

Dr. Tremper Longman, God is a Warrior, Session 1, Introduction

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This is Dr. Tremper Longman in his teaching on God is a Warrior. Session 1, Introduction.

My name is Tremper Longman and I'm a retired professor of the Old Testament. I taught at Westminster Theological Seminary for the first 18 years of my career. And in 1998, I moved to Westmont College in beautiful Santa Barbara, California, where I taught for another 19 years and then retired from full-time teaching. I kept teaching, you know, doing intensives and things and writing to move to Alexandria, Virginia, where we are right now, where two of my sons and six of our grandchildren live and the other son and two other grandchildren are on the East Coast.

So, it was kind of a no-brainer to return from California to this area, where I continue to write on various topics, and also teach some and work on translation projects, most notably, the New Living Translation, where I was in charge of Psalms and wisdom literature. But I also have had a career-long interest and fascination with what is often referred to as the Divine Warrior theme. And as we'll see, it's a theme that once you become kind of sensitive to it, occurs quite frequently from Genesis all the way to Revelation.

And so, we're going to explore this theme. And we're going to explore it as a study in biblical theology. Because if you talk about the Bible, you could talk about the Bible as a piece of literature.

You could talk about it as history. And you can also talk about it, of course, as theology, because it is the Word of God. It is where God has chosen to reveal himself to his people.

And so, he, in this act of self-disclosure, this revelation, we go to the Bible to learn about who God is. And as we do that, and by the way, I should say that even though we could talk about the Bible as literature, the Bible as history, and the Bible as theology, all three of these are intertwined with each other. Theology, as we'll see, is based on God's acts in history, in space and time.

And so, but if we think about the Bible as theology and reflect on how God discloses himself in Scripture, of course, we want to affirm that God's most perfect revelation of himself is in Jesus Christ. But as we, and we'll come to see how the Divine Warrior theme also points to Jesus, but as we go to the Old Testament, I think we can see something very interesting there, that God reveals himself through his actions. You think something like the Exodus.

But also, when the Old Testament talks about God, it often uses various metaphors and similes. And we could run through a whole list of them. God is a shepherd.

God is a father. God's a king who enters into covenants with people. And God is the husband to Israel, his wife.

And then there are some even more of what we might call local metaphors. Those are the big ones. There are some that are quite shocking and surprising.

As Psalm 78, says, God awoke as from sleep, like the sleep of a drunk soldier. And metaphors are supposed to get your attention, right? And that Psalm 78 is neither advocating drunkenness, but it does get you to think, in what way is God like this? And so, one of the big metaphors of scripture when it comes to God is God as a warrior. And so, we're going to see that God reveals himself as a warrior, as I say, from the book of Genesis all the way to the book of Revelation.

But we're also going to see some continuity plus development in the unfolding of this theme as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament. As a matter of fact, I'm going to describe this theme as having what I call five phases. And it's not as if they're even always chronologically sequential.

We're going to see some overlap here, but it's just a convenient way to describe what I think we see in scripture. And so we're going to engage in this biblical-theological study, and we're going to look at these five phases, which I'll just name now, and we'll talk at some length about each one of them. The first phase is when God fights the flesh and blood enemies of Israel.

This is probably the best-known phase and also today the most controversial phase. And indeed, I'll talk more about the controversial aspect of it as we get in and develop the biblical-theological theme. And then at the very end, we're going to reflect on it from both theological and ethical perspectives.

So, I'm going to start by simply describing these five themes, starting with God fights against Israel's flesh and blood enemies, and I'll give many examples of that. And then we'll go on to phase two, which is God fights Israel. There are a whole bunch of episodes in biblical history and Old Testament history where God as a warrior comes and fights against Israel.

And then thirdly, toward the end of the Old Testament time period, particularly in the period of the exile and the post-exilic period, the prophets of Israel started talking about God the warrior coming in the future to free them from their oppression. And then when we turn to the New Testament, we're going to see phase four, which is Jesus comes as the warrior and he heightens and intensifies the battle

so thou is directed toward the spiritual powers and authority. But that's not the end of the story.

When we turn to a book like Revelation, or we look at passages like Mark 13, Luke 21, where Jesus talks about his second coming, we'll see that that second coming is often described using picture images and also language, which is associated with God as a warrior. And we'll see in phase five that when Jesus comes again, he will decisively win the battle against evil, both physical human evil, as well as spiritual evil. So, we're going to see it's actually a very coherent picture that we get of God coming to fight against evil.

But before we even get to phase one, but related to phase one, I want to talk a little bit about warfare in the Old Testament and how wars were conducted in terms of what happens before, during, and after a battle.

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