

# WAR IN THE BIBLE

A Study of the Motivations, Rationalizations,  
and Strategies for War in the Inspired Word.

by

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Posted in the United States of America for everyone throughout the world seeking to do the will of the sovereign Lord of the universe.

Glory, honor, and praise to Him forever and ever.

## DEDICATION

This book tells the reader more about war than most believers may ever want to know. Yet war is a considerable part of the story in Scripture. And it is a constant subject of discussion in contemporary media.

The following material focuses on bloodshed, carnage, and fighting. The tenderhearted can easily be repulsed.

Most people prefer peace. They long for tranquility, quiet, and harmony. In this life, that is, unfortunately, in short supply.

In the last few pages of this document, the promise of peace shines through. This essay on war ends in hope. How refreshing!

Jesus often told people to “*go in peace*” Luke 7:50; 8:48, etc. He gives peace to those who are troubled, John 14:27.

Peace resides in God, John 16:33. Christ “*Himself is our peace*,” Ephesians 2:14. Hence, as His children, we are to be at peace with all men, Hebrews 12:14a.

That is a tall order but an achievable goal, 1 Peter 3:11. Though it is beyond our full understanding, it is within our grasp, Philippians 4:7.

Therefore, I dedicate this study to all of those who let “*peace rule in their hearts*,” Colossians 3:15. “*Blessed are the peacemakers*,” Matthew 5:9a.

Shalom,

Ed Mathews

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last two thousand years, the Old Testament has been viewed as a justification for war. The Hebrew Scriptures are certainly filled with graphic details of military action. Hence, ancient images are made into modern realities. Former violence inspires contemporary bloodshed. Past wars become the model for present conflict. Should they be? Is that the correct understanding of violence in Scripture? Obviously an examination of war in the Bible is a worthy subject, a commendable use of our time.

What is the biblical attitude toward war? Is there more than one perspective? Was Israel unique in her view of war (or did other nations share her point of view)? What was the opinion of the Old Testament prophets? And what about the New Testament? What did Jesus say? What was the position of the early Church? There is much to consider. There are no simple answers. Nevertheless, we will attempt to resolve each of the above issues as we proceed through this study. Obviously we have a lot of ground to cover!

. Previous Findings. Opinions vary regarding war in the Old Testament. They range from embarrassment to embrace, from avoidance to agreement. The subject rarely leaves the serious inquirer devoid of drawing some conclusions. Whether for or against the ancient ideology of war, scholars have explored the issues, have stated compelling reasons for every position one might imagine. For example, there are those who see military conflict as “holy wars.” Others view them as “moral surgeries.” Often the subject is divided between “offensive wars” and “defensive wars” (or “just” and “unjust hostilities”). Some writers separate biblical combat into “descriptive behavior” and “normative morality.” And, increasingly, there are those who—from the get go—question the historical accuracy of the war passages in Scripture. For that reason, many will dismiss the whole issue. *“Israel was not like us. Her ethics were not our ethics.”* Yet is that really the conclusion of the matter? I do not think so. The war stories are still there. The problem will not go away. How did Israel understand the killing? Did she carry a burden of guilt? How did she make sense of the brutality? Did her soldiers suffer post-traumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD)?

. Interpretation Challenges. We move forward (though the journey has its complications). The war texts of the Bible are scattered across two millennia of ancient history—plenty of time for ideas to shift and attitudes to change. The war texts in the Bible include several different cultures that hold different military ideologies. Notwithstanding, the Scriptures contain valuable information about real events. However, more often than not, the battle stories have little or no extra biblical evidence corroborating their accuracy. We take them as they are by faith.

These passages mention the lives, the experiences, and the beliefs of real people existing in a time and a place far removed from our own. How are we to assess these texts? What relevance, if any, does ancient secular documents have for interpreting the inspired war narratives? Our study will require confronting the fundamental issues of Israelite history, the biblical text, and archeological discoveries. That is no small assignment. The analysis of war in the Bible is a real challenge. Yet it is also a real blessing. For, in the process of sifting through the military activity in the word of God, we will discover the worldview of our spiritual forefathers. Attitudes toward war are a cultural map showing relationships between God and man, life and death, as well as one nation over against another nation. These texts are a template of understandings regarding politics and ethics. So, while our task is fraught with puzzling questions, it is a treasure trove of information concerning the efforts of Israel to define her identity.

. Various Approaches. There is more than one approach to the study of war in the Bible. Different academic disciplines look at the military texts in Scripture through the lenses of their specialized training. The results, for the most part, produce a collage of helpful conclusions. For instance, anthropologists will likely classify wars according to kin relationships: families, clans, tribes, or nations. They will observe who fights whom (believing that that determines the tactical strategies involved). Theologians tend to focus on holy wars and the moral implications involved in the extermination of the conquered peoples. Sociologists look at bloodshed through the eyes of social structure: raids, feuds, revenge, and war. While political scientists analyze conflicts by drawing lines between inside-the-group hostility and outside-the-group warfare (otherwise labeled “personal” and “impersonal aggression”). Thus, there is not one way to proceed. The contributions of various scholars and different academic backgrounds will undergird and enrich this study.

. Causal Explanations. What is the reason for war in the Bible? Social, psychological, economic, and political explanations abound. Those who study such matters say war contributes to group identity. The more certain of who people believe they are the less aggressive their war ideology will be. But when their survival is threatened—due to lack of food, want of water, need for security—war seems inevitable. Certainly these elements must not be dismissed. Neither must the ambivalence over the killing be ignored. The enemy has to be dehumanized. A distinction between “us” and “them” is required. How do warring people make peace with themselves after the carnage? How do the Scriptures answer these questions? Obviously there are numerous layers of inquiry in the ensuing investigation.

. Righteous Conflicts. Finally, this short essay will weigh the justification for bloody slaughter in the Bible. Is there such a thing as a just war? How do we

determine the validity of that claim? Is self-defense a sufficient reason to engage in warfare? Is abiding by a humane code of combat adequate to earn the label of righteous conflict? Surely limiting wanton violence, excessive destruction, and cruel treatment of captives would be welcome. But not all conflicts in the Bible have these restraints. How do we reconcile the differences? We proceed with caution. Prayer is needed. Likely a complex set of attitudes and a range of ways of justifying bloodshed will emerge. There will also be some disagreement among scholars over what is allowable battlefield behavior. Where do we go from here? How do we remain faithful to the word of God? Certainly we must not take this challenge lightly. May we discover the truth. May we honor the Lord.

# PART I

## CONCEPTS OF WAR



## CHAPTER 1

### DEVOTED THINGS

The most perplexing concept of war in the Bible is called the “ban.” The word “ban” refers to an official decree of condemnation. In the conquest of Jericho, the city was banned or “*devoted to the Lord*.” Every living thing was slaughtered with the sword, Joshua 6:21; cf. Numbers 21:2,3. Often, a reason for such extermination was stated, Deuteronomy 7:2-6. However, sometimes a rationale was not given, Joshua 10:39,40. All living creatures—men, women, and animals—were “*destroyed*,” were “*not spared*,” were “*put to death*,” I Samuel 15:3. There were “*no survivors*,” Joshua 10:28.

The descriptions of such carnage are puzzling. Where is mercy? The cruelty seems counter to the warning against the “*shedding of blood*,” Genesis 9:5,6, as well as the command prohibiting “*murder*,” Exodus 20:13. How do we reconcile the “ban” with exhortations to show compassion? Where do opposing commands find common ground? Perhaps, the place to start is with the root meaning of the word “ban.”

. Language of Sacrifice. The Hebrew word for “ban” is herem. It means to exclude from human use. Why? The banned item was “*devoted*” to God. Surrendering something to the Lord meant devoting it to His service, Leviticus 27:28. Whatever is devoted is considered holy. It must not be redeemed. Nothing should be substituted in its place. Devoted objects were to be given to the sanctuary to support the priests, Numbers 18:14; cf. Ezekiel 44:29. The gold, silver, bronze, and iron from Jericho were banned, holy to God, and “*put into His treasury*,” Joshua 6:19.

Often, though not always, the “ban” was a curse that required destruction, the compulsory elimination of something that impeded or resisted the work of God, Numbers 21:1-3. The Hebrew word herem is applied to almost all the cities that Israel conquered in Canaan, Joshua 8:26; 11:11. Such bloodshed seems inordinately excessive to us. Why would the Lord “ban” these cities? If left standing, their idolatry would lure the Israelites away from Jehovah, Deuteronomy 13:12-15. In other words, they would impede the work of the Lord!

In Israel, sacrifices were “*holy*,” set apart to God. Likewise, anything banned was “*devoted*” to the Lord. These two ideas are closely related, Leviticus 27:28,29. People and booty were devoted to God as a sacrifice of appreciation for His assistance in battle. Mesha, a king of Moab, who was mentioned in II Kings 3:4, believed he was commanded by Chemosh, his god, to capture the Israelite city of Nebo. Mesha did. He devoted everyone and everything to destruction. The word

translated “devoted” was herem. The “ban” was a common war ideology in the ancient Mediterranean world. Substantial evidence has been discovered that shows that Egypt, Edom, Ammon, Syria, Assyria and Babylon also practiced the “ban.”

. Imagery of Feasting. The near eastern literature of yesterday is replete with battle imagery. Their poems often mentioned post-battle banquets. For example, after a military victory, there was a procession to the palace of the victorious king. A feast was prepared. The “devoted things” were eaten (likely referring to the livestock). The conquest was commemorated. A celebratory banquet was the usual way of describing successful combat in ancient documents. Such imagery is found in the Song of Moses that pictured the army of Egypt boasting about defeating Israel at the Red Sea, Exodus 15:9,10; cf. Isaiah 34:5,6; Jeremiah 46:9,10. Likewise, after the war with Gog and Magog, it was the birds of prey and the carnivorous beasts that gathered to eat flesh and drink blood, Ezekiel 39:17-20. Are these gory details to be taken literally? Whatever position one entertains, the “ban” must not be disassociated from the idea of the sacred and the concept of sacrifice. To do so would be tantamount to ignoring the obvious.

. Roots of Discomfort. The “ban” is not the only thing in the Bible with which we are uncomfortable. Polygamy, stoning, slavery, and trial-for-jealousy (to name a few) make us ill at ease, too. Still these practices are in Scripture. They cannot be wished away. They describe the ancient world in which the people of God lived.

It is not easy to visualize Jehovah receiving humans in exchange for conquest in war, Numbers 21:1-3. Notwithstanding, some people try to take God off the hook in claiming the “ban” was instigated by military leaders. Skirting the obvious only complicates matters. Rewriting the text creates more problems and solves none. The herem is found over fifty times in Scripture. We must deal with our discomfort rather than rearrange the word of the Lord.

The “ban” was a pervasive ancient notion. The soldiers were offering sacrifices to the Lord. The victims were slaughtered “*by the sword*,” Joshua 6:21; cf. Isaiah 1:19,20. Their deaths were perceived as a reciprocal exchange for assistance in battle. The “devoted things” were the portion belonging to heaven. In other words, the presence of the “ban” as sacrifice in Scripture cannot be denied. However, can it be set aside as poetic exaggeration? Some scholars think so. But let us move on before deciding.

. Sacrifice of Children. Where does the idea of the “ban” originate? What is its significance in understanding the religion of Israel? The answer to these inquiries might be helpful. For, if the “ban” was, at some level, regarded as human sacrifice, then child sacrifice might have had a part in forming or sustaining such a worldview. The prophet Micah suggested giving his first born for his transgressions, Micah 6:7. Without objection, Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac “*as a burnt offering*,”

Genesis 22:1,2. Though Isaac was spared, when Mesha, the king of Moab, was reminded of the near sacrifice of Isaac, he offered his son to Chemosh, II Kings 3:21-27. Certainly, child sacrifice was not an approved behavior among the people of God, Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10; Jeremiah 7:30,31; 19:5. Yet many in Israel sacrificed their children, Isaiah 57:5; cf. Ezekiel 20:25,26. One is led to wonder if the attitude of these Jews (who ignored the instructions of God and sacrificed their children) was due to the example of Abraham?

Firstborn children and animals belonged to the Lord, Exodus 22:29,30 (though the firstborn child was to be redeemed, Exodus 13:2,14,15). Seemingly, in the mind of some Israelites, sacrifice and redemption were two options. In the case of Abraham, the ram redeemed. In the case of the Exodus, the blood of a lamb on the doorposts redeemed. In the case of the “ban,” sacrifice was demanded. In the case of the first born, some Israelites may have viewed sacrifice as an alternative. In other words, human sacrifice was a recurring theme in Judaism like the ban-as-sacrifice is an important theme in Old Testament Israel. This does not make child sacrifice right. It merely suggests a reason for a few folks in the nation of God practicing it.

. Origin of Practices. How did human sacrifice get incorporated into Jewish culture? Was it always there or was it borrowed from pagan sources? These are very hard-to-answer questions. Many—perhaps most—Israelites thought of themselves a Yahwists. Still a minority of them abandoned monotheism and adopted polytheism (including child sacrifice). The fact that passages exist that condemn such subversive behavior testifies to the presence of human sacrifice among the Jews, Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; II Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35. Surely this is not a mere literary leftover from the pre-Israelite past or the practice of a small renegade group of Jews. More likely it was a state sponsored ritual until the reform of king Josiah (640-609 BC). It is more or less during that time when significant portions of the Old Testament (especially the books of Judges through II Kings) were collected and recorded. One of the outcomes of the reform was to set the tone for a major change in worldview.

The “ban” was remembered but morphed into a matter of divine justice. Idolaters were perceived as deserving extermination. This huge transition in thinking will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. For now we will stay focused on our initial questions. Was the “ban” really the way early Israel practiced war? And, if so, who would want to preserve this understanding? In other words, how did the culture of Israel develop and change over time?

. Significance of Herem. Items that make up a culture must serve a need or disappear. What need would the “ban” serve? For one thing, the “ban” would validate the enemy as valuable. Therefore, an opposing army was not turned into a monster or an awful “other.” Imposition of the “ban”—so that the enemy became a sacrifice to God—makes sense of the inevitable bloodshed. The deaths were not

meaningless brutality. The “ban” as sacrifice dealt with the guilt of the killers. In various cultures, people deal with the horrors of taking human life in different ways. Herem accepted slaughter as sacrifice. The deaths were a necessary offering to God. Yet why kill every breathing creature? All that lived was promised to God. This spared the victors from making choices about having mercy on this one but not that one. Guilt for doing so was avoided.

We might prefer facing an enemy who allowed mercy or practice restraint. However, that was not the worldview of those in the ancient near east. The “ban” as sacrifice required a different view of God and a belief in the effectiveness of human sacrifice. Obviously neither idea is part of our culture. Consequently, unless we try to understand their culture, these practices will remain strange and detestable to the modern western mind.

## CHAPTER 2

### DIVINE JUSTICE

The “ban” as sacrifice never completely disappeared from Israelite thought. Though, eventually, justice replaced sacrifice as an understanding of war. Supporters of the reforms of king Josiah viewed killing as a just means of dealing with idolatry.

Josiah (640-609 BC) was a good monarch. He repaired the temple (which was, at that time, three hundred and fifty years old), II Kings 22:3-6. In the renovation, the “Book of the Law” was found. It explained why God was so angry with His people, II Kings 22:13. Huldah, a prophetess, gave further details regarding the displeasure of heaven, II Kings 22:15-17. Josiah instigated a reform. The reform was an attempt to get rid of idolatry (and its contaminating practices), II Kings 23:4. Josiah dismissed the pagan priests, II Kings 23:5. He tore down the male prostitute rooms in the sanctuary, II Kings 23:7. He desecrated the child sacrifice altars, II Kings 23:10. He smashed the shrines on the temple roof that were dedicated to the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, II Kings 23:12.

The backers of Josiah saw the reform as a just war. They believed it was fought for a righteous cause. These Yahwists were troubled by the demand for human sacrifice. Therefore, they put “divine justice” in the place of the “devoted things,” the punishment of God in the place of sacrifice to the Lord. Just judgment was the rationale for the bloodshed of the reform.

. Covenant of Justice. Deuteronomy speaks of justice in killing, Deuteronomy 13:12-18. The “ban” and “compassion” are mentioned in the same context. Justice was clarified by covenant. Idolatry shattered that agreement. It led the people “astray,” Deuteronomy 13:13. The plunder of war became “*a whole burnt offering*,” Deuteronomy 13:16. After the sacrifice, God showed “*mercy*,” Deuteronomy 13:17b,c. The basis of His kindness was His “*promises*” given to the forefathers of Israel, Deuteronomy 13:17d. Clearly that is covenant language.

If the people of God heard about “*base fellows*” leading (actually “*impelling*”) the inhabitants of a city “*to worship idols*,” they were to take action. They were to “*inquire*,” “*probe*,” and “*investigate*” thoroughly, Deuteronomy 13:14. In other words, there was to be a genuine, unbiased, fact finding inquiry. If the accusation proved true, the “ban” was imposed, Deuteronomy 13:15. If the accused were exonerated, the “ban” was not imposed, Joshua 22:1-34. When imposing the “ban,” none of the “devoted things”—the plunder—was to be found in the possession of an Israelite, Deuteronomy 13:17a. This was the sin of Achan, Joshua 7:10-26. Achan

"violated the covenant" of God, Joshua 7:11,15. He was carefully investigated. Lots were cast. Achan was found guilty. The similarities between Deuteronomy 13 and Joshua 7 are unmistakable. The "ban" was a whole burnt offering that restored the mercy of Jehovah toward Israel.

The idea of justice (while exercising the "ban") is found elsewhere. (1) Deuteronomy 7:1-5. The idolatrous pagans who inhabited Canaan were banned in the conquest. No pity toward them was to be shown. No treaties with them were to be signed. No intermarriage among them was to be arranged. Why? Israel was a chosen people in covenant with God. They were His "*treasured possession*," Deuteronomy 7:6. Idolatry must be avoided or, like the pagans, Israel would experience the justice of God. (2) Deuteronomy 7:23-25. Herem was pronounced on the silver and gold covering the Canaanite idols. It was the spoils of war, an abomination, doomed under the "ban." The people of God must "*detest it*," must "*destroy it*," Deuteronomy 7:26. Israel must have nothing to do with idolatry, Exodus 20:3,4. She was in covenant with the Lord of lords. Obviously, the foundation for divine justice in war was mentioned as far back as the exodus. It surfaced as a war ideology somewhere during the period of the Israelite kings. Likely, the cautions of Deuteronomy played a critical role in the transition from "devoted things" to "divine justice."

. Change in Thinking. In Deuteronomy, the "ban" found its fullest expression. Deuteronomy 20 fleshes out the reasoning of Deuteronomy 7 more completely. It appears to be a code of conduct in battle, the rules for military behavior, Deuteronomy 20:1-20; cf. Deuteronomy 23:9-14. Of particular importance is an attempt to clarify the different war traditions. Why was the "ban" imposed on some but not on all enemies? Why was livestock taken as booty in some cases but not in all cases? Why was war conducted differently "*in*" Canaan compared to "*at a distance from*" Canaan? Deuteronomy 20:10-18. "Sacrifice" was applied to the former and "justice" to the latter (if they surrendered)!

The "ban" as an expression of divine justice, was a new way of making sense of war, a refinement of the former rationale for killing in battle. The "ban," as sacrifice, had been the way of war for several centuries. In the new worldview, the concept of "devoted things" was redefined by "divine justice."

. Critique of Herem. The Book of Judges provides an example of the misuse of "ban" ideology. It happened in the days before Israel had a king, Judges 19:1a. Likely, this sorted event occurred before justice tempered the violence of herem. A husband and his concubine accepted the hospitality of an old man who lived in Gibeah of Benjamin. While staying with him, "*some of the wicked men*" of the town surrounded the house. They wanted to have sex with the male guest, Judges 19:22. The owner of the house refused. He offered them the concubine instead, Judges 19:23,24. She was abused all night, Judges 19:25. She died the next day,

Judges 19:27,28. The husband cut her body into twelve pieces. He sent one piece to each tribe in Israel, Judges 19:29,30, as a way of indicating that all of Israel was responsible, I Samuel 11:7. The reaction of the Israelites was swift, Judges 20:1-3. The Benjamites were asked to identify the rapists. They refused to give up their kinfolks. The whole tribe was guilty of obstructing justice. A bloody war ensued. Thousands died. The “ban” was imposed on Gibeah, Judges 20:37. That was clearly a misuse of herem. Wars of extermination were applied to outsiders. When the “ban” was used as a technique to keep in-group mischief-makers in line, it became an instrument of hate and cruelty.

The “ban” was wrongfully applied. Gibeah was destroyed. Brother killed brother. The tribe of Benjamin was decimated, Judges 20:48. Later, those who erred in their use of the “ban” were “*grieved*” by their over-zealous actions, Judges 21:6,15. Nevertheless, to compound their mistake, Jabesh-Gilead, a town in the tribe of Manasseh, was found guilty of non-participation in rooting out the evil in the tribe of Benjamin, Judges 21:8,9. Hence, Jabesh-Gilead was added to the list of those “devoted” to destruction, Judges 21:10.

Israel had reached rock bottom. The “ban” was carelessly used against their fellow Israelites. Did this awful action serve as a wake-up call? Did the phrase “*everyone did as he saw fit*,” Judges 21:25, indicate the need for a new war ideology? Was Israel ready to adopt “justice” in the place of “sacrifice?”

3. Purge of Jehu. Another passage that has implicit connections with the shift of worldview is the purge of Jehu (841-814 BC). His actions raise an important question. Did Jehu employ the “ban” to facilitate reform or punish the wicked?

Jehu was encouraged by the prophets of God, II Kings 9:4-10. He undertook a coup against the family of Ahab and Jezebel. Their son, Joram, was as wicked as his parents. Jehu assassinated Joram, II Kings 9:22-24. Then Jehu went on to slaughter the worshippers of Baal. None of them “*escaped*,” II Kings 10:25-27. His actions were reminiscent of a herem style cleansing. Does the story suggest that the Baal worshippers were treated as “devoted things?” If one applied the rationale for bloodshed mentioned in Deuteronomy, the answer would be “yes,” II Kings 10:30. But, Hosea, a century later, viewed the whole episode differently, Hosea 1:4. Why were there two dissimilar evaluations of the same event? I am not sure. However, it may be the collision of two war ideologies: one looked through the lens of the “devoted things” while the other viewed the story through the lens of “divine justice.”

. Warning of Prophets. This shift in worldview did not begin with Josiah. It was already well under way a century or more earlier. The Jews were living through turbulent times. Assyria was marching south. Syria had already been devastated. In Palestine, the clouds of invasion hung heavy on the horizon. But, due to internal

unrest in Assyria, the Assyrian army returned home. Israel was temporarily spared. However, the people of God were spiritually sick, Amos 2:6-8. The idol shrines were occupied by mindless ritual-keepers, Amos 4:4,5. Worship was a nauseous attempt to manipulate God Hosea 4:4-9. When Amos warned them of impending doom, the people become irate, Amos 7:12,13.

Israel was not healthy, Amos 5:21-24. The people of God were in a desperate condition—spiritually ill without knowing it, Amos 6:3-7. Divine judgment was coming. Few would survive, Amos 3:11,12; 5:2. The Lord would treat Israel like any other pagan nation, Amos 9:7. Justice would be served, Amos 3:2. The covenant of God was a moral agreement. Israel was anything but moral. Hence, there was no cure (other than repentance), Amos 5:4,14,15.

Pagan idolatry was rampant in the ten northern tribes. It was the reason for the downfall of Israel. She was unable to repent, Hosea 5:4. Her affection for the Lord was fickle, Hosea 6:4. Her behavior was stupid, crazy, senseless, Hosea 4:10-14. She was ripe for judgment. Jehovah was in control. All events in history fulfilled His will. He called Israel to be His people. They failed. They fell under His just condemnation. Yet, the failure of Israel was not the failure of God. For even mighty Assyria would come to Him when He whistled, Isaiah 7:18,19. He builds up nations and He tears them down, Isaiah 10:5-19; Romans 13:1. The Lord is just. He is a sovereign God.

The people of promise were headed for punishment. A remnant would remain, Isaiah 6:13. The tree of David would be cut down (though a stump would be left). Out of the stump, a faithful tree would grow, Isaiah 11:1. Punishment, then, was purification (not annihilation). This idea became pivotal. A new ideology of war was developing. Amidst all the doom and gloom, a fresh paradigm was blossoming. The bloodshed took on a different meaning.

. War as Justice. Was the “ban” as the justice of God ever used by an Israelite ruler to come to power (or remain in power)? Yes, I think so! From all appearances, Jehu did just that. Josiah, in his efforts at religious reform, did, too. The reason from bloodshed in both cases was justice. In the process of worldview change, the notion of God accepting human sacrifice was abandoned. And, as time went along, the “ban” as justice grew in popularity (especially during the exile and post-exile periods). The Israelites were idolaters. They deserved herem—the justice of heaven.

Worldview has to do with the values we hold. It molds our thoughts and prompts our actions. Worldview is the way we look at life. In the case of war, it is the way we understand killing. Worldview assumptions are passed down from generation to generation (seldom being questioned). Therefore, worldview changes slowly. This is certainly the case in understanding war in Israel. The move from viewing the



enemy as a “sacrifice to God” to being the recipient of the “justice of God” was a long process. It took centuries to accomplish. Worldview change always takes time. In the process, competing ideologies will collide. Contradictions will occur. Yet, in the end, a new idea will overpower and old assumption. And life will move on. This is exactly what happened in the Old Testament regarding bloodshed on the battlefield.

## PART II

### CAPTIVES OF WAR

## CHAPTER 3

### BOOTY BRIDES

Life has many anomalies. An anomaly is a departure from the normal, usual, common, or recognized order of things. It is an exception to the rule. Numbers 31 is certainly an anomaly. Though it is frequently discussed as an example of imposing the “ban,” the passage differs from herem as sacrifice and as justice in important and interesting ways.

. War of Vengeance. The Lord commanded Moses to “*to take vengeance on the Midianites*,” Numbers 31:1. This made the conflict a holy war. Midian had employed Balaam to curse Israel, Numbers 22:1-7. Thus, Israel took revenge. They “*killed every man*” (including Balaam), Numbers 31:7,8.

The passage has a strong “us” and “them” tone. Important in conveying this distrust between Israel and Midian is the evil female enticers, Numbers 25:1-3. These women embodied the wrong way, Numbers 25:6-8. Upon the suggestion of Balaam, they seduced some Israelite men, Numbers 31:15,16. In so doing, they became the enemy, Numbers 25:17,18. They were slaughtered. This carnage sounds like the “ban” as sacrifice.

The emphasis in Numbers 31 is on providing reasons for the elimination of the enemy. The “ban”—whether as sacrifice or as justice—was typically accompanied by a rationale for the killing. So, in the Midianite episode, a reason is stated, Numbers 31:3; cf. Jeremiah 50:15,28; 51:11. The war was described as necessary and justified.

. Difference in Ideology. The Numbers 31 passage does not contain the word herem (though there are several things in it similar to the “ban”). For example, (1) the Numbers 31 text (like the “ban” texts) has God commanding the war, Numbers 31:7 and Deuteronomy 20:2-4. (2) The word “kill” is found in both places, Numbers 31:8 and Joshua 6:17,21; 8:22. But, that is where the similarities between Numbers 31 and the “ban” stop. In Numbers 31 some of the enemy was slain. The lack of total extermination in Numbers 31 is key to understanding the anomaly.

In a typical “ban-as-sacrifice” passage, Samuel chastised king Saul for not fully implementing herem. He failed to kill king Agag (and the livestock), I Samuel 15:17-19. Later, an anonymous prophet, in a “ban-as-justice” context, criticized king Ahab for the same thing, I Kings 20:42. But, in Numbers 31, complete destruction of the enemy was not demanded, Numbers 31:9,11,12. The young virgin

girls were spared, Numbers 31:17,18. This sets the passage apart from the “ban” texts. Why were the virgin girls kept alive? What is the justification for killing the young boys? Where does Numbers 31 fit into the spectrum of war ideology texts?

. Women as Chattel. In societies where women often died young in childbirth, there was a need for more women to provide offspring. This may be the reason for sparing the virgin girls. But why not spare the little boys. After all, they were young, compliant, and teachable. The youthful males could become slave labor. The culture of most patriarchal societies viewed captured women as booty of war, Deuteronomy 20:14. The “women as chattel” mentality is reflected in several places in the Old Testament, Genesis 34:25-29; Deuteronomy 20:10-15; 21:10-14; II Kings 5:1-3. When Jacob secretly left Mesopotamia, to return to Palestine, his father-in-law, Laban, accused him of treating his girls as spoils of battle. “*You have carried off my daughters like captives of war,*” he said, Genesis 31:26. Hence, women as “plunder of war” were a common notion in pre-Christian times.

The disparity between the number of young women compared to the number of young men may have contributed to the “women as chattel” thinking. Yet, even more important, in defining the status of conquered females, was the issue of their purity. The incident regarding the killing of the Benjamites in Judges 21 reveals the importance of “virgin” war brides. The over-zealous Israelites slaughtered all but six hundred men in the tribe of Benjamin, Judges 20:47. The killers vowed not to share any of their daughters with the unmarried male Benjamite survivors, Judges 21:1. In no time, however, the Israelites “*grieved*” for the plight of their Benjamite “*brothers*,” Judges 21:6,7. They solved the dilemma in the punishment of Jabesh Gilead, Judges 21:8-12. The Benjamite men were provided with pure, young, Israelite females for wives—booty brides from Jabesh Gilead, Judges 21:13,14. The insistence on youthful virgins spoke to the importance of purity. It also provided protection for the vulnerable female captives, Deuteronomy 21:10-14.

All of this explains why the boys are not spared in Numbers 31. In Judges 21, female children were saved because the raid on Jabesh Gelead was intended to capture virgin girls for the Benjamite bachelors. In Numbers 31, the distinction between male and female children is made very clear in a context describing “us” and “them,” differentiating between the “pure” and “impure.” Little boys grew up to be soldiers. They were likely exterminated for that reason. Little girls were potential brides. Because they were pure, they were spared. The anomaly has its root in the culture of the ancient Mediterranean people. That culture is far different from our own. In order to evaluate the significance of booty brides, we must look at the Scriptures through their worldview.

. Issues of Purity. The matter of purity among the females spared in battle has been duly noted. In Numbers 31, further description of cleansing is mentioned. This amplification of the rules for purity underlines the anomalous nature of the

Numbers 31 passage.

In the “ban-as-justice” texts, the enemy was considered unclean. Sometimes destruction, in these texts, included objects the unclean ones had touched, Joshua 7:24-26. On the other hand, in the “ban” passages, where booty could be taken, the plunder was assumed to be clean. In Numbers 31, stricter distinctions were drawn between the clean and unclean. Greater care was taken to purify the Israelite soldiers (and the Midianite captives), Numbers 31:19. In Numbers 31, war was seen as a defiling activity. Similarly, because he was a warrior, king David was not allowed to build the temple, I Chronicles 28:2,3. However, in Numbers 31, the soldiers were cleansed. Why was David not purified? This question points to the anomalous character of the conflict with Midian. The commanders in Numbers 31 offered to the Lord, as atonement, what they had found among the personal effects of the dead enemy—armlets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and necklaces, Numbers 31:50. From what did these items atone? Why was David not given the same opportunity? These questions are impossible to answer with complete certainty. They are the stuff of an anomaly. Beyond doubt, the Midian affair is a unique slice of war ideology in the Old Testament.

## PART III

### HEROES OF WAR

## CHAPTER 4

### CHIVALROUS DUELS

In addition to the “ban” passages, we have identified Numbers 31 as an anomaly. Embedded in all of these texts is the behavior of the “*men of valor*.” Their style of fighting is reminiscent of medieval European chivalry.

The life of David is the epicenter of hero stories in the Bible. The famous encounter with Goliath is the first of many examples, I Samuel 17:1-54. The requirement that he obtain a hundred foreskins, as a test for becoming the son-in-law of king Saul, is part of the same genre, I Samuel 18:24-27; cf. Joshua 15:16. Likewise, the career of David, as a crafty bandit who attracted elite soldiers, fits into the same category, II Samuel 23:8-39. These stories mention the characteristics of the ancient heroes of armed conflict.

. Men of Valor. Daring warriors like Gideon and David are called “*men of valor*,” Judges 6:12; I Samuel 16:18; II Samuel 17:10; 23:8a. Sometimes skill in handling certain weapons was attributed to these brave military men, I Chronicles 8:39,40; II Chronicles 14:8. They appear to be a special group of elite combatants (similar to our Green Berets and Navy Seals). It is to these mighty warriors that we now give close attention.

The exploits of Benaiah, a “*valiant fighter*,” is highlighted, II Samuel 23:20-23; cf. I Chronicles 11:22-25. The bravery of Jonathan, the nephew of David, is also mentioned, II Samuel 21:20,21; cf. I Chronicles 20:6,7. There are many others that will be given their due as we proceed.

1. Taunt as Prelude. As in the case of Goliath, ancient war was frequently proceeded by designated warriors taunting each other, I Samuel 17:8-10; cf. II Samuel 21:21; 23:8,9. This type of behavior on the battlefield was common. The taunting was a gesture to get the other side to back down, to avoid imminent bloodshed. The belittling was accompanied by bluffing-and-counter-bluffing. Gideon accused the people of Succoth of “*taunting*” him, Judges 8:15. Isaiah mentioned Sennacherib, a king of Assyria, insulting the Lord, Isaiah 36:19,20. And, in like manner, the prophet, Zephaniah, condemned Moab for “*insulting Israel*,” Zephaniah 2:8-10. These war-of-words often went on for days—even weeks, I Samuel 17:16. The taunt seemed to be a ritualized challenge to the manhood and power of an opposing enemy.

Goliath was described as a menacing threat—his height, his armor, and his weapons

were exceptional in size and weight, I Samuel 17:4-7. The formidable champion of the Philistines taunted Israel to provide a suitable combatant to engage him in a duel. Such a confrontation occurred before the larger battle. The drama was electrifying. The idea of war as sport was present. Prestige was on the line. David, at the time, a young lad, stepped forward. Goliath glared at his youthful opponent, I Samuel 17:42,43. He belittled the shepherd. *"Come here,"* Goliath said, *"and I will feed you to the birds,"* I Samuel 17:44. David stood his ground. He returned the taunt with a statement of faith. *"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty,"* I Samuel 17:45. Words of ridicule filled the air. Tension was high. Neither contestant backed down. The point of the verbal skirmish was to gain a psychological advantage. Goliath seemed to imply that a warrior deserved to be challenged by an equal—a man of valor—not an inexperienced boy. This aspect of battle behavior is found repeatedly in the Old Testament. It is basic to the taunt exchange.

2. War as Sport. There were other battlefield duels. They, too, were a prelude to a larger confrontation. The language of these duels emphasized the "sporting" aspect of combat. The soldiers gathered in close proximity to each other, II Samuel 2:12,13. In the posturing that followed, one side or the other challenged their opponents to a contest, II Samuel 2:14. The Hebrew actually says, *"Let the lads rise up and make sport before us."* This was not lighthearted competition. It was a serious engagement, a fight to the finish (like Roman gladiators). The combatants got up *"to play."* The whole scene implied an approach to battle as a game. It was certainly very different from the "ban" (that slaughtered everyone and everything that breathed). The gripping of the head, in a wrestling style maneuver, pointed to a playful sport becoming a deadly encounter, II Samuel 2:16a,b. Where killing as *"sacrifice"* suggested God must receive His due, where killing as *"justice"* implied the enemy deserved the punishment, the image of battle as a "sport" pointed to the killing as a matter of individual training and skill. The soldiers were professionals. They limited the carnage to their military opponents. The warriors on both sides adhered to a code of conduct.

. Code of Conduct. The chivalrous duel, at the pool of Gibeon, became a war, II Samuel 2:17. However, the bloodshed was limited. A line was drawn between kin and non-kin opponents. A code of conduct was carefully followed.

1. Behavior toward Kin. A "man of valor" was not supposed to kill kinfolk. When Joab, the commander of the army of Judah, surrounded Abner, the commander of the army of Israel, a sense of camaraderie and kinship took center stage, II Samuel 2:26. Abner pled for his life. *"How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?"* He played the kinship card, II Samuel 2:27. Joab recognized his argument, II Samuel 2:28. Obviously, in this context, "kin" was understood to mean "fellow Israelite." The children of God were family. They shared the same lineage and identity. This kinship connection frequently played



out on the battlefield (though unfortunately, at other times, it was ignored).

A similar scene of sparing kin is seen in another war between the nations of Judah and Israel. David had united the people into one nation, I Chronicles 11:1,2. Solomon maintained that unity. But, the son of Solomon, Rehoboam, drove a wedge between the two groups. The northern ten tribes broke away from the southern two tribes. Rehoboam mustered his troops against Israel in order to reunite the nation, I Kings 12:21. God told him to stand down, I Kings 12:23,24. Why? Israel was his kin—his “*brothers*.” However, things “went off the rails” after that. Two hundred years later, the king of Israel, Pekah, defeated Judah and took captives “*from their kinsmen*,” II Chronicles 28:8. The Lord had delivered Judah into the hands of Israel, II Chronicles 28:9b. But, Israel went overboard. “*They slaughtered them in a rage*” that reached heaven, II Chronicles 28:9c. They intended to make the captive men and women of Judah their slaves. God said, “No!” He directed Israel to send back their fellow countrymen to Judah, II Chronicles 28:11. (See Amos 1:11 for a similar incident.)

2. Behavior toward Non-Kin. A fascinating parallel to the behavior toward kin is the generous treatment of non-kin. The context is the miraculous escape of Israel from Syrian invaders, II Kings 6:19. Sudden blindness rendered the enemy helpless. They became prisoners. Elisha, the prophet, insisted that the captives be treated as guests, II Kings 6:22,23. Such kindness is a refreshing change from the barbaric killing in the “ban” as sacrifice and the “ban” as justice scenarios.

The loyalty shown to kin and mercy extended to non-kin in war is found elsewhere. For example, Gideon defeated his adversaries, Judges 8:10-12. If his captives had not killed his brothers, Gideon would have spared their lives, Judges 8:18,19. The ideology involved was not the “ban” but fair play intertwined with loyalty to kin, to fellow Israelites. Moreover, an important aspect in ancient battles (beyond the code of fairness) was the equitable dividing of the booty.

. Distribution of Spoils. In both war as sacrifice and war as justice, fair distribution of the spoils was mentioned. Indeed, participation in war was often motivated by the hope of getting the booty of battle, Judges 8:1-3. Bickering over plunder was common in the Old Testament, I Samuel 30:21,22. Therefore, David regulated the practice, I Samuel 30:23,24. His wisdom became a code of conduct among his warriors, I Samuel 30:25.

An interesting parallel to the raid of David was that of Abram (when he rescued Lot), Genesis 14:14-16. Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of “*everything*,” Genesis 14:20b. Likely, “*everything*” refers to the plunder. Abram took nothing. He shared the rest with the men who went on the raid, Genesis 14:21-24.

Both David and Abram had a just cause for war: the abduction of kinfolks. Both gave God credit for their victories. Both were concerned with the distribution of the spoils. Both exercised a fair and generous attitude in sharing the plunder. Both are heroes in war and gentlemen in peace. Both demonstrated a code of conduct befitting a person of faith.

In this chapter, a code of battle behavior was examined. Fair play, respect for opponents, fighting as sport, and treatment of kin and non-kin were obvious components of each war scene. The dividing of the spoil was also considered. In short, the chivalrous duels in the Old Testament display a noble order amidst the chaos of war, cf. II Chronicles 28:1-15.

The recurring language of these texts suggests an ingrained style of engaging in battle. These passages were rich in description, full of emotion, and saturated with comment on appropriate conduct. Taken as a group, these war texts revealed a consistent attitude toward the shedding of blood. In other words, war was glorified. It was made palatable, a game of sport. The best men won. Like John Wayne movies, these stories endowed war with an alluring excitement. They sensationalized the competitive side of the soldiers who engaged in combat. They helped perpetuate military activity. For better or for worse, it was literature written by men for men in a male dominated culture.

## CHAPTER 5

### DECEITFUL TRICKERIES

A significant part of the Old Testament describes war as clever chicanery. These treacherous episodes were cameos that took place inside larger battles. They all relied on deception—an ethic at odds with the code of honor among valiant warriors. The hero or heroine achieved victory by tricking the enemy. And, in three out of five cases, sex was front-and-center in the plot.

. A Devious Bargain. The first tale of underhanded trickery begins with rape. The ensuing battle was fought over a man abusing a woman who belonged to other men. The victim had a very minor role in the whole event. She was not even mentioned by name until the end of the incident. The story is about the men from opposing non-kin groups. For, true to the culture of the time and place, it was a masculine centered society.

A narrative about raping a woman of another group is a very ancient and a very common theme throughout history. The dilemma of men protecting “their” women and victimizing “other” women is the basis of many wars in ages long past. To know how a group defined with whom it was proper to have sexual relations is to know a great deal about their sense of “self” and “others.” The rape of Dinah reveals a lot more than the trickery of her brothers.

Dinah had gone to visit some of her non-Israelite neighbors, Genesis 34:1. It was not proper for a woman to venture out in public alone. The passage suggests she did (though she was never accused of wrong-doing). She was “*defiled*” by a Hivite man, Genesis 34:2,5. The rapist wanted her to become his wife, Genesis 34:3,4. The brothers of Dinah, who were her protectors, were “*furious*,” Genesis 34:7.

Jacob, the father, was silent about the situation. He did not take action. His sons did. They sought revenge. The same inaction by a father and revenge by sons was played out in the family of king David, II Samuel 13:21-29. In both cases, the violated women remained in the background. Though they were central to the story—without them there would have been no plot—the episodes were not about them. The narratives were about the contests of honor between the men linked to the women.

In the event in question, the father of the rapist tried to make a deal with the father of Dinah, Genesis 34:8-10. As an alien among strangers, Jacob could have viewed it as an attractive offer. However, it did not fix the main issue—the violation of Dinah,

the dishonor inflicted on the family of Jacob. So the brothers took matters in their own hands. They concocted a plan, Genesis 34:14,15. The Hivites agreed to the proposal, Genesis 34:18,19. However, when the men were indisposed by the surgery, the sons of Jacob, the brothers of Dinah, took advantage of the situation they had created by trickery, Genesis 34:25,26. They killed the men and “seized” all the plunder in the city, Genesis 34:27,29. The whole context was grounded in the themes of sex and vengeance. Their deceit restored their honor and maintained the lines of “us” and “them” in the process.

In the range of war stories, Genesis 34 belongs under the heading of a “feud” in a pre-state society. The issue was couched in female impurity and male honor. The struggle was between small groups in patriarchal households. The fighting involved relatives of the victim (instead of professional warriors). The story tells us a great deal about war in the pre-tribal days of Israel. The Israelites were a spunky but insecure pastoral people set apart from the local uncircumcised pagans. Sentiments about “us” and “others” were strong. Noble warriors were not involved. The dead enemy was not a sacrificial offering to deity. Victory was won by deceit. There was no code of conduct, no honesty among combatants.

Deception is one of the ways marginal people imagine themselves improving their lot among those who are perceived to have greater power. The sons of Jacob used their wits to conquer. The help of God was not mentioned. Yet the trickery was a hollow, temporary success. In the case of Jacob and sons, after their victory, they were vulnerable, Genesis 34:30. So they moved to safer surroundings, Genesis 35:5. The results were not final (like the outcome of herem). And, years later, on his death bed, Jacob disapproved of his sons skullduggery, Genesis 49:5-7.

. A Deadly Game. The story of Samson has several motifs in common with the Dinah feud. Both contain marital overtures between an Israelite and a non-Israelite. Both stories involve deception. Both describe overt violence between men who want to control a women. Hence, a constellation of ideas recurs several times in the Samson narrative: a woman, sex, trickery, and killing.

Samson saw a Philistine woman and wanted her. His parents tried to discourage the relationship, Judges 14:1-3a. Like the brothers of Dinah, they considered such a union disgraceful. Notwithstanding, Samson persisted. At the wedding feast, Samson issued a riddle, Judges 14:12-14. A riddle contest is part of wedding feasts worldwide to this day. Similar to taunting among warriors, these riddle games allow individuals, who distrust one another, to act out their animosities in a friendlier way so that no one hopefully gets hurt. His Philistine guests were stumped. They pressured the wife of Samson into getting her husband to explain the riddle, Judges 14:15. Her tears finally overpowered Samson, Judges 14:17. The stronger became the weaker. He did not control his wife. He got the payment for losing the contest by killing thirty Philistines, Judges 14:19. The Philistines gave the

wife to the “best man” in the wedding party of Samson, Judges 14:20. Samson retaliated, Judges 15:1-5. The violence escalated. The Philistines burned his wife to death, Judges 15:6b. So Samson slaughtered more of his enemies, Judges 15:7,8a.

A happy time turned into a sad time. There were no winners. The quest for power spun out of control. The Philistines maintained their dominant position, Judges 15:11a,b. Samson had poked the hornet’s nest. He lived by the “eye for an eye” rule, Judges 15:11c. Out of fear, the men of Judah wanted to end the carnage, Judges 15:12,13. They, like Jacob, dreaded a backlash that such treachery would likely bring upon them. Yet Samson was not finished. He killed a thousand more Philistines, Judges 15:14-16. Only when he abandoned his deception—revealing the source of his strength—was he subdued. The distrust of the Philistines was equaled by the implicit insecurity of Judah in her military strength. The killing was directed toward non-Israelites. The trickster strategy led to uncontrolled violence. It is the war ideology of the modern day Middle East. Those who see themselves as disadvantaged and oppressed adopt guerilla warfare expressed in terrorist tactics.

. A Friendly Enemy. Jael assassinated Sisera. Again, deception was the crux of the story. Jael offered hospitality to a battle weary Canaanite. Disguising herself as a friend, she gave the commander a place to hide. “*Do not be afraid*,” she said, Judges 4:18. Sisera took the bait. He accepted her offer. Jael served him some milk and “tucked him into bed.” Sisera fell asleep. Jael killed him, Judges 4:21. In the Dinah story, a man defiled a woman. In the Jael episode, a woman destroyed a man. The mother of Sisera waited for the return of her son. She assumed he was delayed by the collecting and distributing of plunder, Judges 5:28-30. The mother was an upper class, aristocratic lady living in a home with “*latticed windows*.” Sisera was overpowered by a tent dwelling, peasant. The comparison is obvious. Instead of getting a woman or two as spoil of combat, Sisera was subdued by one, low class, nomadic, non-Israelite, pagan woman. Jael was a Kenite—similar to the modern day gypsy, Judges 4:17. The role of Jael was quite different. She was the heroine. Her weapon was a tent peg. The battle, inside a larger war, was quick and decisive. The “duel” was between the weaker and the stronger. The weaker one prevailed. The victory was gained by trickery. And, as in the other stories of dishonesty, the noble heroine (Jael) was a duplicitous liar.

. A Left-Handed Scheme. Israel was controlled by a non-Israelite power. They had been suffering, for eighteen years, under the heavy hand of Eglon, king of Moab, Judges 3:12-14. Ehud freed the people of God from their oppressor, Judges 3:15. The key to the trickery of Ehud was his left-handedness, Judges 5:16. Almost all soldiers would carry their sword on their left side (in order to easily draw it from its scabbard with their right hand). Ehud eluded detection because, unbeknownst to the Moabite “secret service,” he was left-handed. His dagger was hidden on his right thigh. He stabbed Eglon in the belly while pretending to whisper a secret in the ear of the unsuspecting monarchy, Judges 3:20,21.

The whole scene is dripping with suggestions of a sneaky secret, a dastardly deed, a murderous scheme to assassinate an enemy, Judges 3:18,19. Though David pulled a similar trick on king Saul, that scenario did not end in bloodshed, I Samuel 24:1-4.

All four stories were dominated by contests between the weaker and the stronger, the oppressed and the oppressors. Power was expressed in two of the passages in sexual terms. The underlings took temporary control from their overlords. Just cause for bloodshed was found in the trickster contexts (like the war as justice passages). The enemy deserved to be killed because he was an oppressor. The sneaky element was simply a necessary ingredient in the process. Each contest recognized the presence of God, Judges 2:16-19. But the stories focused on the subterfuge that the weak employed to overpower the strong. The main characters relied on their own resources to survive. These tales have helped Israel during her long and difficult history. Pragmatic, self-sufficient, and street smart trickery has sustained Israel during the many periods of her political, economic, and cultural oppression.

. Working the System. Most of us have never lived in an enemy occupied country. We have never suffered soul-eroding tranny at the hands of an uncaring, out-of-control despot. Israel did. Most of her history has been a rigorous test of her will to survive. The Book of Esther is a typical case in point. The Jews were in captivity. The Persians were anti-Jewish. The king of Persia was snookered into permitting the lawful killing of any and all Jews, Esther 3:8-11. The people of God tricked the same ruler into giving the Jews permission to protect themselves, Esther 8:11. Violence was inevitable. *"The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them,"* Esther 9:5. This war belongs to the trickster style of engagement. The chicanery was made more respectable because devious deceit was not involved. Queen Esther followed political etiquette. A germane part of the whole story was Esther using the wiles of a woman to ensnare an overbearing egotist named Haman. Sexuality was related to the deception of the Queen (as in the case of Jael and Samson). The oppressed survived. The oppressors were killed. The story does not sanction an ethic of political rebellion but of "collaboration with tyranny." The Jews walked a political tightrope that gave them life but not liberty.

The Book of Esther is not about feminism trying to overcome male dominance. Esther gets her way through the only means available to her. She played the system to her advantage. The Book of Esther is not about taking booty. The Jews took none, Esther 9:16. In the "ban" as sacrifice, they did not take booty because it belonged to God. In the "ban" as justice, they did not take booty for fear of idolatry (or profiting from the death of kin). Here the denial of booty portrayed the Jews as good citizens (who did what is necessary to defend themselves). They were not fighting for profit but for survival. So, as in the other trickster stories, there is no sign of guilt. Instead the Jews celebrated the victory. They established the Feast of Purim to remember

the incident, Esther 9:20-22. They still celebrate that event to this day. It continues to bolster their courage in the never-ending Middle East crisis.

## PART IV

### METHODS OF WAR



## CHAPTER 6

### MILITARY STRATEGIES

The Hebrew word saba is translated “war.” The term conveyed two ideas. Saba meant to “fight.” For example, the army of Israel “*fought*” their enemies, Numbers 31:7. The term also meant to “serve.” The priests “*served*” in the tabernacle (and, later, in the temple), Numbers 4:23.

Saba defined life in ancient Israel. To live was to war against the forces of evil (whether on the battle field or in the house of worship). We, too, are to understand life in a similar way, Ephesians 6:10-18; I Timothy 6:12.

Therefore, war imagery is sprinkled throughout the Scriptures. In the exodus, for instance, Israel “*plundered*” Egypt like a conquering army, Exodus 12:36. They camped in the wilderness like soldiers, Numbers 1:52. God, as the Lord of armies, lead them in their conquest of the Promised Land, Joshua 5:13-15. Unless Yahweh went to battle with them, they failed to succeed, Psalms 44:1-3; cf. Proverbs 21:31. All of this speaks of discipline, loyalty, courage, and obedience. It calls for plans, preparations, tactics, methods, and strategies for war.

. Strategies in Battle. God led the army. He supplied the power to fight, Joshua 1:6,7. But the people often devised the strategies for engagement. These strategies had to take into account the route of march, the field of conflict, the use of raids, the walls of defense, and the time of attack. Success was not automatic. Victory demanded forethought and planning.

1. Routes of March. Canaan was a land bridge between the Nile River in the south and the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers in the north. This narrow strip of land contained two popular highways: One along the Mediterranean coast and the other branching off at Megiddo (near Mt. Carmel) crossing the Jordan, and turning north through Syria to Assyria, Isaiah 19:23. During times of peace, these dusty trails were filled with merchant caravans, Genesis 37:25. In times of war, the highways were empty (except for attacking armies), Judges 5:6; Isaiah 33:8.

These routes were vital to the movement of goods and the transport of troops. Hence, armies marching north or south took the coastal highway. But, to the invading Bedouins from the desert—Midianites, Ammonites, and Moabites—these ancient thoroughfares were of no value. As smaller raiding parties, the Bedouins crossed the Jordan from the west and took the winding paths through the hills to maintain their cover and heighten the element of surprise, cf. Judges 6:11.

2. Fields of Conflict. To understand Hebrew battle tactics, it is necessary to know the terrain of Canaan. From west to east, the land was divided into four geographic extremes: the coastal plain, the central highlands, the Jordan Valley, and the Transjordan Plateau. The coastal plain (which included the coast highway) was the most fertile land in Canaan and the home of the Philistines and Phoenicians. It was never completely occupied by Israel. The center of Hebrew culture was in the central highlands—an almost unbroken ridge of hills running through the heart of the land. The hill country traversed the entire length of Palestine from top to bottom (except for a small break just south of the Sea of Galilee). The break in the hills was called the Plain of Esdraelon. The Assyrians and the Babylonians used this break in the hill country to march toward Samaria and Jerusalem.

The Jordan Valley ran north to south. It was a skinny, well watered, strip of land that allowed an easy access for both friends and foes to enter Israel. The Jordan Valley went south, from the Sea of Galilee, to the Dead Sea. From there it ran further south along the border of Moab until it reached the Gulf of Aqabah (which is a bay off of the Red Sea). Solomon built a substantial fleet of merchant vessels whose home port was Ezion Geber on the shore of the Red Sea, I King 9:26-28. Finally, west of the Jordan Valley was the Transjordan Plateau. It was a rugged wasteland of live oaks, scrub cedars, and rocky ravines suitable for pasturing goats, II Samuel 18:6-8. In that region, called Gilead, Absalom, son of David, caught his hair in the branches of an oak tree, II Samuel 18:9. It was obviously not an ideal place for military maneuvers.

3. Walls of Defense. Prior to the monarchy in Israel, there were few walled cities. As a result, when bands of Bedouins invaded the country, the Israelites hid in caves, Judges 6:2, in holes, tombs, or cisterns, I Samuel 13:6. King Saul fortified his capitol at Gibeah. Solomon built defenses around key towns, I Kings 9:15. Rehoboam, son of Solomon, made a concerted effort to fortify several strategic cities in Judah, II Chronicles 11:5-12. After the division between Israel and Judah, king Asa of Judah continued to build important fortresses, I Kings 15:16-22.

4. Uses of Raids. The nomads east of Israel, in the Transjordan Plateau, often raided the Israelites. Settled states, like Israel, remained on constant alert against these lightening strikes by their unpredictable Bedouin neighbors. The tribe of Gad, which lived in the Transjordan, was subjected to these annual invasions, Genesis 49:19. The people of God suffered regularly at the hands of the Moabites, Amalekites, Ammonites, and Midianites, Judges 3:12; 6:1-5; 10:9; I Samuel 30:1,2; II Kings 13:20. The desert invaders attempted to recapture what had been lost in previous battles. The raiding parties were small groups of terrorists. They were highly mobile units of grudge keepers who sought to settle disputes about rights to pasture, Genesis 13:5-7, as well as possession of water wells, Genesis 26:17-22. The serendipity of these raids was the plunder—a secondary bonus in an otherwise ruthless enterprise.

5. Times of Attack. The time of attack could help ensure the success of a military operation. The preferred moment of assault was at night (often just before dawn), Joshua 10:9. King Saul surprised the Ammonites in a pre-dawn attack, I Samuel 11:11. Gideon confronted the Midianites just after midnight, Judges 7:19. Darkness helped the attackers remain undetected until the trumpet sounded the advance, I Samuel 14:36. In the dark, an unsuspecting army could become confused. Such confusion often resulted in their fighting among themselves. Under these conditions, defeat was usually inevitable, Jeremiah 6:4,5.

. Preparation for War. The spring of the year was the “*time when kings went off to war*,” II Samuel 11:1. Winter was over. The rains had stopped. The invading army could “live off the land.” In the case of Israel, when defending their country, troop provisions were the responsibility of the family of each soldier, I Samuel 17:27-29.

War was seldom declared (since the would remove the element of surprise). The edict of war by Amaziah of Judah against Jehoahaz of Israel was unusual, II Kings 14:8. It resulted in disastrous consequences for Judah, II Kings 14:12-14. Negotiations were sometimes attempted in order to avoid (or delay) a conflict, Judges 11:12-28. As in the case just cited, the negotiations almost always failed, I Samuel 11:1,2; I Kings 20:1-8. Treaties were equivalent to surrender. The Middle Eastern code of honor did not allow such “weakness.” In the end, death rather than surrender was preferred.

Troops were mustered in various ways: (1) the trumpet call, Judges 3:27; 6:34, (2) signals from hilltops, Joshua 8:18,19, and (3) messengers, Judge 7:24. These methods of gathering the “minute men” for battle were standard procedure in the pre-state period of Israel.

Before engaging the enemy in battle, the people of God consulted the Lord to determine if the time was right, if heaven was with them. War was to be undertaken with divine sanction, Numbers 14:41-45. If Israel obeyed the Lord, He would help them, Joshua 10:11. Sometimes the prophets were consulted, I Kings 22:5,6; II Kings 3:11. King Saul, in desperation, conferred with the witch of Endor, I Samuel 28:6-8. Inquiry was made before the ark, Judges 20:27, or the ephod, I Samuel 30:7,8, or the urim and thummin, I Samuel 28:6. Priests would accompany the army into battle (as did the ark on one occasion), I Samuel 4:4; 30:7; cf. Numbers 31:6; II Samuel 11:11. Likewise, the Philistine soldiers brought their idol gods to the battlefield, II Samuel 5:21. And, centuries later, Jewish soldiers carried charms to ensure their safety, II Maccabees 12:40.

Before battle, sacrifices were made to gain the favor of God, Judges 6:20,26; 20:26. This was a vital part of “*preparation for war*,” Jeremiah 6:4; Joel 3:9. These sacrifices translated the soldier and his weapons out of a profane status and into a sacred state. Thus the combatants believed they were on a mission for God.

. Methods of Fighting. There were two types of warfare. Each type was dictated by the situation involved: (1) battles in open fields and (2) attacks against walled cities.

1. Open Combat. The battle array was the simplest kind of war. Opposing armies lined up opposite each other, charged their opponents, and fought to the death (or retreat) in an open field, I Samuel 17:2,3; II Samuel 10:8,9a,17. The battle lines were composed of spearmen in front and archers behind them. A trumpet sounded the attack, II Chronicles 13:12, and signaled the retreat, II Samuel 2:28. The attack was often accompanied with a prearranged war cry, Judges 7:20; I Samuel 17:52; Isaiah 42:13; Amos 1:14.

2. Siege Warfare. While the Egyptians were aware of siege tactics, it was Assyria and Babylon that perfected the technique of a walled-city-invasion. To avoid a long, drawn out siege, spies were often sent into a city to discover the weaknesses in its defense, Judges 1:22-26.

An effective siege cut off all communication of a city from outside help. The attackers also controlled all sources of water in the vicinity. For example, when Joab had “*taken the water supply*” of Rabbah, he sent word to king David that it was time to lay siege to the city, II Samuel 12:26-28.

When besieging a walled town, an army built a siege wall, II Kings 25:1; Daniel 11:15. These dirt mounds were protective barriers for the battering ram operators, Ezekiel 4:1,2. These war machines were built from the trees growing in the area of the battle, Jeremiah 6:6. Those defending the city would try to disrupt the battering ram by shooting arrows at it. The battering ram was built to accommodate several archers in its tower. These archers engaged the defenders on the town wall. Breaking through the wall could take days or months. Tunnels under the wall were also attempted.

Once the attackers felt the defenses of a city had been sufficiently compromised, a general assault was made. The first wave of attackers was infantry men equipped with shields and spears. They mounted ladders to reach the top of the wall. At the same time, archers released a heavy barrage of arrows to protect the vulnerable soldiers climbing the ladders. Simultaneously, other soldiers were digging their way through the holes punched in the walls or crawling through the tunnels under the walls. It was an all out attack. Casualties were high. Hand-to-hand fighting, house-to-house combat characterized the bloody confrontation. It often took days to overpower a stubborn enemy.

. Outcomes of Engagement. Once a city was subdued, the defenders were put to the sword or sold into slavery. The conquerors were ruthless in their treatment of prisoners. This reflected the “ban” mentality. War was believed to be a sacred duty.

God (or, in the case of pagans, the gods) required herem. Disobeying the “ban” had dire consequences (as Achan learned). Captured kings were slain. The male population was exterminated, I Kings 11:15, mutilated, Judges 1:6, or taken as slaves, Deuteronomy 20:11. Women and children were treated as booty of war (though pregnant women were killed), II Kings 8:12; 15:16; Amos 1:13.

The cruelty of the Assyrian conquerors was legendary. Crucifixion or decapitation was common. Severed heads were piled in heaps. Other captives were cut in half. Many were burned. Some were mutilated by cutting off hands, feet, noses, ears, or tongues. Infants were dashed to pieces, Psalms 137:8,9; Nahum 3:10. Deportations were common, II Kings 17:6,24; cf. II Kings 24:12b-14; 25:11.

When a siege was successful, the walls were completely torn down, II Kings 25:10. The city was burned, II Kings 25:9. The attackers took (as plunder) everything of value. If a city surrendered voluntarily, a heavy tribute was imposed, II Kings 18:13-16. Hostages were often taken to ensure payment of the annual fee. Obviously, war was not a happy event for those who suffered defeat.

## CONCLUSION

In the final installment of this short book, an attempt will be made to assess war in the Bible. Up to this point, the Scriptures seem to sanction military action. Are there any passages that disapprove of such bloodshed? Is war ever condemned? What did the prophets say? What did Jesus teach? What did the apostles write? The thoughts that follow are an effort to bring balance to our discussion. Doubts linger. Issues remain. Nagging questions continue. We will let God have the final say.

Regardless of when or where or why military action takes place, *“war is hell.”* What is the use of a code of honor? What is the value of restrictions on killing? Can war ever be fought nobly? In the end, can bloodshed be viewed as a good, wholesome, uplifting thing? The cause (in the minds of men) may be just, but once the battle begins, the best a soldier can do is fight skillfully in order to survive, do whatever is necessary to win as quickly as possible. If civilians are killed, it is labeled “collateral damage.” If terror is struck in the hearts of the enemy, it is called “show of force.” The statement that *“war is hell”* is certainly true for both the conquered as well as the conqueror, the victims as well as the victors.

. Bloody Business. War is a bloody enterprise (no matter how one views warfare). Lives are shattered. Injustices are committed. And the moral tone of a nation is diminished. After all of the victory parades, the flag waving, and the monument building, winners and losers alike must pick up the pieces and make sense of the senseless carnage. Lives were lost. Limbs were amputated. And, though time moves on, the scars remain. What is the use? What is gained? Will it not happen again and again and again?

1. Naked Aggression. War was not always approved. Abimelech, the son of Gideon, is exhibit number one. Abimelech came to power by murdering his opponents (who happened to be his kin folks), Judges 9:1-6. Abimelech was not honorable. He betrayed his own family. The narrator of this gruesome saga disapproved of the aggression of him-who-took-what-he-wanted because he could, Judges 9:16-20. The actions of Abimelech were rejected, Judges 9:21-25. Though he fought and subdued many of his countrymen, he finally met his match at the hands of an unnamed woman, Judges 9:50-53. God sternly rebuked naked aggression, Judges 9:56,57. This story provides a very different view of war. Clearly not all fighting was sanctioned by heaven.

2. Just Cause. War was often discussed in a pragmatic way. For instance, Jephthah did not believe the Ammonites has a just cause for attacking Israel, Judges 11:12. Jephthah thought that the land rightfully belonged to the people of God. The Ammonites disagreed, Judges 11:13. Jephthah responded with a lengthy

rehearsal of history. (1) Israel took the land from the Amorites (not the Ammonites), Judges 11:14-22. (2) The Lord gave the land in dispute to Israel, Judges 11:23-25. And (3) the children of Jehovah had possessed it for three hundred years, Judges 11:26,27. In short, Ammon did not have a just cause for invading Israel. Belief in the capacity of God to allocate land became the means for upholding territorial *status quo*. And, because of the long-term possession of the land by Israel, Ammon had no right to claim ownership. In spite of cogent reasoning, however, an agreement was not reached, Judges 11:28. War followed, Judges 11:32,33. Israel triumphed. The underlying assumption in this passage is “war should not be entertained unless there is just cause.”

Yet, just cause for war is a “slippery slope.” In any conflict, the combatants are biased toward their own cause. Thus, every war has its just rationale. The killings are justified. The brutality is all part of the action. A commander in the Assyrian army told king Hezekiah of Judah that the God of Israel had sent the Assyrians to besiege Jerusalem, II Kings 18:25. Hence, the Assyrian cause had a clever twist. Jehovah supposedly turned His back on His own people. With the help of God, an enemy pragmatist made war to further his own political, territorial, and economic agenda.

3. Essential Need. Using the “ban” to justify combat can also mask the true goal of the killing. For just below the surface lies the acquisition of land, plunder, or women to increase the prosperity, or, perhaps, the very survival, of the aggressor. An extremely thin line separates these two conflicting reasons for bloodshed. Obedience to God and greed for gain are the underlying issues. The more we try to understand these complexities the deeper the complications become.

The tribe of Dan was unable to dislodge the Philistines during the conquest of Canaan. They needed land in order to feed themselves, Judges 18:1. Thus, they traveled north, attacked a town, and “*put everyone to the sword*,” Judges 18:27,28a. They claimed “*God had given them the city*,” Judges 18:10. But, in truth, the Danites had no right to the town. They simply wanted it. So they took it. It was a classic “land grab.” The inhabitants of the place were a peaceful people. They had no fusses with anyone, Judges 18:27. The Danites decided to take what was not theirs because they could. Is that not unadorned aggression, a battle justified by opportunity?

To further support the condemnation of the Danites, the story details their barbaric plundering along their route of march, Judges 18:14-17. The Danites did not have a just cause. They did not need one. What they wanted, they took. Power became the certificate of ownership. Their actions spoke of an ideology of might-makes-right, namely, doing what promotes self-interest, what is appropriate to the purpose of the moment, a contrivance adopted to meet an urgent need, cf. I Kings 9:16. Though the language in the Danite story sounds like the “ban,” the ethic involved is entirely

different. Possessing sufficient power is not the justification for indulging in war.

4. Expedient Alternative. Sometimes the extermination of prisoners—reminiscent of the “ban”—was for expedient reasons. The victor eliminated the enemy to silence witnesses to a massacre. Joab, the commander of the army of David, attempted to annihilate the Edomites, I Kings 11:15,16. Why did Joab commit such brutality? The killings were not a matter of revenge. They were not to strike fear in the heart of the enemy. The purpose seems to be an elimination of eye-witnesses to the slaughter. Similarly, David, as a bandit, in his pre-king days, made raids on non-Israelites. In the process, he killed all his prisoners. These deaths were not sacrifices to God or victims of justice. In order to win the trust of the Philistines, David had to tell his Philistine hosts that the raids were against his own people. The ruse of David would work only if his victims were silenced, I Samuel 27:8-12. God did not order the killing. David shed blood to save his own hide. His heartlessness was a matter of expedience.

Later, when David became king, he attacked Jerusalem (which, at the time, was in the hands of the Jebusites). David and his men were met with taunts, I Samuel 5:8. But, when David captured the city, he singled out the “*blind and the lame*” to be butchered. David is portrayed as a merciless tyrant. To use unnecessary force, against the most defenseless, is blatant cruelty. The writer of the story does not criticize the king. Instead, he used this bloody episode to explain why, in later times, the blind and limb were denied access to the “palace,” II Samuel 5:8.

The savagery toward the blind and the lame was not an isolated event in the life of David. For, a few years later, the king mistreated some Moabite prisoners, II Samuel 8:2. Again, the reason for the brutality is not explained. He had taken his parents to Moab for safekeeping, I Samuel 22:3,4. His great-grand mother, Ruth, was a Moabite, Ruth 1:3,4a. Hence, Moab seemed like a safe haven for his parents. However, it has been suggested, the Moabites were unkind to his dad and mom. They may have even killed them. Killing the Moabite prisoners could have been “pay back.” We do not know for sure. But, whatever the reason, David was portrayed as a cold, calculating despot. He claimed for himself a god-like power to save or to destroy as he pleased. No wonder he was described as a “man of blood,” unworthy to build a house for God!

Another expedient alternative happened in the reign of Amaziah. He slaughtered ten thousand Edomites. Then, as an after thought, his army took ten thousand prisoners to the top of a cliff. They threw the captives down alive. All of them “*were dashed to pieces*,” II Chronicles 25:11,12. What was the reason for this killing? The Scriptures are silent. It appears Amaziah had the power to do so. Therefore, he did. These stunning stories record excessive brutality, unnecessary bloodshed, and murder for the sake of sport. It is war gone wrong, honor yielding to atrocity, violence breeding violence. Eventually God had enough. He was “*no longer willing*



to forgive," II Kings 24:4.

. Biblical Critique. Dramatic changes in the ideology of war took place after the fall of the Israelite kingdom. The nation ceased as a political force. They lost their capacity to wage war. Hence, their notion of military combat also changed.

1. Prophetic Words. The prophets looked forward to universal peace in the latter days, Isaiah 11:6-9; Jeremiah 32:36-41; Ezekiel 39:25-29; Micah 4:3,4. Notwithstanding, they had been advocates of war. For, in earlier times, they had supported the kings in military ventures, I Kings 20:22; 22:13; II Kings 3:13-19. The prophets, on an occasion or two, had actually planned battle strategy. Yet, though they occasionally championed war, more often than not, they were opponents of warfare. Upon closer examination, the prophets opposed military action when the main component for holy war (namely, the sanction of heaven) was absent.

The necessary prerequisite for war was an uncompromising trust in the power of Yahweh to give victory. In her waning years, Israel lost faith. She trusted in wealth, military power, alliances, and diplomacy to survive, Isaiah 30:1-5; Jeremiah 9:23,24; Amos 2:13-16. "*Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength,*" Jeremiah 17:5; cf. Isaiah 31:1. The people of God had become like a dove—"silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria," Hosea 7:11.

Because Israel adopted the religious practices of her neighbors—importing their gods and abandoning Jehovah God—Israel lost her true source of strength. The Lord could no longer lead His people. They became like lost sheep. The basis of the "ban" was gone. Israel was on her own—helpless and ready for slaughter.

In allowing herself to drift, Israel lost her purpose, her covenant vocation to be a light to the nations, cf. I Kings 8:59,60. Instead of leading others to God she allowed others to lead her away from God, Hosea 7:8-10. Consequently, rather than being an instrument of divine justice against the nations, the nations became the weapons of divine justice against Israel. War took on a new meaning, Isaiah 5:26-30; 10:5-11; Jeremiah 5:29-31; 6:1-5; Hosea 10:7-10; Micah 1:10-16; Habakkuk 1:5-17. In typical Biblical fashion, the punishment fit the crime. In other words, the sovereignty of God was without bias. His wrath was impartial. He punished evil wherever it existed—in Israel and beyond Israel, Deuteronomy 10:17; II Chronicles 19:7; cf. Job 34:19; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; I Peter 1:17.

2. Jesus' Teachings. War was not a central theme in the ministry of Christ. Since He made messianic claims, He was obligated to accept a messianic role as head of the kingdom (which included a final battle against the forces of evil), Acts 1:6. But the Lord was not interested in ruling the nations of the world, Matthew 4:8-10. He had legions of angels at His disposal to conquer nations and subdue enemies, Matthew 26:53. He obviously fit the profile of a warrior Messiah. Yet He chose to be

a suffering servant, cf. Isaiah 53:10-12. Therefore, He rebuked Peter for defending Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26:51-54. During His trial, He admitted He had a kingdom but it was *“not of this world.”* It was *“from another place,”* John 18:36.

Jesus never spoke against war among earthly empires. He never spoke in favor of it either. He did mention the impending battle that destroyed Jerusalem, Matthew 24:4-25. He illustrated His teaching with an example drawn from making war, Luke 14:31. He even asked His disciples to take swords to the prayer meeting in Gethsemane, Luke 22:35-38. But He did not need to resort to war because He knew He would soon have all authority in heaven and on earth, Matthew 28:18.

In effect, war was a non-issue in the ministry of Christ. Though, in view of His teaching, he did recognize the divisive nature of His ideas, Matthew 10:34. The words of Jesus were strongly directed toward peace and peacemaking. The kingdom of God did not have an army of soldiers to establish it or maintain it. The peacemakers (rather than the warriors) *“will be called sons of God,”* Matthew 5:9. The enemy is to be approached with love and good deeds rather than hate and violence, Matthew 5:43,44; Luke 6:27,35. The ethic of Christ does not support war. Indeed, if followed, it would eliminate all war both now and for evermore.

. Eschatological Realities. The Church is the new Israel. The old Israel was a national structure, a political organization. Thus, by her very nature, she was thrust into military activity. The Church is an international structure, an intercultural organization. Hence, because of this difference, she is set apart from war. Individual Christians might chose to serve in a national army, but a Christian army or a Church war is a contradiction in terms. An ideology of war—like that in the Old Testament—does not belong in the Church, is not found in the New Testament.

Carnal warfare is reinterpreted as spiritual warfare, II Corinthians 10:3; I Timothy 1:18. The struggle of the Church is not against human beings but against demonic powers ruling in the cosmos, Ephesians 6:10-12. Our weapons are entirely spiritual, to be used against the forces of evil in heavenly realms, not against human adversaries, II Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:13-17. We fight the fight of faith, I Timothy 6:12; II Timothy 4:7. The aim is to endure to the end, to be faithful to the Lord of lords.

Physical warfare belongs to the state (not the Church). War is based on greed, supported by the desire for things, James 4:1-3. It results in quarrels and ends in fights. Christian warfare attacks the very motives that create physical conflict. Bloody carnage will cease when our spiritual war is won, Isaiah 2:3.

The victory is the gift of God. Believers will not have to wait till the end of time for the intervention of heaven. In the crucifixion of Christ, the war has already been

won, Colossians 2:15. The present spiritual struggles against the forces of evil are merely the “mop up operation” against the lingering pockets of resistance. The end is in sight. The devil is “on the run,” in full retreat from the advancing forces of righteousness, James 4:7. The evil one is doomed, Revelation 20:7-10. In the interim, we share the wonderful news. The battle belongs to God. Eternity waits. War will be no more. Our task moves swiftly toward the finish line. We call all men and women to live in peace with God, II Corinthians 5:16-21, and with their fellow human beings, Romans 14:19; Hebrews 12:14.

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