

## What Will God Do About It?

After two years of a traumatic pandemic, the last thing the people of Ukraine needed was to have them and their country attacked indiscriminately. As the war has continued, we have been shocked and disturbed to see the devastation of cities like Mariupol and Khakhiv and hear of the atrocities committed in the wake of the Russian withdrawal from Bucha, Irpin and Borodyanka. However, we have also seen tremendous acts of kindness and selflessness from people and governments across Europe who have sheltered the millions of refugees fleeing the danger or donated money or supplies to help those left with nothing. War is truly horrific, but adversity can often bring the best out in people.

From my privileged position thousands of miles from the events in Ukraine, I have wondered, as I'm sure many others have, why these things are happening. What is wrong with Putin? Why are civilians being targeted? How can this madness be stopped? What will God do about it? What is even worse is that this is not the only war happening in the world at the moment! All this has made me look again at what the Bible says about war and how God reacted to it in the past. As I expected, views on war tend to fall into two distinct camps; holy and righteous war in the Old Testament and the avoidance of war and the spreading of peace in the New Testament. The former has a lot about the Lord smiting his enemies and using his people as a '*hammer and weapon of war*' (Jeremiah 51:20), but then, this part of the Bible was written during an era when everyone between Egypt and India were almost constantly at war with everyone else as they tried to assert themselves and their claims to various bits of land. For the Israelites, war was the way God identified them as His chosen people.

Thankfully, with the arrival of Jesus, war becomes something to be discouraged, regardless of whether it is between nations or individuals. '*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peace-ably with all*', Romans 12:18. This attitude is much more like our own and the transformation from a vengeful God to a peaceful one is a big relief to me. Knowing this, though, brings us back to the question of what is God going to do about Ukraine, or Afghanistan, or Yemen, or wherever the next conflict might start?

Despite the continuing hostilities, the answer is that God is working through his people again, not as a weapon of war, but as an instrument of love. All those people who have taken in refugees, spent hours volunteering at border crossings, risked their own safety to get people away from danger, are showing us what God is doing about the situation. He is getting on with it, trying to clear up the mess that humans have created as best He can. We know from our own experiences and from the Bible, that God isn't just concerned with grand gestures, He works through individuals, persevering, challenging, making a difference where they can.

So, in that case, the obvious next question is, how is God working through us? I am a firm believer that God asks us only to do things that He knows we can do. So, we can be safe in the knowledge that whatever God calls on us to do for people suffering the consequences of war, we will be able to do it, we just need to listen and respond to the call. In our services and across the URC, we have been praying weekly for the people of Ukraine, but we may also be able to donate our money, time or resources as a part of God's work to tackle this and other wars around the world.

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