

God Without Jesus: Theological Tribalism and the Tragedy of Gaza

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This paper addresses one of the most urgent and uncomfortable questions facing the Christian conscience today: what happens when the God of the Old Testament is invoked without the redemptive ethic of Jesus Christ? At the heart of this inquiry lies the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, where ancient theological justifications have been repurposed to excuse modern violence. Drawing from the punitive acts of God as recorded in the Hebrew Bible and contrasting them with the radical mercy of Jesus in the New Testament, this paper explores how selective theology—particularly one that champions divine favoritism, conquest, and vengeance—can be weaponized in contemporary conflicts. By analyzing both historical patterns and present rhetoric, it calls for a return to the core of the Gospel: love for enemies, compassion for the vulnerable, and the sanctity of every human life. The aim is not to discredit Scripture but to clarify its trajectory in light of Christ, urging Christians to reject any theology that reveres power while forgetting the cross.

Keywords: Jesus, Old Testament, Gaza, theology, divine violence, retribution, mercy, conquest, Zionism, Christian ethics, Sermon on the Mount, holy war, God, Christ-centered, prophetic lament, forgiveness, religious nationalism, biblical justice, tribalism, peacemaking. A collaboration with GPT-4o. CC4.0.

Abstract

This paper investigates the moral and theological consequences of embracing a vision of God rooted exclusively in the punitive justice of the Old Testament, while ignoring the redemptive, universal, and peace-centered teachings of Jesus Christ. It explores how such a theological imbalance—emphasizing divine wrath, retribution, and tribal election—can enable or justify real-world violence, particularly in the context of modern conflicts that invoke sacred texts for political or nationalistic ends. Focusing on the ongoing crisis in Gaza, the paper contends that the suffering of civilians and the systematic destruction of a population reflect a spiritual crisis as much as a political one: a worldview in which God's authority is invoked to destroy rather than to redeem. By offering a detailed examination of punitive acts attributed to God in the Hebrew Bible and placing them in contrast with the nonviolent, inclusive ethics modeled by Jesus in the New Testament, this study reveals the danger of theological tribalism when severed from the Gospel's core message of love, forgiveness, and universal dignity. It argues that without Jesus, the image of God becomes a weapon rather than a healer. The paper concludes by calling for a renewed Christ-centered public theology that affirms justice through mercy, prioritizes human life over ideology, and seeks peace as the highest expression of divine will.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, sacred texts have served as sources of moral authority, cultural identity, and political legitimacy. When interpreted with humility and ethical restraint, they can inspire justice, compassion, and peace. However, when selectively applied or manipulated, these same texts can be weaponized to justify conquest, exclusion, and violence. This paper addresses a troubling and urgent manifestation of this dynamic: the use of ancient theological frameworks—particularly those rooted in the punitive depictions of God in the Hebrew Bible—to legitimize modern acts of aggression, most notably in the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

At the heart of the problem lies a profound theological distortion: the invocation of God's authority to sanction acts of violence while bypassing the radical ethic of love, forgiveness, and mercy introduced by Jesus Christ. In such frameworks, divine justice is interpreted solely through the lens of covenantal law and national election, leading to an exclusive moral vision that dehumanizes the “other” and elevates obedience to inherited identity over universal human dignity. The teachings of Jesus, which offer a corrective lens through which the Old Testament can be fulfilled—not abandoned—are often ignored or dismissed, particularly when they interfere with political or territorial ambitions.

This theological dichotomy between covenantal justice and universal mercy is not merely academic; it is a matter of life and death. When sacred texts are interpreted to mean that one group has divine permission to dominate or eliminate another, the result is not faithfulness to God but a descent into religious nationalism, violence, and spiritual blindness. The distinction between a God who commands the eradication of enemies and a God who dies for them on a cross must be taken with utmost seriousness.

Gaza stands today as a harrowing example of what happens when theology is misapplied or selectively invoked in the service of state power. Civilian lives are treated as collateral, entire communities are reduced to moral abstractions, and the name of God is invoked not to heal but to destroy. The crisis in Gaza is not only political—it is theological. It is a tragedy that reveals what happens when the God of judgment is proclaimed without the Gospel of peace.

This paper begins by cataloging the punitive acts of God in the Hebrew Bible, exploring their original contexts and theological purposes. It then contrasts these acts with the teachings and actions of Jesus Christ, who redefined justice through mercy and love. The study concludes with a critical reflection on the misuse of Scripture in modern geopolitics and a call for a return to a Christ-centered theology that prioritizes reconciliation, humility, and the sacredness of every human life.

2. Divine Violence in the Hebrew Bible: A Catalog of Punitive Acts

The Hebrew Bible presents God as a multidimensional figure—Creator, Lawgiver, Redeemer—but most prominently, in its earlier books, as Judge, Warrior, and King. These roles, especially in the historical and prophetic texts, are often accompanied by acts of divine violence that serve both theological and narrative functions. God is portrayed as the supreme moral authority who not only commands righteousness but also enforces it through often dramatic and destructive means. These punitive actions are not framed as arbitrary but are deeply rooted in a worldview centered on holiness, covenantal fidelity, and the deterrence of sin through public, exemplary judgment.

The central theological rationale behind divine punishment in the Hebrew Bible is that God's holiness cannot coexist with sin. Sin, in this framework, is not merely a personal moral failing but a breach of the divine order that threatens the stability of the community and the sanctity of the covenant between God and Israel. Punishment, then, is portrayed not as cruel vengeance but as necessary correction—a form of cosmic justice intended to preserve the integrity of God's people and their relationship with Him.

Below is a catalog of some of the most well-known and theologically significant punitive acts attributed to God in the Hebrew Bible:

The Flood (Genesis 6–9)

This early and archetypal act of divine judgment results in the annihilation of nearly all living beings on Earth, sparing only Noah and his family. The rationale is the universal corruption of humanity: *“The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become”* (Genesis 6:5). The flood represents a reset of creation, a cleansing of sin on a global scale. It reflects a theology in which God's intolerance for evil justifies total destruction in order to restore moral order.

Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)

The cities of the plain are destroyed by fire and brimstone due to their grave sins, particularly those involving inhospitality, violence, and sexual immorality. Lot and his family are spared, though Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying

the command not to look back. This act serves as a warning of the consequences of collective depravity and the swiftness of God's judgment upon cities or cultures that violate divine standards.

The Ten Plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7–12)

These escalating acts of judgment target Pharaoh and the Egyptian nation for their enslavement of Israel and their refusal to heed God's command to release His people. The final plague—the death of every firstborn son in Egypt—marks the climax of this punitive sequence. While the plagues demonstrate God's power over nature and foreign gods, they also underscore a theology in which divine intervention for one nation (Israel) comes through the suffering of another (Egypt).

The Conquest of Canaan (Book of Joshua)

After the Israelites enter the Promised Land, God commands them to completely destroy the Canaanite populations occupying it: *"You shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them..."* (Deuteronomy 20:16–17). This conquest is framed as the fulfillment of divine promise and the removal of moral corruption. Yet the totality of the violence—including the slaughter of men, women, and children—has made it one of the most morally debated parts of the Bible.

Punishment of Individuals

Numerous individuals suffer direct, often sudden, judgment from God.

- Uzzah is struck dead for touching the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:6–7).
- Nadab and Abihu are consumed by fire for offering unauthorized incense (Leviticus 10:1–2).
- Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt for a single act of disobedience (Genesis 19:26).

These incidents emphasize God's intolerance of irreverence, even in minor or seemingly understandable breaches. They reinforce a theology of strict obedience and the immediacy of divine consequences.

National Judgment through Exile (Assyria and Babylon)

The destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria (722 BCE) and the Southern Kingdom by Babylon (586 BCE) are interpreted by biblical prophets not as mere geopolitical defeats, but as divine punishment for centuries of idolatry, injustice, and covenant violation. These events are accompanied by famine, siege, and mass death, and are narrated with theological reflection in books like Lamentations, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. In this view, national suffering is not accidental but providential—a severe but justified correction meant to purify and eventually restore the people.

Interpretive Traditions: Divine Justice vs. Mythic Memory vs. Theological Construct

These violent episodes have generated significant theological debate across Jewish and Christian traditions. Some interpret them as literal historical events reflecting divine justice. Others see them as mythic memory—culturally shaped stories meant to affirm the power and sovereignty of God in a dangerous ancient world. Still others treat them as theological constructs—texts that must be read allegorically or critically in light of evolving moral and spiritual understanding, especially when juxtaposed with the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament.

What emerges from this catalog is a conception of God that is consistent, but not necessarily merciful by modern standards: a God who protects His people, purifies His covenant, and eradicates opposition. These acts, while theologically coherent within their ancient context, raise significant ethical challenges when invoked today as justification for political or military action. It is precisely this tension—between ancient divine violence and the modern invocation of God for nationalist ends—that necessitates the corrective, transformative ethic introduced by Jesus Christ.

3. The Theology Behind Punitive Acts

To understand the violent and punitive acts attributed to God in the Hebrew Bible, one must examine the theological framework that undergirds them. These acts are not portrayed as arbitrary or senseless but rather as embedded within a

coherent, though often harsh, system of divine justice. Central to this system are the themes of covenantal exclusivity, ritual purity, and the perceived necessity of holy war for the protection and sanctification of God's chosen people. This framework, though theologically intelligible within its historical context, becomes deeply problematic when imported into modern contexts without reinterpretation through the lens of the Gospel.

Covenant Exclusivity: Israel as God's Chosen Nation

The foundation of much of the Old Testament's theology of divine violence lies in the doctrine of election—that God chose Israel out of all the nations of the earth to be His special possession (Deuteronomy 7:6–8). This election is not merely spiritual but national, with Israel's political and territorial identity woven into its spiritual calling. The covenant made with Abraham, reaffirmed with Moses and David, establishes a unique and binding relationship in which obedience is rewarded and disobedience is punished. Violence against others—especially the Canaanite nations—is often portrayed as necessary for maintaining this exclusive covenant. The land itself is promised to Israel, and those who inhabit it are seen as obstacles to God's plan. The theology of election thus justifies conquest, expulsion, and annihilation as acts of faithfulness to God's covenant.

Sacred Space and Purity Laws: Justification for Exclusion or Elimination

Closely tied to the covenant is the concept of holiness, which in the Hebrew Bible involves both moral uprightness and ritual purity. God is holy, and His people must be holy (Leviticus 19:2). This results in a complex system of laws governing what is clean and unclean, who may enter the sanctuary, and how impurity must be dealt with. Transgressions of purity are not treated as minor errors but as contaminations of sacred space that must be purged—sometimes through death. The land itself is viewed as defilable (e.g., Leviticus 18:24–30), and the presence of sinful or idolatrous peoples is seen as polluting it. The expulsion or extermination of these peoples is framed not as cruelty but as purification. This theology allows for the exclusion of foreigners, the execution of the disobedient, and the ritual separation of Israel from all that is deemed impure.

The Moral Logic of “Holy War” and Collective Punishment

The concept of *herem*—the complete destruction of a city or people devoted to God—is a key element of Old Testament warfare theology (see Deuteronomy 20:16–18, 1 Samuel 15). In this view, war is not simply political but liturgical; it is a form of worship in which obedience to God is tested by one’s willingness to carry out divine commands, even to the point of mass killing. The logic is not utilitarian but theological: total destruction is required to prevent spiritual contamination and to demonstrate exclusive loyalty to Yahweh. This extends to the idea of collective punishment: entire communities are held accountable for the actions of individuals (e.g., Achan’s family in Joshua 7), and the sins of leaders can lead to the suffering of the nation (e.g., David’s census in 2 Samuel 24). This framework leaves little room for nuance or individual moral agency, and reinforces a worldview in which judgment is communal and non-negotiable.

Prophetic Reflections on God's Wrath as Righteous and Corrective

Despite the severity of divine punishment, the prophetic literature consistently frames God’s wrath not as arbitrary rage but as the righteous response of a holy God to covenant violation and social injustice. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos interpret disasters—whether military defeat, famine, or exile—as God’s attempt to call His people back to faithfulness. Divine judgment is portrayed as a form of correction, a disciplinary measure intended to restore right relationship. *“Whom the Lord loves He disciplines”* (Proverbs 3:12, echoed in Hebrews 12:6) becomes a theological anchor for understanding suffering within the covenantal relationship. Even when punishment is harsh, the prophets insist it is never final: God remains committed to Israel and promises restoration on the other side of judgment.

Limitations: Internal Biblical Critiques

Importantly, the Hebrew Bible does not present a monolithic view of divine violence. There are significant internal critiques that complicate and challenge the theology of punishment:

- Job questions the assumption that suffering is always the result of sin. His righteous suffering exposes the limitations of retributive theology and invites a more mysterious understanding of divine justice.
- Jonah is scandalized by God's mercy toward Nineveh, a foreign and wicked city. The book ends with God's rhetorical question: "*Should I not have concern for that great city?*" (Jonah 4:11), offering a rebuke to the exclusivism of earlier narratives.
- The Psalms of lament frequently express anguish over what seems to be unjust suffering or divine silence (e.g., Psalm 22, 88). These prayers open space for protest, grief, and hope within the context of faith.

These texts reveal a theological tension: while divine violence is presented as just, the biblical writers also wrestle with its implications, especially when it appears indiscriminate or disproportionate. The presence of these critiques indicates that the Bible itself is not comfortable with a simplistic reading of God as a cosmic executioner.

By articulating this theological architecture—its logic, its purpose, and its internal contradictions—we are better positioned to understand how a worldview based solely on Old Testament punitive themes can become dangerous when applied uncritically to modern conflicts. Without the ethical transformation introduced by Jesus Christ, the God of judgment remains, but the invitation to love, mercy, and redemption is tragically lost.

4. The Jesus Ethic: Mercy Without Exception

Jesus of Nazareth entered into a religious and cultural world shaped by the legacy of covenant, purity, and retributive justice. His teachings, actions, and ultimately his self-sacrifice stand as a radical re-interpretation—not a rejection—of the theological assumptions of his time. Whereas the Old Testament often framed divine justice in terms of national identity, legal fidelity, and the punishment of

wrongdoing, Jesus introduced an ethic centered on mercy without exception. His vision of the Kingdom of God shattered tribal boundaries and replaced vengeance with grace, exclusion with inclusion, and law with love.

The Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount as Moral Reversals

In the opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus sets forth a moral vision that stands in stark contrast to the expectations of a punitive and triumphalist theology. The Beatitudes bless not the strong or victorious, but the meek, the poor in spirit, the peacemakers, and those who hunger for righteousness. These blessings invert the world's power structures, suggesting that divine favor is not reserved for the dominant, the militarily victorious, or the ritually pure, but for the humble and the merciful. The Sermon continues with teachings that demand not just external compliance with the law, but an internal transformation of the heart. This represents a moral revolution in which intent and compassion matter more than ritual and conquest.

Love for Enemies and the Command to Forgive

Among the most radical elements of Jesus' teaching is the command to love one's enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44). In a society under Roman occupation, where hatred for the oppressor was seen as righteous, this directive cut against both nationalist zeal and conventional morality. Forgiveness is not optional in Jesus' ethic; it is central. In the Lord's Prayer, he teaches: *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"* (Matthew 6:12), linking divine forgiveness directly to our own practice of mercy. Forgiveness is not reserved for the deserving, nor is it contingent on repentance; it is an unconditional expression of grace. This ethic abolishes the logic of "an eye for an eye", replacing it with a theology of reconciliation.

Jesus' Rebuke of Retributive Thinking

Jesus consistently opposes punitive attitudes, even among his own disciples. In Luke 9:54–56, when James and John ask Jesus whether they should call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village—as Elijah once did—Jesus rebukes them. Some manuscripts even add, *"You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."*

Likewise, in John 8:1–11, Jesus intervenes in the attempted stoning of a woman caught in adultery. Instead of affirming the legal punishment mandated by the Torah, Jesus challenges the crowd: *“Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.”* These episodes reflect Jesus’ insistence that mercy is superior to legalism, and that judgment belongs to God alone.

The Cross as Nonviolent Atonement: Substitutionary Love, Not Tribal Victory
The crucifixion of Jesus is the culmination of his ethical vision, not an exception to it. While some theological traditions have interpreted the cross primarily as a legal transaction or appeasement of divine wrath, the Gospels portray it as the supreme act of nonviolent love. Jesus willingly submits to death at the hands of both religious and imperial authorities, not to reinforce tribal victory but to expose and absorb the violence of the world. He does not resist arrest, retaliate against his accusers, or curse his executioners. Instead, he prays: *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). The cross is not vengeance—it is the ultimate act of substitutionary compassion, a demonstration of God's love for all people, including his enemies.

Jesus and the Universalization of Neighbor

One of Jesus' most enduring contributions to moral theology is the redefinition of “neighbor.” In Luke 10:25–37, he tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan in response to a lawyer’s question: *“And who is my neighbor?”* The answer—an enemy figure who becomes the model of mercy—upends Jewish-Samaritan animosity and challenges ethnocentric ethics. Similarly, Jesus affirms the faith of a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5–13), a representative of the occupying enemy power, and says, *“Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”* In both examples, Jesus expands the moral community to include outsiders, enemies, and perceived threats, undermining any theology that privileges one group as uniquely righteous or favored.

The Eschatological Warnings of Jesus: Justice Through Mercy, Not Annihilation
Even Jesus’ teachings on final judgment emphasize compassionate justice over punitive destruction. In Matthew 25:31–46, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats presents judgment not based on tribal affiliation, ritual purity, or doctrinal

correctness, but on acts of mercy: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the prisoner. Those who are welcomed into the Kingdom are not those who conquered their enemies but those who served the least. Jesus warns of consequences for those who ignore the suffering of others, but the standard is not legal or ethnic—it is relational and compassionate. Justice is not abandoned, but it is filtered through mercy.

In every dimension, Jesus offers an ethic that transcends vengeance, tribalism, and exclusivity. His life and teachings dismantle the logic of holy war and replace it with a theology of sacrificial love, universal dignity, and relentless forgiveness. To invoke the name of God without incorporating the ethic of Jesus is to perpetuate violence in the name of holiness—a distortion that leads not to righteousness but to ruin. Only by placing Jesus at the center of theological reflection can we hope to recover a vision of God that heals rather than harms.

5. God Without Jesus: The Dangers of Selective Theology

When the concept of God is invoked without the ethical, universalizing, and mercy-centered framework of Jesus Christ, theology becomes vulnerable to distortion. History and current events alike show how such distortions—especially when grounded in selective readings of the Hebrew Bible—can be deployed to justify violence, exclusion, and conquest. In this section, we examine how the absence of Jesus' teachings from theological discourse leads to a worldview that venerates divine power without reflecting divine love, and how this dynamic plays out in both ancient and modern history, with devastating consequences.

The Political Weaponization of Divine Favoritism

One of the most dangerous ideas in any religious system is that God favors one group—ethnic, national, or ideological—over all others in an exclusive and permanent way. The Hebrew Bible contains strong themes of divine election, especially in the covenant with Israel. While the New Testament reinterprets this election through Jesus as inclusive and spiritual (e.g., “There is neither Jew nor

Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus” – Galatians 3:28), the Old Testament concept of chosenness has been repeatedly weaponized in political contexts. When stripped of Jesus’ teachings on humility, self-sacrifice, and love for enemies, divine favoritism is easily transformed into political entitlement. In this framework, opposition to one’s national or religious group becomes opposition to God Himself—justifying any and all actions taken to eliminate the perceived threat.

How Ancient Texts Are Used to Justify Modern Conquest

Selective theology thrives on anachronism: the uncritical application of ancient commands to modern situations. When stories of divinely sanctioned conquest, such as the annihilation of the Canaanites, are lifted out of their historical, cultural, and theological context and applied to current geopolitical struggles, the result is a theology of conquest disguised as faithfulness. Those who draw on texts like Deuteronomy 7 (“you shall utterly destroy them”) or Joshua’s campaigns without the interpretive filter of Jesus’ nonviolence run the risk of repeating the logic of tribal extermination, this time with modern weapons and state institutions. In such cases, sacred texts cease to function as instruments of spiritual guidance and become tools of propaganda, reinforcing ideologies of domination rather than divine love.

Religious Exceptionalism and the Dehumanization of the Other

The absence of Jesus from theological reflection often leads to religious exceptionalism—the belief that only one group bears the image of God in a meaningful way. This, in turn, permits or even mandates the dehumanization of the Other. If one’s enemies are understood not merely as political opponents but as inherently unrighteous, impure, or divinely cursed, then violence against them becomes not only justified but sanctified. Jesus directly challenged this mindset in his parables and teachings, reminding his followers that Samaritans, Roman centurions, Gentile women, and even tax collectors were not beyond the reach of God’s grace. Without this corrective, theology becomes a machine for moral exclusion, and whole populations can be spiritually erased before they are physically targeted.

Zionism, Divine Entitlement, and Militarized Exegesis

A particularly potent and relevant example of selective theology is found in Zionism, especially in its religious variants. While Zionism began as a secular nationalist movement, its religious justification has been increasingly invoked through appeals to biblical texts that portray the land of Canaan as a divine inheritance for the Jewish people. When these texts are read in isolation from the universalist, peace-seeking ethic of Jesus, they lend themselves to a theology of entitlement backed by force. This “militarized exegesis” supports the idea that modern Israel not only has a political claim to the land but a divine mandate to occupy and subdue it—regardless of the human cost. Such a theology permits massive civilian casualties, displacement, and suffering, all while claiming divine legitimacy. It turns God into the guarantor of territorial control rather than the advocate of justice and mercy.

Historical Parallels: Crusades, Colonialism, and Religious Nationalism

The pattern of invoking God without Jesus is not new. In the Crusades, Christian warriors marched under the banner of the cross to reclaim the Holy Land, often committing atrocities in Jesus’ name while violating everything He taught. During the colonial era, European powers justified the conquest and subjugation of indigenous peoples through the “civilizing mission,” baptizing imperial greed in theological rhetoric. In both cases, the Jesus of the Gospels was eclipsed by the God of the sword—a misreading that allowed violence to be interpreted as righteousness. In the 20th and 21st centuries, religious nationalism in various forms—from Hindu supremacy to Islamic extremism to Christian dominionism—has repeated the same fundamental error: invoking God's name to justify human violence, exclusion, and power.

These patterns warn us that the absence of Jesus in theological reasoning does not produce a neutral or abstract belief in God. Rather, it leaves a vacuum that is often filled by the most coercive and tribal dimensions of religion. When Jesus’ ethic is removed, what remains is not God as revealed in love, but God as a projection of national will, military force, and religious absolutism. In Gaza and

elsewhere, this selective theology continues to justify immense human suffering while silencing the Gospel's central demand: to love the least, serve the enemy, and renounce the sword.

6. Gaza as Theological Battleground

The conflict in Gaza is not merely a geopolitical crisis, nor merely a humanitarian disaster. It is also a battleground of theologies in conflict—not only between different religions, but within the traditions themselves. The violence, destruction, and entrenched hostility we witness in Gaza are not the products of material forces alone; they are also the consequence of theological frameworks—some ancient, others modern—that have been selectively invoked, misapplied, or outright manipulated to justify what, in any Gospel-centered view, is a tragedy of staggering moral proportions.

Examples of Religious Justification Used in Rhetoric Around Gaza

In the rhetoric surrounding Gaza, particularly from religious-nationalist factions within Israel and their political supporters, ancient Hebrew Bible texts are frequently cited to justify military action, territorial entitlement, and the subjugation or elimination of perceived enemies. Phrases such as “God gave us this land” or “We are fulfilling biblical prophecy” echo the divine commands in Deuteronomy or Joshua to conquer and cleanse the land of its inhabitants. Settler ideologues have referred to Palestinians as “Amalekites”—invoking a biblical enemy God commanded to be utterly destroyed (1 Samuel 15)—thus framing modern Palestinians not as human neighbors, but as theologically expendable adversaries.

This religious narrative extends beyond marginal groups; it influences national policies and legitimizes disproportionate violence under the guise of sacred duty. In some Christian Zionist circles, similar themes appear: the suffering of Palestinians is seen not as injustice but as a necessary stage in God's plan for Israel's full restoration. In this worldview, justice becomes subordinate to

eschatology, and the human cost is regarded as collateral damage in a divinely orchestrated drama.

Civilian Suffering as a Moral Test of Religious Sincerity

The scale and intensity of suffering in Gaza—bombed hospitals, starving children, displaced families, targeted journalists—constitute a direct challenge to any theology that claims to represent the God of mercy, justice, or compassion. If faith in God means anything, it must be judged not by the ability to defend land or assert identity, but by how it responds to human suffering. The Gospel declares that *“whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”* (Matthew 25:40). Yet in Gaza, the least—by any measure—are ignored, demonized, or reduced to statistics.

This is not just a political failure; it is a moral and spiritual collapse. Any theology that cannot account for or respond to the suffering of innocents with love, empathy, and action is exposed as hollow. The prophetic tradition—shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—holds that God's anger is directed not merely at idolaters or outsiders, but especially at those who trample the poor, pervert justice, and hide behind religion while doing so (see Amos 5:21–24, Isaiah 1:11–17). The suffering of Gaza exposes the sincerity—or lack thereof—of contemporary religious commitments.

The Silence—or Complicity—of Global Religious Institutions

Perhaps more disturbing than the rhetoric of extremists is the silence—or complicity—of mainstream religious institutions, especially in the West. Many Christian leaders have remained muted, cautious, or indifferent regarding the devastation in Gaza, choosing institutional diplomacy or political alignment over prophetic clarity. Churches that speak out fervently about the unborn, the persecuted, or the poor are suddenly subdued when the victims are Palestinian. In some cases, church bodies have actively supported Israeli military policies under the banner of “standing with Israel,” regardless of their alignment with Christian ethics.

This silence is not neutral. It communicates whose suffering matters and whose does not. In failing to speak clearly, many institutions become functionally

complicit, lending theological cover to policies of oppression. The result is not only a betrayal of the Gospel but a deepening of global cynicism about religion's moral credibility. The Church—if it is to be the Body of Christ—cannot remain silent while Christ is crucified again in the faces of Gaza's wounded and forgotten.

The Lost Opportunity for Repentance, Reconciliation, and Peace

In this moment of crisis, Gaza also represents a missed opportunity—a chance for deep, transformative repentance on the part of all who have been entangled in cycles of violence, religious nationalism, or theological triumphalism. The suffering could become a doorway to humility: a moment to renounce the idols of power, land, and vengeance, and to recover the heart of God as revealed in Christ. But that opportunity is rapidly vanishing.

Each bomb dropped is not just a military action; it is a theological declaration—one that says: “we do not believe in mercy.” Each refusal to mourn Palestinian dead is a testimony against the universal love Jesus proclaimed. Each invocation of ancient conquest stories to justify present-day annihilation is a declaration that the Cross has no meaning.

Reconciliation, difficult though it may be, requires theological courage. It demands that both sides look beyond their inherited myths and sacred scars to see the divine image in the face of the other. But for that to happen, Jesus must not be an afterthought or a symbol of personal salvation alone. He must become the measure of all religious claims, the lens through which Scripture is read, and the ethic by which God's name is spoken.

Until then, Gaza remains not just a humanitarian battleground, but a theological battlefield, where the name of God is invoked but the character of Christ is absent—and where, until that changes, peace will remain elusive.

7. The Christian Mandate: Love in the Face of Judgment

In a world marked by escalating violence, theological division, and selective moral outrage, the mandate of Jesus Christ to love without exception is more radical and urgent than ever. The Gospel does not call Christians to remain neutral in the face

of injustice, nor to hide behind theological abstraction while people suffer. Instead, it calls for a clear, sacrificial commitment to truth, mercy, and peace, especially where these values are most threatened. In the context of Gaza and similar crises, the Christian responsibility is not to choose sides based on political loyalty, national identity, or even religious heritage—but to follow Christ, who chose the cross over the sword, the outcast over the powerful, and mercy over vengeance.

The Danger of Revering Scripture While Ignoring the Christ of Scripture

The Bible is a sacred text, but it is not a flat document. Within its pages are stories of liberation and conquest, mercy and judgment, inclusion and exclusion. Without a guiding hermeneutic—an interpretive principle—Scripture can become a tool for righteousness or a weapon of oppression. For Christians, Jesus Christ is that interpretive center. He is not merely a figure within Scripture but the living Word through whom all Scripture must be read.

To revere the Bible while ignoring the Christ who fulfills and reinterprets it is to risk turning a book of divine revelation into a book of divine authorization for any number of human agendas. This is especially dangerous when Old Testament texts are lifted out of their covenantal and historical context to justify modern political or military policies. Without the corrective lens of Jesus—who taught forgiveness, humility, and universal love—the text is easily distorted to serve the interests of the powerful.

The idolization of Scripture apart from Christ is a recurring danger in Christian history, and it is deeply relevant today. When Christians defend or excuse atrocities committed in God's name because they resemble patterns found in ancient Israel's wars, they are not defending the Gospel—they are denying it.

A Return to the Centrality of Jesus' Moral Vision in Public Theology

Public theology—the engagement of Christian ethics with social and political life—has too often been hijacked by cultural nationalism, partisanship, or sanitized moralism. A truly Christian public theology must be centered not on power or tradition, but on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. His moral vision is clear:

“Blessed are the peacemakers... Love your enemies... Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me.”

This vision does not mean passive disengagement or moral relativism. On the contrary, it demands active, courageous engagement with systems of injustice, violence, and exclusion. But it calls Christians to engage in a way that reflects the character of Christ: nonviolent, truthful, and rooted in radical empathy. The Christian voice in the public square must no longer echo the rhetoric of empire or tribal allegiance. It must echo the voice of the crucified Savior who laid down his life not just for his friends, but for his enemies.

Practical Implications: Diplomacy, Forgiveness, Coexistence

The practical outworking of this Christ-centered ethic in global conflicts such as Gaza must begin with a rejection of religious justifications for violence, and a commitment to diplomacy grounded in mutual recognition of dignity. Christians are called not only to pray for peace, but to advocate for it, using their voices, institutions, and influence to promote negotiations, ceasefires, and humanitarian aid—especially when civilian lives are at stake.

Forgiveness, though politically unpopular and spiritually demanding, is a non-negotiable aspect of Christian witness. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting wrongs or abandoning justice; it means refusing to let vengeance have the final word. It means opening the door to reconciliation, even when the past is filled with pain. Coexistence, likewise, does not imply moral equivalency or naïveté. It means choosing relationship over eradication, neighborliness over nationalism, and solidarity over suspicion.

These are not sentimental ideals. They are the concrete practices of the Kingdom of God in a world that prefers division, superiority, and retaliation.

Recovering Prophetic Lament and Christlike Compassion in a Violent World

Finally, the Christian mandate requires a recovery of lament—the sacred practice of mourning with the brokenhearted and crying out against injustice. Lament is not weakness. It is the prophetic voice of conscience, the spiritual protest of those who will not accept evil as inevitable. Jesus himself lamented: *“Jerusalem,*

Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37).

The refusal to lament the death of Palestinian children, the destruction of homes, the suffering of the displaced, is not theological neutrality—it is spiritual apathy.

Christlike compassion compels us to feel the pain of others, even those the world considers enemies. It compels us to act not out of guilt, but out of love. It opens our eyes to the divine image in every person, including the wounded, the weeping, and the wronged. And it demands that we call evil what it is—even when it wears the garments of religion or drapes itself in the language of divine will.

The Christian response to Gaza, and to all theological violence, is not primarily a political project. It is a moral and spiritual mandate: to reclaim Jesus as the center of faith and the standard of judgment. To reject theologies that exalt divine wrath while silencing divine mercy. To speak, to act, and to suffer, if necessary, for the sake of peace, justice, and human dignity. In the face of destruction, Christians are called not to defend God’s honor through silence or alignment with power—but to embody God’s love, as revealed in the wounded Christ who still stands with the crucified of the earth.

8. Conclusion

The tragedy unfolding in Gaza is not merely a distant geopolitical crisis—it is a theological crisis, and it stands as a mirror held up to the global Christian conscience. It asks uncomfortable, even damning questions: What kind of God do we believe in? What kind of Gospel are we preaching? Whose suffering do we see, and whose do we ignore? And perhaps most damning of all: Have we crafted a Christianity that reveres God but has forgotten Jesus?

For Christians, Gaza is not just a political test, but a spiritual reckoning. It exposes how easily sacred texts can be stripped of their Christ-centered meaning and retooled to justify vengeance, tribalism, and conquest. It reveals the danger of a

theology that clings to divine authority while discarding divine compassion. And it calls the Church to account for its silence, its complicity, and its fear of offending power while entire populations are buried under rubble, demonized in rhetoric, and erased from moral concern.

The solution is not to abandon the Old Testament, nor to pit Jesus against the Hebrew Scriptures. The solution is to read all of Scripture in light of the One who fulfills it—not through violence, but through sacrificial love. Jesus does not discard the law; he completes it. He shows what the law was always meant to lead toward: justice through mercy, holiness through inclusion, and strength through self-giving love.

The call now is for theological integrity. Christians must insist that our understanding of God be filtered through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No image of God that contradicts the crucified Christ can be true for Christians. A god who justifies slaughter in the name of prophecy, or who sanctions the dispossession of the weak in the name of sacred land, or who calls for vengeance over reconciliation, is not the God revealed in Jesus. That is not the Gospel—it is a distortion, an idol.

We must reject this false god of power without mercy, of judgment without grace, of vengeance without redemption. This god has been invoked in every era of religious violence, from the Crusades to colonialism to Gaza. And this god always demands sacrifice—but never his own. In contrast, the true God of the Gospel offers himself, not others, as the atoning sacrifice. He dies to end the cycle of violence, not perpetuate it.

To proclaim Jesus is to break the theological justification for annihilation. It is to say that no land, no prophecy, no history, and no scripture can ever override the worth of a single human life. It is to say that even the enemy is loved, even the violent are redeemable, and even in war, the command to love holds firm.

The tragedy of Gaza is a call not only to humanitarian action but to theological clarity. The Gospel is not an abstraction; it is a challenge to every false god, every

corrupted scripture, and every silence in the face of suffering. Jesus must not merely be included in our theology—he must be the center of it.

Until this happens, Gaza—and places like it—will remain. Until Jesus is not only worshipped in churches but followed into the heart of conflict, into the places of pain and mourning, into the cries of the oppressed, we will remain spectators to a world torn apart by theologies without love.

The Gospel does not permit that.

Jesus does not permit that.

And the cross, once again, waits for those willing to carry it—not in conquest, but in compassion.

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