

# **Dr. Tremper Longman, God is a Warrior, Session 3, Phase 1: God fights flesh and Blood Enemies of Israel; Phase 2: God fights Israel**

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This is Dr. Tremper Longman in his teaching on God is a Warrior. This is session 3, Phase 1: God Fights Flesh and Blood Enemies of Israel; Phase 2: God fights Israel.

So, having explored what the Old Testament tells us about what took place before, during, and after a battle, it both exposed us to the religious nature of warfare in the Old Testament, plus it gave us an opportunity to take glimpses, at least, at certain battles that I would put under what I'm calling phase one, which is examples of battles where God fights the flesh and blood enemies of Israel. But I want to take a look at a few more examples now and start at the beginning, by which I mean at the beginning of God's warring activity. And to provide a background for that, of course, let's go back to the opening chapters of Genesis 1 and 2, where we find no hint of God as a warrior, I would suggest, which is interesting because in the ancient Near East, creation stories often had a conflict at the heart of it, where the creator God, whether it's Marduk of Babylon or Baal of Canaan, would fight deities that represented the waters, Tiamat in Babylon, and Yam and Yam's cohorts, including Lothan, which is basically the Ugaritic equivalent of Leviathan.

And creation arose out of this conflict. But you don't get a hint of conflict in Genesis 1 and 2. God takes an unordered creation and shapes it into something that my friend John Walton would call functional, habitable, organized order. But he does so more along the lines of an artist or a sculptor than a warrior.

But of course, at the end of Genesis 2, I would describe the situation as human beings, God's creation, living in harmony with God, in harmony with each other, and also in harmony with the creation itself. But of course, then we turn to Genesis 3, and we have the appearance of the serpent. Now, the origins of the serpent are debated.

I'm not going to get into that. But the serpent is definitely a malevolent power that's seeking to lure Adam and Eve away from their obedience to God and succeeds. So, what we have in Genesis 3 is the introduction of sin, as Paul will tell us later in Romans 5:12 and following.

And the result is a new type of disorder, chaos. And so, you have God judging Adam and Eve, but also giving them a token of grace in the form of clothing. And then at the end of the chapter, we get the first kind of glimpse of God as a warrior who

commands a spiritual army when it says, verses 23 and 24, So the Cherubim are interesting figures.

I earlier talked about how God was the God of hosts, the God of the heavenly army. So, the angels are his army. Now, I often will describe the Cherubim to an American audience as the seal team six of God's heavenly army.

And we earlier talked about how the priests were guardians of God's holiness on a spiritual level. It's the angels and specifically the Cherubim who are very close to him. And so, he's now placed the Cherubim in a position to guard the entrance into the Garden of Eden.

Again, analogously to later where some Levites will be gatekeepers to the holy sanctuary. So, this is the first hint that God is a warrior now that sin has been introduced into the world. And as I said earlier when we were doing our survey and focusing in on the celebration, reading Exodus 15, verse 3 is the first time that God is explicitly called a warrior.

But we get hints of it even in the book of Genesis, not just here in Genesis 3, but it's a hint, but it's definitely there in Genesis 14. Genesis 14 is the story about Abraham pursuing these four kings of the East who have come in and plundered Canaan and kidnapped Lot. And so Abraham rallies a force of 318 men and goes after them.

It's a fascinating story in and of itself. I wish we had more time to look at it. But what I want us to see is that as Abraham goes out and successfully defeats these four kings and recovers the plunder and Lot, notice what this sort of mysterious figure of Melchizedek, king of Salem, says as he comes out and greets Abraham again.

This warrants a whole lesson in and of itself. But I want you to hear what this king of Salem says. He says, Blessed be Abram by God most high, creator of heaven and earth, and praise be to God most high, who delivered your enemies into your hand.

This idea of God delivered the enemies. Melchizedek and Abraham both recognize that though Abraham did the fighting, it was because of God that they were able to successfully win this battle. So, another place where I would go and we could look at, we took a brief look at the victory that God had over the Egyptians in Exodus 14, celebrated in Exodus 15.

We're going to come back later and see that though right now we're focusing in on Phase 1 where God wins battles against flesh and blood enemies of Israel. Later when we're talking about Phases 4 and 5 and we're talking about the heightening and intensification of the battle so that it's directed toward spiritual powers and authority, we're going to see glimpses of that spiritual battle even though in the Old Testament human beings aren't invited into it as they are in the New Testament, in a

place like the plagues. But we'll hold on and come back and take a look at the plagues as God's battle against the gods of Egypt to our spiritual powers.

But for now, I'd like to take a second example and there are a whole bunch of examples of Phase 1 in the Old Testament so I'm just picking a few to illustrate it. Let's take a look at Genesis 10. We talked a little bit about the Battle of Jericho but all the battles of the conquests are intimately related to this Phase 1. Joshua 10 begins, Now Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it.

We'll come back to Ai in Phase 2. Doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king. And that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and had become their allies. Now this is interesting in connection with what we talked about earlier about inquiring of God before you go to battle or before you do anything in relationship to the peoples in the land.

And so, Joshua 10 is reminding us of what happened in Joshua 9 which is after the Battle of Ai a bunch of, well you'd call them diplomats, show up on tired horses with stale food and they say we've come from far far away and we'd like to enter into a treaty with you. Somehow, they know that distinction that we saw in Deuteronomy 20 between how Israel was to treat people in the land as opposed to people outside the land. And Joshua enters into a treaty with them even though like in verse 8 he does ask who are you and where do you come from and they say your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God.

For we have heard reports of him, all that he did in Egypt and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites. So, they lie to him about being far away and Joshua goes ahead and enters into this agreement with them. Then later in the chapter, it censures Joshua because it said he did not inquire of the Lord. So he didn't do what he was supposed to do, he didn't inquire of the Lord. He entered into this treaty, he had to abide by it.

This will cause trouble later in Israelite history but it becomes the pretense for why Adoni-zedek gathers together an alliance of Canaanite city states. By the way, just a little background of this time period, Canaan was not a unified country but was composed of a whole bunch of city states that each had their own ruler. They were often referred to as kings. But now facing this common threat from Israel, Adoni-zedek puts together an alliance between the cities of Hebron, Yarmouth, Achish, Eglon. He says come up and help me attack Gibeon because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites.

This draws Israel into the battle. This is the famous battle where God prolongs the day much debated exactly what goes on here, it is unnecessary for our purposes to

dwell on that but the day is prolonged and it allows Israel to completely defeat the forces of southern Canaan.

But here is the verse I want to draw your attention to as they, namely, the Canaanites, fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah. The Lord hurled large hailstones down on them and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

So again we have this situation where Israel is engaged in battle but they recognize that God by prolonging the day and also by sending the hail is the real victor here. He is giving them the victory.

Another thing to notice in your own reading as you read through the Old Testament, notice how often God will use the forces of nature in order to, as kind of his weapons whether he's sending down torrential rain storms to cause chariots to get stuck in the mud or whatever. God is the one who is the ultimate victor of these battles.

The theme is also found in the book of Judges. Though the Judges are typically very dubious characters one of the interesting themes of the book of Judges is how God provides victories even through deeply flawed individuals. They get worse and worse as you go from the beginning from people like Othniel and Ehud and Deborah then you come to particularly Samson. Samson does nothing good but God still uses him in order to have a victory over the Philistines.

But I thought I'd read as an example the story of Ehud which is short and not as well-known even though it's a little, as you'll see, dark. So, this is Judges chapter 3 verse 12 where it says, again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. And because they did this evil the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. So Eglon's probably made an incursion into the southern part of Israel taking over Jericho. The name Eglon, by the way, means fat calf. That probably plays into the story.

Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel and they took possession of the city of Palms. The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for 18 years. Again, the Israelites cried out to the Lord and he gave them a deliverer Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gerah the Benjaminite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a cubit long which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing. He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab who was a very fat man. Just a pause here, you might remember what I said about physical description being very sparse. When it's there, it's relevant to the story by way of characterizing somebody or feeding into the plot. Here by describing it as left-handed which is very unusual for people in the ancient Near East and actually later

too in antiquity. I mean the Roman word, Latin word for left-handedness is sinister. I think we're being told how he got beyond security. Security isn't what it was, what it is today. So, he probably got checked since everybody's right-handed on his left thigh, not on his right thigh. So, he was able to get in to assassinate, as we'll see.

So, after Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way those who had carried it. But on reaching the stone images near Gilgal, he himself went back to Eglon and said, your majesty, I have a secret message for you. The king said to his attendants leave us and they all left. Speculation surrounds why Eglon would let Ehud go though. Some scholars think he's hearing an invitation to shall we say a romantic interchange with Ehud which is why they find him up in the bathroom area.

Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room and he said I have a message from God for you. And the king rose from his seat. Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh, and plunged it into the king's belly even the handle sank in after the blade and his bowels discharged. Ehud did not pull the sword out and the fat closed in over it.

Then Ehud went out to the porch he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. After he'd gone the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked he said he must be relieving himself in the inner room of the palace they waited to the point of embarrassment but when he did not open the doors of the room they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fall to the ground dead.

While they waited Ehud got away. He passed by the stone images and escaped to Seirah. When he arrived there he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim and the Israelites went down with him from the hills with him leading them. Follow me, he ordered, for the Lord has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands. So they followed him down and took possession of the fords of the Jordan that led to Moab. They allowed no one to cross over at that time. They struck down about 10,000 Moabites all vigorous and strong. Not one escaped. That day Moab was made subject to Israel and the land had peace for 80 years.

So again, highlight this statement for the lord has given Moab your enemy into your hands. Now God as warrior is somewhat subdued in many of these stories partly, I would argue, because during this time period the book of Judges is describing a people who are morally depraved. They're politically fragmented and they're spiritually confused but still God is the one who is providing this victory during the time of Judges.

One more example from 2 Samuel 5:13 or 17 and following and again we could multiply the examples but I wanted to pick something from a number of different

time periods. This is David and it says, when the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel they went up in full force in search of him. But David heard about it and went down to the stronghold. Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the valley of Rephaim. So David inquired of the Lord, shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hands? Go, for I will surely deliver the Philistines into your hands. So, David went to Baal-perazim and there he defeated them. He said, as water breaks out the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me. So that place was called Baal-perazim. The Philistines abandoned their idols there and David and his men carried them off.

Once more the Philistines came and spread out in the valley of Rephaim. So David inquired of the Lord and he answered, do not go straight up but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. As soon as you hear the sounds of marching in the tops of the poplar trees move quickly because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.

So, David did as the Lord commanded him and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer. So, wait till you hear the rustling of the poplar tree because that means the heavenly army is going to go in before you and then you will win the victory.

So again, Phase 1 God fights the flesh and blood enemies of Israel and there are countless examples of this.

But there are also examples, not as many, but there are still examples of what I'm calling Phase 2 which is God fights Israel. Okay, so what are those examples. Well let's start with the conquest again and notice that right after the battle of Jericho comes the battle of Ai. Now Ai's location is to the west of Jericho, essentially what happens in the first movement into the promised land. So Jericho and now Ai and to understand this story you should also know what Ai means in Hebrew. It means dump, tell, ruin. It's not much of a city apparently. That's important because they've just defeated the walled city of Jericho. God has won that victory. They've marched around the city. On the 7th day they march around it 7 times. They blow the trumpets which announces the coming of God and the walls collapse. They take the city.

Now they go up to Ai, dump city and Joshua doesn't send the whole army up. He doesn't think he needs to. He just sends up a small force and what happens is they're defeated. They come back and Joshua is beside himself with grief and wondering and saying, God why did this happen? God says it happened because you violated the rules of warfare. Remember that you can't take plunder for your own good, for your own benefit.

As it turns out we learn through a lot that a man named Achan had taken some of the plunder and buried it in his tent. Because of that violation, God would not let Israel win the battle. They lost the battle. So, after Achan is outed and he's executed and buried. They name the valley, the valley of Achor, the valley of trouble. Then they go up to Ai again and they win that battle so again an example of because of disobedience God fights against Israel.

The second example comes a little later at the time of Samuel's youth in the first chapters of the book of 1 Samuel 4 and 5. So at this time, Eli is the judge. Eli has two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who are leading the army. They're going to battle against the Philistines.

They enter into the battle and they lose and we already know these men are wicked. They're taking meat that's being offered for sacrifices. They're sleeping with the women who work at the Tabernacle. These are bad men. But they scratch their heads and they go, oh we forgot the Ark of the Covenant which is an indication of just how spiritual they are. But also, we get the indication that they're not doing this out of trust and faith but kind of thinking we forgot that weapon, that power base so we need to bring it in so we can defeat the Philistines.

So, they get the Ark and even though the Ark is there because of their sin, God allows Israel to lose and the Ark gets carted off to the Philistine city where it's placed in the temple with Dagon, their chief god. It is as if Dagon probably has won a victory over Yahweh. This is often the way that ancient Near Eastern people thought, at least the polytheists among them, that our god is stronger than your god and was able to defeat your god.

But of course, the story goes on it say, the next day they come into the temple and Dagon's statue is boop on its face before Yahweh. They put him back up and then again, this time the head and the hands are broken off and that along with disease which is ripping through the cities makes them realize that the Philistines defeated Israel not because Yahweh was weak but because Israel was sinful. So, they send the Ark back but again.

A second example of the fact that it's not like God will always fight with Israel Joshua 5 again, are you for us or are you for our enemies? No, neither I'm not your god that will act on your whim.

So now the third example is the most dramatic and we're talking here about the Babylonian defeat of Jerusalem in 586 BC which initiates the exile. So, God had been warning the people of God for years that they needed to repent or that He would abandon them, and He would abandon the temple.

We get a picture of the abandonment of the temple in Ezekiel 9-11 as God's glory rises up and the cherubim meet Him in the courtyard. Then He starts moving East and the last time you see God it's over the Mount of Olives as He's abandoning the temple in preparation for the defeat of Jerusalem.

Probably we could read a whole number of texts to illustrate this point, but I want to turn to the book of Lamentations. Now Lamentations was written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. It's a fascinating book often overlooked because it's short and it's placed in English Bibles between the big books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

But Lamentations are five separate poems each bemoaning the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. I won't go into all the details but it's fascinating from a literary point of view because if you'll notice four of the chapters have 22 verses. The middle chapter has 66 verses which of course is divisible by 22 three times. If you read it in Hebrew and know that Hebrew language has 22 letters in its alphabet. Each chapter is a form of an acrostic that is writing a poem that begins with a verse that starts with Aleph which is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, then Beit, then Gimel, then Dalet all the way to Tav.

So that happens in the first chapter, then the second chapter. Then the third chapter has 66. So the first three verses start with Aleph the next three verses start with Beit all the way through Tav. Then the fourth chapter, 22 verses going back to the pattern of chapters 1 and 2.

Then the fifth chapter has 22 verses but it's not an acrostic. It's actually quite masterful because acrostics, one of its purposes is probably to show order but the book of Lamentations ends not with everything being restored but with the poet continuing to call on God to restore them unless he says you have forgotten us forever.

So, the acrostic breaks up at the very end I want to read a section from the second chapter. So, Lamentations chapter 2 says, How the Lord has covered the daughter Zion with the cloud of His anger. He has hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth. He has not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger. Without pity the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob. In His wrath He has torn down the strongholds of daughter Judah. He has brought her kingdom and princes down to the ground in dishonor. In fierce anger He has cut off every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn His right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it. Like an enemy He has strung His bow. His right hand is ready. Like a foe, He has slain all who are pleasing to the eye. He has poured out His wrath like fire on the tent of daughter Zion The Lord



is like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel He has swallowed up all her palaces and destroyed her strongholds

And Lamentation 2 continues in this way to describe God coming against Jerusalem like an enemy. Again illustrating what I'm calling Phase 2 When Israel is disobedient God comes against them as a warrior.

We talked earlier about the book of Deuteronomy being a covenant renewal text and we talked about how law played a significant role in a treaty covenant. Well, in a treaty as well as in biblical covenants, law is followed by blessings and curses. If you obey the law the following blessings will happen to you. If you disobey the law then these curses will come against you.

And Deuteronomy 28 is an example of a list of blessings and curses as is Deuteronomy 27. But I want you to notice how some of these blessings and curses relate to warfare. So, Deuteronomy 28 verse 7 says If you obey me the Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. Whereas verse 15 changes the curses, It says however If you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all His commands and decrees I'm giving you today all these curses will come on you and overtake you. Including in verse 25, The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven. And you will become a thing of horror. Your carcasses will be food for the birds and the wild animals and there will be no one to frighten them away.

And it goes on and on in that way warning the people of God of judgment that would come on them if they disobeyed the law. And again, remember how the prophets would warn the people about the coming judgment. Especially a prophet like Jeremiah is deeply versed in the book of Deuteronomy, and what he's essentially doing is reminding them of what God had already told them that unless they repent that they were going to be punished.

That's why I often call prophets covenant lawyers. When Israel breaks the law God sends in his prophets to present a case against them and warn them to repent.

Okay so we've looked at Phase 1, God fights against the flesh and blood enemies of Israel. We just finished Phase 2 God fights against Israel. We'll see that this is not the last phase in the Old Testament. We're now going to turn our attention to Phase 3 which is to look at how some of the later prophets will talk about how God will come as a warrior to save them from their oppressors

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