

Shoftim 5786

Chronicles I 22:8

And the word of G-d came to me: You have spilled much blood, and you have made great wars. You shall not build a house in My Name, for you have spilled much blood upon the ground before Me.

Jerusalem Talmud, Sheviit 6:1

Joshua sent three messages into Israel, before the Jews entered the land: Whoever wants to leave, may do so. Whoever wants to make peace, may do so. Whoever wants to make war, may do so.

Midrash Tannaim to Deuteronomy 20:12

"Besiege it" – Surround them on all four sides. Rabbi Natan said: Give them one path, through which to flee.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on Deuteronomy 20:19

A midrash says: "'To capture it' – not to destroy it." Your goal should be only to subdue the city, not to enslave its residents as prisoners of war.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch on Deuteronomy 23:10

Also, when you leave the normal boundaries of family and civil life, and you are in a military camp arranged against your enemies, then even though you are in a military camp, where the ethical reins are easily loosened and the actual goal of war is an unrestrained coarseness – then, too, "guard yourself against every bad thing." Do not cease examining yourself, with self-control, and be on guard against "every bad thing."

Bavli Kiddushin 21b

The Torah only presented this to combat the evil inclination.

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, Ethics and War, Techumin 4, pg. 184-5 (from the notes of R. Mordechai Torczyner)

The beginning of the calculation of a war's justification is the concept of milchemet mitzvah. The category of milchemet mitzvah includes war for the aid of Israel before an enemy who attacks. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 5:1) But note, "the aid of Israel". We must ask whether a particular war will actually help Israel; not every war aids Israel. Every war has a price.... 1) Second, the price [of war] is also paid by the enemy, who is also graced with the Divine image, and one should grieve whenever Gd's creations drown in the sea. On this point, the issue of quantity is meaningful, and one certainly must weigh the justifications for harming many in order to save an individual. 2) Third, war harms the nature of the individual and society which battle. As Nachmanides wrote, regarding Deuteronomy 23:10, "And you shall be on guard against every bad thing," "The most naturally righteous of people will be clothed with cruelty and rage when going to war against the enemy, and therefore the verse warned, etc." King David was denied the opportunity to build the Temple because "he spilled much blood upon the earth (Chronicles I 22:8)", even though that was in milchemet mitzvah. Even the sword used in a milchemet mitzvah is unsuitable to aid in building the altar, as is written in the Mechilta on Exodus 20:22...