

# What the Scriptures Teach about War



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## FOREWORD

**WE ARE NOW** well into the twenty-first century. World conditions are rapidly deteriorating. The people that we have trusted in, the things that we have come to know and enjoy, and have even taken for granted, are disappearing. Many in the world today now live in a constant state of fear. We see firsthand that world tensions are at an all-time high. Conflicts, wars, and acts of terrorism now fill our headlines and news reports. The world is caught up in a frenzy, which has led many to fear for their very existence. At the same time a renewed sense of patriotism has arisen in our country and in other parts of the world. Because of these conditions countries and their people have been coming together to form new alliances that were once thought to be out of the question. A struggle between the supposed powers of good and evil is underway. There has been a call to arms, which has led to violence being rendered for violence. A great deal of pressure has been put upon individuals to “join the fight” at all cost.

Mankind in general is not looking to God for help, but is relying on his own methods for bringing peace to the world. In this setting we find the child of God faced with many important decisions. What do the Scriptures teach concerning violence, war, and killing? How can the Scriptures be used as a basis for being a religious conscientious objector opposed to war in any form? It is our hope that this booklet will help the reader with the answers to these important questions.

# Old Testament View of War

**GOD IS OFTEN** described in the Bible in warlike terms—the “anger of God,” and the “wrath of God”—as mentioned in Numbers 11:10,23. The Heavenly Father is so opposed to everything that is impure that it is to be destroyed sooner or later. He is like “a consuming fire,” for “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 10:31) “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence.” (Deut. 32:35) The Scriptures also tell us that he cannot look upon sin, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.” (Hab. 1:13) The Lord shall judge his people, and test those who do evil in his sight, for he is “a jealous God,” and “a man of war,” who rises up to judgment against the nations according to his appointed time.—Exod. 20:5;15:3

He has done this in his past dealings with the world of mankind, and will carry out his plans and purposes to their appointed ends in the future. He wants all of our affections, confidence, and trust. We must realize that this is for our good and is not selfishness on his part. At the same time, God’s jealousy is just and is sure to bring to the sinner a just punishment. Fallen man views God with

bitterness, resentment, and selfishness, which comes from the condemnation of Adamic sin.

## **ISRAEL'S MEN OF WAR**

As we begin our discussion of God's dealings with the nation of Israel, we see that they were instructed to number themselves by armies. "The LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, ... after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies."—Num. 1:1-4

The Israelites were often led by men of war in their struggles to gain possession of their promised land. Joshua, the "captain of the host" (Josh. 5:14), was instructed by an angel on how to destroy Jericho. With the blowing of trumpets, and divine intervention, the walls of the city "fell down flat," and were "utterly destroyed." (Josh. 6:1-21) Look also at the experiences of Samson. According to the Law, Samson was rated as a very faithful servant of God. His faithfulness consisted in his loyalty to the divine requirements, to the cause of God, and to Israel the covenanted people of God. The Israelites, instead of cooperating with Samson and claiming the divine possession of the land of Palestine and the overthrow of all opponents, failed to do so. They feared the Philistines, and had little faith in God.

God taught his people how to fight. We are told by David, “Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.”—Ps. 144:1

Israel would come to fight many wars. God even taught them how to fight. “Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.” (Ps. 144:1) He sent them into battle. “The LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: ... And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, ... Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war. ... And they slew the kings of Midian.”—Num. 31:1-8

## **GOD FIGHTS FOR HIS PEOPLE**

God fought for his people when they were being pursued by Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and his army of horses and chariots. “When Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. ... And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” (Exod. 14:10-14) The waters of the sea parted by the power of God, and the host of Israel was delivered.

## A TIME FOR EVERY PURPOSE

Another set of scriptures to be considered is found in Ecclesiastes 3:1,3,8: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ... A time to love, and a time to hate; a time to war, and a time of peace.” Many people have used these scriptures to justify killing, and going to war. When we examine this closer we will see that Solomon is writing as a result of his own wide experiences and observations. He is making a point from a social standpoint. He sees men laboring hard to amass wealth, and wisely inquires, What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?”—vs. 9

Solomon ends his discussion with, “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”—Eccles. 12:13,14

## A GOD OF LOVE

We will now pose a question that was once asked to Pastor Russell, and relate his reply.<sup>1</sup> In the book, *What Pastor Russell Said*, we read on page 780:

“If God is a God of love as the Bible tells us; how can we understand his command to the children of Israel to utterly destroy their enemies?”

The answer given to this question is as follows:

“We must remember that the Nation of Israel is God’s covenanted people—‘you only have I known of all the families of the earth.’ (Amos 3:2) Terrible

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1 Charles T. Russell (1852-1916), Pastor, Bible Scholar, Lecturer, Author: *Studies in the Scriptures*, and *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*.

conditions existed in the promised land of Canaan when Israel came to possess it. The Philistines, Amorites, etc. who occupied the land, were practically savages, as they engaged in all forms of idolatrous worship, offering up human sacrifices in connection with their false gods and religion. It was because their wickedness and depravity had reached to such a stage that God, in his wisdom and justice, saw that it would be best to destroy them and to place in the land a people who, under his instructions, attained to a high degree of civilization. When the Jews were about to enter the land, the Lord established a system of laws with them with the assurance that if disobedient they would be punished. One of these was, 'Thou shalt not kill.' (Exod. 20:13) Malice, hatred, and anger are of the murderous spirit."

The fact that the children of Israel are God's chosen people is taught very clearly in the Bible. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." Look at the words from Jeremiah 13:11: "So have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory." He is "God of all the families of Israel." (Jer. 31:1) "In thee ... shall all the families of the earth be blessed." —Gen. 28:14

Israel's neighbors constantly made war against Israel and if Israel would obey God, he would help them. If they disobeyed God, he would let their enemies succeed. God made it clear to Israel through the prophets that the present time of evil, hate, war and poverty was a temporary situation.



His plan was aimed at eliminating all warfare, hate, despair and poverty. This would take place when his kingdom would be set up.

So we see that God dealt with his chosen people in very special ways, and under special laws and circumstances. Let us remember the commandment that he gave to them, "Thou shalt not kill." As we go into our discussion further, we will see that according to the Lord's teachings in the New Testament, life is to be prized, and not jeopardized.

# New Testament View of War

**AS WE STUDY** God's teachings in the New Testament, it will soon become apparent that a change has taken place. The Heavenly Father is now dealing differently with the nation of Israel, and it all begins with his dear Son. The Lord left his heavenly home, and was born a perfect man. "In a beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and a god was the Word. (John 1:1, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott, Interlinear*) "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. ... He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:14,10,11) We know that "his own," refers to the nation of Israel. He was rejected by them in fulfillment of the scripture, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows."—Isa. 53:3

When Pilate asked the Jews, who were gathered at our Lord's trial, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified." (Matt. 27:22) As we read at the close of the account, Pilate washed his

hands of the matter finding no fault with him. “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.”—Matt. 27:25

Throughout the Lord’s ministry, he longed to help Israel. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Luke 13:34,35) This is part of the witness of Jesus. Because of this rejection of the only begotten son of God, Israel failed to obtain what it had long sought. They had sought to obtain continued blessings and prosperity under God’s direction. “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; ... (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.”—Rom. 11:7,8

## **EXAMPLES TO TEACH US**

We now again mention, using the Scriptures, the purpose of God’s Old Testament relationship with Israel. “Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ... Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” (I Cor. 10:1-6) From this record we have these warnings, and with them the opportunity to learn from them so that we can do our best to serve God. Natural Israel never were heirs unconditionally of any part of the promise made to Abraham—“In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

(Gen. 12:3) They also were not heirs as a nation of the spiritual part of the promise, which is the chief, or principal, part. When God entered into the covenant with Israel, the understanding was that if they would keep the Law, they would have everlasting life. This would then allow them to inherit the privilege of blessing all the families of the earth—all people.

## **HEIRS OF GOD'S PROMISES**

The words of the Apostle Peter, “The promise is unto you, and to your children” (Acts 2:39), are in full harmony with all of the Lord’s dealings with Israel, and with his covenant with them as the children of his servant Abraham. They still had this hope in Jesus’ day, as Paul said, “Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.” (Acts 26:7) When the Israelites were proven unworthy of becoming heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant, they were broken off, and the Gentiles were grafted in to take their places. These Gentiles, now as individuals, could become partakers of “the root and fatness of the olive tree.” (Rom. 11:17) Only those who accepted Christ were made “heirs according to the promise,” as members of the spiritual seed. (Gal. 3:29) This, as we have explained, resulted from the unfaithfulness of Israel. “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: ... The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matt. 21:42,43) Since Israel was not ready to be used of God in the blessing other nations, their typical righteousness ceased, and the promise of

royalty ceased to be theirs. It was “given to a nation,”—to spiritual Israel—“an holy nation, a peculiar people.” (I Pet. 2:9) We are told that this nation is separate and distinct from all others, and is gathered out from all peoples of the earth. This nation will include bond and free, for truly, he hath called “a people for his name.” (Acts 15:14) Look also at these scriptures that further illustrate this point. “In his name shall the Gentiles trust.” (Matt. 12:21) “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (II Tim. 2:19) “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23) “Shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (I Pet. 2:9) “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

## **REJECTION OF VIOLENCE AND WAR**

Our Lord Jesus Christ is certainly the key to the change in the teachings that are brought out in the New Testament. Jesus rejected the concepts of violence and warfare that had come to be known and accepted in the world. Through his teachings, and by his example, he provided us with a way of knowing the Father’s will. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:34,35) This is a higher commandment, a higher law, than was given to the Jews under the Law Covenant. We are under a law in Christ Jesus. This law in Christ is the law of our covenant, and is the law of love. It is

given by our Head to all those who have entered the school of Christ, and who are hoping to become members of the church class. To love one another means to love our neighbors, our brethren, and our Heavenly Father. It even implies giving of our time and talents, sacrificing our all in service to the Lord. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) We must realize that loving obedience is pleasing to the Father, and it should be shown by not only justice, but also, love. It should lead us to follow after "the law of the Spirit of life."—Rom. 8:2

Our Lord led by example; he showed through his daily life what was truly in his heart. This is the true keeping of the law, the righteousness of the law that Paul is writing about in his letter to the Romans. We want to walk in our Lord's footsteps and have our minds in harmony with the spirit of God the Father. God would have our heart's intentions right, and have us control the flesh as much as possible. We want to fully surrender to the divine will, to give our lives to the Lord, and not to pursue the weaknesses of the flesh. We also want to be teachable, to learn of him and, in turn, learn more about the Father. "My Father hath taught me," he says in John 8:28. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."—vss. 31,32

Violence as a result of sin, is running rampant in the world today. It exists in many forms and involves many cultures. Satan, the author of sin, goes about the world "as a roaring lion, ... seeking whom he may devour." (I Pet. 5:8) He is the "god of this world" and "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not." (II Cor. 4:4) Because of this

influence, violence has become the norm. This may be in the form of day-to-day problems with neighbors, problems in the schools or in the workplace, and even in conflicts involving nations. We know that this is contrary to the teachings of our Lord. The Scriptures show that our Lord rejected violence, and the personal use of force to settle disputes. In Matthew 26:51-53, Jesus corrected Peter for drawing his sword against a servant of the High Priest, which resulted in injury to one of them. Jesus knew that he had to be taken by them willingly. He told his disciples, "Put up again thy sword."

We never again hear of the disciples using force or violence in the service of the Lord. He could have called into service "legions of angels," but he did not do so. He was not willing to use divine power for his personal comfort. Jesus never prayed for deliverance from his troubles, but cheerfully endured as part of his sacrifice. We should also be doing the same thing in our own life. We should lay aside our own will, and carry out the will of God at all cost. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."—Phil. 2:5

## **NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD ENEMIES**

Our Lord also preached concerning a new attitude toward our enemies. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matt. 5:44) We might at first say that this is a high standard to live up to, and we would be correct. This type of love goes beyond loving your neighbor. It has been said that it is easy to love those who love us. But to

love our enemies requires that we have a big heart, as the saying goes, and be generous to them all. It implies a heart condition, so full of love that not even an enemy could stir up in our hearts any evil intentions. This would have no room for acts of retribution or hatred. It does not mean that we like evil or injustice, or that we have any part in it. We are opposed to those who oppress the weak and helpless. The mindset of the world today involves doing wrong to others to save self, and to serve selfish interests. We are to “hate the evil, and love the good.” (Amos 5:15) For the faithful footstep followers of the Lord this is all very important. This is an example of putting our faith into practice. It is a way to show that you “love” the Lord with all your heart. (Matt. 22:37) We remember also that those who sin and do evil in the sight of God will have their reward.—I Cor. 3:8

## **PRINCIPLES OF LIFE**

Our Lord Jesus taught us principles of living which were characterized by meekness, and peace-making. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: ... Blessed are they that mourn: ... Blessed are the meek: ... Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: ... Blessed are the merciful: ... Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matt. 5:1-12) Our Lord spoke these words in his Sermon on the Mount, to instruct his disciples, and, in turn, us. We are to be submissive to his will, and again be teachable. He wants us to practice self-control, to be gentle, not easily provoked or irritated. He



wants us to practice mercy, and real forgiveness, for the unkind acts of others. We are not always going to have perfect conduct, but we want to have perfect intent. We should be peacemakers, lovers of peace, and take opportunities to help others. The Lord's people are to sympathize with all, and join with no one in the warring world.

Purity of heart toward God shows itself in peaceable desires and efforts to promote peace in others. These "peacemakers" will have opportunity in the world. This is especially true in this time in which we are living, in the present evil world. It is true that darkness hateth the light, and the enemies of righteousness will hate and persecute those who desire to lead a life pleasing to the Father. The Lord is looking for those who are so faithful to the principles of righteousness, that they will exercise it. This is to be done even toward their enemies when persecuted by them. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, ... for great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. 5:11,12) We also read in I Peter 4:16, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God." Our Lord gives us further assurance when he tells us, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—John 16:33

# Responsibilities of New Testament Teachings

**WE ARE TO** be pilgrims and strangers in the earth. This means that we are responsible to God's laws, not man's. Look at the admonition that we are given concerning this. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: ... Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest." (I Pet. 2:9-11) We are to obey man's laws when they do not conflict with God's laws.

We all know that the Heavenly Father holds obedience to his will as a very important matter. We have been shown this by all of the lessons that have been represented to us concerning the nation of Israel. Our Lord also taught us a lesson about this when he said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matt. 22:21) A further explanation of this matter is taken from Reprint

5928 (*The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*), and is entitled *Conscience and The War*.

"The Bible Student's claim is that they have their citizenship in heaven, and that by giving their obedience to the Heavenly Lord they renounce in a degree their obedience to earthly kings—governments. Any oath of allegiance to any earthly government is not required of aliens, or foreigners, and is objected to by Bible Students, not because they are opposed to law and order, or unwilling to be regulated by the government under which they live, but because they have already given allegiance to the higher power—the Heavenly Lord. To them his words, his commands, etc., are paramount"—"Dearly beloved, I beseech you." We are to be obedient to the laws, may look for protection under the laws, but are not compelled to fight against our King. We are told to "submit yourselves to every ordinance" (I Pet. 2:13), except when our conscience and God's laws would be violated. Apostle Paul points to justice as a consideration for rendering honor, respect, and service to whom honor is due.

We should trust that the Heavenly Father is working out everything according to his plans and purposes. He is looking especially at how we are living up to the teachings that were revealed to us by his dear Son, which is displayed in our daily lives. "The fire [of that day] shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (I Cor. 8:13) This "fire" will reveal what type of character we have developed during our lives. Our faith should be built upon the precious promises of God which, we are told, are gold, silver, and precious stones. We are not to build improperly with other materials that do not stand

up to this test by fire. The Apostle tells us that everything that is built according to earthly methods and traditions will be destroyed. The Heavenly Father is allowing all nations to deceive themselves into thinking that they can solve all of the world's problems. We have seen that peace has never been long lasting, new conflicts arise suddenly. These events of violence and war are helping to prepare the world of mankind for God's kingdom of everlasting peace. We see by the conditions in this present evil world that mankind is far removed from the spirit of Christ. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Rom. 8:9) We should see that this is a very important principle.

The Lord's people are to remember the special instructions that were given to them by their master to be peacemakers. Let us then, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."—Heb. 12:14

# Concluding Thoughts

**THE NEW TESTAMENT** teaches that Jesus rejected the concepts of violence and war. He taught us by example, and through the establishment of a commandment “to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” and to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Matt. 22:37-39) This new attitude toward our enemies rejects the use of force and killing. This type of character is based upon the principles of love and peacemaking.

One day soon, the scripture will be fulfilled, “He maketh wars to cease,” as prophesied by David. (Ps. 46:9) The method to bring this about is revealed in Micah 4:3, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” All of the people of the earth will one day know everlasting peace, and have the opportunity to then live in harmony on a restored, perfect earth forever.

Religious conscientious objection to war in any form certainly has a strong scriptural basis. Taking a stand as a conscientious objector is an individual matter, and is one that should be based on personal study and prayer. May the Heavenly Father guide and direct you as you contemplate this very serious matter in your life. Trust in him in all things, for he “will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”—Heb. 13:5