



MILITARY SERVICE

If my soldiers were to begin to think, not one would remain in the ranks.

Frederick the Great

The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophes.

Albert Einstein

War is the ultimate expression of greed and hatred. It is the inevitable and ultimate result of lawlessness. Its chaos and carnage are fully-matured rebellion against YHVH and the antithesis of all he represents and wishes to give his children. This is why Holy Disciples of Yahoshua do not participate in or support military forces or industry nor endorse those who do. As we will see, our view of warfare is inextricably knit to our view of God—whether or not we believe in him and if so, what temperament and abilities we attribute to him.

The Foundation's position regarding military service is guided by the following scriptures:

Then Yahoshua said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword shall perish by a sword."

Matityahu (Matthew) 26:52

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have fought that I might not be delivered up to the Jews. However, now, my kingdom is not from here.

Yochanan (John) 18:36

You shall not murder.

Sh'mot (Exodus) 20:15

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am YHVH.

Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:18

No one is able to serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and he will love the other or he will cling to the one and he will despise the other. You are not able to serve God and wealth.

Matityahu (Matthew) 5:9

But God said to me, "You shall not build a house to my name, for you are a man of battles, and you have shed blood."

1 Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles) 28:3

And questioning him also were soldiers, saying, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said unto them, "Do violence to no one, nor accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

Luke 3:14

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

Matityahu (Matthew) 5:9

Ancient Israel waged war under YHWH's direction on several occasions. Many, including those who have little use for the Torah, capitalize on the Bible's narrative of such conflicts justify of their own military aspirations. Countless have been the opposing forces that have invoked the name of one god or another—sometimes the same god—each seeking divine intervention on their behalf. Scores have been the leaders, from popes to presidents, from kings to imams, who have claimed to be agents of God's will, inciting tens of thousands to "righteous" fury against those falsely made out to be destined for destruction.

The futility of such divine invocations reached the heights of insane irony in World War 1, when priests and chaplains passed through the trenches of both sides, giving their blessing on the slaughter of Christians by Christians.

If ever there was a reason to take up arms in modern times, Adolf Hitler presented one. Yet, in choosing to bail out Stalin's Soviet Russia—a jilted former ally of Hitler's, the

western power ended up partnering with just another genocidal beast. As a result, the Allied “victory” paved the way for the four-decade Soviet subjugation of Eastern Europe.

We put the word victory in quotes because, despite the military outcome, the two world wars and the ensuing conflicts shattered generations of fathers and profoundly weakened the domestic and social fabric of the societies that emerged.

Since God commanded Israel not only to attack, but to annihilate particular nations, it is not only fair, but imperative to ask why. And was this a model for other nations?

In this context, it is critical we consider Israel’s very first military encounter, as well as God’s first promise about warfare.

First was the threat posed by Egypt’s army during the exodus. Defenseless, hemmed in by the mountains and the sea, Israel was given no provision for a resistance. Instead, she was given miraculous passage through the sea, which then engulfed her pursuers.

Israel’s gratitude for this deliverance soon evaporated in the parched wilderness and when the next foe, Malek, appeared, Israel mustered its own troops for the confrontation.



The next we hear about warfare in the narrative is the following promise:

I will send my terror before you, and I will confound all the people among whom you come. And I will give the neck of your enemies to you. And I will send hornets before you which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite and the Hittite before you.

Sh’mot (Exodus) 23:27-28

After that, there were various occasions when God fought Israel’s battles for her and others when she fought—sometimes with spectacular intervention, sometimes with none.

God is anxious to defend his children, but he will not squander his efforts on a thankless people.

Clearly, Israel could have enjoyed much more intervention on God’s part against her enemies. Yet, even when she did go into battle, it was to be within particular, or shall we say, peculiar constraints, the likes of which can only elicit scoffs from politicians and

career military.

To begin with, Israel was not to maintain a standing or professional army. The following scriptures are instructive in this regard:

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots, a people more than you, you shall not be afraid of them. For YHVH your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be, when you draw near to battle, the priest shall come and speak to the people, and say to them, "Hear, Israel. You are drawing near today to battle against your enemies. Do not let your heart be faint; do not fear nor tremble, nor be terrified before their faces. For YHVH your God is he who is going before you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you."

And the officials shall speak to the people, saying, "Who is the man that has built a new house, and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, that he not die in battle and another man dedicate it. And who is the man that has planted a vineyard, and has not used its fruit? Let him go and return to his house, that he not die in battle, and another man use its fruit. And who is the man who has betrothed a woman, and has not taken her? Let him go and return to his house, that he not die in the battle, and another man take her."

And the officials shall speak further to the people, and say, "Who is the man who is afraid and faint of heart? Let him go and return to his house." Then the heart of his brothers will not melt like his heart.

And it shall be, when the officials have finished speaking to the people, commanders of the armies shall be appointed at the head of the people.

D'varim (Deuteronomy) 20:1-9

This is not describing a singular occasion, but a standard prelude to any battle. And only after various groups are culled out are the commanders appointed.

Though holy scripture frowns on Israel's establishment of its own monarchy, the Torah nevertheless gives instructions for this inevitability. Among the provisions:

However, he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to turn back to Egypt so as to multiply horses, since YHVH has said to you, "You shall not again return in this way any more."

D'varim (Deuteronomy) 17:16

Imagine an army in antiquity with no cavalry and no chariots! Obviously, any king abiding by this instruction was relegated to nothing but an infantry—surrounded by nations hamstrung by no such constraints.

Of course, when Israel finally got its kings, this instruction received the same respect it would today.

On the eve of the ascendance of Israel's first monarch, Shmu'el (Samuel) addressed the nation:

And Shmu'el spoke all YHVH's words to the people who were asking a king from him. And he said, "This is the privilege of the king who shall reign over you. He shall take your sons and shall appoint them for himself among his chariots, and among his horsemen. And they shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself heads of thousands, and heads of fifties; and to plow his plowing, and to reap his reaping; and to make weapons for war for him, and weapons for his charioteer."

1 Shmu'el (Samuel) 8:10-12

God did not abandon Israel and, even after the establishment of her monarchies, he continued to win some of her battles for her. One of the later instances of such intervention reads as follows:

So YHVH says this to the king of Assyria, "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with a shield, nor pour out a siege mound on it. He shall return by the same way that he came in, and he shall not come into this city," says YHVH. "For I will defend over this city to save it, for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake."

Then the Angel of YHVH went out and struck a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of Assyria. And they rose early in the morning; and, behold! They were all dead corpses.

And Sennacheriv, king of Assyria, set out, and went and returned; and he lived at Nineveh. And it happened as he was worshiping in the house of his god Nisroch, even his sons Adrammelech and Sar Etzer struck him with the sword.



Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 37:33-38

Even after the establishment of the monarchy and a standing army, whenever a conflict appeared imminent, the king was expected to consult God before going into battle, just as Israel's previous leaders had done for hundreds of years before.

And they spoke to David, saying, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are plundering the threshing floors." And David asked of YHVH, saying, "Shall I go? And shall I strike against these Philistines?" And YHVH said to David, "Go, and you shall strike the Philistines and save Keilah."

1 Shmu'el (Samuel) 23:1-2

The Bible records many such instances when God was consulted about escalating hostilities as well as a few in which he was not:

And Sha'ul died because of his trespass that he trespassed against YHVH, against the word of YHVH that he did not keep, and also for asking of a medium, to inquire, and did not inquire of YHVH. And he caused him to die, and turned the kingdom to David the son of Yishai.

1 Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles) 10:13-14

Impious kings were not above pretentious inquiries of the divine, as the following humorously tragic account relates:

It happened in the third year, that Yehoshafat the king of Yehudah came down to the king of Israel. The king of Israel said to his servants, "You know that Ramot Gil'ad is ours, and we are still, and don't take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?" He said to Yehoshafat, "Will you go with me to battle to Ramot Gil'ad?" Yehoshafat said to the king of Israel, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." Yehoshafat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire first for the word of YHVH."

Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go against Ramot Gil'ad to battle, or shall I forbear?" They said, "Go up; for YHVH will deliver it into the hand of the king." But Yehoshafat said, "Is not there present a prophet of YHVH besides, that we may inquire of him?"

The king of Israel said to Yehoshafat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of YHVH, Mikhayahu the son of Yimlah"—but I hate him, for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Yehoshafat said, "Don't let the king say so." Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, "Get quickly Mikhayahu the son of Yimlah."

Now the king of Israel and Yehoshafat the king of Yehudah were sitting each on his throne, arrayed in their robes, in an open place at the entrance of the gate of Shomron; and all the prophets were prophesying before them.

Tzidkiyahu the son of Kena'anah made him horns of iron, and said, "Thus says YHVH, With these shall you push the Syrians, until they be consumed." All the prophets prophesied so, saying, "Go up to Ramot Gil'ad, and prosper; for YHVH will deliver it into the hand of the king."

The messenger who went to call Mikhayahu spoke to him, saying, "Look now; the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one mouth: please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak you good." Mikhayahu said, "As YHVH lives, what YHVH says to me, that will I speak."

When he was come to the king, the king said to him, "Mikhayahu, shall we go to Ramot Gil'ad to battle, or shall we forbear?" He answered him, "Go up and prosper; and YHVH will deliver it into the hand of the king." The king said to him, "How many times shall I adjure you that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of YHVH?"

He said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And YHVH said, 'These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace.'"

The king of Israel said to Yehoshafat, "Did not I tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

1 Melechim (Kings) 22:1-17

Paying lip-service to a god or gods while trusting in one's military establishment is nothing new, for national leaders or the masses. In America, we say, "In God we trust" when it is really our armed forces in which we trust. Ironically, one will find more support for the military today in America's houses of worship than in its secular institutions. Yet, when do we find a national leader, not only consulting heaven before waging war, but waiting for a verifiable answer?

Even otherwise righteous rulers fell into disaster when they entered into battle presumptuously:

After all this, when Yoshiyahu had prepared the house, Necho the king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Yoshiyahu went out to meet him.

And he sent messengers to him, saying, "What do I have to do with you, O king of Judah? I am not coming against you today, but toward the house with which I have war; and God said for me to hasten; stop yourself from opposing God, who is with me, and he shall not destroy you."

Yoshiyahu would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself to fight against him, and did not listen to the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo.

And the archers shot at King Yoshiyahu. And the king said to his servants, "Carry me out, for I am severely wounded." And his servants carried him out from the chariot, and caused him to ride in a second chariot of his, and brought him to Jerusalem. And he died and was buried in the graves of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem were mourning for Yoshiyahu.

2 Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles) 35:20-23

So far as ascertaining God's will is concerned, Gamaliel, when presiding over the Sanhedrin during the New Testament era, put it well when he said:

...if this counsel is of men, or this work, it will be destroyed. But if it is from God, you will not be able to destroy it, and you will even be found fighters against God.

Acts 5:38-39



It is not divine counsel, but military advisers that are sought, their perspective limited by, among other things, the accuracy and extent of the intelligence available to them as well as their own ambitions. Public opinion rests on whatever the press—often itself ill-informed and/or manipulated—frenetically churns out. Those carrying out the commands on the ground to wreak the havoc of war are slaves to the command structure, in no position to question the

justification for their actions.

Most will dismiss the Bible's stance against ancient Israel's maintaining a professional army as either as utterly ridiculous, or at best, non-binding upon anyone else—the very same stance we find with regard to most of the Torah. Yet we need not look beyond the state of our modern military to observe a profoundly dysfunctional subculture.

One hardly need serve to observe; a casual conversation with military personnel or a visit to their living quarters is enlightening. As well-represented as are the same vices in society at large, it is striking how particularly seedy the outskirts of military installations are. Prostitution continues to thrive around military installations as it has for thousands of years. The introduction from abroad into the American populous of exotic, antibiotic-resistant sexually transmittable diseases by military personnel is a grave concern of the armed forces.

Likewise, the prevalence of substance abuse in the military is proverbial.

Twenty-one percent of service members admit to drinking heavily—a statistic the military hasn't managed to lower in 20 years—but service officials are determined to change that.

“If you look at heavy use of alcohol, drinking a lot in a short span of time, we tend to have a higher prevalence than the civilian community,” said Lt. Col. Wayne Talcott, an Air Force psychologist. Young military people between 18 and 25 also tend to do more heavy drinking than their civilian

peers, he noted.¹

In addition to these vices, deployments and the practice of frequently relocating military families also exact their toll. The families of absentee parents—military or not—suffer, resulting not only in long-term personal hardship, but strain on community services and a weakening of the larger social fabric.

This is the military at home. In deployment, no military institutions of any nation have demonstrated themselves above rape, the killing of unarmed civilians, looting and the like.

The governing council of Jerusalem’s New Testament community identified the most basic prerequisites for “gentiles turning to God” who wanted to enter the congregation:

Refrain from idolatry and blood and that strangled, and from sexual immorality, from which continually keeping yourselves, you will do well.

Acts 15:29

While refraining from blood can be and is taken to refer to the consumption of blood, it also applies to the shedding of blood. For this reason, disciples do not voluntarily enter into the military profession, nor do we participate in the manufacture or trade of the weapons of war. When conscripted, we are limited to non-violent assignments.

The question remains as to those already in the military and their prospects for discipleship. One of the most telling New Testament statements in this regard is Yochanan’s response to the soldiers cited above, “Do violence to no one”

Also instructive is the account in Acts chapter 10 of a centurion named Cornelius. As both a gentile and a soldier, he would not have been considered eligible for full entry into the holy community. It took two extraordinary occurrences to make this possible. The first was Kefa’s (Peter’s) vision. The second and most important was the spectacular arrival of the holy spirit on Cornelius and his household of which Kefa and his companions were essentially passive witnesses.

This account accommodates the conversion of military personnel—under some circumstances. Acts shares some details about Cornelius’ situation that should not go overlooked.

First, it refers to him “with all his house” (vs. 2). One’s house would typically be one’s family and household servants. We should not view his assignment, far-flung as it was,

¹Alcohol Abuse Costs DoD Dearly, American Forces Press Service, Staff Sgt. Kathleen T. Rhem, USA,, Washington, June 6, 2000

to be absent his family. The reason his family could be present is the other critical detail.

Cornelius was not deployed on a combat mission. He was a member of Rome's longstanding occupation force in Judea. During his tenure, the Romans were enforcing the peace as a police power, not bent on destruction. True, the Jewish population was subjugated, but not without considerable freedom.

So long as they can live with their families and follow the Torah, peace-keeping military personnel can submit to God as their sovereign and become disciples. However, choosing such assignments is not an option when joining the military. Neither are occupation or police forces always benevolent.

In the best case, such an assignment is tenuous and fleeting. A few decades after Cornelius served, the Roman forces were viciously crushing a Jewish revolt. Once hostilities escalated, there was hardly room in that theatre for Torah-observant, God-fearing centurions. Any Roman soldier entertaining conversion shortly before or during the revolt was considering treason.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also wait for a Savior, the Master, Yahoshua Meshiach (Messiah).

Philippians 3:20

Avraham obeyed to go forth to a place which he was going to receive for an inheritance; and he went out not understanding where he went. By faith he resided as a foreigner in a land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the joint-heirs of the same promise, for he looked forward to a city having the foundations of which the builder and maker is God.

These all died by way of faith, not having received the promises, but seeing them from afar, and being persuaded and having embraced and confessed that they are aliens and tenants on the earth.

For those saying such things make clear that they seek a fatherland. And truly if they remembered that from which they came out, they had time to return. But now they stretch forth to a better, that is, a heavenly land. Therefore, God is not ashamed of them, for him to be called their God; for he prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:9-10,13-16

Before closing, we should note that it is not our intention to suggest that every activity conducted by the military is abhorrent. Some of the greatest and most effective efforts in peace-time humanitarian aid are conducted by the military. When natural disaster strikes, its resources, organization and expertise are without equal. The staffs of military hospitals perform a critical and welcome service. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plays

a crucial role in flood protection, transportation, power generation and other activities pertaining to the development and maintenance of the modern infrastructure on which we all depend.

As disciples of Yahoshua, we are subjects of Meshiach, and our primary allegiance is with him and the Kingdom of Heaven. In peacetime, this may appear to society at large as a pitiable platitude, a fruitless abstraction. In times of war, such sentiments may be viewed as subversive and treasonous. This is particularly true as militant, religious fanatics launch terrorist attacks against civilians. To be passionately wed to one's religious ideals is increasingly equated with violence against others.

In the sixth and seventh centuries BCE, Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) was instructed by God to tell the leaders of Judah to submit to the domination of the Babylonian army. No nation wants to be told to voluntarily relinquish its sovereignty, and anyone delivering such a message in the shadow of impending invasion can expect certain imprisonment or death.

It was under the pretext of treason that the Romans executed Yahoshua.

Given that our allegiance does not rest first with our temporal hosts, it is important our devotion to peace and condemnation of violence be open, clear and explicit, that our ardent desire for the well-being of all humanity be readily apparent.

After letting mankind complete the experiment in autonomous rule, the Meshiach will return in power to establish his rule on earth. All challengers will be vanquished. It is crucial to understand that he will have no need of human assistance in this task.

And I saw heaven being opened. And, behold! A white horse, and he sitting on it having been called Faithful and True. And he judges and wars in righteousness. And his eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head many diadems, having a name that had been written, which no one knows except himself; and having been clothed in a garment which had been dipped in blood. And his name is called the Word of God.

And the armies in heaven followed him on white horses, being dressed in fine linen, white and pure. And out of his mouth goes forth a sharp sword, that with it he might strike the nations. And he will shepherd them with an iron rod. And he treads the winepress of the wine of the anger and of the wrath of El Shaddai. And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name having been written: King of Kings and Master of Masters.

And I saw one angel standing in the sun. And he cried with a great voice, saying to all the birds flying in mid-heaven, "Come and gather together to the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of chiliarchs, and the flesh of strong ones, and the flesh of horses, and of the ones sitting on them, and the flesh of all, both freemen and slaves, even of the small and great."

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies being

assembled to make war with the one sitting on the horse, and with his army. And the beast was seized, and with this one the false prophet doing signs before it, by which he led astray those having received the mark of the beast, and those worshiping its image. The two were thrown alive into the Lake of Fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword of the one sitting on the horse, the sword having gone forth from his mouth. And all the birds were filled from their flesh.

Revelation 19:11-21

The Yahoshua Foundation strongly encourages prayer for our temporal leaders and serving as volunteers in our local communities and our countries in peaceful, humanitarian efforts—in peacetime and in war.

Rebuke the wild beasts of the reeds, the herd of bulls, with the calves of the peoples, trampling down with pieces of silver. He scatters the people who delight in war.

Tehil (Psalm) 68:30

If anyone gathers captivity, into captivity he goes. If anyone will kill by a sword, by a sword he must be killed.

Revelation 13:10

Vengeance and retribution belong to me; in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the things prepared are hurrying for them. For YHVH will bring his people justice, and he shall have compassion on his servants, for he sees that their power is gone, and only the imprisoned and abandoned remain.

D'varim (Deuteronomy) 32:35-36

I, I am YHVH; and there is no savior besides me.

Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 43:1

YHVH is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? YHVH is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Tehil (Psalm) 27:1

And it shall be in the end of days, the mountain of the house of YHVH shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come and let us go up to the mount of

YHVH, to the house of the God of Ya'akov. And he will teach from his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Tzion the Torah will go forth, and the word of YHVH from Jerusalem.

And he shall judge among the nations and shall rebuke many people. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war anymore.

Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 2:2-4

