

Halabja



Author`s notes

This material is part of the wider material on genocide to be found on the GENOCIDE page of www.visionworld27.org It needs to be read in conjunction with that material, especially “The agony of Pontus”, where much of the basic teaching on genocide can be found. That essential material is not repeated here.

Halabja was one incident within the Iran/Iraq conflict, and only one of many uses of chemical weapons. It is best understood within this wider conflict. Many books exist to help understand the Anfal. Use a browser. I have read “A poisonous Affair” By Joost R. Hinkeltermann helpful, along with “An Inconvenient Atrocity” by Susan Schuurman. Both available on Amazon.

This material focuses on the theological issues which Halabja raises, as does this whole genocide series. I am aware that I have made a number of rather general statements about Halabja, but I have done so because my main concern is not politics or military, but spiritual.

Also available in this series:-

The agony of Pontus
The Roma genocide
The Guatemala genocide
The Cambodia genocide
Srebrenica

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The beginning

Halabja is such a shocking event, that it is hard to know where to begin. I have decided to start with two very different pieces - one forensic and one personal. I hope this provides a framework for what follows.

The Genocide convention

This is what the United Nations, (U.N.) feels about genocide - if only it had acted on it.

The Genocide convention, Article 1: The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

Article 2:- In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

This is what happens when conventions are ignored:-

Hamida Mahmoud, a Kurdish citizen of Halabja, tried to save her two year old daughter by allowing her to nurse at the breast. She thought she would not breath the gas if she was breast feeding. Hamida died with the child still at the breast.

The facts

During the Iran/Iraq war of the 1980s, the Iraqi government set out to destroy the Kurdish people living within their border - they named this series of actions the Anfal. It is well documented and can easily be traced using any browser.

Within the Anfal, a particular event occurred, similar to the Srebrenica event in the Bosnia war. This event - Halabja - was so terrible that it was in genocide in its own right. At the 25th anniversary of the Halabja chemical attacks and Anfal Campaign there was a commemoration in the European Parliament . The speakers asked for international recognition of Halabja and Anfal as Genocide. (www.mesop.de)

The facts as best they can be reconstructed: - (See www.hrw.org or use any browser.)

The war between Iran and Iraq was in its eighth year when, on March 16 and 17, 1988, Iraq dropped poison gas on the Kurdish city of Halabja, then held by Iranian troops and Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas allied with Tehran. According to the testimony of survivors, the chemical weapons employed in Halabja were dropped from airplanes well after the town had been captured by Iranians and Iraqi Kurdish rebel forces allied with them and after fighting in the immediate area had ceased.

The city's 70,000 or so inhabitants, many of whom were refugees from outlying areas, had already been pounded for two days from the surrounding mountain heights by conventional artillery, mortars and rockets. Many families had spent the night in their basements to escape the bombs. When the gas came, however, that was the worst place to be since the toxic chemicals, heavier than air, concentrated in low-lying areas. Between and 4,000 and 5,000 people, almost all civilians, died either at the time or shortly after.

Hewa, a university student, survived by covering his face with a wet cloth and taking to the mountains around the city. He says that Iraqi warplanes followed, dropping more chemical bombs. "I got some gas in my eyes and

had trouble breathing. You always wanted to vomit and when you did, the vomit was green.” He says he passed “hundreds” of dead bodies. Those around him died in a number of ways, suggesting a combination of toxic chemicals. Some “just dropped dead.” Others “died of laughing.” Others took a few minutes to die, first “burning and blistering” or “coughing up green vomit.” Journalists noted that the lips of many corpses had turned blue.

International response by the U.N., U.S.A. and the international community

The response of the international community was, at best hesitant, and at worst incompetent. The United Nations (U.N.) documents show the difficulty faced in responding by any bureaucracy riddled with self-interest. The more I have read the documents, the more disheartened I have become. I experienced just the same with the U.N. response to Srebrenica. Politicians and diplomats dithered, while people died.

America (U.S.A.) seemed very concerned with its trading relations with Iraq, and of course, access to the oil reserves in Iraq. So it accused both Iraq and Iran of using chemical weapons. This avoided having to place any blame and, consequently, take any action.

Politics is a difficult business, having to deal with many conflicting influences and pressures. We can understand the difficulty of taking a stand, but can't help thinking that Chemical Ali was right when he said, (and I quote verbatim) “I will kill them with chemical weapons. The international community - who is going to say anything? The international community - **** them.”(en.wikipedia.org:twitter.com) It's a harsh thing to say, but he appeared to be right.

One more fact to note: - The material to manufacture the chemical weapons came from Western businesses.

No excuse

No one - the Iraqis, the U.N. or the U.S.A could argue that what was happening was acceptable. They had all signed the Geneva protocol of 1925, which banned chemical weapons. Signed at Geneva June 17, 1925 Entered into force February 8, 1928 Ratification advised by the U.S. Senate December 16, 1974 Ratified by U.S. President January 22, 1975 U.S. ratification deposited with the Government of France April 10, 1975 Proclaimed by U.S. President April 29, 1975, it stated:-

“Whereas the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices, has been justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world; and

Whereas the prohibition of such use has been declared in Treaties to which the majority of Powers of the World are Parties; and

To the end that this prohibition shall be universally accepted as a part of International Law, binding alike the conscience and the practice of nations;

Declare:

That the High Contracting Parties, so far as they are not already Parties to Treaties prohibiting such use, accept this prohibition, agree to extend this prohibition to the use of bacteriological methods of warfare and agree to be bound as between themselves according to the terms of this declaration.(Signed by Iraq, Iran and USA among many others).”

I don't want to be cynical, but on so many occasions international conventions and protocols only survive until one, or many, of the signing parties sees it in their self-interest to ignore them.

Trials

The coalition set up the Iraqi Special Tribunal to try leading perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

The first trial began before the Iraqi Special Tribunal on 19 October 2005. At this trial Saddam and seven other defendants were tried for crimes against humanity with regard to events that took place after a failed assassination attempt in Dujail in 1982 by members of the Islamic Dawa Party (see also human rights abuses in Iraq). A second and separate trial began on 21 August 2006, trying Saddam and six co-defendants for genocide during the Anfal military campaign against the Kurds of northern Iraq. On 5 November 2006, Saddam was sentenced to death by hanging. On 26 December, Saddam's appeal was rejected and the death sentence upheld. Saddam Hussein was executed by hanging on 30 December 2006. With his death, all other charges were dropped. (Wikipedia, but many other sites give similar information.)

Ali HassanAl-Majid (Chemical Ali) was captured following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and was charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. He was convicted in June 2007 and was sentenced to death for crimes of genocide against the Kurds committed in the Anfal campaign of the 1980s. His appeal of the death sentence was rejected on 4 September 2007, and he was sentenced to death for the fourth time on 17 January 2010 and was hanged eight days later, on 25 January 2010.

Why?

The “Why” question is like a revolving door in these genocide studies. However hard we try, we keep coming back to it. In earthly terms these answers to “why” present themselves:-

* A long standing ethnic hatred, waiting only the opportunity to come back to life? As I explained in the Pontus material, genocide is a philosophy which keeps coming back, however hard we try to erase it.

* Fortuna Belli. (The fortunes of war). These things happen in conflict. It's hard to justify this when the massacre was so premeditated.

* Failure of the international community let this happen. May be, but the Iraqi military seemed very determined. Only overwhelming force could stop them.

Spiritual answer?

These genocide reflections have tried to find some spiritual answer to the genocidal events, although this has not been easy. We are not allowed to shrug our shoulders and say "Fortuna Belli" or "Force Majeure." We have got to try and find some kind of spiritual answer, because we cannot leave God out of it. We have to wrestle with Halabja, as we did with Srebrenica, to try and get to the truth. So what can we say?

The danger of Babylon

Babylon is a focus for the dark spiritual forces which oppose the will of God and seek to rule and ruin His creation. The growth in power of this force marks a vital point in the spiritual history of our world.

Saddam Hussein rebuilt it. It seems that he might have activated its dark side at the same time.

Babylon - its history

The first mention of Babylon is found in the book of Genesis: - **"Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. ...The first centres of his kingdom were Babylon..."** (Genesis 10:8-10) The evil influence of this place was soon felt in Israel. The terrible sin of Aachen, which brought the anger of God on Israel, came about **"when I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels. I coveted them and took them."** (Joshua 7:21) Babylon was actively involved in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

The Bible says: - **“The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites.”** (2 Kings 17:24) But it was an Israelite King who made possibly the greatest error of all:-**“At that time, Merodach Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of Hezekiah’s illness. Hezekiah received the messengers, and showed them all that was in his storehouse...there was nothing in the palace or in his entire Kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.”**

Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked **“What did those men say and where did they come from?”** **“From a distant land,” Hezekiah replied. “They came from Babylon.”** (2 Kings 20:12-20) Hezekiah, the anointed and chosen King of Israel, had let Babylon into every part of his Palace, and into Jerusalem. There was nothing he did not show to the Babylonian visitors. The evil had found its man and its access.

Isaiah saw all too clearly what this would mean:-**“The time will surely come when everything in your palace and all that your fathers have stored up till this day will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left says the Lord.”**

This is exactly what did happen. Babylon had found what it wanted. Slowly but surely it pressed against God’s people until it destroyed them, exiled them and tore down the very Holy Place of God.

Babylon - the spiritual reality

The Old Testament period saw the rise of the evil Kingdom of Babylon, almost an evil copy of Jerusalem. One was the throne of David, and the place where God had chosen to put his light, and the other was a foreshadowing of Satan’s throne, an evil and dark place, determined to destroy the people of God, and raise a throne for the evil dark powers. In the New Testament times, the physical place of Babylon no longer existed. But as a spiritual evil reality, its power was very prominent, aggressive and committed to the same programme as Babylon of old - to dominate, to destroy God’s kingdom, and to rule as God. These truths are seen at their

clearest in the Book of Revelation. In Chapter 13, the purposes and plans of Babylon are explained in the vision of the two beasts.

Babylon destroys as it has always done. It waits opportunity and in Hussein it might have found its man. Result - Halabja.

Failure of prayer?

Gethsemane saw an insurgency of evil, but Jesus was strong enough to resist. Drawing on his own strength and commitment, and angelic support, he resisted, though it cost him his life.

Guatemala faced a similar insurgency of evil, which planned to annihilate the Mayan people, (and anybody else who got in the way) in order to take control of the Nation. Sadly, God's people were not strong enough to resist this insurgency, and the result of this failure to watch cost the Nation a very great deal. For a period, evil reigned.

Did the same happen to Halabja? Did we fail to pray? We must heed the warning from Guatemala. We must be ceaselessly vigilant for our nations. Insurgencies of evil are always waiting to invade.

It must not be said of us "Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?"

Did we?

The gas attacks at Halabja and the Anfal suggest that, yet again, we failed to watch, to warn and to defend. The cost of this failure was dreadful. How many more times must I write on genocides before we, God's people, get the message?