

OLD COVENANT WARFARE VERSUS NEW COVENANT WARFARE

By *Gerry Watts*

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Introduction

The history of mankind is dominated by warfare right up to the present day. In fact, it has been said that more people have been killed by war in the last century than throughout recorded history. Warfare is usually caused by the need to conquer and enslave others and take control, leading to oppression, servitude, killing, vast amounts of bloodshed, and very often horrific suffering and torture, as well as destruction of property. Man's inhumanity to man is usually seen at its worst in the light of war and iron-handed aggression. In fact, some of the greatest horrors that have been perpetrated against humans have been done in the name of God and religion - particularly by the powers of Christendom who claimed to be representing Christ.

This is still continuing today through the Western 'Christian' nations, as well as the Islamic nations and the State of Israel. The common war cry of "God wills it - He is on our side" has been used so arbitrarily down the centuries, particularly during the Middle Ages, usually as a feeble excuse to condone bloodshed and outright wickedness. Even now, the Christian Church in general seems to support war if it is 'just' and is defending righteousness! Those who hold to this view within Christianity and Judaism usually use the Old Testament to justify war, arguing that God told Israel to go to war and even slaughter women and children.

This subject is a very controversial one and yet it is one that causes numerous people, even Christians, to question the Bible and God's use of warfare. Many are confused because the Old Testament seems to completely contradict the New Testament regarding warfare and killing. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss pacifism or patriotism, or the politics and opinions of present warfare, or to look at the history of Christendom in this regard, etc, but instead we shall be considering the difference between Old Covenant Warfare and New Covenant Warfare as it is clearly revealed in the Bible to hopefully answer the questions and difficulties that many have with this subject.

Accountability of Souls

Yet from the word go, I need to say this: Many teachers today are rejecting, or at best ignoring or re-interpreting, the clear words of the New Testament concerning God's wrath and vengeance in the coming Day of the Lord. Yet unknowingly they are risking being held accountable for the blood of others by not declaring the truth. The Apostle Paul, like Ezekiel, was a prophet and a watchman, and he made sure that he was innocent in this matter of the accountability of souls (or blood, for the soul is essentially the blood), and he declared this to both Jews and Gentiles. He was clear of any guilt because he proclaimed the truth of the gospel of the kingdom and the full counsel of God in Christ Jesus. Any true teacher, pastor, evangelist, spiritual elder, etc, should do the same thing. The following are not just empty words.

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself."

(Ezekiel 33:7-9 NIV)

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when **the Jews** opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to **the Gentiles.**"

(Acts 18:5-6 NIV)

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus...However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace...Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

(Acts 20:21, 24, 26 NIV)

Balanced, but Controversial, Truth

On the other hand, some are going the other way and over-emphasising God's anger and fury, and in the process perverting His just judgments, often using the horrific doctrine of 'eternal torment in Hell' to instill untold fear into people, as well as over-emphasising all the doom and gloom of prophecy. On the contrary, I am attempting to present the whole counsel of God in my work on this website and through my books, laying out the clear truth in as balanced a way as possible.

If anything, I hope there is an over-emphasis on God's love and grace, and his ultimate goal of Universal Reconciliation, nevertheless, I will not in any way attempt to avoid the more 'negative,' unpleasant and somewhat controversial side of the Scriptures, so therefore, in this article in particular, I will seek to face the unpopular subjects of killing, warfare, bloodshed, and God's power and vengeance and justice. Being 'slain in the Spirit' will have a very different meaning here in comparison to how numerous Christians usually understand this phrase!

For some strange reason, men in particular (it must be the testosterone!) are fascinated by warfare and various kinds of combat, armed or unarmed. Most kids at some time or another have played 'soldiers' or 'cowboys and indians,' whether as role play or using toys. Most men, and some women, love a good action movie, and let's be honest, without combat and the fight against good and evil, we wouldn't have the common themes of; endurance in the face of suffering; good overcoming evil; love overcoming hate; the underdog being victorious over the evil oppressor; etc. These subjects are rehearsed time and again in films and novels, and even in games, where military strategy is revealed as a fascinating part of history and human experience.

And strangely enough, it is a vital part of Biblical history as well, for the Scriptures reveal God's view of history, and for the most part, history is prophecy fulfilled. The stories of Israel's battles, and the likes of David and Goliath, as well as the great Empires of ancient civilisation, are all told in the pages of Scripture. It also reveals the awesome judgments of

God upon mankind, such as the Great Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. These accounts of history (as well as prophecy yet to be fulfilled) may be extremely difficult for us to read when we grasp the violent nature of such destruction. In fact, the crucifixion of Jesus is among these violent events and scenes of suffering and death, yet it forms the basis for the Good News of God!

So let's face it - there is a paradox here. Warfare and evil, no matter how horrific and tragic, can have a positive side, and it is all a part of God's overall plan for humanity and the earth. This cannot honestly be denied! And one day, there will come an Era of true and lasting peace for all, which will bring healing and restoration. Meanwhile, warfare, suffering and death exist as a sign of God's judgment upon sin (and this includes Satan's part in it all as well). But the most important question is this: Does God command the use of warfare today by His followers? And also: Why did He ever command the use of warfare in the first place for ancient Israel? And the toughest question of all: Will Christ Jesus kill people when He returns as the earth's rightful King? Let's investigate the truth in this matter, **but be prepared for your flesh to be hit with the stone of truth, right between the eyes! This is not for the fainthearted!**

God is Sovereign

Firstly, we must approach this subject with an understanding that God is absolutely Sovereign over His creation. He is The Creator. **We are the clay, and God alone is the Potter.** He has every right to take a person's life, and He has every right to demand a person's life, and He has the right to destroy sin and all wickedness. Paul just about sums it up in Romans 9.

"Or has not the potter the right over the clay, out of the same kneading to make one vessel, indeed, for honor, yet one for dishonor? Now if God, wanting to display His indignation and to make His powerful doings known, carries, with much patience, the vessels of indignation, adapted for destruction, it is that He should also be making known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He makes ready before for glory..."

(Romans 9:21-23 CV)

God is Supreme. And through His Son, Christ Jesus, He has absolute authority and control over His creation. The fundamental issue is that of Divine Authority and Subjection. Paul states in Romans 13:1-5 that all governmental authority is God-ordained, and they are His servants in the earth to maintain some kind of law and order. This includes even the wicked rulers who are, all alike, under God. Therefore submission to all those in authority is always commanded throughout Scripture, but only in so far as they give you the freedom to obey God's commands, otherwise, like Peter and John testified before the Sanhedrin, we should obey God rather than men (Acts 4:18-20). (For further study on the sovereignty of God, see the article *Almighty God versus Almighty Self*).

We must also bear in mind that all killing and destruction of people is confined to this Old Creation; it is temporary; it is not humanity's final end. God has a glorious plan and purpose in which He will save and reconcile all mankind to Himself in the age of the glorious New Creation, nevertheless, justice will be done during this process so that all mankind shall learn

righteousness. If we approach this subject without these things in mind then anger, bitterness and misunderstanding shall blur our vision of God's purpose in the earth.

Contrasting Old and New

God is dealing with humanity as a Father, as well as a Creator God. He is doing this both on a corporate, national level and on a personal, individual level. His ultimate purpose is to bring each individual child from **stubborn immaturity** to **willful, loving maturity**. Discipline or chastening is often greatly needed to teach us the divine principles of righteousness and justice, which, of course, is to be based on love. The divine Law, originally given to mankind via the nation of Israel in the form of the Old Covenant, contains the standard for all righteousness and justice, as well as revealing God's holiness, power and love. Yes! Believe it or not, the Law still reveals something of the nature of God's love for His people (figured as a Husband and wife), as well as for the whole of mankind. Deuteronomy 7:9 & 12 states that the Old Covenant given through Moses was a covenant of love. God's Law is based on His inherent attributes of Grace, Mercy and Love. God never changes, and Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for the ages to come. So the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament. His character is the same, and He judges in the same way - with righteousness and justice, yet also abounding in grace, mercy and compassion.

Be that as it may, there is nevertheless a progression of the revelation of God and His ways with humanity throughout Biblical history, **but He is still the same God of the Old and the New Testaments**. Through Jesus the Messiah, a New Covenant has now been fully revealed which fulfills and enhances the principles and teaching of the Old Covenant. Contrary to what it may appear like, these covenants do not actually contradict one another. The same God instituted both covenants - and I repeat, He does not change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for the ages - and He is Yahweh, the Word, Who gave Moses the Law and brought His judgments upon the people. Christ Jesus is Yahweh, the God of Israel, the Spiritual Rock, the very Lawgiver Himself - Who even appeared on earth as a human in complete submission to the Law, even taking upon Himself the curse and punishments of the Law for our sakes.

The Apostle John makes it clear in his first letter that the Old and the New Covenants are connected. He tells the Jewish Christians that the command to love one another is an old command that they have had from the beginning - that is, it is rooted in the book of Genesis, the book of Beginnings, the first book of Moses. The message is not new. Yet on the other hand, the revelation of God's love in, and through, Jesus the Messiah is so much deeper and higher than anything that has gone before, to the point where God sacrifices His only Son for His enemies! Hence Jesus also gives us a new command to love one another in the way that He has shown us (1 John 2:7-10; 3:11-12; John 13:34-35; Romans 5:8-10). Therefore, the way of the New Covenant focuses on Love, Grace, Pardon (Forgiveness) and Mercy. The Law was given through Moses; yet Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ. The New Covenant in Christ fulfills, and supercedes, the Old Covenant of the Law. The whole book of Hebrews was written to explain and establish this truth.

The main difference between the Old Covenant and the New is one of immaturity and maturity, flesh and spirit, the Old Creation and the New Creation. In the case of sinful, fleshly humans, the Law can only condemn and destroy, and it keeps God at a distance as an angry Father displeased with His stubborn, disobedient children. Yet the Grace and Truth that comes through the New Covenant in Christ brings us to maturity without condemnation, and gives us

life instead of death. It reconciles us to our loving Father as clean, obedient sons. It saves us from death and gives us an inheritance of life, as a spiritual new humanity, dominated by God's life-giving Holy Spirit. Yet even the children of God need to be chastened in God's fire to help us grow into the sons of God while we are in our mortal bodies. This is the purpose of the Kingdom of God - to establish a righteous kingdom in the earth, as well as in the heavens, and to bring everyone to maturity through means of the divine Law.

The Sin-Debt

Let me put it another way. (I will not quote loads of scripture at this point, but most of the following figures and phrases can be found throughout Scripture, and particularly in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles). Due to the sin of our human father/ancestor Adam, all of us are born into slavery and debt. Sin itself is always viewed as a debt to God and others, that is, to those who have been sinned against. From the moment we are born into this world we are all building up a sin-debt before God which we cannot pay off. Everything is being debited from our account. In many respects, the longer we live in sin (that is, in this body of flesh, a body of sin and death), and the more we disobey God, the more our sin-debt is increased.

For the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant, God established an intricate system of animal sacrifice as a means of temporarily covering over sin (atonement or propitiation). This system of divine worship and service using water cleansings (or baptizings) and sacrifices revealed the foundational truth in as clear a way as possible - that the only way that a human can approach God to be cleansed and forgiven of his or her sin-debt, and be sheltered or covered from the wrath and judgment of God, is through the blood of an innocent creature being slain. The blood represents the soul and life of a creature. Basically, the innocent creature has to take the rap for us humans. This applied individually and corporately. **But these sacrifices could never actually take away sin - it was a temporary measure.**

This reveals the absolute justice and righteousness of God - soul for soul, life for life. God cannot bend His own laws, for He is truly righteous and holy. Under the Old Covenant, most sins or transgressions (that is, a breaking of the law incurring debt) could be forgiven by the prescribed method of sacrifice, along with various prescribed means of repentance (that is, an obedient action that restores the lawful order, such as a thief paying back double to his victim). Yet there were other sins that could *not* be forgiven via sacrifice. These were usually sins whereby the lawful order could not be restored in this life (for example, murder, adultery, prostitution, etc). On the other hand some of these 'unforgivable' sins, such as, idolatry, cursing of parents, kidnapping, etc, revealed how a Holy God views these actions, even though technically the lawful order could be restored via repentance, nevertheless the penalty was death and they could not be forgiven apart from the grace of God. (Grace basically extends mercy to an individual or nation giving them more time to allow for repentance. It is delayed judgment, yet the judgment can be avoided if obedience is shown).

All these crimes were punishable by death. Their blood would be on their own heads and they were to be stoned to death. If Israel's leaders or judges failed to put the law into proper effect, God Himself would eventually intervene in judgment, though in most cases, this was after a period of grace. (For these laws and sacrifices, see Exodus 20-23 and the book of Leviticus). In effect, all of the curses and punishments of the Law, as well as God's judgments on all humanity, serve to reveal the justice of God. Yet this is only in a temporary sense in relation to this Old Creation. It is not the final end. Ultimately, God's judgments are corrective in nature, so utter destruction is not satisfactory as an end in itself.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

The fact is, there is a greater Judgment coming where all humanity will have to give an account to God for everything we've said and done. For those who are obedient to God, they will receive Life in the Kingdom, but for the rest, they will pay off their sin-debt in the Second Death because their blood is on their own heads. Since the establishing of the New Covenant at the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the blood of Jesus as the ultimate Sacrifice, the Lamb of God, is now the only way that anyone can escape the wrath of God and the ultimate judgment of the Second Death (metaphorically called the Lake of Fire in the book of Revelation).

The Sacrifice or Blood of Jesus is the Ransom price that redeems humanity from its sin-debt originally begun in Adam, and all this was foreshadowed in the sacrifices and rituals of the Law. Nevertheless, only those who truly believe in His Sacrifice and then follow Christ as their new Master will be saved from God's wrath, with Christ's blood acting as a propitiatory shelter allowing the righteous indignation and destruction of God to 'passover' them. The Bride and Body of Christ is the treasure hidden in the field of the world, yet Jesus not only paid for the treasure - **He purchased the whole world**. Therefore, as Master and Redeemer, He has the right to do with humanity as His Father wills.

For those who belong to Him as His people, His servants, **their un-payable sin-debt has been cancelled**. As servants of a new Master, they can now credit baskets of fruit to their account (that is, righteous, obedient acts of the Spirit), which will be repaid as wages when Christ returns to fully establish His kingdom - so long as they remain faithful to Him until the end (that is, to remain in the Vine). For those who have not repented and believed the good news of Christ, their blood is on their own heads - so therefore, they will have to pay off their own sin-debt in the Second Death until their new Lords and Masters, Christ and the sons of God, deliver them when they have paid the last penny of their sin-debt.

At this point, you may be thinking, "That's a contradiction. How can you pay off an un-payable sin-debt?" Well done for paying attention! Firstly, we must remember here that this 'paying-off of sin' by itself will not actually save anyone - only Christ Jesus has the power and right to save anyone at all, for He alone holds the keys of Death and Hades. Without Him, we'd all remain in death! Sin, Death and Darkness would reign supreme! Thank God that this is not the case!

Be that as it may, everyone will nevertheless be judged in accordance with their acts done in this life: those who are saved first as the Firstborn Sons of God, the Firstfruits of a new humanity offered to God, shall be rewarded with age-abiding life and a position in His kingdom; whereas the rest shall receive divine chastening in the Second Death as those shut outside of the kingdom paying off their sin-debt as slaves, as God sees fit - but ultimately all will be saved and reconciled to God. This is the Good News! Yet all must learn righteousness first and the lawful order must be restored, that is, justice must be done. Ultimately, though, Grace shall win the day. (For further study, see **Is There Really A Hell?**; **The First and Second Resurrections and the Judgment Day**; and **The Promise and Christ's Inheritance**).

Now you may be asking, "Well, what has warfare got to do with all of this?" Quite a lot actually, so let's take a more detailed look at some key elements of warfare in Scripture.

Iron

Throughout Scripture, as well as in nature, iron is shown to be a tough, heavy metal, and it was especially used to make weapons for fighting with. Therefore, iron represents that which is tough and hard, and it is particularly associated with warfare. From a human viewpoint, it often represents iron-handed oppression and military might, yet from the divine viewpoint it represents kingdom authority and rulership. Both of these meanings are combined in the visions of Daniel chapters 2 and 7, where the four kingdoms of man in this present age of the times of the nations are represented with various metals, with iron being the most inferior yet most dominant metal, representing the final worldly kingdom of this age that will dominate with oppression and military might.

"Finally, there will be a **fourth kingdom, strong as iron**—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and **partly of iron**, so this will be a divided kingdom; **yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it**, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle."

(Daniel 2:40-42 NIV)

"After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. **It had large iron teeth**; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left... He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.'"

(Daniel 7:7 & 23 NIV)

(A more detailed treatment of these prophecies of Daniel are given in the section **The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed**).

Yet within the Messianic prophecies, iron is also associated with the kingdom rule of Christ Jesus. Psalm 2 is a primary example.

"I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an **iron scepter**; you will **dash them to pieces** like pottery."

(Psalm 2:7-9 NIV)

In this prophecy, the Messiah, as the greater Son of David and the Son of God, is given the promise of rulership over the nations extending over the entire earth. He will rule with great power and might over the whole earth, symbolised by the iron scepter that smashes a clay pot into pieces. This prophecy is also being alluded to in the book of Revelation, and in the first instance it is quoted by Jesus Himself as a promise to those Overcomers who will rule over the nations with Him as His Bride, becoming sons of the Father like Jesus Himself.

"To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, **I will give authority over the nations**— 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'— just as I have received authority from my Father."

(Revelation 2:26-27 NIV)

"She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter."

(Revelation 12:5 NIV)

"Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.'" He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."

(Revelation 19:15 NIV)

This is not describing some weak, soft, slushy approach to ruling the nations! This is describing the awesome power and majesty of God ruling His kingdom in righteousness and holiness and truth - no messing! This is total control of a King who will not tolerate lawlessness and rebellion. On the other hand, this kingdom is one that is dominated by love and light, where mercy and grace are still very much in evidence. This scepter is the rod or club of a Shepherd that is used to protect and guide His sheep. Revelation 2:26-27 reveals that the Overcomers, the sons of God, the true Body of Christ, will co-rule with Christ as God's authority in the universe. More on this later. These texts reveal that 'the iron scepter' represents the power and authority of God revealed through Christ, and 'the sharp sword' are the very words and commands of the King (i.e. His Law), which will bring destruction of the flesh, the striking down of the nations, particularly during the judging that will occur at the return of the King. We shall be taking a look at the Day of the Lord a little later.

The Iron Yoke

In the Old Covenant, the curses of the law were the judgments of God that were used as a means of disciplining the nation of Israel, along with some of the surrounding nations as well. The Yoke of Iron is mentioned in Deuteronomy 28 as the ultimate curse and judgment of the law that would come upon the nation of Israel. It was the yoke of servitude and exile.

"Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. **He will put an iron yoke on your neck** until he has destroyed you."

(Deuteronomy 28:47-48 NIV)

The yoke is a symbol of servitude, for the yoke was used not only to bind oxen together for ploughing the fields, but it was also used to bind prisoners and slaves together by placing the wooden or iron bars around the neck and shoulders, using shackles or chains to keep them together. This 'iron yoke' was placed upon the nation of Israel at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles (see Isaiah 9:4; 14:25; Jeremiah 27:8, 11-12), and again at the Roman exile in 70 AD (Luke 21:20-24). At the time of the Babylonian exile, the prophet Jeremiah made it

clear to the house of Judah that the wooden yoke of lesser burdens (cp. 1 Kings 12:4) was being replaced by an iron yoke - complete servitude to a foreign power involving exile - which had been prophesied in Deuteronomy 28 quoted above.

"Go and tell Hananiah, 'This is what the LORD says: **You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron.** This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals.' "

(Jeremiah 28:13-14 NIV)

Yet the prophets also spoke of a future restoration of Israel to their land and a restoring of their fortunes and blessings, at which time God would destroy the yoke that had burdened them for so long.

" 'In that day,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them.' "

(Jeremiah 30:8 NIV; see also Ezekiel 34:27; Nahum 1:13)

The National Sin-Debt

This restoration began in the 6th century BC with the return of the Jewish exiles from the Babylonian captivity under Joshua and Zerubbabel, and later under Ezra and Nehemiah, but the iron yoke was inevitably placed upon them again by the Romans in 70 AD due to Israel's rejection of Jesus their Messiah (Luke 19:41-44). Just before His death, Jesus had prophesied and warned the people of this horrific judgment and the ultimate iron yoke that would be placed upon them that would last for many centuries, when the days of vengeance would occur to fulfill all that is written.

(The first quote below also clearly reveals that the sin-debt carries over onto further generations, and only repentance can break this chain of debt. The Jews of Jesus' day received the judgment of their forefathers' sin-debt of murdering innocent blood, even going right back to the first murder of Abel, before Israel was even a nation! So not only is there personal sin-debt, there is national or generational sin-debt also).

"Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell (*Gehenna*)? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. **And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth,** from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

(Matthew 23:32-36 NIV)

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it

is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

(Luke 19:41-44 NIV)

"...The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city..."

(Matthew 22:7 NIV)

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"

(Matthew 27:24-25 NIV)

But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

(Acts 18:6 NIV)

"Now whenever you may be perceiving Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then know that her desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee into the mountains, and let those in her midst be coming out into the country, and let not those in the country be entering into her, **for days of vengeance are these, to fulfill all that is written.** Yet woe to those who are pregnant, and to those suckling in those days; **for there will be great necessity in the land and indignation on this people. And they shall be falling by the edge of the sword and shall be led into captivity into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden by the nations, until the eras of the nations may be fulfilled.**

(Luke 21:20-24 CV)

Sadly and tragically, this episode in Jewish/Israelite history fulfilled the horrific words of Deuteronomy 28:53-57.

Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you. Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. The most gentle and sensitive woman among you—so sensitive and gentle that she would not

venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot—will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities. (NIV)

For nearly 2000 years now the Jewish people have been under this iron yoke, experiencing intense hatred and persecution. Even the appalling wickedness and suffering of Hitler's Holocaust is included in the following words of prophecy.

The LORD will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed. You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the LORD your God...

Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life.

(Deuteronomy 28:61-62, 64-66 NIV)

This iron yoke remains upon the Jewish people to this day, even though there is an appearance of it being removed because there is a Jewish State in the land of Israel. Nevertheless, this is a deception because the Jewish people, and particularly the city of Jerusalem, are still under the authority of the unbelieving nations - and this is including its own government! The majority are most certainly under the bondage of sin. The Scriptures make it clear that this iron yoke will not be removed until 'the times of the nations' are complete, at which time the kingdom of God will be established at the return of Christ in the Day of the Lord. In the meantime, a remnant of Israel shall be saved and restored.

"They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles (*nations*) until the times of the Gentiles (*nations*) are fulfilled."

(Luke 21:24 NIV)

"...do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles (*the nations*). They will trample on the holy city for 42 months."

(Revelation 11:2 NIV)

This 'yoke' of the Old Covenant and its curses was referred to by Peter at the Jerusalem Council, and by Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

"Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?"

(Acts 15:10 NIV)

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by **a yoke of slavery**."

(Galatians 5:1 NIV)

Promise of Restoration

On a happier note, only the New Covenant can now save Israel, as well as the nations. Only repentance and faith in Jesus Christ can cancel or wipe out the sin-debt against Israel and the world.

"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this..."

"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. **Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out**, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

(Acts 3:13-15, 17-21 NIV)

This covenant of peace and spiritual regeneration will ultimately bring a full and lasting deliverance and restoration for the Israel of God in the Day of the Lord. This was promised in Deuteronomy 30.

When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, **then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you**. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

(Deuteronomy 30:1-6 NIV)

Initially, this was referring to the restoration from the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities whereby God re-established or renewed the Old Covenant with Israel as a 'covenant of peace.' Its ultimate fulfillment, though, is in the New Covenant promised through Jeremiah.

Centuries later, the prophet Ezekiel revealed further details of this restoration.

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

...Then he said to me: "Son of man, **these bones are the whole house of Israel.** They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' "

(Ezekiel 37:7-9, 11-14 NIV)

Nevertheless, since the Roman captivity of 70 AD, the restoration of Israel can only be achieved by the New Covenant of peace and spiritual regeneration. Yet, going back to our earlier point, even this New Covenant, which comes through Jesus Christ, having been legally established by His death and resurrection, still involves servitude of some kind. Christ Jesus is the King and Master, and those who follow Him must serve Him as their Redeemer. Yet Jesus said Himself that His yoke is kindly and His burden is light compared to that of the Old Covenant (Matthew 11:29-30). The gracious nature of the New Covenant in Christ, which is the gospel (good news) of the kingdom and of salvation, is that which brings true freedom from sin and death due to the coming of the Holy Spirit - which brings spiritual regeneration and restoration.

Israel's Warfare

Under the Old Covenant, the nation of Israel, who represented God's kingdom and authority in the earth, were commanded to use fleshly warfare with physical, worldly weapons as a means of destroying that which opposed God's righteous order. That is, they were commanded to subdue, and often destroy, their enemies. They were never told by God to *hate* their enemies, but they were to hate the sin and rebellion that was opposed to God's rule, particularly when it was in the form of idolatrous practices. The use of physical weapons (usually swords, as well as stones) to execute their enemies also applied to the judgments of God that were carried out within the nation of Israel itself. The stoning to death of a transgressor for certain sins was meant to instill the fear of God into the people so that they wouldn't sin. Stones were used to emphasise the breaking of the commands of God that were written on tablets of stone.

Here are some examples of God's justice being meted out by worldly means.

"Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.' "The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died."

(Exodus 32:27-28 NIV)

"Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid."

(Deuteronomy 21:21 NIV)

"When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby. However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes."

(Deuteronomy 20:10-16 NIV; see also chapter 7)

Here in this last text we see strict justice at work in God's dealings with the nations through His people Israel. The basis of this command is that of Divine authority to subject others. The subjection of the other nations to Yahweh through His people was ultimately to be a source of blessing to the nations. The nations in the land of Canaan had become corrupt and full of idolatry, and they had polluted or defiled the land where they dwelt. In fulfillment of the prophecy spoken by Noah in Genesis 9:25-27, the tribal clans of Canaan were to be enslaved to the sons of Shem. Yet paradoxically, this prophecy was fulfilled because Israel ultimately *disobeyed* God's command to wipe out everything that breathed within the land of Canaan. God originally commanded Israel to completely destroy (literally doom) everything within Canaan because the Holy Living God was now going to dwell in that land amongst His people, so therefore all the uncleanness of the other peoples had to be removed. It was also to protect Israel from any unholy influence.

It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...

The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be

ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.

(Deuteronomy 9:5; 12:29-31 NIV)

As a consequence of their disobedience in this regard, like a virus that spreads, Israel was eventually led astray into lawless idolatry and became worse than the other nations for they alone had the perfect Law of God and they should have known better.

For those nations who lived further afield, outside the land of Canaan, Israel was commanded to give them an offer of peace and subject them to forced labour. But if the offer of peace was rejected and the nation attacked Israel, then they had to lay siege to the city and kill all the adult males. This was the only way of righteously dealing with humans of sinful flesh who were in a state of rebellion against God. On a human level, God showed His power and authority through the leaders of the people of Israel, dealing out vengeance and justice to all rebels by fleshly, worldly means, that is, in a way that the immature peoples of the earth could understand.

And it should be noted that any killing was to occur reasonably quickly, without any kind of torture or dismembering (the only case of dismembering that I'm aware of that was commanded by Yahweh was the chopping off of a woman's hand if she deliberately attempted to damage a man's testicles - Deuteronomy 25:11-12.) In some cases of capital punishment, where the person had to bear their own guilt and could not receive sacrificial pardon via the ceremonial rituals, the body was to be burned without being given a decent burial, but this was *after* the person was dead, and not the means of death (Leviticus 20:13-14; also Joshua 7:25).

We must bear in mind that the majority of the nations had very low standards and they practiced all kinds of idolatrous rituals involving immorality and child sacrifice, as well as living in a very unclean, unjust way. Virtually everything they believed and practiced was a perversion of the truth passed down from Adam through Noah and his sons (see Romans 1:18-32). They all worshipped some kind of idol or spirit (which are really demons and lords of the kingdom of darkness) and they believed that it was their god or goddess who gave them victory in war and blessed them in whatever they put their hands to in their land. So God chose the nation of Israel and became their God, Yahweh, to prove to the other nations that He is the true God, while all the others are fakes. This has to include the ultimate power on earth - to give life or take it; to give land or take it away. We must also remember that the vast majority of human history has been very brutal and violent, particularly in ancient times. Only in recent centuries have some of the nations of the world tried to change and become more 'civilised.' Nevertheless, violence and brutality still exist today throughout the world. This is the way of the flesh.

Vengeance on the Nations

One of the toughest texts to accept and understand in the Old Testament is Numbers 31 concerning the vengeance on the Midianites. This is one of those texts where you just wish it wasn't in the Bible. Here are some of the key details from the account.

The LORD said to Moses, "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites"...They fought against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and killed every man. Among their victims were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba—the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword. The Israelites captured the Midianite women and children and took all the Midianite herds, flocks and goods as plunder...

Moses was angry with the officers of the army—the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds—who returned from the battle. "Have you allowed all the women to live?" he asked them. "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD's people. Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.

(Numbers 31:1-2, 7-9, 14-18 NIV)

The Midianites were originally at peace with Israel, and Moses had even married into the family of Jethro (also called Reuel), a Midianite priest who was a believer in Yahweh (Exodus 3:1). Yet some years later, it was the elders of Midian who joined with Israel's enemies, Balak and the Moabites, to hire the false prophet Balaam of Mesopotamia to curse Israel, and it was the women of Midian (along with the Moabites) who were the main culprits in seducing Israel into idolatry and prostitution when they worshipped the filthy god Baal of Peor. God then punished Israel for this flagrant spiritual adultery by destroying 24,000 of them in a plague. So in accordance with His justice, Yahweh had to avenge the Midianites for this deliberate charade, which had caused 24,000 Israelites to be killed in judgment (see Numbers 25:1-17; Revelation 2:14).

As hard as it is to come to terms with the reality of this violence and mass killing, nevertheless, I think it becomes quite clear as to why they had to kill all the women, because they were the ones who had caused the plague on the Israelites so they too had to die for their sin. The really difficult thing to accept here is the killing of all the male children, but we must realise that sin carries on through the generations (e.g. Exodus 20:4-6), and boys become men, so as hard as it is to grasp, God did not see these boys as being totally innocent. They were corrupted seed, if you like. There may be other issues that I'm missing here as well. One thing is for sure: these Midianites would've all been given an opportunity to hear the truth about Yahweh, but they chose to arrogantly reject it.

Nevertheless, in accordance with the Law, the Israelite soldiers were allowed to take the virgin women as wives, and it appears as though the female children were also spared. These women and girls would then be adopted into the Israelite community. (For the treatment and procedure of marrying a captive woman, see Deuteronomy 21:10-14). This whole episode highlights the absolute hideousness of sin and the absolute justice of God. The interesting thing to remember here is that if one or more of these Midianites had originally believed in Yahweh as the true God and had sought to join the people of Israel as one of the foreigners among them, they would've been saved from this slaughter and they would've had access to the atoning sacrifices of God.

Immaturity versus Maturity

Throughout the Old Testament era right up to the time of Christ's ministry, God was dealing with humanity in **immaturity**. Humanity is fleshly and immature, and full of corruption, and this Old Creation is worldly and physical, therefore God has to use extreme righteous measures to teach humanity about itself and its condition. This He did through the Old Covenant especially. We must remember though that this Old Creation, and the Old Humanity in Adam, is temporary. It will eventually be replaced by a brand New Creation, and a New Humanity. In the meantime, while this Old Creation exists, God uses means of temporary suffering, destruction and death as a means of judging, chastening and humbling mankind.

Although virtually every evil (or curse or bad thing; a calamity) that humans have to suffer is caused directly by Satan and the kingdom of Darkness, for he is the temporary master of the earth in this present wicked age, ruling through Sin and Death, nevertheless, God is Sovereign and He uses Satan, as well as humans, as tools of judgment. This is made very evident in the book of Job, and in the events of Joseph in the book of Genesis, as well as in numerous other instances in Israel's history, not least of all in the suffering and death of God's Only Son. Yet having said that, all will be held accountable for their actions, particularly the vessels of wrath, the sons of stubbornness, the unbelievers, who will have to endure the Second Death. Nevertheless, the Father of all will ultimately be justified for allowing evil to exist during the ages, and particularly for His own use of evil via His judgments. We cannot truly appreciate life and wholeness without death and corruption. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge.

The Church's Warfare

From the era when Christ came in the fullness of time to reveal the full heart and nature of His Father, God has been dealing with mankind in accordance with the New Covenant, which ultimately leads to a New Creation. This covenant focuses on the spiritual, heavenly things of the kingdom through the Ecclesia (or Church) of God. The focus is on Love and Grace, and the spiritual power of God. **Therefore, Christians are not supposed to operate in accord with the Old Covenant by using physical, worldly weapons in fleshly warfare.** That is the way of the world! That is the way of the flesh! That is the way of immaturity! We are commanded to go beyond the legal rights of the Law, which says 'an eye for an eye, a soul for a soul' and we are to practice forgiveness and grace instead, following in the footsteps of our Master, Who entrusted Himself completely to His God and Father. Right now, God is conciliated to the world in an era of grace (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

Yet sadly, the religion of Christendom has totally abused this covenant and has completely missed the point, in the meanwhile torturing and murdering thousands of innocent people, including true followers of Christ. One only has to do some research into the power and exploits of the Holy Roman Empire and its popes to see the horrific and wicked destruction that has been perpetrated in the name of God and His Son. No wonder that God says that she belongs to Secret Babylon, the Great Harlot, who will be severely judged and will receive double for all she has done, for in her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth (Revelation 18).

Jesus made it clear when replying to Pilate's questions that those who belong to God's kingdom are not to engage in fleshly warfare.

"Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews.** But now my kingdom is from another place."

(John 18:36 NIV)

The era of maturity has now arrived for those who follow Christ. Paul also shows that even as he and the others were Christ's apostles, prophets and deputies, they did not wage war as the world does. The stratagems, the armour, and the weapons of our warfare are very different. We are a celestial or heavenly Israel that belongs to a New Jerusalem and a New Creation, therefore our weapons are spiritual and are based on righteousness and truth, as opposed to being carnal or worldly. Here are some key texts that confirm these truths.

"Yet I am beseeching, that I may not, being present, have to have courage with the confidence with which I am reckoning to dare any who reckon us as walking according to the flesh, for, walking in flesh, we are not warring according to the flesh. **For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful to God toward the pulling down of bulwarks (*fortresses*); pulling down reckonings and every height elevating itself against the knowledge of God, and leading into captivity every apprehension into the obedience of Christ, and having all in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience may be completed."**

(2 Corinthians 10:2-6 CV)

"...in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;"

(2 Corinthians 6:7 NIV)

"For the rest, brethren mine, be invigorated in the Lord and in the might of His strength. Put on the panoply (*complete armour*) of God, to enable you to stand up to the stratagems of the Adversary, for it is not ours to wrestle with blood and flesh, but with the sovereignties, with the authorities, with the world-mights of this darkness, with the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials. Therefore take up the panoply of God that you may be enabled to withstand in the wicked day, and having effected all, to stand."

"Stand, then, girded about your loins with **truth**, with the cuirass of **righteousness** put on and your feet sandaled with the readiness of **the evangel of peace**; with all taking up the large shield of **faith**, by which you will be able to extinguish all the fiery arrows of the wicked one. And receive the helmet of **salvation** and the sword of the spirit, which is a declaration (*rhema word*) of God. During every prayer and petition be praying on every occasion (in spirit being vigilant also for it with all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints, and for me), that to me expression may be granted, in the opening of my mouth with boldness, to make known the secret of the evangel, for which I am conducting an embassy in a chain, that in it I should be speaking boldly, as I must speak."

(Ephesians 6:10-20 CV)

"The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor (*more correctly 'weapons' or 'implements' CV*) of **light**."

(Romans 13:12 NIV)

The Spiritual Sword

The servants of Christ (that is, the true saints or people of God) are to be spiritual warriors and soldiers who use a spiritual sword or blade, which is the word or declaration of God. This is the sword that Christ wields - it is the power and authority of God, which has the power to take life or give life, to destroy or heal, to take captive or release.

"I will be giving you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatsoever you should be binding on the earth shall be those things having been bound in the heavens, and whatsoever you should be loosing on the earth, shall be those having been loosed in the heavens."

(Matthew 16:19 CV)

"Verily, I am saying to you, Whatsoever you should be binding on the earth shall be those things having been bound in the heavens, and whatsoever you should be loosing on the earth shall be those loose in heaven."

(Matthew 18:18 CV)

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer."

(2 Timothy 2:3-4 NIV)

"Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight..."

(Timothy 1:18 NIV)

"Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (*declaration - CV*) of God."

(Ephesians 6:17 NIV)

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

(Hebrews 4:12 NIV)

"Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter."... The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."

(Revelation 19:15, 21 NIV)

"In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword... Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

(Revelation 1:16; 2:16 NIV)

The Fight at Jesus' Arrest

From the moment Jesus began His ministry on earth in about 29 AD, this spiritual Sword has taken the place of the fleshly sword. God's people are not to use the weapons of the world. The one place where this seems to be contradicted is when Jesus made sure that Peter and the other disciples had a couple of swords with them on the night He was betrayed and arrested. Subsequently, at the time of Jesus' arrest, Peter actually used his sword to attack Malchus, the servant of the Chief Priest, cutting off his right ear. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12 "He was numbered with the transgressors." This reveals that the acts of violence, even though it was in self defense, were now viewed as transgressions of the Law, that is, disobedience to the commands of God's Messiah. Jesus' response to Peter's act made it equally clear - He said,

"No more of this! Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me? Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

(See Luke 22:36-38, 49-51; John 18:10-11; Mark 14:46-47; Matthew 26:50-54 NIV).

Jesus then healed Malchus' ear. Now these are words of peace followed by an awesome act of love - and all in obedience to His Father. This is the pattern by which we are to follow Him. Only later, at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, did Peter and the others fully realise that they now had spiritual swords with which to strike, and not physical swords. Consider this comparison of the fate of 3000 of the people under the two swords: the first under the Law of Moses (physical sword), and the second under the Law of Christ (spiritual sword). The first occurred after the giving of the Old Covenant; and the second occurred after the giving of the New Covenant.

"The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died."

(Exodus 32:28 NIV)

"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

(Acts 2:41 NIV)

The Law of Moses brings death, bondage and condemnation; while the Law of Christ brings life, freedom and justification. The letter of the Law kills; while the Spirit brings life (2 Corinthians 3:6-18).

Returning to the incident in Gethsemane, it is interesting to note that in Matthew 26:53, Jesus states that more than 12 legions of angels (that is, spirit beings) could've been sent to protect Him - but it was not the will of His Father for Him to call for this. We are talking of thousands of angels being sent to Jesus' side! The Son of God is the Chief Messenger of the spiritual armies of heaven, and at one time He was commanding them to carry out His judgments upon Israel and the other nations, yet during this crisis in His earthly life He didn't even use His God-given right to access the angelic armies! He knew the way of sacrifice and apparent weakness lay before Him instead. Yet the time is coming, and already is, when the armies of heaven will assist Him in judging the earth. This army consists of angels and glorified humans.

"The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean...Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army...They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

(Revelation 19:14, 19; 17:14 NIV)

For further study on these things see the article *The Spirit Beings and Spiritual Warfare*.

Taking the Kingdom by Violent Force

Most of the Jews in Jesus' day did not grasp the true nature of God's kingdom. They still had the attitude of seeking to establish the kingdom by violent force so they could throw off the Roman yoke and become a free nation, but they wanted it done their way and not God's way. They wanted to avoid the 'sin and repentance' bit and yet they still wanted the freedom and the blessings. They desperately wanted salvation and deliverance, but they wanted to avoid doing it God's way, which is the only way to real freedom and deliverance. In the following texts, Jesus describes this kind of attitude of snatching the kingdom by violent force.

"Now, from the days of John the baptist hitherto, the kingdom of the heavens is being violently forced and the violent are snatching it."

(Matthew 11:12 CV)

"The law and the prophets are unto John; thenceforth, the evangel of the kingdom of God is being brought, and everyone is violently forcing into it, and the violent are snatching it."

(Luke 16:16 CV)

There are two ways in which these verses can be applied.

1) Jesus is describing something akin to a rescue mission where the people are so desperate to be rescued from the sinking ship that they push and shove, and fight and kill to get a place on the rescue boat. They also seek to establish the kingdom by physical brute force.

A similar thought is being presented in John 6:15 where it says that Jesus retires into the mountain alone to avoid the crowds because He knew that they wanted to make Him king by force (literally 'snatch Him'). This occurred after the miraculous feeding of over five thousand people. The people loved the miracles and the blessings of this great Teacher so they wanted to make Him their king. But God and His Son cannot be manipulated or forced to do anything. The people had the wrong heart attitude, and God's will and plan was a little different to theirs.

2) He is describing the power and force of the spiritual kingdom ransacking the powers of darkness through spiritual believers.

In 1) above, the violence and force is negative and fleshly; while in 2) the force is positive and spiritual.

Modern Zionism

A similar attitude to 1) above has continued throughout the centuries within Judaism and the Jewish people to free themselves from the yoke of iron that God imposed upon them and to establish their own kingdom with their own messiah. Modern Zionism has partially achieved this goal through the establishing of the State of Israel. Although these things are fulfilling prophetic patterns and are in accordance with God's overall plan and intention, nevertheless, these methods and goals are completely opposed to the kingdom and message of Christ, and the New Covenant.

At one time, both Jews and Arabs lived side by side in their villages of Palestine, many families having lived there for centuries. Then the Zionists came along and changed all of that by military force. Many of these Palestinians were followers of Christ, yet they too were thrown off their land or killed. It is understandable that the Jewish people needed a land of their own, but it should not have been established like this. Even terrorism was used by the Zionists against their own Jewish people to further their cause.

Humanly speaking, it has become necessary now to bring into being a Palestinian State, due to the division of Palestine into Israel and the 'occupied territories.' Some years ago, I was very much pro-Israel, like so many Christians in America and Britain, but in recent years my view has changed. Modern Israel is an unbelieving nation, like most other nations, and sadly, the Jewish Zionists seem to have forgotten the horror and suffering of their own people in the Holocaust of WWII, not to mention the suffering of their ancestors throughout their history - because now they are treating the Palestinians in a similar way. The Palestinian people are justified to a degree in their cries against this injustice, though their own methods of war and violence are not helping the situation. Ideally, they all need to entrust themselves to their Creator and let Him deal out His justice in His time.

The words of God to ancient Israel given in the Law are particularly poignant today,

"As for the foreigner, you shall not tyrannise or oppress him, for you came to be foreigners in the land of Egypt...you know how it feels to be a foreigner...**the foreigner who lives with you in your land should be treated like a native-born, and you should love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt**...Do not withhold justice from the foreigner or the fatherless, or take away the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt and Yahweh your God redeemed you from there."

(Free Translation of Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:19; 24:17-18, 21-22)

In light of the above, the truth of the matter is that most of the Palestinian Arabs *are* native-born and are not actually foreigners! So this is even more of a reason why they should be treated justly. But of course there are two sides to this complicated and desperate situation, and there are many arguments put forward for both sides, but certain facts remain evident. Only God, through His true Anointed One, will solve this problem by bringing the kingdom of the heavens to the earth.

This contrast of fleshly warfare (Old Covenant) and the peace of the gospel of the kingdom (the message of Conciliation; the New Covenant) is typified in the reigns of David and Solomon. Here is what God said to king David.

"But this word of the LORD came to me: 'You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever."

(1 Chronicles 22:8-10 NIV)

Although God had called David 'a man after my own heart' and David had killed numerous people in accordance with God's Law, nevertheless, this spilling of blood through a physical sword was not the ideal picture of Messiah's coming kingdom. Christ's kingdom is a heavenly, spiritual, supernatural kingdom that is not of this world, and its Sword is the powerful Word of God. This kingdom of the heavens will bring peace and security to the world through justice, righteousness and grace. Hence Solomon is the one who prefigures Messiah and His kingdom reign.

In God's eyes, the only true Jews today are those who are circumcised in spirit, in the heart, and have accepted the New Covenant in Jesus the Messiah (Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:3). Jesus Himself said that there are many who call themselves Jews or God's people yet they are really a synagogue of Satan, and are therefore liars! (Revelation 2:9; 3:9)

The true people of God need to bear a different kind of fruit by heeding these commands:

"Love your enemies, and pray for those who are persecuting you..."

(Matthew 5:44)

"Yet seek first the kingdom and its righteousness..."

(Matthew 6:33)

"Bless those who are persecuting you: bless, and do not curse, so as to be rejoicing with those who are rejoicing, and lamenting with those who are lamenting...To no one render evil for evil...Being at peace with all mankind, you are not avenging yourselves, beloved, but be giving place to His indignation, for it is written, Vengeance is Mine! I will repay! the Lord is saying...Be not conquered by evil; but conquer evil with good."

(Romans 12:14-15, 17-21 CV)

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God"

(Matthew 5:9)

"Do to others as you would have them do to you...Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

(Luke 6:31,37 NIV)

Law and Order

Now someone may be thinking 'What about those mentioned in the NT who were soldiers?' This is a good question. What we need to bear in mind though is that, during those days, soldiers were employed to act as a police force to enforce the law. Amongst the Jews, there were the Temple Guards who kept order in the city of Jerusalem, primarily at the temple courts, and they were deputies who carried out the commands of the Jewish Ruling Council, the Sanhedrin, which was a self-governing political/religious body based in the temple grounds. It was a squad of these soldiers, along with their captain or officer, and some deputised Jewish elders, who came with Judas Iscariot to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane (John 18:3, 12-13). King Herod also had his own set of troops, who no doubt were Jewish (Luke 23:11).

Before Jesus began His ministry, John the Baptist gave some instructions to some of these Jewish soldiers who had received the baptism of repentance. This is what he told them,

"Now soldiers also inquired of him, saying, "What should we also be doing?" And he said to them, "You should be intimidating no one, neither be blackmailing, and be sufficed with your rations." "

(Luke 3:14 CV)

These soldiers were not to be involved in physical warfare but as law enforcers they still had to conduct themselves in a righteous, yet merciful, manner in their dealings with the people.

They were not to intimidate or oppress anyone, and they were not to be involved in any kind of blackmailing or bribery, and as Levites they were also told to be content with their rations so as not to fall into grumbling and bitterness. They were still under the authority of their Jewish leaders. (It is also possible that these were Roman soldiers, but the principles remain the same). Jesus Himself told His disciples to submit themselves to the Jewish authorities for they sat in Moses' seat, but He also told them not to imitate the actions of the scribes and Pharisees for they were hypocrites.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."

(Matthew 23:1-3 NIV)

The real issue here is one of authority and subjection. Jesus Himself submitted to the Jewish and Roman authorities because He came as one under Law to serve His people. Even though He is the rightful King and Governor of Israel and the whole world, He nevertheless submitted to His Father's authority, which in turn was to submit Himself to the worldly authorities - which led to persecution and death. This has to be the attitude of the true believing follower of Christ - those who are Overcomers in Christ. Jesus' example is the ultimate pattern for us to follow as His servants. We are to be His Ambassadors.

Jesus' whole attitude to the structure of authority is clearly seen in the incident with the Roman centurion in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. The centurion had sent a delegation of Jewish elders to Jesus to ask Him to heal his dying servant. This is what happened while Jesus was on His way to the house.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. **But say the word, and my servant will be healed.** For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

(Luke 7:6-10 NIV)

Jesus was amazed at the faith of this Roman, because this man knew and understood that Jesus was under the authority of God and was therefore able to heal his servant with one word. He understood the God-given structure of authority and obedience - and Jesus honoured him for his faith. I've no doubt that in later years this centurion would've had to re-evaluate his role as a Roman army officer, because as a Christian his conscience would suffer greatly if he had to go to war, knowing that his true authority was the invisible King of kings, and not Rome - and this King is the Prince of peace.

Paul also gives us some extremely important and insightful instructions on authority in Romans 13, which are exactly in line with how Jesus viewed things.

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. **He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.**"

"Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."

(Romans 13:1-7 NIV; see also 1 Peter 2:13-17)

This text is self-explanatory really. It's beyond the scope of this article to look at the place of governments in this present era, but notice here that the governing authorities have the power of the sword! That is, capital punishment in accordance with the principles of God's Law is allowed, for they are said to be God's agents of wrath to bring punishment on the lawbreaker. They are there to curb lawlessness, particularly murder. Punishment for murder was one of the first laws to be given to mankind through Noah (Genesis 9:5-6). Many murderers today are going to face a harsher judgment before God because they were allowed to live, only for them to be released and to kill again and again! And God says through Paul that the sword is the main means of execution (but not necessarily by beheading). The thing that the governing authorities have to be very careful of is shedding innocent blood, for they will be held accountable for every soul. They will also be held accountable for every victim who was killed by a murderer that had been released!

The Power and Nature of Christ's Kingdom

When Jesus came the first time, He came in the fullness of time to reveal the full heart of the Father (Galatians 4:4-5; John 14:8-10). His main aim was to manifest the true power and nature of His Father's kingdom, which ultimately is one of love, mercy and grace. Even though Jesus had the authority and power to destroy many, He used this power and authority to save people from sin and death, for that is why He came. He became the ultimate Ransom to redeem those who believe. The amazing fact is this: **Jesus never harmed anyone at all**. "A bruised reed He did not break; a smouldering wick He did not snuff out" (Matthew 12:15-21).

On the contrary, He healed people, He saved people from the forces of darkness, He loved people, He comforted those who were hurting; He forgave, He restored, He reconciled, He provided and He blessed. This is the true power and nature of God's kingdom. And even when Jesus twice drove the merchants and money changers from the temple in His righteous zeal, He didn't beat them up or injure anyone. (John 2:13-22; Matthew 21:12-13)

One of the greatest incidents in Jesus' ministry, which is often overlooked, occurred during His arrest in the olive grove of Gethsemane. Only John records what happened as the squad of

temple guards and their captain, along with some officials from the Sanhedrin, approached Jesus, with Judas leading them.

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he, (*Lit. Greek 'I am'*)" Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) **When Jesus said, "I am he, (*Lit. Greek 'I am'*)" they drew back and fell to the ground.** Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go."

(John 18:4-8 NIV)

So here's the scene. A fairly large group of men, including soldiers with weapons, arrive at night to secretly arrest Jesus. Jesus deliberately goes out to them for He knew why they were coming, and He deliberately asks them who it is they want. When they say 'Jesus of Nazareth,' Jesus simply replies with 'I AM.' In effect, He was declaring Himself to be Yahweh, the great I Am (Exodus 3:14). (It is interesting to note that the Gospel of John, in the original Greek, records the phrase 'I am' being spoken by Jesus a total of 8 times. The number 8 speaks of resurrection and new beginnings, and in Gematria, the name of Jesus is 888.)

As soon as He said 'I am,' the power of the Spirit was released so that the whole group drew back and fell down on the ground! Jesus didn't blow on them or do some kind of theatrical gesture - He just spoke the words! It appears as though nobody said a thing after they'd fallen down, they just got back up, wondering what had happened, but it didn't stop them arresting Him. Basically, through this act, Jesus was saying to them, "Don't think that you have the power to take me because you don't! I am letting you take me because it is the will of My Father. I lay down my life willingly." (also John 10:17-18). As He also said to Pilate, "You would have no power over me unless it was given to you from above." (John 19:11).

The fact is, Jesus could have called on His Father to have immediately sent Him more than 12 legions of angels (that's well over 70,000 angels, using the figure of a Roman legion being around 6,000 men) (Matthew 26:53). But He didn't! It was God's will that He should lay down His life just as the prophets had foretold. So He came as a gentle Lamb to the slaughter without opening His mouth in protest (1 Peter 2:21-23).

The Armies of Heaven

Angels (literally Messengers) have a prominent place throughout Scripture. These elect (or chosen) spiritual beings form the spiritual army (or host) of the kingdom of heaven. They are often used to execute God's judgments in the earth. Christ Himself, being one and the same as Yahweh, the Angel of the Lord, is the ultimate Chief Messenger of the forces of heaven. Here is one of my favourite incidents concerning the angelic armies.

And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

(2 Kings 6:17-18 NIV)

In this instance, we see the enemy being defeated by temporary blindness, with no one getting hurt or killed. Yet this invisible army of the dimension of heaven has the power and authority to totally destroy the enemies of God, but they do nothing outside of the righteous and holy will of their King.

One of the greatest spiritual battles that has ever taken place was the battle in heaven between the messengers of God (headed up by Michael) and the messengers of Satan, the adversary. Satan, the great Dragon, failed to keep his place in heaven - and he has been confined to the earth with limited power until he and his angels are judged at Christ's Return.

And there was war (a battle) in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

(Revelation 12:7-9 NIV)

He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

(Luke 10:18-20 NIV)

(For further study on angels and demons, see *The Spirit Beings and Spiritual Warfare*).

The Day of the Lord

There have been many Days of the Lord, Days of Judgment, but there is still the ultimate one to come at Christ's Return, which the New Testament writers call 'the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ.' In contrast to His first coming, Jesus' second coming will be very different. He will return as King and Lord to cleanse the earth and to reclaim that which is rightfully His. It will be a Day of wrath, punishment, vengeance, destruction, uprooting and cleansing by fire. It will be an era of justice and holiness.

This great and awesome Day will reveal that Jesus Christ is Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. This will be the time when God will show up on this planet and truly reveal Himself to the whole world in power and glory. Contrary to what many Christians believe, that Day will bring about death and destruction for many throughout the world. This is exactly what Jesus was talking about in the parable of the Vineyard Farmers (or Tenants).

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has

become the capstone'? **Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.**"

(Luke 20:15-18 NIV)

Jesus is clearly talking about the judgments of God coming upon Jerusalem and unbelieving Israel. The Messiah is the Living Stone Whom the builders rejected, yet He has become the Chief Cornerstone or Capstone of the true building of God. Either way, that Stone will cause death. For those who fall on the stone by believing in Christ, He breaks us to pieces in the flesh so that we can be made new. But for those who do not accept Him in this age, He will become the Stone that will fall on them when He returns, crushing and scattering them like chaff.

Here is a similar message, which is often misunderstood and misapplied, in the parable of the Ten Minas.

"He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me."

(Luke 19:26-27 NIV)

Jesus is describing the judgment upon Jerusalem and Israel when He returns as their rightful King (and this also includes the judgment upon secret Babylon, the false harlot church). Those who claim to belong to His kingdom but who have no fruit to show their King, then whatever blessings they have will be taken away. Their lampstand will be removed (Revelation 2:4-5). Those who are directly opposed to Jesus being their King (His enemies) shall be slain. He does not mince His words here - He clearly says 'Kill them in front of Me.' There is no mention here that Jesus hates them or wants to destroy them, but because they have chosen to be His enemies, this rebellion has to be crushed. This doesn't contradict Jesus' teaching on loving our enemies, as some have suggested. Jesus *does* love His enemies - He suffered and died for them - but the season and era of the wrath and indignation of God has to arrive - and those who remain His enemies shall be *temporarily* destroyed.

It is no different from these words spoken in Deuteronomy 32:39-41.

"See now that I myself am He!
There is no god besides me.
I put to death and I bring to life (*I keep alive - CV*),
I have wounded and I will heal,
and no one can deliver out of my hand.

I lift my hand to heaven and declare:
As surely as I live forever (*As I am The Life for the age - CV*),

when I sharpen my flashing sword
and my hand grasps it in judgment,
I will take vengeance on my adversaries
and repay those who hate me.

(NIV)

Many people in the world today are arrogantly shouting for God to reveal Himself - well, one day He will, and the Lamb who was rejected and crucified will return as the Lion who conquers. In that Day, men will freeze with fear and terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the earth for the heavens and the earth shall be shaken when the Lion of the Tribe of Judah roars (Luke 21:26-27). And to think that many today think Jesus is a wimp or a sissy weakling!

Here are some even tougher words from the mouth of the risen Lord Himself - and this is directed at the apostate Church!

"I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. **I will strike her children dead**. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds."

(Revelation 2:21-23 NIV)

Here are two other scriptures that tell us in no unmistakable terms what the Day of the Lord will be like.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great...The rest of them were **killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse**, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."

(Revelation 19:17-18, 21 NIV)

The Lord is at your right hand; **he will crush kings on the day of his wrath**. He will judge the nations, **heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth**.

(Psalm 110:5-6 NIV)

Even though the Lord is already judging the nations through the rise and fall of Empires, these texts are still referring to the Day of the Lord.

"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed... Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it... Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."
"Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

(Luke 17:30, 33, 35-37 NIV)

The Apostle Paul gives us some very clear words concerning the return of Christ in the Day of the Lord, confirming the words of the prophets, including the greatest Prophet of them all - Jesus Himself.

"...at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His **powerful messengers, in flaming fire**, dealing out **vengeance** to those who are not acquainted with God and those who are not obeying the evangel of our Lord Jesus Christ -- who shall incur **the justice of eonian extermination** from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His strength..."

(2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 CV)

Now you can't get much clearer than that! Notice the emphasis on **fire**. Isaiah states the same thing.

See, **the LORD is coming with fire**, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, **and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword** the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD.

(Isaiah 66:15-16 NIV)

But what are we to make of this fire? Is it literal or figurative?

Flaming Fire

There are usually three levels of truth in relation to most things as taught in Scripture. Fire is a good example. Firstly, there is natural fire that is part of this physical creation, which we have all experienced.

Secondly, there is supernatural fire that is part of the celestial (or heavenly) world (or dimension), which is, nevertheless, very real (in fact, more real than natural fire) and can manifest itself in this material world. God Himself appears as a **consuming fire**, which has the power to destroy (e.g. Nadab and Abihu - Leviticus 10:1-2) or to preserve (e.g. the burning bush - Exodus 3:1-2).

Then thirdly, there is the highest level of figurative fire, the fire that shapes our character, the fiery trials that refine us like gold and silver, the fire of God's righteousness working within us to destroy the flesh, which is essentially the fire of God's Law doing its work within us. The supernatural fire and the figurative fire are both spiritual, whereas the natural fire is worldly and terrestrial. (For further study of fire, see *Is There Really A Hell?*)

Most of the instances in Scripture that refer to the fire of God are describing the supernatural fire that either preserves or destroys. The Glory and Presence of Yahweh is usually described as appearing as cloud and fire, particularly the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led Israel through the desert to the Promised Land. In numerous cases, the fire of God from heaven either consumed animals offered in sacrifice or it killed men in judgment. The fire of God does not always destroy things though. Remember that Moses was amazed

that the fiery bush did not burn up when God appeared and spoke to him (Exodus 3:2-3). It was this same fire of God that preserved Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the natural fire of Babylon's furnace (Daniel 3:19-27). And it was this same fire of God that descended as tongues upon the heads of the apostles and believers on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon them while they were in the temple courts (Acts 2:1-4).

So to say 'God is a consuming fire' is literally true - it is not just a figurative expression. Yet there are other instances where the fire of God is also figurative. Take for example Revelation 1:14 and 19:12 where we are told that Christ's eyes are as flames of fire. This is describing that Christ's eyes are the eyes of God, eyes that are full of justice and holiness - and they don't miss a thing. He *is* coming to judge His people and the world.

Let us look at a few other key examples of this supernatural fire of God in relation to the Day of the Lord.

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

(Hebrews 10:26-31 NIV)

"...for our "God is a consuming fire." "

(Hebrews 12:29 NIV; see also Deuteronomy 4:24)

"This is the plague with which the LORD will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

(Zechariah 14:12 NIV)

⁴⁹"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

(Luke 12:49 NIV)

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

(Matthew 3:11-12 NIV)

Now for those of you who think that many, if not all, of these texts are to be understood solely in a figurative manner in relation to the return of Christ, read these words of Jesus very carefully.

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. **Then the flood came and destroyed them all**.

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, **fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all**.

"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed."

(Luke 17:26-30 NIV)

Let's repeat that last line again.

"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed."

Now it doesn't get any clearer than this! We either believe His plain words or we don't. This is primarily describing spiritual, heavenly fire, though it doesn't rule out figurative fire or natural fire playing their part in the Day of the Lord either. I'm sure that all three will be manifested, for Peter states that the present heavens and earth are stored with fire ready for that great and awesome Day (2 Peter 3:7).

The Avenger

The New Testament clearly reveals that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Avenger of all wrong-doing. He alone is the one who will pour out God's vengeance in the Day of the Lord when He returns to this earth, avenging the blood of His chosen ones who have died at the hands of wicked men.

"Yet should not God by all means be doing the avenging of His chosen ones, who are imploring Him day and night? And He is patient with them. I am saying to you that He will be doing the avenging of them swiftly. Moreover, consequently, at the coming of the Son of Mankind, will He be finding the faith on the earth?"
(Luke 18:7-8 CV)

"No one is to be circumventing and overreaching his brother in the matter, because the Lord is the Avenger of all these (*sins*)..."

(1 Thessalonians 4:6 CV)

"And when It opens the fifth seal, I perceived underneath the altar the souls of those who have been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they had. And they cry with a loud voice, saying, "Till when, O Owner, holy and true, art Thou not judging and avenging our blood on those dwelling on the earth?"

..."Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power is of our God, for true and just is His judging, for He judges the great prostitute who corrupts the earth with her prostitution, and avenges the blood of His slaves at her hand."
(Revelation 6:9-10; 19:1-2 CV)

Nevertheless, it is equally clear that this avenging is *not* to be performed now by His people, but instead we are to be His ambassadors proclaiming a message of conciliation while we wait for God to judge the world at Christ's return.

"Being at peace with all mankind, you are not avenging yourselves, beloved, but be giving place to His indignation, for it is written, Vengeance is Mine! I will repay! the Lord is saying..."

(Romans 12:18-19 CV)

(For further details on the Second Coming of Christ, see *The Day of The Lord*.)

Anyhow, be that as it may concerning Christ's return, let us compare how God judged His people under the Old Covenant with how He now judges His people under the New Covenant.

Judgment Under The Old Covenant And The New

Here is a classic example of God's swift judgment under the Law. It has to do with the severe destruction by supernatural fire of Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu. Even though they were priests, who were the only ones who could approach God and make sacrifices on behalf of the people, these two disobeyed God almost immediately upon the priests beginning their ministry by offering unauthorised fire before Yahweh at the Tabernacle. Rebellion and disobedience is as the sin of divination and idolatry, so God destroyed them by fire (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. **So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD...** Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Come here; carry your cousins outside the camp, away from the front of the sanctuary." So they came and carried them, still in their tunics, outside the camp, as Moses ordered.

(Leviticus 10:1-2, 4-5 NIV)

Then, when we come to the New Testament, we have a similar incident where we find two New Covenant priests, a couple called Ananias and Sapphira, playing the hypocrite not long after this new ministry had begun at Pentecost. They too were showing their disobedience and disrespect for the Law of God by lying to other believers (and ultimately lying to God because

they were lying to the Body of Christ) and being hypocrites, that is, pretending to be something that they weren't or pretending to do something righteous when it was a lie. It is clear that the New Covenant is not an excuse to sin and disobey the righteous and holy laws of God.

"Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."

(Acts 5:1-11 NIV)

On the surface of things, this seems a little harsh to say the least! Yet God had His purpose in this. If you'll take a closer look at the context by reading the end of Acts chapter four, you will see that this couple were doing the dirty on their brethren and lying to God. They had decided to bring an offering to the Lord (via the apostles) that would be used to help the poor amongst the believing community. Yet contrary to the Law, they secretly and selfishly changed their minds and kept back some of the money for themselves, and then they pretended that they were giving all of it to the Lord (see Leviticus 19:11; 27:28). So due to the nearness of the Kingdom at that time and the power of the Holy Spirit being present, particularly through the authority of the apostles, Peter declares the prophetic judgment of God upon them both - and they immediately have the breath of life taken from them and they drop down dead.

Now notice carefully here that Peter doesn't lay a finger on them. There appears to be no physical contact at all. Instead of a physical sword, Peter uses the mighty Sword of the Spirit, the very words of God Himself. It is the supernatural power of God that strikes them down, though there was no visible fire, as there was with Nadab and Abihu.

We are not told if this kind of thing ever happened to anyone else in the early church, though something similar happened to King Herod a number of years later when an angel struck him down with a worm-eating disease (see Acts 12:21-23), but there are a few texts in the writings of Paul and John that indicate that judgment by death did continue to occur in the church, although it is highly unlikely that these judgments occurred as swiftly as that which befell Ananias and Sapphira (see 1 Corinthians 11:29-32; 1 John 5:16-17). Nevertheless, take note

that these judgments took place **after the New Covenant had been fully instituted at Pentecost 33 AD**. This occurred amongst the Body of Christ.

So, think about this. We hear so much today about Christ's authority and the Holy Spirit's power to save, heal and restore - and rightly so, for He does - but here we have a clear instance where two believers are taken out - or simply put, killed by the power of the Lord! Their lives are no more, they were put to sleep. They were slain by the Spirit! I know that unless we witness the coming of our Lord we will all fall asleep at some point anyhow, as God wills, but this kind of direct judgment from God is very specific and it's the ultimate discipline.

I can understand why the above incident in Acts 5 is often ignored or conveniently overlooked by many Bible teachers, along with the many other unpleasant, awkward texts. It is easier and much more comfortable to focus on the 'healing and restoration' texts rather than the 'judgment' ones - **but we cannot ignore the judgments of the Living God**. I believe that the reason why many of these severe judgments by death are not happening in the same way today as they were occurring in the early Church is primarily due to the secret Administration of Grace that was introduced through Paul - and abundant grace allows more time for repentance. The more sin increases, the more grace increases. Nevertheless, this is not an excuse for sin, and when the kingdom truly draws near again at the very end of this age we could begin to see such judgments as these in the church again. With more power, comes more judgment - and the judging begins from the house of God (1 Peter 4:17).

Types and Shadows

There is a huge amount that we can learn from the history of Israel under the Old Covenant. Not only do we have the principles of God's righteousness and justice laid out for us, which still applies today and will apply for the ages to come, but we also have numerous types and shadows that reveal to us many levels of spiritual truth. Paul makes this abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 10. Some of the incidents that he mentions here concerning ancient Israel have been considered above.

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Now these things occurred as **examples** (*more accurately 'types'*) to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

These things happened to them **as examples** (*more accurately 'typically'*) and were written down **as warnings for us**, on whom the fulfillment (literally 'ends' or 'consummations') of the ages has come.

(1 Corinthians 10:1-11 NIV)

These are words of wisdom and warning that the Ecclesia of God needs to heed in these deceitful days. The Old Covenant may no longer be in force, nevertheless, it's principles, prophecies and types are age-abiding (eonian). The New Covenant has superceded the Old one, but we must remember that the same God instituted both of them. Those who serve Him need to walk in accordance with His commands as given through Christ Jesus, the Chief Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant, to show themselves worthy of the kingdom of God. Every covenant that is entered into has terms that need to be kept.

The Old Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ. Jesus Himself said that He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

(Matthew 5:17-18 NIV)

The era of the Day of the Lord is very near at which time much more of God's Law will be fulfilled. It will be the time of vengeance and cleansing to rid the earth of lawlessness and rebellion in preparation for the kingdom of the heavens, which will be established with power and great majesty, that the rule of the mighty God and King may progress to fullness - a kingdom that shall have no end. It will signal the beginning of the Restoration of all things (Acts 3:19-21).

This may have been tough, sober reading for many, but one thing is for sure - God is truly the Awesome, Almighty, Magnificent Ruler of all things - The One and Only God Who deserves all our praise and adoration.

He is the Rock, his works are perfect,
and all his ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
upright and just is he.

(Deuteronomy 32:4 NIV)

Bible Abbreviations:

NIV = New International Version

CV = Concordant (Literal) Version