

Finding the Arc of Peace in the Bible

by Dina Ferguson



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The Bible says “beat your plowshares into swords” (Joel 3:10) as well as “beat your swords into plowshares” (Isaiah 2:4).

Proof-texting with the Bible can justify almost any behavior. Many governments have used the scriptures as a permission-giving text for war, now and throughout history. And we know that this has all too often led to disastrous results. I believe that it is important to look at the arc of the biblical narrative and decide where God is leading us.

New scholarship describes the final editing of the First Testament in the wake of the Babylonian Exile and identifies a major arc of scripture as showing that the way of war has ended in disaster for Israel.

Note especially that the war with the Assyrians resulted in the end of the Northern Kingdom. And the war with the Babylonians resulted in the exile.

I think it is important to notice that our entire scripture—First and Second Testaments—are set within the context of peace. The story begins with the Garden of Eden and ends with the holy City of God where God dwells with us and the tree of life produces leaves for the healing of the nations. In the First

Testament we hear significant stories of forgiveness (Esau forgiving Jacob), doing good for enemies (Elisha healing Naaman, a general of the invading army), crossing boundaries and welcoming the stranger (the story of Ruth), and even peacemaking in the time of war (see the delightful story in 2 Kings 6). The role of Israel as a “light to the nations” is a major theme in Second Isaiah (see for example Isaiah 42 and 49).



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We don't necessarily identify Jonah as a story of peace unless we specifically emphasize that God desires Jonah to call a foreign people from their evil ways. Jonah is a prophet to the Gentiles.

Storytellers looking to develop a repertoire of peace stories might begin by looking at the stories they already know using this perspective.

They can also add stories identified in this article. An easy story to learn and a powerful story of peace is the story of Elisha and the king of the Arameans in 2 Kings 6. In addition, so many stories of Jesus can be seen as peace stories when that is called out as a specific context. And all of the books in the Second Testament can be viewed this way.

Look for peace.