

**Why Did God Command  
the Israelites to  
Slaughter Men, Women,  
and Children  
With the Sword?**

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*Discovering the light of the character of God which  
shines out of darkness in the face of Jesus Christ  
(2 Corinthians 4:6)*

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## Does God Really Condone the Use of Swords (or any weapons) to Kill?

*"And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and **smote them with the edge of the sword**, and he utterly destroyed them, **as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded.**" (Joshua 11:12)*

According verses like this, it appears that God was carrying out His justice by commanding His people to kill with the sword. However, when we look at other portions of Scripture concerning the use of the sword and destroying others, we read seemingly strange statements such as this:

*"And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: **Neither shalt thou make marriages with them;** thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly." (Deuteronomy 7:2-4)*

Here God says, "Thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them" but then adds "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them." If a group of people were wiped off the map completely, then why would you give a command not to intermarry with them? How could they intermarry with them if they were destroyed?

Take note that the word חָרָם (*charam*) translated here as "destroy" can mean "to seclude, to ban." So, were they to kill or simply seclude or ban them? This apparent contradiction might be resolved in the understanding that Israel was commanded to proclaim peace unto a city, and if they made peace then the city was to be made tributary to Israel and their idols and worship system were to be destroyed:

*"When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then **proclaim peace unto it.** And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee." (Deuteronomy 20:10-11)*

*"But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their **altars**, and break down their **images**, and cut down their **groves**, and burn their graven images with fire." (Deuteronomy 7:5)*

Yet even if we are to allow these points, it still falls far short of the teaching of Christ.

*"... Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus [Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his*

sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, **'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.'**" (Matthew 26:50-52)

Here, Jesus plainly says that He is against the use of the sword. His disciples had misunderstood the true meaning of His words when He said:

*"But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and **he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.**"* (Luke 22:36)

They thought He was speaking of a literal sword. Notice how the International Standard Version (ISV) translates verse 38:

*"So they said, 'Lord, look! Here are two swords.' He answered them, 'Enough of that!'"* (Luke 22:38)

The King James Version quotes Jesus as saying, "That is enough." A superficial reading of this may lead the reader to believe Jesus accepted their use of the sword by simply saying two swords were enough. What comes next, however, reveals Jesus' true attitude toward the sword:

*"When those who were around Jesus saw what was about to take place, they asked, 'Lord, should we attack with our swords?' Then one of them [Peter] struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. **But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' So He touched the wounded man's ear and healed him.**"* (Luke 22:49-51, ISV)

*Jesus' teachings about "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" is an eternal precept. Therefore, there must be something deeper going on concerning all those commands to kill their enemies with the sword*

Is Jesus going against the commands of His Father? No. Jesus is "the Word of God" (John 1:1) who said, "He [the Father] who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him ... I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things" (John 8:26,28). Jesus was teaching nothing different from His Father, but was teaching exactly what His Father had taught Him.

In the book of Malachi, God says, "I am the LORD, I change not" (Malachi 3:6), therefore the book of Hebrews echoes this truth telling us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). With that understanding, we must conclude that it was the Father speaking through Jesus saying, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

### **Alexander MacLaren's Expositions Of Holy Scripture:**

"As to the difficulty felt in the injunction to buy a sword, our Lord would be contradicting His whole teaching if He was here commanding the use of arms for the defence of His servants or the promotion of His kingdom. That He did not mean literal swords is plain from His answer to the Apostles, who produced the formidable armament of two.

'It is enough.' A couple are plenty to fight the Roman Empire with. Yes, two too many, as was soon seen. The expression is plainly an intensely energetic metaphor, taking line with purse and scrip. The plain meaning of the whole is that we are called on to provide necessary means of provision and defence, which He will bless. The only sword permitted to His followers is the sword of the Spirit [Ephesians 6:17]."

### **John Gill's Expositions of the Bible:**

"These words of Christ are not to be understood literally, that he would have his disciples furnish themselves with swords at any rate, since he would never have said, as he afterwards does, that two were sufficient; which could not be enough for eleven men; or have forbid Peter the use of one, as he did in a very little time after this: but his meaning is, that wherever they came, and a door was opened for the preaching of the Gospel, they would have many adversaries, and these powerful, and would be used with great violence, and be followed with rage and persecution; so that they might seem to stand in need of swords to defend them: the phrase is expressive of the danger they would be exposed to, and of their need of protection; and therefore it was wrong in them to be disputing and quarrelling about superiority, or looking out for, and expecting temporal pomp and grandeur, when this would be their forlorn, destitute, and afflicted condition; and they would quickly see the affliction and distress begin in himself."

### **John Wesley's Notes on the Bible:**

"He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one - It is plain, this is not to be taken literally. It only means, This will be a time of extreme danger."

Some commentators have concluded that the Greek word translated as "sword" here (*μάχαιρα/machaira*) can also refer to a small knife such as "a slaughter-knife; a short sword or dagger mainly used for stabbing." Here's one translation that uses this interpretation:

*"Somberly he said, 'This time it will be different. Now you need to prepare. Take some money, pack some provisions, and get a **hunting knife**, and if you don't have one, sell a coat and get one. For the Scripture states: 'He was counted with the criminals;' and I am telling you this must happen to me. Be certain what is written about me is being fulfilled.' The disciples said, 'Look, we already have two **hunting knives**.' 'That will do,' he replied." (Luke 22:36-38; The Remedy Bible)*

### **Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible:**

"However the matter may be understood, we may rest satisfied that these swords were neither to be considered as offensive weapons, nor instruments to propagate the truth. The genius and spirit of the Christian religion is equally against both."

## **Jesus Will Smite the Nations With a "Sword"**

In the book of Revelation, John sees Jesus in vision riding a white horse. He again mentions that Jesus' name is "the Word of God" (Revelation 19:13) and says, "in righteousness He doth judge and make war ... **And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations ...**" (Revelation 19:11,15). Isn't that a strange place for a sword? What does it mean that Jesus will smite the nations with a sword that comes out of His mouth? And how does Jesus judge and make war in righteousness? Is His type of warfare different than fallen man's? Yes, Jesus does not wage war by the use of violence, but by the sword of His word which brings conviction of sin in order for us to acknowledge it and accept His everlasting mercy.

*"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*  
(Hebrews 4:12)

Jesus said He nor His Father will judge (condemn) anyone:

"The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." (John 5:22)

"Ye judge after the flesh; I (Jesus) judge no man." (John 8:15)

We will judge ourselves by how we react to His word (sword):

*"And if any man hear My words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: **the word that I have spoken, the same (word) shall judge him in the last day.**" (John 12:47-48)*

The warfare that God is involved with is a war of words— Satan's word against God's. God does nothing outside of righteousness. Judging and making war in righteousness does not inflict harm or death upon another:

*"Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but **righteousness delivereth from death.** The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked*

*shall fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness.” (Proverbs 11:4-6)*

*“In the way of righteousness is life; and **in the pathway thereof there is no death.**” (Proverbs 12:28)*

How does God conquer His enemies in war? Not by inflicting punishment, torture, or killing them, but by converting His enemies into friends. Righteousness doesn't destroy the person, it kills "the old man" of sin (Deuteronomy 32:39; Romans 6:6-11) and "delivereth from death." God conquers and gets His "revenge" upon evil by always doing good for it is the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4).

*“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. **Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink:** for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but **overcome evil with good.**” (Romans 12:17-21)*

God judging in righteousness does not result in war as we know it, but will result in peace and the putting away of the sword:

*“And **He shall judge among the nations,** and shall rebuke many people: and **they shall beat their swords into plowshares,** and their spears into pruninghooks: **nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.**” (Isaiah 2:4)*

When God says He will judge, He is saying He will diagnose our sin problem and will permit that sin to manifest (reveal) itself to us. We then have two options:

1. Acknowledge and confess the sin because we believe and accept God's everlasting forgiveness, which permits Him to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).
2. Disbelieve and reject God's loving kindness and forgiveness, bringing self-condemnation, self-judgment, and self-destruction upon ourselves (Acts 13:46).

Because God does not use the methods of forced obedience, He will reluctantly permit the sinner to reject His everlasting love and mercy and cut themselves off from God who is the only Source of life.

## Did God Really Want Israel to Wage War and Kill Others?

In regard to the possession of Canaan by Israel, the Lord told them how this would be accomplished:

*"Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and **I will** bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and **I will** rid you out of their bondage, and **I will** redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And **I will** take you to me for a people, and **I will** be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And **I will** bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and **I will** give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD." (Exodus 6:6-8)*

Clearly, by saying "I will", it was God who would do all the work. He delivered them from Egypt without any use of the sword and He confirmed they would go into the promised land in the same manner. God had told them of His plan:

***"I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee ... By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land." (Exodus 23:27-30)***

Just as Israel had escaped Egypt and seen the Egyptians defeated without one use of the sword, there is no mention of the sword here as well. There are three things to emphasize in God's plan:

1. He would send fear before them.
2. He would destroy all the people.
3. He would send hornets before them.

Let's look at each of these.

**1. "I will send my fear before thee."** In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses quotes God as saying:

*"This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee." (Deuteronomy 2:25)*

This "fear" was confirmed by Rahab as she spoke with Caleb and Joshua just prior to the Israelites conquering Jericho:

*"For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the*



*Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And **as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man**, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." (Joshua 2:10-11)*

Step one in God's plan was working. This "fear" was working in two ways. 1. It was convicting their hearts and turning them to the Lord (as we see in the case of Rahab). 2. It was making the unbelievers so uncomfortable that their courage to fight was waning. This brings us to step two of God's plan.

**2. "I will ... destroy all the people."** Here's where most people insert their own preconceived ideas. However, the Hebrew word for "destroy" here is **חָמַם** (*hamam*) which literally means, "To make a noise, move noisily, confuse, discomfort." Here's how the *New King James* translates it:

*"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."*

Here's the Berean Standard Bible:

*"I will send My terror ahead of you and throw into **CONFUSION** every nation you encounter. **I will make all your enemies turn and run.**"*

God's original plan had nothing to do with the Israelites killing the people with swords. Because of self-induced fear (due to lack of knowledge of the one true God), confusion would settle in lessening their courage, resulting in them to turn and run instead of fighting.

**3. "I will send hornets before thee."** Earlier we read what Rahab had told Caleb and Joshua, that fear and confusion had set in due to how God delivered the Israelites from Egypt and from "the two kings of the Amorites" (Joshua 2:10). In Joshua 24, we see that these "hornets" had nothing to do with the Israelites using swords:

*"I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, also the two kings of the Amorites, but **not with your sword or with your bow.**" (Joshua 24:12)*

God told them He would discomfort them by saying, "I will send hornets before thee." He never told them to go up and fight or to instigate any type of warfare. If the children of Israel believed God and were filled with His Spirit, they would have cleansed Canaan in the same way that Jesus cleansed the temple. They would not have needed to strike one person. The Canaanites would have fled before them and left, or accepted God's

forgiveness and been converted to the truth.<sup>1</sup> Here's a couple of commentaries regarding the hornets:

“How distressing and destructive a multitude of these might be, any person may conjecture; even the bees of one hive would be sufficient to sting a thousand men to madness, but how much worse must wasps and hornets be! No armor, no weapons, could avail against these. A few thousands of them would be quite sufficient to throw the best disciplined army into confusion and rout. From Joshua 24:12, we find that two kings of the Amorites were actually driven out of the land by these hornets, so that the Israelites were not obliged to use either sword or bow in the conquest.” (*Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Exodus 23:28)

“And I will send hornets before thee, ... Which may be interpreted either figuratively, and so may signify the same as fear before which should fall on the Canaanites upon hearing the Israelites were coming; the stings of their consciences for their sins, terrors of mind, dreading the wrath of the God of Israel, of whom they had heard, and terrible apprehensions of ruin and destruction from the Israelites: Aben Ezra interprets it of some disease of the body, which weakens it, as the leprosy, from the signification of the word, which has some affinity with that used for the leprosy; and so the Arabic version understands it of a disease: or rather, the words are to be taken literally, for hornets, which are a sort of wasps, whose stings are very penetrating and venomous; nor is it any strange or unheard of thing for people to be drove out of their countries by small animals, as mice, flies, bees ...” (*Gill's Exposition*, Exodus 23:28)

If it were literal hornets, it would be the same as when God “sent” fiery serpents among the murmuring Israelites by removing His protective hand from the serpents already in the land.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not these are literal hornets or used as a metaphor for calamities, it is clear that hornets did not involve the use of the sword or the bow.

The Israelites themselves misunderstood the character of God, so could it be that taking up the sword was simply a manifestation of the god that Israel had imagined? They had wrongly boasted saying, “The LORD is a man of war” (Exodus 15:3). The instruction from God to utterly destroy their enemies without mercy, while being in harmony with a warrior-god that Israel had imagined, was not reflective of the true God of heaven but a reflection of themselves and their desire to go to war.

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<sup>1</sup> See the article entitled, [Didn't Jesus Show Violence and Anger When He Kicked the Moneychangers Out of the Temple?](http://lastmessageofmercy.com) for more info on this at lastmessageofmercy.com.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed study on this instance, see the article, [Didn't God Send Fiery Serpents To Kill the People When They Complained At His Leadership?](http://lastmessageofmercy.com) at lastmessageofmercy.com.

**"It follows then that it was never in God's purpose that Israel or anyone else should ever carry the sword.**

It has no place in His character and corresponding methods, and therefore is to find no acceptance in the character



and behavior of His people ... The institution of this form of defense was entirely the people's work, the expression of their having more faith in themselves than in God. It was the establishment of human principles and procedures in place of the divine. **Therefore in every instance where the Israelites went to war or executed the wrongdoers among themselves, their actions were not a revelation of the character of God.**

There has been a universal readiness to conclude that they were, on the erroneous assumption that the people were simply doing as the Lord told them ... The purpose here is to establish that it was in spite of God's best efforts to the contrary that the sword became an establishment in the camp of Israel. **The recognition of this truth is essential to understanding the directives given to Israel which have been viewed for too long as an indication that He was personally using them as executioners.** If God's will had been respected, they would never have carried the sword, the Levites would never have executed those who worshiped the golden calf, nor would there have been the many bloody battles whereby they gained possession of the land. God would have been left free to do His work for them according to the eternal principles of righteousness.

The command given by God at various times in connection with these slayings makes it difficult for the average person to see this. It is argued that God was personally and directly involved, that He decided the particular sentence, and then ordered its execution. This certainly appears to be a watertight argument, but it still leaves those terrible contradictions.

**God does not give orders contrary to the principles of eternal rectitude and righteousness.** Therefore more study is required to remove those seeming inconsistencies. This may be done with the sweet consciousness that there are no contradictions in the Word of God and that God's character is perfectly consistent in all its behavior ... **The commands given by God were to a people who had already chosen the way they would go and who, if left completely unguided, would use those weapons in the worst way. God's commands were designed to minimize the evil effects of what they had chosen to do. In this, He was acting out the role of a Saviour.** The people insisted on taking up the sword. Now God would try to save them from its worst effects." (Fred Wright, *Behold Your God*, 510-512)

This is the same conclusion that's found in *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers* when commenting on Luke 22:36 we discussed earlier:

"The mention of the 'sword,' however, introduces a new element of thought. **Our Lord's words to Peter (Matthew 26:52) show that the disciples were not meant to use it in His defence. It is not likely that He would teach them to use it in their own, as they preached the gospel of the Kingdom.** True teachers felt afterwards that the weapons of their warfare were not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4). What follows supplies a probable explanation. The Master knew that two of the disciples (Peter and another) had brought swords with them, and **with that acceptance of the thoughts of others which we have so often traced, He SADLY, and yet, as it were, with the gentle sympathy with which a man speaks to those who are CHILDREN IN AGE OF CHARACTER, conveyed His warnings in the form which met THEIR fears and hopes.** If they meant to trust in swords, a time was coming when they would sorely need them."

The Bible says that judgment is given without mercy to those who have showed no mercy.

*"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." (James 2:13)*

This verse can read two ways. Those who show no mercy will judge others without mercy, and also those who show no mercy will receive none when they are judged. Why? Because by judging others without mercy, they have judged themselves unworthy of receiving mercy. They are no better than the others they judge, thus they pronounce their own sentence against themselves because of their own rejection and disbelief of that mercy. This idea of merciless justice reflects the mind of Satan because God's justice system always involves mercy and restoration (see, Psalm 89:14).

Although God's people were to be a light unto the Gentiles, God wanted them to be separate in the sense of how God was to be worshipped.

*"Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, **Learn not the way of the heathen**, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them." (Jeremiah 10:1, 2)*

*"**Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers:** for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And **what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?** for **ye are the temple of the living God;** as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore **come out from among them, and be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)*

The more they mingled together, the more the Israelites would be influenced by the heathen customs around them. God had no desire to kill off the people of the surrounding nations, but for the people to be drawn to Him by the kind words and non-violent actions of His people. He never wanted His people to go to war against the nations in order to wipe them off the planet. God would cause the proper separation **His way** and build His temple (church/people) made up of both Jew and Gentile in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29). This would be accomplished "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). Or, as *The Good News Translations* says, "You will succeed, not by military might or by your own strength, but by my spirit."

*Godly justice is not killing offenders of God's Law. Godly justice is restoring the offenders back into harmony with God's Law*

"But what about the terrible 'killing' language God used in directing Israel to destroy the Canaanites? 'You shall conquer them and utterly destroy them'; 'You shall strike every male ... with the edge of the sword ... Of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall utterly destroy them' (Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:16, 17). If God's ideal will was something other than absolute destruction of the Canaanites by the sword of Israel, the language does not suggest it. God invariably gives as a reason for the total annihilation of a people, 'lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods and you sin against the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 20:18).

Placing this language within our new model, God may be saying here and in numerous other places, in essence: You have chosen to deal with this emergency militarily, in harmony with the methods of the nations around you, instead of exercising the faith required to rely totally upon Me. **Therefore, since you have chosen this method and I must either reject you for it or direct you in it, I choose to do the latter. When you go to these nations to war, you must utterly destroy them; otherwise, they will be a snare to you for all future generations. If you're going to do it your way, He seems to say, then do it right [meaning: carry your way all the way through 'lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods'].**

Here, as in their later decision to have a king [to be like all the other mighty military nations which God frowned upon, 1 Samuel 8:1-8], the choice is final. They came to regret their request for a king (1 Kings 12:4,14), yet God neither reviewed nor revoked their servitude to one [1 Samuel 8:9]. Nor does He alter their choice to be a military nation. It is interesting to note, through the perspective of time, that even here, following what may have

been their own wayward choice, Israel proved unfaithful and ultimately reaped the predicted results of noncompliance with God's clear and positive instructions. They failed to 'utterly destroy' the Canaanites, who led them into idolatry and consequent separation from God from which the nation never fully recovered.

How might God have effected the Israelites' settlement in Canaan had they refused the sword? In our humanness we cannot see where they had a choice. Without it, what chance did they have against the armies of Canaan? But God always has other options. **God repeatedly informed the people He had no need of their swords (See, for example, Joshua 24:11,12; Psalm 44:3; Ezekiel 33:26), and the very first recorded combat between Israel and another nation underscores His point.**" (Marilyn. M. Campbell, *Light On the Dark Side of God*, Ch. 9, words in brackets my own)

So again, why did God "command" the execution of others?

*"Moreover **the Law entered [privately into one's heart], that the offence might abound.** But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 5:20, 21)

It was to magnify sin in the heart. Why would God want to magnify sin? For the offender to seek His grace and mercy. This applies not only to Israel's enemies but also to expose Israel's self-righteous heart that the Israelites might see themselves in their true light. They didn't see killing their enemies as sin, and until they did so they would never enter God's perfect will and put away their swords, accepting God's mercy and healing on behalf of their enemies. In commanding the Israelites to kill their sinful enemies, God's restraining power was removed, giving them (the Israelites) over to their own merciless sinful mindset (which was full of hatred, violence, war, and killing) resulting in sin punishing sin. This is in fact a second application of God's justice. The Psalmist says that "The LORD is known by the justice He brings", and then explains what that justice brings by saying, "the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands" (Psalm 9:16).

Take another look at how God's justice is executed:

*"See how wicked people think up evil; they plan trouble and practice deception. But **in the traps they set for others, they themselves get caught.** So **they are punished by their own evil and are hurt by their own violence.** I thank the LORD for **His justice**; I sing praises to the LORD, the Most High."* (Psalm 7:14-17, Good News Translation)

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God says:

*"Therefore speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: 'Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, **I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.**'"* (Ezekiel 14:4, 5)

Israel had set up a false idol — a false god based on exterminating others who sin differently than we do. God had simply commanded what was in Israel's heart.

## **An Example of Sin Punishing Sin**

After the golden calf incident, we read:

*"Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And **all the sons of Levi** gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, 'Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, **Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.**' And there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." (Exodus 32:26-28)*

It was the tribe of Levi who were instructed to kill with the sword. Moses himself was of the tribe of Levi. Is there any connection to Levi with their willingness to use the sword? Long before Moses was born, the following words were spoken by Jacob concerning his son Levi, the original leader of his tribe (the Levites):

*"**Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations.** O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. **Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.**" (Genesis 49:5-7)*

When looking into the future, Jacob, under inspiration, gave a prediction of the future of the tribe of Levi as well as Simeon. The anger of Levi was a curse, and it was this anger that Moses had to wrestle with in his own experience to the very end of his earthly life. We see this anger manifested in Phineas (also of the tribe of Levi) who put a Javelin through the sinners who were causing a plague to descend on them (Numbers 25:7, 8). The Levites revealed their abhorrence of idolatry and the wrong actions of their brethren. Why then would God choose the tribe of Levi to take the priesthood (Deuteronomy 17:9)? We need to go back to the story of Shechem.

When their sister had been seduced by a young man named Shechem, the response of Simeon and Levi was treacherous cruelty manifested in the murder of the Shechemites. They took violent revenge against the whole city, tricking the men to circumcise themselves in an act of peace but then killing them with the sword when they were at their weakest (Genesis 34:1-29). Their father Jacob was not pleased at their violent behavior:

*"And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.'" (Genesis 34:30)*

This willingness to kill for transgression would be visited upon Israel at Mt Sinai and in other places, because the prophecy of Jacob about them was for far into the future. God wrought through the cruelty of Levi to punish the sins of Israel. The characteristics of the priesthood that Israel as a nation perceived and envisaged were just the characteristics found in the tribe of Levi and thus visited upon Israel. In the story of the slaying of the 3,000, the iniquities of the father (Levi) upon the children unto the third and fourth generation were now visited. God only commands in the Law that which the Levites were thinking in regard to how this should be dealt with. The Lord tests the faithfulness of the Levites because of their past faithlessness. When Israel sinned with the golden calf, the Law entered and caused their sin to abound. Their past sin in using the sword as a nation was now being visited upon them. At no time were they filled with the Spirit of Jesus as they slaughtered these people, because there is no violence in the Spirit of Christ (Isaiah 53:9). The Lord was offering forgiveness through Moses when he asked them who is on the Lord's side (Exodus 32:26). When these people refused to repent, they had to face their own understanding of judgment. The sin of using the sword was magnified through the Law, and God punished sin with sin.

*God's justice isn't  
lashing out  
toward the  
offender, but  
simply permitting  
the offender to  
reap their own  
self-destruction*

In Exodus 12:38, we read that "a mixed multitude went up also" with Israel from Egypt. In Numbers 11:4 the mixed multitude "fell a lusting" for flesh food, causing also the Israelites to lust and complain saying, "Who shall give us flesh to eat?" Due to this incident, is it not fair to say that the mixed multitude were also the primary suspects in instigating the making of the golden calf and thus became the majority of the 3,000 souls who perished



by the sword at the hand of the Levites? Likewise, the Shechemites had covenanted to join themselves to the family of Jacob and have their sons and daughters marry into each other (Genesis 34:8-10). The Levite slaughter at Mt Sinai of the mixed multitude that had joined themselves to Israel was a magnification of the slaughter of the Shechemites that had joined themselves to Israel centuries earlier. In manifesting the sin of their first father Levi, the Levites had the opportunity to seek the Lord for their cruelty of slaughtering people with the sword. As the Levite men went to sleep that night and saw the tortured faces of the dead and dying in their dreams and potentially awoke in horror at the scenes of death (PTSD), they had an opening to turn from violence and seek a better way.

**“The NT teaches us to base all of our thinking about God on Jesus.**

In contrast to the way God spoke in the past, the author of Hebrews teaches, Jesus is the one and only ‘exact representation of God’s being’ (Heb. 1:3). He is the one Word of God (Jn 1:1) and the one image of God (Col. 1:15). When Philip asked Jesus to show them God the Father, Jesus said, ‘If you see me, you see the Father. Why then do you ask, ‘Show us the Father?’ (Jn 14:7-9). John 1:17-18 even suggests that no one really knew God until Jesus ... **The bottom line is that, however we explain violent portraits of God in the OT, and even if we can’t explain them, we must never allow anything we find in the OT to compromise or in any way qualify the revelation of God we have in Christ.** Jesus isn’t part of what God is like, the fullness of God’s deity was in Christ (Col. 2:9). And **Jesus reveals a God who chooses to die on behalf of enemies rather than to use force against them** ... Whenever we find portraits of God in the OT that fall below the character of God revealed in Christ — all portraits that have God commanding or engaging in violence — **we should see a reflection of the cross in them. That is, we should view these portraits as an example of God humbly stooping to enter the limited and fallen worldview of the authors.** They reflect God meeting people where they are, working through the limited and fallen worldviews that they hold, in order to bring humanity to the place where he could reveal what he is really like — which is what he does in Christ.” (Greg Boyd, *reknew.org*, October 9, 2012)



It hurt God to have to deny Himself (and carry the cross) and lower His character so as to teach humanity by veiling His glory and surrounding Himself in dark clouds:

*“He [God] shrouded Himself in **darkness**, veiling His approach with **dark rain clouds**.” (Psalm 18:11, New Living Translation)*

But this was the only way to begin the slow process of raising humanity back up from the darkness of sin. Jesus, in His word through the prophets interpreting their sacred history, aimed to lift up their understanding, and by them the Gentile nations around them, so they would be ready for the full revelation of the character of His Father when Jesus came. In these last days we are granted the opportunity to see the character of God as it truly is. In the face (expressions/personal presence) of Jesus, we can begin to uncover the true intentions of our heavenly Father:

*"For God, who **commanded the light to shine out of darkness**, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light [truth] of the knowledge of the glory [character] of God **in the face of Jesus Christ**." (2 Corinthians 4:6)*

Jesus assured us:

*"He that hath seen Me (Jesus) hath seen the Father ... the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." (John 14:8-10)*

How many people did Jesus kill with the sword? How many did He burn with fire? How many children did He impale with a spear? Absolutely none!

Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). What sword did Jesus bring?

*"And take the helmet of salvation, and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**." (Ephesians 6:17)*

We do not use a worldly sword or weapon to kill our enemies. If we are truly God's children, we will "**Love [our] enemies** ... and [we] will be sons [children] of the Most High. For **He is kind to the unthankful and evil**" (Luke 6:35). The sword we use is the word of truth in order to combat the lies of Satan he has spread against our most gentle and loving Father!

*"For **the weapons of our warfare are not carnal**, but mighty through God to the pulling down of **strong holds**; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself **against the knowledge of God**, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5)*



Yes, every thought will be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ because we will have the true knowledge of God and His character. Won't you be obedient to Christ who said, "Put your sword in its place"? And where is that place? The same place His sword is — your mouth!

**For more info on what you've just read,  
you may like the following book**

**Canaan Conquest**

By Adrian Ebens & Kevin J. Mullins

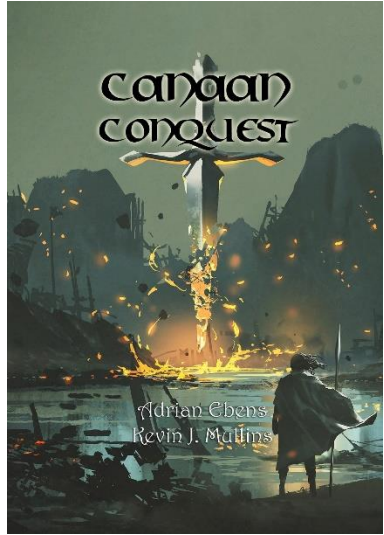
Were the Israelites truly in tune with the character of God? Why were they regularly afraid that He had brought them out into the desert to kill them?

Was the deep darkness that fell upon Abraham in any way related to his taking of the sword to save his nephew and family?

Did the slaughter of the Shechemites by Levi and Simeon have any influence on the vow of Israel to utterly destroy their enemies?

Do you need to know? If you didn't, might Christ come to you as He did to Jacob in His trouble and be perceived as an enemy? Only trusting in the mercy of God did Jacob overcome as the true Israel of God.

*"With the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself **seem** tortuous [or, a wrestler]." (Psalm 18:26, English Standard Version; Cf. Young's Literal Translation)*



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## **This booklet is a printed copy of one of our online articles that deals with the subject of God's character**

Have you ever wondered how a God of love could command His people to violently kill men, women, and children of other nations?

*"And we took all his cities at that time, and **utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain ... the LORD our God delivered all unto us.**"*

*(Deuteronomy 2:34-36)*

It is difficult to read passages of Scripture like these without a shudder of horror running through your soul. While some find a way to justify the slaughter of warring males, it is inconceivable to picture an Israelite soldier with a small child impaled on the end of his sword. I don't know about you, but for me it brings a feeling of utter revulsion. What makes this much worse is that the Bible appears to not only condone these actions, but to command them.

*"So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, **as the LORD God of Israel commanded.**" (Joshua 10:40)*

This not only causes the wrong type of "fear" towards God, but also causes doubt in Jesus' words that if we have seen Him and how He acts towards sinners, we've seen the Father (John 14:9). Can we harmonize this?

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