242 times in the Old Testament, so quite common. Of those compound titles: Yahweh this, Yahweh that, you know, Yahweh Nissi, Yahweh Shalom, or whatever, Yahweh Mekoddishkem, this is the one that is used most frequently.

It appears more often in the prophets. It is used 88 times in Jeremiah, 55 times in Zechariah, which is a lot. Zechariah is 14 chapters and it has got 55 of these Lord of hosts titles. Malachi, 4 chapters, has it 25 times. Haggai has it 14 times and so forth. So it is used a lot in the prophetic books because in the prophecies God is often shown as filling this role as the Lord of hosts.

And it is even used in the New Testament by Paul and James. Paul uses it in Romans 9:29. He is quoting Isaiah, so that makes sense. But James uses it without a quotation in James 5:4. I will just let the *Baker Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* tell you what this means. "This title evokes the image of a warrior God commanding heavenly and earthly armies on behalf of His people Israel against their enemies, or conversely, directing earthly armies against a rebellious, unfaithful Israel."

Now this makes what the Commander of the army of the Lord said in Joshua 5 in response to Joshua's question, "Are you for us or against us?" make sense. He replied, "No." because the Commander of the armies of the Lord is above all of that partisanship. He is saying He could be for Israel or, in His duties as God's Commander, He could be against Israel. Because as we know, as He became Jesus Christ, all judgment was given to Him, and He judges without partiality.

And if the people of the world need to be judged and God's wrath needs to be shown, He shows it to them. But if it is Israel, on the other hand, that has departed from the way of the Lord and they need to be judged and God's wrath shown, He will give it to them. He is just. He is also merciful, of course, but He is just, and as the Commander of the armies of the Lord, He has to be nonpartisan. The only thing He is against is sin. And it does not matter who is sinning; if God sends Him to act in a militaristic way, He will do it.

So we can look at Him, on one hand, as being, hey, our hero! but as the other way we could look at Him as oh, He is going to get us because we have not been faithful to Him. So we could call Him neutral in this way, that He is there as the sword of the Lord or the rod of God; that is another way to put it.

This title then likely means that He is Lord over *all* hosts; He is supreme over *all* armies, meaning that not only does He command the armies of heaven, He also commands the armies of Israel, but He also has power over all armies for or against Him, which emphasizes His sovereignty. He is Lord over all that goes on.

Let us just peek at Psalm 84 because this is how it began to be understood in Israel. (We sang this today. Thank you, Jared.)

**Psalm 84:1-12** How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young—even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You. Selah. Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; every one of them appears before God in Zion. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah. O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed. For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!

Can you find any place in that psalm where it talks about armies? It does not. There are two mentions of shield in there, meaning that He is their protector, but nothing like that He goes to war for them or He beats down their enemies or any of that sort of thing.

What this shows you is that, at the time of this (this is a psalm of the sons of Korah, I do not know exactly when it was written, but probably David or Solomon's reign), but they had already come to understand that He was sovereign over everything and that He was their God and that is how they looked at it. The Lord of hosts maybe not ceased to refer specifically to God as a warrior, but more specifically it referred to God as their Sovereign, the One who took care of them, the One they wanted to dwell with.

And so you will find a lot of places in Scripture where the Lord of hosts has nothing to do with any kind of military conflict at all. But then again, you

will find others where the Lord of hosts is actually doing a lot of Lord of hosting, if you know what I mean.

Let us go to Isaiah 24. I believe this is one of those places. We start in verse 19 and read all the way through the end of the chapter, and then we will pick it up in chapter 25, verse 6. By the way, this section from 24 through 25 is often called by scholars Isaiah's Apocalypse because it has a lot of similarities to the book of Revelation.

**Isaiah 24:19-23** The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again. It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth. They shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.

**Isaiah 25:6-8** And in this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.

This is all stuff that the Lord of hosts does. And under this title, He is here shown as the Lord of judgment. He is also the Lord of royal dignity. He is also the Lord of blessing and abundance, and of course, He is the Lord of salvation.

Again, this title, while it has connotations of being a divine warrior, also stresses His sovereignty over His creation, and this is very important for arguments about why He appears as a warrior because He is sovereign over

His creation. He is sovereign; He is the One who makes God's purpose work. He makes it go. He is, to use language we just used, supreme Commander over all things. He has that prerogative to do all these things: to rule, to bless, to judge, to save, and to make war. Everything proceeds at His word. He is like the great general of God's plan. And He gives the commands; He is the Word. Words go out of His mouth and things are accomplished.

So we have got to unhitch a little bit this idea of the Lord of hosts or the divine warrior from *just* warfare. We need to understand that He commands everything in every aspect, and only one aspect is that He is Commander of the armies of the Lord who make war. Now, we are reminded of this a little bit in Matthew 28:18, where in His last words to His disciples, He says that God had given Him all authority in heaven and on earth, so they should go forth and make disciples, preach the gospel, baptize, teach all nations.

Now He is not the Commander of the armies of the church; He is actually the Commander or, as we look at it, the Head of the church, preaching the gospel, moving that part of the plan forward. There was a lot more war that had to take place under physical Israel because they were a nation of this world. Now He is doing the same things, but He is doing it with the church, and all His commands, all His warfare, if you will, is of a spiritual nature. But that does not mean that He will not come back and do the war again when necessary.

Let us just quickly go back to Exodus 17. There is always a question about this particular thing and a couple other instances of this. This is when Amalek attacked Israel as they were coming out of Egypt, and God sent Joshua to fight against the Amalekites.

**Exodus 17:10-13** So Joshua did as Moses said to him and fought with Amalek. Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. So it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Now verses 14 and 15 is important.]

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called its name, The Lord-Is-My-Banner; for he said, "Because the Lord has sworn: the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

Let us go to Deuteronomy 25. I just pick up verses 17 through 19.

**Deuteronomy 25:17-19** "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget."

Pretty stern stuff here. You could also jot down I Samuel 15:1-3, where God gave the command through Samuel to Saul that he was to do this bit of wiping Amalek out.

These passages open up a theological can of worms for some, at least to those theological liberals. Now I do not know if you know the genealogy of things, but Amalek was a grandson of Esau, and his descendants harried Israel frequently, and of course they did it coming out of Egypt, picking off the stragglers and the weak in the back of the line. So God swore, basically, a perpetual hatred against them and commanded them to be completely wiped out. And Israel failed to do this.

I mentioned Saul just a minute ago. He spared Agag, and apparently some of his progeny escaped, and we find they pop up again in Esther, where Esther and Mordecai have to deal with Haman, an Agagite, during the Persian Empire hundreds of years later. They have a tendency, these Amalekites, to take advantage of Israelite or Jewish weakness. They have this idea that you kick them when they are down. So every time Judah, especially, but also Israel had a period of weakness, the Amalekites would be the first ones there to try to take advantage of it.

Let us just go to Amos 1, verses 11 and 12 where this is spelled out very clearly. God says,

**Amos 1:11-12** Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever. But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah."

Both of them are Edomite cities. And as I mentioned before, Amalek was part of Edom. God takes Esau to task for this penchant for violence against Jacob in the book of Obadiah, where He promises that in the Day of the Lord, in verse 18, no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau, which would include Amalek.

Now these prophecies or these passages run parallel to the one that opens Malachi's prophecy. God says in Malachi 1,

**Malachi 1:2-3** "Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated."

Now passages like these spur commentators to say stupid things like the God of the Old Testament is mean and vindictive, that He is hateful and unjust, He is warlike and cruel, and then they claim they prefer Jesus, the New Testament God over the Old Testament God, which is just wacky because they are the same Person.

How do we explain this? How do we explain this perpetual hatred? How do we explain His commands to wipe these nations out like Amalek and the Amorites and so forth? Well, Paul gives us a pretty good idea of how to do this in Romans 1 and in Romans 9. Let us start in Romans 1, verses 18 through 23. It is actually a pretty easy concept to understand, but people are pretty obtuse and they do not want to see how simple it can be.

**Romans 1:18-20** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God shown it to them. For since the creation



of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and [divine nature], so that they are without excuse, . . .

What is he saying? He is saying people know. They know what is right. They know that there is a God. He has shown it to them. If they claim they do not know, they are lying; they are simply remaining *willfully* ignorant of that, and He says they have no excuse.

**Romans 1:21-23** . . . because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts [that is what happens with atheists], and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

So they do not want to worship God because He places restrictions on them. He places responsibilities on them. They ignore His law. They ignore all the ways that He has shown that He is there and He is enforcing His way, and so God says they are without excuse. They have done it to themselves.

Let us go to chapter 9 and we will start in verse 10. He has been talking about Sarah, Isaac, and Abraham here, and he says in verse 10,

**Romans 9:10-21** And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." [verse 14 begins his explanation of why this is fair, why this is just] What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose I have

raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

These passages give us a theological basis for God doing these things to the Amorites and the Amalekites and others. Paul's overall argument is that God is justified in what He does. I mean, that is pretty simple. God is justified in what He does. He does not do anything wrong. He does not do anything that is unfair or unrighteous. He is God! He sets all the rules. He lives by those rules. He has perfect character. Not only that, He is the Creator. He made us all. He made *everything*. He made His law known.

So these people are without excuse. They sinned in worshipping other gods, and they sinned in various other ways against others and certainly against His people Israel. And so they are guilty. And because they are guilty, God has every right as Judge of all to punish their iniquities in wrath. He is not being mean. He is giving them what they asked for because they failed to keep His law. They sinned.

And because He is God, He is totally sovereign. He can use whomever He wants to bring that wrath upon sinners. Sometimes He used the nation of Israel—the old nation or kingdom of Israel—to do that. They were His sword. They were the rod of the Lord, and they punished the Canaanites. Sometimes He used Assyria, and He used them to punish Israel; sometimes, to Habakkuk's dismay, He used the terrible Babylonians, the Chaldeans, to punish Israel. He thought that was just terrible. And God says, "I can do whatever I want. You guys are sinners. You've been judged, found wanting, and the nation must die."

In addition, because He is God, He is sovereign over all things, He can choose or prepare certain peoples to bring about His plan of redemption. He can choose them to be vessels of mercy and honor, or He can choose them to

be vessels of wrath or dishonor. He is God. He can choose whomever He wants. He can enlighten some, He can harden others. And He does this in righteousness according to His holy character, and no one has standing to gainsay His decisions. You have no argument against what He does if He is acting as Judge and He judges righteously and fairly.

Besides, these severe punishments for iniquity are not necessarily eternal. The wages of sin is death. But our God, that same Lord of hosts, the Commander of the armies of the Lord, has overcome death. And He can raise them up in the general resurrection and give them their day of salvation. So in the end, I say this kind of flippantly, but no harm, no foul. He was moving His purpose forward and did that as Commander of the Lord's armies to move the purpose of God forward because that is what God had told Him to do.

We know from Revelation 20:11-13, that these people who were annihilated on earth in their day will come back, and they will be given their chance for eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Let us finish in Revelation 19. Because the day of the Commander of the armies of the Lord is not over.

**Revelation 19:11-16** Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

One of the last acts of this age features the Lamb of God, the Word of God, the One we know as Jesus Christ, in divine warrior mode, bringing God's

wrath upon His enemies, in justice. You might want to write down Psalm 110:1:2, 5-6. There it shows in the poetic language of the Psalms, Him doing the exact same thing when God says, "Sit on Your throne and make My enemies Your footstool."

He strikes the nations with the sharp sword of His mouth, and notice it says He *Himself* will rule them with a rod of iron. He *Himself* treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. He does it personally. He does not give it off to some junior. He is going to do this Himself. And as I mentioned before, He never loses a battle. And with His victory, He will bring peace to the earth and usher in God's Kingdom and a thousand years of prosperity and goodness for all.

So God is a divine warrior because men and angels are at war with Him—that is, fallen angels. He meets them on the field of battle in judgment and in wrath, and His righteous interventions bring justice to the iniquitous and peace to the faithful. And there is nothing wrong with that.