

Military Service and God's Church

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The Church of God was founded by Christ in 31 AD. There was *also* a great **false** church which likewise rose up almost immediately after Christ's crucifixion... and has continued to this day. That *false* church grew great in numbers and in wealth. Many scriptures refer to that false church. As an example, notice the following: "For such *are* **false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ**. And no wonder! For **Satan** himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if **his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness...**" (II Cor. 11: 13-15). Satan, along with his ministers, has **deceived the whole world!** (Rev. 12:9).

The final book of the Bible—the book of Revelation—*refers to* that great, false church. In Revelation chapter 17, the false church is depicted as a "woman" (verse 3), a "great harlot" (verse 1), and as "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, **THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS...**" (verse 5).

Regarding its depiction as "THE **MOTHER OF HARLOTS**," that is a *prophecy* regarding the fact that many "daughter churches" would eventually *spring from* that one great, false church... and that they, *likewise*, would be "harlots" (false churches). (For more information regarding the *false* church versus God's *true* Church, *see* FOOTNOTE #1)

Let's now return to our discussion of the *true* Church—the Church founded **by** Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18)—"the *little* flock" (Luke 12: 32)—a Church which would experience varying degrees of *persecution* throughout its existence (John 15: 20).

Since the time of its founding in 31 AD, what has been *the historical record* of its members *participating* in military service?

The Historical Record

Let's examine **the historical record** of whether members of God's true Church participated in military service and warfare.

Notice the following statements from John H. Ogwyn's article "Military Service and God's True Church":

Jesus Christ, however, had clearly stated while on trial before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is **not** of this world" (John 18:36). He went on to explain to Pilate that if it *had* been of that world—the human society

in which He lived— then His servants **would** have fought to prevent Him from being turned over to the Jews.

After His [Christ's] crucifixion, when fighting broke out in Judea, the early Church still residing there **didn't** take part in the Jewish Wars against the Romans. **Heeding Christ's advice given in the Olivet prophecy, the true Church [instead of fighting] FLED** Jerusalem after Pentecost of A.D. 69 (cf. Luke 21: 20-21). Going to the mountainous area of Pella, Jewish Christians **refused** to participate in the wars that rent their homeland...

One of the most readily identifiable characteristics of the **true Church—right along with Sabbath observance**—has been the **refusal** to participate in carnal warfare.

...History records the story of God's people who fled beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire and remained in remote areas **throughout the medieval period**.¹

Prior to continuing with Mr. Ogwyn's accounting of the historical record, let's first notice this one quote (from a *different* article) by Mr. Ogwyn: "The historical record is clear—**for the first TWO CENTURIES after Christ, Christians took no part in military service**. Notice the testimony of historian Edward Gibbon in speaking of the early Church: 'But, while they inculcated the maxims of passive obedience, **they refused to take any active part in the civil administration or the military defence of the empire**' (*The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, p. 41)."²

[Now, continuing with Mr. Ogwyn's accounting of the historical record] ...When we pick up the story in Europe and America during the **16th and 17th centuries**, we find true Christians who *didn't* become involved in the political and military affairs of their society. In fact, most of the historic pacifist sects—such as the Mennonites and Hutterites—trace their history back to "Sabbatarian Anabaptists," a name that outsiders attached to remnants of the true Church of God in Central Europe.

The issue of military service was taken so seriously by the Church that, during **the American Revolution and the Civil War**, there is record of men being disfellowshipped from the Church for joining the military.

John Staunton, one-time president of the Michigan Conference of the Church of God, "enlisted in the Union army, and the Waverly church **disfellowshipped** him, maintaining that only non-resisters could be in their church" (Richard Nickels, *History of the Seventh Day Church of God*, p. 32).

In the April 23, 1865, issue of the Church of God publication *Hope of Israel* is this statement: "We thank God that President Lincoln... did cause to be made such laws as would deliver God's saints from participating in war.... To this end let us

still pray for our future rulers, as a law abiding and devoted people, to the end that we may be able to lead quiet and peaceable lives to his honor and glory.”

In April 1917, when the United States entered **World War I**, Andrew Dugger, president of the Church of God (Seventh Day), contacted a Missouri congressman to arrange an interview with President Woodrow Wilson. Accompanied by the congressman, he met with President Wilson and received exemption for Church members from combat service (Nickels, p. 92).

During the **Korean and Vietnam Wars**, the Worldwide Church of God, under the leadership of Herbert W. Armstrong, petitioned the government to recognize Church members as having conscientious objector status. Many young men in the Church **suffered ridicule and threats because of their conscientious refusal to take up arms against their fellow human beings.**¹

The Church in Modern Times

In the paragraph above, the name Herbert W. Armstrong is mentioned. Mr. Armstrong served for many years as “Pastor General” of God’s Church during the 1900’s... until his death in 1986. He taught that it is **wrong** for a Christian to engage in war and to kill his fellowman on the battlefield! Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong’s teachings on this subject are made plain in his 52-page booklet *Military Service and War*.

The Living Church of God has carried on the work and teachings of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. Organized under the leadership of Pastor Roderick C. Meredith, The Living Church of God has likewise always taught *against* members of God’s Church serving in the military. Until his death in 2017, Pastor Meredith consistently upheld that position. Gerald E. Weston, *current* “Presiding Evangelist” of the Living Church of God, continues with that same teaching.

Most members of the Living Church of God are very familiar with Pastor John H. Ogwyn. Mr. Ogwyn, who died in 2005, was a prolific writer for the Living Church of God, and was the author of the Church’s *Tomorrow’s World Bible Study Course*.

Among Mr. Ogwyn’s many writings, he authored a 3-part series of articles on the subject of warfare and military service. (Those 3 articles were actually written prior to the founding of “The Living Church of God”... when the Church, under the leadership of Roderick C. Meredith, was known as “The Global Church of God.”) **Many quotes from those three articles are contained within the article which you are now reading. Furthermore, those three articles by Mr. Ogwyn are in total accord with—and very similar to—what Mr. Herbert Armstrong wrote in his 1985 booklet *Military Service and War*.**

CHRIST’S Teaching *and* Example

Having examined the historical record of the Church, let’s *now* consider Christ’s *teaching*—as well as His *example*—on this subject of whether Christians should engage in war.

In discussing the issue of whether a Christian should enter into Military Service, many individuals will immediately bring up the example of King David. We will, in fact, examine the issue of King David *later* in this article.

However, for a true Christian, the most **important** thing in life, is to follow the teachings—and example—of Jesus Christ!! So, what did Christ *teach* regarding the issue of killing one's enemies? Jesus Christ's teachings on this subject, should be **THE DETERMINING FACTOR**, as to whether we submit to participating in the wars of this world!

Here is how Christ instructed us to deal with our enemies: “**LOVE your enemies, BLESS** those who curse you, do **GOOD** to those who hate you” (Matt. 5:44). So... *is it possible* for us to LOVE our enemies—to BLESS them—to do GOOD to them—**while KILLING them?!** **NO**... it is **not** possible! Accordingly, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith has stated this: “**WAR** is the complete **ANTITHESIS** of Christ's admonition to **love** your enemies!” The complete **antithesis!**

In his article “Violence, War and Christianity,” Mr. John Ogwyn wrote this:

Notice what He [Christ] taught in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the *peacemakers*” (Matt. 5:9). [Then, in verse 39, Christ said] “**But I tell you not to resist [or retaliate against] an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also**” (v. 39). **It's important to understand the context here. Christ was speaking of evil and abusive men in authority—those who have power over us. [However,] If someone on the street, so to speak, were to physically assault you, the best course of action would probably be to *clear out* instead of waiting for the next blow!**

The Apostle Paul spoke of Christian warfare and explained both what it is and what it isn't. In 2 Corinthians 10: 3-4, he wrote, “For though we walk in the flesh, **we do not war according to the flesh**. For the weapons of our warfare *are not* carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.” He made it plain that Christians are engaged **only** in *spiritual* warfare, **not physical** conflict.²

Notice now, Christ's **EXAMPLE**: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us **an example**, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did **not** revile in return; when He suffered, He did **not** threaten...” (I Peter 2: 21-23).

Likewise, how did Christ *react* when Peter used a **sword** to defend Christ and the group of disciples? Christ **rebuked** Peter! “But Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword’” (Matt. 26:52). In John's account of that incident, after **rebuking** Peter for using the sword, Christ said this: “My kingdom is **NOT** of this world. If My kingdom **were** of this world, My servants would fight...” (John 18:36). So, plainly, **Christ's servants DO NOT FIGHT!**

Yes, Christ said that His servants do not fight... **BECAUSE** they are **not OF** this world!

Christians Are NOT “OF” THE WORLD!

Consider, if you will, Jesus Christ’s life while He was here in the flesh. Was Christ a **PART OF** this world? Was He part of this world’s **values**... part of this world’s **ways**? Of course not! Jesus Christ came here to **do** the Father’s will—and to be **about** His Father’s business! (John 4:34; Luke 2:49).

While on earth, Christ maintained a very **close relationship** with the Father (John 10:30; 17:11,22). Christ did not **ALLOW** the **ways** of the world, to **corrupt** Him! He was **not** “**part of the world**”... He was not “**OF** the world.”

Now, what did Christ say about those who **follow** Him—those who are true Christians? Christ said this: “They [Christians] are **not of the world, JUST AS I [Christ] am NOT of the world**”! (John 17:14).

That is an **INCREDIBLE** statement!! **Think** about it! You and I are not “OF the world,” **JUST AS** Jesus Christ was **not** “OF the world”!!

And that concept is so **important**, that Christ **repeats** it, two verses later, in verse 16: “They are not of the world, **JUST AS** I am not of the world.”

Then, notice what Christ says in the very *next* verse: He asks the Father to “**Sanctify** them by Your truth.” “Sanctify” means to “**set apart**.” So, Christ was asking His Father to **set** His followers **apart FROM** the world!

Christ said, “I will build my church.” The inspired Greek word for “church” was *ekklesia*, which means “**called out** ones.” Christ’s followers would be called **out** of Satan’s world... **set apart** from Satan’s world! Christ said, “you are **not** of the world... I chose you **OUT** of the world” (John 15:19).

Notice now, what *Peter* said about God’s people: “But you *are* a **chosen** generation, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy** nation, His **OWN SPECIAL** people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you **OUT** of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Peter 2: 9).

Let’s understand. This does **not** mean that true Christians are “better” than other people. But it **DOES** mean that we are **different** from others! And it means that God has set us **apart**—as “His **own special** people.”

Notice what else Christ said. He said, “**AS** You [the Father] sent **ME** into the world, I [Christ] also have sent **THEM** into the world” (John 17:18).

Yes, Christ sends us **into** the world—as His **representatives**! “Now then, we are **AMBASSADORS for** Christ...” (II Cor. 5:20).

What is an “ambassador”? It is a person *representing* a **foreign** nation. As a Christian, you are a **foreigner** here on earth! You are a foreigner, **representing** God’s Kingdom!

As an “ambassador,” you are in the *same* relative position, as the American Ambassador in communist China. The American Ambassador lives **in** China, but he **represents** the United States. He is **not** a communist. He does **not** regard China as “his” government. He does **NOT** enter into the Chinese **military**—nor does he **vote** for Chinese leaders! He is *not* there to try to eradicate the evils in their system. He does not *oppose* the Chinese; he is subject **to** them, *while* living there—and he **conducts** himself so as to be highly regarded **by** them.

Likewise, we, as Christians, live **IN** the world; but we are **representing God’s Kingdom!** As scripture says, our **MAIN** citizenship is in heaven (Philip. 3:20). **Our PRIMARY allegiance must be to God’s Kingdom!!**

Yes, we, as Christians, are **foreigners** in this world. We live as “sojourners” and “pilgrims” during this present life (I Peter 2:11). We are **heirs**—**not yet** inheritors—of our **permanent** dwelling, the Kingdom Of God.

Hebrews chapter 11 is known as “the **faith** chapter.” It speaks of the “super heroes” of faith. Notice verses 13-14: “These all died in faith, **not** having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that **they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth**. For those who say such things declare plainly that they **seek a homeland**.”

Abraham was *one* of those “heroes of faith.” “By **faith** he [Abraham] dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a **foreign** country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he **waited** for the city which has **foundations**, whose builder and maker *is* God” (verses 9-10).

Likewise, **our** hearts, must **NOT** be set on this world... but rather, on passing **through** this world! “**Blessed is** the man... **whose heart is SET on PILGRIMAGE**” (Ps. 84:5). Is **YOUR** heart “set on pilgrimage” while here in the flesh?

The Apostle Paul admonishes us to “...**seek** those things which are **above**, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. **SET your mind** on things above, **NOT on things on the earth**. For you **DIED**, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ *who IS our life* appears, then you also will appear **with** Him in glory” (Col. 3: 1-4).

Again, we are **IN** the world, but we are **not** part **OF** it! Paul exhorts us to “**not be CONFORMED to this world**”! (Rom.12:2).

Let’s now notice II Corinthians, chapter 6. “...For you **ARE** [notice, “you **ARE**”] the **temple** [or **dwelling-place**] of the living God. As God has said: ‘**I will dwell IN them** and walk among *them*. I will **be** their God, and they shall **be** My people.’ Therefore ‘**Come OUT from among them** and **BE SEPARATE**, says the Lord...” (verses 16-17).

Yes, God calls us **OUT** of this world—out of its **customs**, its **philosophies**, its **WAY** of life! “Therefore, if anyone *is in* Christ, *he is* a **NEW** creation; **old** things [old habits—**old ways of THINKING**] have passed **away**...”! (II Cor. 5: 17; cf. Rom. 6: 2-6).

In Mr. Ogwyn's article "Military Service And God's True Church," he stated the following:

"Render... to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," said Jesus (Matt.22:21).

... Clearly, Christians were to obey the civil law. The only **exception** to this is **when man's requirements directly conflict with the commands of Almighty God**. An example of this is when some of the apostles were commanded to quit preaching in the name of Jesus. Peter answered the religious leaders of the Jewish nation, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). However, Peter and the others **didn't** seek to protect themselves by armed resistance. Rather, they submitted their cause directly to God in heaven.

...as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, *this* world isn't really *our* world! **We are strangers and pilgrims in this society, waiting in faith for a city** "whose maker and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10, 13).

...True Christians, however, aren't to be enmeshed in this world's system. We should, instead, seek to **avoid military service—on TWO grounds**. **The first is** Christ's clear teaching about the spirit of the law in regard to doing violence against our neighbor. **Secondly**, Christians will avoid being part of the politico-military system of this world because our citizenship is in heaven— we are ambassadors of a coming Government that will supersede all others (Dan. 2:44). Regarding this world's system, God commands His people, "Come out of her my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).

...According to Jesus Christ, there is coming a time of trouble and violence without parallel (Matt. 24:21-22). There is only one hope for protection during this coming time of peril. That hope most certainly DOES NOT lie in reliance on weapons of violence for our protection.

...God's people, as never before, must learn to walk with Him and to rely on His mighty arm to preserve us. We are strangers and pilgrims in an alien society. Our hope is in the establishment of the Kingdom of God ushered in by the returning Messiah, the Prince of Peace.

...The true Church of God, the bride of Christ, remains aloof from the political and military aspects of this present *ungodly* society. She remains a chaste virgin, faithfully awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom. May God speed His return! ¹

A DIFFERENCE Between the N.T. Church and the Nation of Israel

In his booklet on the subject of military service, Mr. Herbert Armstrong said that Christians **should LOVE** their **COUNTRY!** **However...** he said that it comes down to a simple matter of each Christian realizing "that **OBEDIENCE to God** must come **FIRST!**" ³ The Spirit-begotten

Christian has citizenship **NOT ONLY** in the country in which he lives... but he **ALSO** has a “**spiritual citizenship**.” And, this “spiritual citizenship,” says Mr. Armstrong, “*does make a difference* between the one who **HAS IT**, and owes spiritual **ALLEGIANCE** to it, and one whose **ONLY** citizenship is to a war-making kingdom of **THIS WORLD**.”³

Mr. Armstrong said, “***we do not judge*** those who think military service and killing in war is right. God has not set us to be their judges. **Neither** do we condemn them.”³

However, said Mr. Armstrong, God Almighty is judging **the Spirit-begotten Christian NOW!** “The true Christian, who has this **UNDERSTANDING**, is *held accountable, NOW!*”³ (I Peter 4:17)

Yes, we must understand that there is a basic **DIFFERENCE** between the **New** Testament Church and the **Old** Testament Church—the congregation or assembly known as “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, *KJV*).

Ancient Israel was **not offered** God’s Holy Spirit. So, they—like the vast majority of mankind **today**—were **carnally minded!** The “carnal mind,” one’s natural mind—the mind that we are all born with—was spoken of by the Apostle Paul. He said, “The carnal mind is enmity [**hostile**] **against** God; for **it is NOT SUBJECT TO the law of God, nor indeed can be**” (Rom. 8:7).

Since the Old Testament Israelites did not *have* God’s Spirit, they could **not** live by the spirit or intent of God’s Law. God gave them only the **letter** of the law. Yet, they proved unfaithful even in that!

In fact, consider that one of the primary reasons why God **raised up** the nation of Israel, was to **demonstrate** that mankind **NEEDS** God’s Holy Spirit! It was to show that **without** God’s Spirit, man **cannot** fulfill God’s spiritual Law! Notice the following comment by Herbert W. Armstrong: “God gave **PROOF**, through Israel, that **WITHOUT** the Holy Spirit, **MAN IS HELPLESS!** They even had God to appeal to. But they did not have His Spirit *within* them... One of the *purposes* of this nation was to prove by human experience that man **without** the Spirit of God within him **cannot** be righteous” (*Mystery of the Ages*, Herbert W. Armstrong, 1985, p. 175, Worldwide Church of God).

Ancient Israel *repeatedly* showed their lack of submission to *even* the **letter** of the Law. They repeatedly showed their lack of faith in looking **to God** for protection and deliverance! In other words, they repeatedly showed that they were “**hard hearted**.”

This issue of “hard heartedness” is discussed by pastor John H. Ogwyn in his article “The Truth About Old Testament Warfare”:

Why does the Old Testament record so much fighting and violence? ...**To properly understand the warfare depicted in the Old Testament, let’s examine Christ’s teaching on another, similar topic.** The religious leaders of Jesus’ day sought to entangle Him in their arguments about divorce and remarriage. In explaining to them that “what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19: 6), Christ shocked the Pharisees. Their response was, “**Why**

then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce”? (v. 7). Christ explained that “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, *permitted* you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (v. 8).

The story of the human race has been the story of sin, **lack of faith and hardness of heart**. **So many times mankind, including ancient Israel, has taken the hard way because lack of trust in God has kept it from taking a better way.** There have been things that **God has *allowed*— but never *intended* for—mankind because of a collective hardness of heart.**

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He **didn’t** instruct them to wage their own wars. In fact, He specifically told them, “The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Ex. 14:14). But despite God’s almost constant intervention on their behalf, the Israelites lacked real faith and constantly doubted His promises. Exodus 17 records that not only did they murmur against and complain about Moses, but they actually came to the point of threatening to kill him!

At this juncture, the **Amalekites**—a warlike people of that region—attacked in force. Knowing that the people were utterly lacking in the faith to trust God and fearing that they would be slaughtered, Moses ordered Joshua to organize an armed force and go out to fight (v. 9). Even at this point, God made it plain that **He** gave Israel the victory. The Israelites didn’t prevail simply because of their of their own strength or cunning (Ex. 17: 11-12).

The people should have learned from this experience. A short time later, **at Mount Sinai, God gave them a chance to forever avoid carnal warfare by trusting in Him, as their sole Deliverer (Ex. 23:22-23).** But the record of Scripture shows that the Israelites lacked faith to wait on God and wanted to depend on the weapons and craft of warfare as did the nations around them. They found it far easier to have confidence in what they could *see* rather than to trust the *invisible* God. Swords and shields somehow seemed more real than the Almighty and His angelic hosts.

At the time God made the Sinai Covenant with ancient Israel, He included special promises of His intervention on its behalf. However, the fulfillment of these specific promises was **based upon the Israelites’ faith and obedience**. Let’s examine the passage in Exodus 23 cited in the last paragraph: “But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and Hittites and Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off....

“I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I

will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you” (vv. 22-23, 27-28). Notice that God proposed to drive out the enemies of His people. The Israelites were not asked at Mount Sinai to raise and equip an army.

But the people of Israel did not put their trust in God. So, though it was clearly NOT what He had *originally* intended, God instituted laws of military service and directly ordered them to go to war. Therefore, they spent years fighting to subdue the Promised Land. Yet even as they stood on the brink of entering the land, God offered them a preferable alternative if they would really trust and obey Him: “The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes” (Deut. 1:30). Israel had **not** been required to use military might to gain its freedom from Egypt. Rather, Almighty God had directly intervened and literally forced Pharaoh to let His people go. That same God now indicated a willingness to give them the Promised Land in like manner.

LIFE BELONGS TO GOD

...Almighty God is the Giver of life. He *created* our first parents out of inert matter—the “dust of the ground”—and breathed life into them. Not only did life *originate* with God, but He also has the power to *restore* it to anyone or anything that has ceased to live. Coupled with this supreme power, God also possesses supreme *wisdom*. Because life originated with Him and is intrinsic to Him alone, He has the right to give it or to take it as He deems appropriate. From the very beginning, our Creator has made plain to man that the penalty for sin would be *death*, which is the cessation of life (Gen. 3:3).

The point is that **God alone has the right to take life—or to command *someone else* to do so.** He bestowed life as gift, but told mankind from the beginning that *retaining* that life was conditional upon the choices each human would make. **For God to choose to wipe out either individuals, cities or nations is certainly His prerogative. This may sound harsh. But we must keep in mind that He is the only One with the perfect love and wisdom to make that choice and to make it *correctly* every time.**

When we read in the Old Testament of God sending plagues, or using Israel as His instrument to wipe out rebellious and sinful nations, we can trust these decisions. God saw the *whole picture* and made choices as to what was best for all concerned according to His overall plan. It wasn’t initially God’s desire to use human beings as His instruments to kill their fellow man. But because of the hardness of their hearts, He decided on that very course of action. Nevertheless, as Christ said of divorce and remarriage, “from the beginning it was not so.”

GOD FOUGHT THE BATTLES

Men such as Joshua, Gideon and David lived in the midst of a carnal and largely faithless nation. Nonetheless, it was God's purpose to give that nation the inheritance He had promised to its forefathers. Because of Israel's lack of real faith in Him, God used human champions who were responsive to His will. Even in these cases, He often directed circumstances to make it clear to any rational Israelite that it was God, not human strength, that gained the victory. From the collapsed walls of Jericho to the astounding miracle of the sun and moon "standing still," God demonstrated to the faithless Israelites that they hadn't achieved victory through force of arms but, rather, that He had given it. Whether it was Gideon's tiny army or David's slingshot, the Almighty used incredible circumstances to help His people learn lessons of faith, even in the depths of their disbelief.

In fact, there were times when the forces against them were so over-whelming that Israel's leaders laid aside any hope of being delivered by their own hand. They simply made a heartfelt appeal to God. In times such as these, God showed Himself valiant on behalf of those who trusted Him.

In 2 Chronicles 14, for example, we read of **King Asa** being threatened with a massive invasion from the south. "Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men.... And Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said, 'LORD, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those that have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You...' So the LORD struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled" (vv. 9-12).

Later, in the days of Asa's son, **King Jehoshaphat**, Judah faced another crisis. "Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, 'A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea...' And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah (2 Chron. 20: 2-3).

He confessed the utter powerlessness of his people and besought God's intervention. In response, he was told by God's prophet, "**You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you**" (v. 17).

Jehoshaphat appointed singers to lead the way as his people moved toward the enemy! Notice what happened when they responded to the faithful king's lead. "Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated" (v. 22). The result? "And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around" (vv. 29-30).

A number of years later, in the days of faithful **King Hezekiah**, a vast Assyrian army under King Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem. Hezekiah went to God in heartfelt prayer and fasting. The result was similar. **The Eternal sent an angel that wiped out the entire Assyrian army of 185,000 men in one night!** (2 Kings 19).

Time and again, God has shown Himself to be the only real security for His people. Even so, humans tend to trust what they can see. And although the evidence of His greatness and power is all around us (Rom. 1:20), somehow the invisible God can still seem remote and far away.

Israel was a carnal nation that continually limited God through its unbelief (Ps. 78:41). He did use the Israelites to accomplish His purpose and to fulfill His plan, but oftentimes in spite of themselves. Had they really trusted God completely, He would have delivered them without the need for warfare on their part, just as He had promised at Mount Sinai. But due to their lack of faith, God allowed and even directed them to use weapons of war to accomplish His purpose on the enemies of His people. Yet we must never forget: **from the beginning it was not so!**⁴

What About KING DAVID?

A frequent argument used to justify Christians engaging in war, is that **King David** engaged in war... and that King David **did** have God's Spirit... and he was even referred to, in the Bible, as a man after God's "own heart."

In response to that argument, let's consider the following *three* points:

(1) It is true that King David himself **did** have God's Spirit. However, the millions of Israelites over whom he ruled, **did not** have God's Spirit! They, like most people on earth **today**, were carnally-minded. Although King David loved God's ways, and basically did lead the nation **in** God's ways, God knew that David was overseeing a people who had *already* **REJECTED** God's rule over them!

Notice, in I Samuel, chapter 8, what the Israelites said to God's servant Samuel—who was the *leader* over Israel at the time:

...Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; **for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them...** Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them." So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people

who asked him for a king. And he said, “This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint *them* for his own chariots and *to be* his horsemen, and *some* will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, *will set some* to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and *some* to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots... And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day.”

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, “No, but we will have a king over us, **that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.**”

And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. So the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed their voice, and make them a king”... (I Sam. 8: 4-22).

So, the Israelites **REJECTED** God’s rule over them! They wanted to be ruled by a king, like the other nations around them. God *agreed* to allow **this HARD-HEARTED people** to have what they asked for! And (as discussed above) God, on occasion, even used this nation of Israel to act as His *instrument* to punish other nations. Yet... God **DID** so, **ONLY AFTER** the Israelites had **repeatedly shown** that they would **NOT** look to God for protection and deliverance!

(2) Even though David was a “man after God’s own heart,” David was not perfect. In fact, it was **because** David had been such a man of **war**, that God refused to allow David to build the temple! “But God said to me, ‘You shall not build a house for My name, because you *have been* a man of war and have shed blood’” (I Chron. 28:3).

(3) Although King David, as well as Abraham and others, are Biblical **examples** for us—they are **not** our *perfect* example! **Jesus Christ** is our *perfect* example!

WHY CHRIST TOLD HIS DISCIPLES TO BUY SWORDS

We have previously looked at Christ’s teachings—and His example—about how to deal with your enemy. Yet, what about the incident where Christ instructed His disciples to buy swords?

Just hours prior to Christ’s betrayal and arrest, He had told the disciples to buy swords. “Then He said to them, ‘But now, he who has a money bag, let him take *it*, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one’” (Luke 22:36).

Why did Christ give that instruction?

First of all, as we will now see, Christ never intended for the disciples to actually **use** the swords! Notice a couple of verses later: “So they said, ‘Lord, look, here *are* two swords.’ And He said to them, ‘It is enough.’” (verse 38).

Again, that discussion between Christ and the disciples took place only hours prior to Christ's arrest. Jesus Christ **knew** that on this Passover evening He, "the Passover Lamb," would be arrested. He knew that He and His disciples would be confronted by a group of *well-armed* soldiers! So why did He reply that just **two** swords were enough? "Two swords," to defend Christ and 12 disciples—against well-armed soldiers?! It doesn't seem logical. And it makes even *less* sense, when you consider that when Peter **did** use the sword (and cut off the individual's ear) that he was **rebuked** by Christ for doing so!

So why did Christ tell them to *buy* swords, if He didn't want them to *use* the swords? Consider two reasons:

First, consider this statement from *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*: "Since he [Christ] told them not to buy more swords than they had (v.38), and since two were hardly enough to defend the group, the swords may simply be a vivid symbol of impending crisis, not intended for actual use" [*The Expositor's Bible Commentary (NIV)*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984, volume 8, pp. 1029-30].

Secondly, and perhaps *more* importantly, when Christ told them to buy swords, it may well have been for the purpose of *fulfilling a specific prophecy*! Consider that, immediately upon telling them to buy the swords, Christ said, "For I say to you that **this which is written [in Isa. 53:12]** must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was **numbered with the transgressors** ["He was counted among those who had committed crimes"—*NIRV*].' For the things concerning Me have an end [fulfillment]" (Luke 22: 37 *NKJV*).

Thus, we see that their having swords, would *fulfill* that prophecy in Isaiah—in which Christ would be counted among transgressors—outlaws.

Again, Christ was not sanctioning the **use** of weapons. In fact, He **rebuked** Peter when Peter **did** use the weapon!

The Conclusion Of the Matter

If an individual (or a group of individuals—or a nation) truly repents and **surrenders** his life to God...begins striving to live **by** every Word of God—begins living a life of **obedience** to God's Law—and **THEN** begins looking to **God** for protection... then that is great! That is what every-one **ULTIMATELY should** do!

However, if a person renounces use of weapons **without** having unconditionally surrendered his life to God, then that person should *not* expect God's protection. In fact, if such an *unrepentant* course of action were to be taken by a nation's *leader*, then it would amount to that nation essentially "asking" to be conquered by other nations!

And, the only thing which might **prevent** that nation from being conquered, is the fact that there might be **other** nations, who see it in their *own* best interest to **protect** that nation.

In short, there are only *two* choices: (1) Truly **surrender** your life to God, and *then* look to **Him** for protection... or, (2) live by the sword. And, if you are going to live by the sword, then you better have a *bigger* sword than your enemy!

Again, as Mr. Armstrong said, Christians **should LOVE** their **COUNTRY!** He said that we do **NOT** “**judge** those” who think that military service and war is **right**... **neither** do we condemn them.” However, God Almighty, **IS** judging **the Spirit-begotten Christian NOW!**³

FOOTNOTE #1

For a further discussion on God’s *true* Church versus the *false* church, see the following booklets:

[God's Church Through the Ages](#)

[Satan's Counterfeit Christianity](#)

[Where Is God's True Church Today?](#)

[Restoring Original Christianity](#)

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