
THE CASE FOR SPIRITUAL CONTINUITY

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Modern Americans have a difficult time understanding the mindset of an Islamic *mujahaddin* (holy warrior) like Osama bin Laden. His ideas and rhetoric seem so foreign from those of a modern Western democracy that prides itself on its cultural tolerance. However, Christians who know their Bible should understand exactly what motivates his beliefs and actions. Two Old Testament ideas are analogous to the ideology that fuels bin Laden's passionate ideology: sacred space and *herem* warfare.

Bin Laden's anger toward the West is triggered at least in part by the presence of Westerners in Saudi Arabia. To most Muslims the sacred precincts are limited to areas connected to the holy places at Mecca and Medina. Bin Laden has expanded this idea of sacred space to include the entirety of the peninsula and thus wants all infidels expelled from Saudi Arabia. The analogy with the Old Testament may be found in the sacred precincts surrounding the tabernacle/temple in the Old Testament.¹ The sanctuary was surrounded by circles of holiness that permitted only certain types of people to be admitted into God's presence. This sentiment continued as long as the Second Temple remained in existence; note how riots were set off when some suspected Paul had brought a Gentile into the court of the temple (Acts 21:27-29).

¹See T. Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001), 1-74.

The second Old Testament idea reflected in bin Laden's ideology is *herem* warfare. *Herem* may be compared to Islamic *jihād*, both of which have been roughly understood as "holy war." America was shocked when innocent civilians were killed in the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001. However, if we are honest readers of the Old Testament, is this so different from the slaughter of Canaanite men, women, and children prisoners of war that we read about in the book of Joshua?

The comparison raises a number of important issues with which we will deal in this essay. (1) How does *herem* function within the Old Testament? (2) How does the God who ordered *herem* relate to the God of the New Testament who sent his Son, Jesus Christ, not to kill people but rather to die for them? (3) In the light of our answers to the first two questions, how does this relate to the question that is perhaps the most important of all to the Christian: How are we to read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament?

These questions are not simply theoretical; they are of the utmost importance for the practice of the church today. The church often finds itself at odds in terms of values and practice with the broader society.² This tension has sometimes been described as a culture war.³ Indeed, some of evangelical Christianity's leading lights have used martial terminology to describe how the church should engage the world.⁴ Some on the radical fringe of Christianity have even taken the next step and lifted up physical arms in order to defend the faith against encroachment.⁵ As just one example, we can cite the 1993 shooting of an abortion doctor and his escort by Paul Hill, a defrocked Presbyterian minister. By his own testimony Mr. Hill believed he was doing the Lord's will in this shooting; in this he was supported by a small but vocal number of Christians.⁶ It is only too easy to dismiss these people as Christianity's lunatic fringe, but

²I deal with this issue more broadly in *Daniel* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

³J. D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

⁴F. A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1981).

⁵J. Risen and J. L. Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

⁶The recent HBO documentary "Soldiers in the Army of God" (which premiered on April 1, 2001) interviews a number of Hill's supporters.

can they legitimately appeal to the *herem* warfare of the Old Testament to justify their beliefs and practices?

On the other side, many Christians have disowned the Old Testament in order to avoid embracing the bloody acts of God that may be found in its pages. They note the tremendous difference between the God of Joshua on the one hand, and Jesus Christ on the other, who instructed us to love our enemies and to turn the other cheek. However, disregard for the Old Testament is only too convenient, and those who do so ignore the fact that the New Testament builds on the revelation of the Old Testament, both implicitly and explicitly affirming its message. Furthermore, as we will observe below, the New Testament in the final analysis is equally bloody as the Old Testament. It will not do simply to divorce the Old Testament from the canon and shape the God that we worship in the image of what we think is acceptable.

WHAT IS OLD TESTAMENT *HEREM* WARFARE?

The term *herem* is notoriously hard to translate.⁸ It may be translated "banned" or "devoted things." It refers to plundered items and people captured during the course of holy war. *Herem* involves consecration, the giving over of the captives of war to God.⁹ Consecration is a word that suggests worship, and once we understand *herem* warfare in its whole context, we can see just how appropriate that understanding is. Thus, we will begin our exploration with a description of *herem* warfare in terms of three phases: what happens before, during, and after warfare.

⁷A much more extensive description of *herem* warfare may be found in Daniel G. Reid and Tremper Longman III, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). Important bibliography includes F. Schwally, *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Leipzig: Dietrich, 1901); H. Fredriksson, *Jahwe als Kreiger: Studien zum alttestamentlichen Gottesbild* (Lund: Gleerup, 1945); Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, ed. and trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Rudolph Smend, *Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); P. D. Miller Jr. *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (HSM 5; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973). Three significant works by Mennonite scholars include John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1977); Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1980); and Vernard Eller, *War and Peace from Genesis to Revelation* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1981).

⁸See Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical Herem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (BJS 211; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).

⁹Note the discussion of the word by J. A. Naude, "הָרֵם," *NIDOTTE*, 2:275-76.

The following synthesis is the result of studying the two holy-war law passages of Deuteronomy (chs. 7 and 20) as well as the many records of battles throughout the Old Testament.

Overarching Principle: God Is Present with the Army in Battle

As we will see, at the heart of *herem* warfare is the presence of God with the army. Of course, where God is present, he must be worshiped, and thus we will not be surprised to see that *herem* is shaped largely by that fact. Indeed, it is not too strong to say that *herem* warfare is worship. The battlefield is sacred space. To be involved in warfare is a holy activity analogous to going to the temple.

Before Warfare

Seeking the will of God. God did not tell Israel that its enemies were his enemies. Quite the opposite is true, actually. Israel was to be an enemy to God's enemies. On a practical level, this meant that Israel had to know whether it was God's will that they go to war against a particular people. As we read the biblical battle accounts, we see that he made his will known to his people in one of two ways.

(1) The first way is illustrated by the battle of Jericho. As Joshua surveyed the future battlefield, he was confronted by a mysterious figure with "a drawn sword in his hand" (Josh. 5:13). This figure, who described himself as the "commander of the army of the LORD," is clearly Yahweh himself. After all, before what other person would Joshua fall "facedown to the ground in reverence" (Josh. 5:14)? It is at this time that God delivered the battle strategy to Joshua.

(2) The second way of discerning God's will was to actively seek it in the light of a tense circumstance. In 1 Samuel 23:1-6, David learned that the Philistines threatened the Judahite town of Keilah. Instead of rashly rushing to that city's defense, he rather "inquired of the LORD" (23:2). Though this story is set in the period when David was not yet king, he did have a priest in attendance (23:6), who would have used oracular means to find out what God wanted in this situation.

The importance of discovering God's will in the face of a potential enemy is underlined by the story in Joshua 9. Here a group of Gibeonites deceived Joshua into thinking they had come from a far country, though in reality they were from just down the road. As we will explain later, Deuteronomy 20 makes a distinction between how nations in the Promised Land were to be treated compared to those outside. Joshua made a rash decision that would come back to haunt Israel because "they did not inquire of the LORD" (Josh. 9:14).

Spiritual preparedness. When Israelites entered the sanctuary, they had to be spiritually prepared. In other words, they had to observe the purity laws of the Pentateuch. The same was true of the battlefield. Two stories illustrate the necessity of spiritual preparedness before engaging in *herem* warfare.

When the Israelites emerged from their forty years of desert wandering, the second generation, born during the journey, had not, for unstated reasons, practiced circumcision. Thus, before engaging in *herem* warfare in Canaan, the Israelite males were mass circumcised and, afterward, celebrated Passover (Josh. 5:2-12). This ceremony took place on the Jericho side of the Jordan within easy range of their enemies. Needless to say, it was dangerous to perform this operation on Israel's fighting men at this time. One need only remember what happened during Jacob's lifetime in the city of Shechem (Gen. 34). The implicit assumption of the passage in Joshua is that whatever the dangers from the nearby human enemies, it was far more horrific to imagine going into battle uncircumcised.

The other passage that illustrates our point comes from the time of David (2 Sam. 11). The passage begins with a not-so-subtle critique of David's staying home in Jerusalem in the spring "when kings go off to war" (2 Sam. 11:1). Soon, David got himself in trouble as a result of his apparent lack of activity. After a nap, he was strolling on the roof of his palace when he looked down and saw the naked Bathsheba taking a bath. Though fully aware that she was the wife of another man, he took her into his bed, and she became pregnant. Wishing to cover up his sin, David called her husband, Uriah the Hittite, back from the front lines on a pretense with the hope that he would sleep with her and believe the future birth was his child. David's scheme was frustrated by the fact that Uriah refused to sleep with his wife

but chose to bed down that night "at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants" (11:9).

What is of interest to us in our pursuit of an understanding of *herem* warfare is the response he gave the next day to David's bafflement at his actions: "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" (11:11). In spite of David's continued efforts, Uriah resolutely refused to sleep with his wife.

The reason for this refusal is much deeper than typical warrior's bravado. "How can I enjoy myself when my comrades are miserable on the field?" If there was some of this in his refusal, that was not the underlying reason. Uriah's motivation may be found in Leviticus 15:11-18, which states that an emission of semen rendered a man unclean. If Uriah had had intercourse, he would have been temporarily unclean and thus not "battle ready." The striking contrast in 2 Samuel 11 pits David, the king after God's own heart, who here committed adultery and conspired to murder, against Uriah, a non-Israelite (Hittite) mercenary, who observed the fine points of the cultic code.

Sacrifice. The accounts of the ancient wars of Israel are selective. Not every action is recorded for every battle. We read about sacrifices before warfare on that occasion when it proved to be controversial. The following story, then, illustrates the practice of offering sacrifices before *herem* warfare, but elsewhere it was not reported because it happened without special incident.

In this case, Saul was the war leader, and his battle was against Israel's perennial enemy of the time, the Philistines (1 Sam. 13). In Saul's estimation, time was slipping away. The present was the optimal moment for the battle, and the issue was compounded by the desertion of troops who were waiting for the battle to commence. However, Saul well knew that sacrifices had to be offered before the conflict could begin, and the unstated assumption of the chapter is that only a priest like Samuel could legitimately offer sacrifices. But where was Samuel? He was supposed to be there already, but he was nowhere to be found. As a result, Saul finally gave in to his concerns and offered the sacrifices himself. When Samuel finally did arrive, he reviled Saul for his presumptuous act that demon-

strated his lack of confidence in God the warrior, announcing that Saul's kingdom would "not endure" (13:14).

These prebattle sacrifices were motivated by the fact that the army would fight in the presence of God. Our next topic will make this fact more concrete.

The presence of the ark. Typical of early battle narratives is the role of the ark in the battle of Jericho (Josh. 6). God gave Joshua the instructions for how to wage the battle (5:2-5); central to the plan was the march around the city. For six days, the Israelites were to march around the city, and on the climactic seventh day they were to march around the city seven times. At the head of the army was the ark.

The ark was the mobile symbol of God's spiritual presence. The tabernacle, of course, was associated with God's presence, and its importance was due in large measure to the fact that it was the repository for the stationary ark. The most usual reason for the ark to depart the sanctuary was to accompany the army into battle and to serve as a sign of God's presence on the battlefield.

Described in Exodus 25:10-22, the ark was constructed from a rather simple design. It was a relatively small box, three and three-quarters feet long, two and a quarter feet wide, and two and a quarter feet high. It also had rings attached to the sides, through which poles were slid for carrying it. The importance of the ark in the battles of Israel may already be seen during the desert wanderings soon after its construction. These wanderings were, in essence, a long march into battle. We recognize this when we remember the language Moses used at the onset of a day's march. He would announce:

Rise up, O LORD!

May your enemies be scattered;
may your foes flee before you. (Num. 10:35)

The presence of the ark represented God's participation in the battle. The only proper response when one is with God is worship. The Israelite soldier had to be spiritually prepared and offer sacrifices to God before the battle could begin.

May the praise of God be in their mouths
and a double-edged sword in their hands,
to inflict vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples. (Ps. 149:6-7)

During the Battle

The march. With the presence of the ark we can see how the march into battle is a religious procession. Above we commented on how the ark led the Israelites through the desert and began the daily journey with a call for the divine warrior to rise up and scatter the enemies. A close reading of Numbers 2 indicates that when Israel camped during the march, the arrangement of the tribes resembled an ancient Near Eastern war camp. God, the warring king, had his tent in the middle, surrounded by his most devoted warriors, the Levites.¹⁰ The rest of the tribes (army) were situated on all sides of the tent but beyond the Levites.

The religious nature of the march may also be observed in the role that the priests played. The priests, of course, carried the ark and thus were in the vanguard of the seven-day march around the city of Jericho. Later in Israelite history, in the context of Jehoshaphat's battles against the Moabites and Ammonites, we read a moving description of the final preparations and the march, which involved the Levites:

Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with very loud voice.

Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

"Give thanks to the LORD,
for his love endures forever."

As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes....
(2 Chron. 20:18-22)

¹⁰For the priests as God's bodyguards, see Tremper Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001), 139-50.

Prayer, religious song, and celebration all accompanied the waging of war in ancient Israel. Why? Because *herem* warfare was worship.

Warfare strategy. Perhaps the most interesting part of *herem* warfare has to do with warfare strategy. There is no simple formula to describe the war, and each battle recorded in the Old Testament has its unique characteristics. However, one common denominator runs through each successful battle: The victory is clearly the consequence of God's involvement in the battle. Human participation matters but is never determinative of the outcome. The people of God must fight, but great care is taken not to enter a battle with a superior force or with sophisticated weapons. Examples will help make this point.

During the period of the judges, God commissioned Gideon to rid the land of the Midianites, who had come to oppress at least a part of the land of Israel (Judg. 6-8). As Gideon prepared to meet the Midianites in battle from their camp near the spring of Harod, the Lord confronted him with a problem. He had too many warriors! Gideon then issued a command to relieve from duty those who were afraid. Twenty-two thousand went home, but still ten thousand remained. God then instructed Gideon to take those who remained down to the water to drink. Those who lapped with their hands to their mouths, three hundred men, were told to stay and fight the Midianites. Thus, the army was whittled down from thirty-two thousand to three hundred. Why go to such efforts not to enter a battle with too many soldiers? God himself provided the motivation: "in order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her" (7:2).

The same may be seen in what may be called an individual *herem* war in the conflict between David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17). The context of the battle is Israel's conflict with the Philistines during the reign of King Saul. At this time, David was young, not even in the army, and was present at the battlefield only to bring provisions to his older brothers. The emphasis in the narrative is on David's youth and inexperience. While he was visiting the camp, the Philistines issued a challenge to Israel. They had a champion of unusual abilities and dimensions as well as great war experience in Goliath. Goliath kept challenging Israel to provide a champion of its own, but no one in the army had the courage to volunteer.

Finally, David passionately stepped forward to take on the arrogant infidel who defied "the armies of the living God" (1 Sam. 17:26). He entered the battle with no armor and only a simple slingshot. The contrast could not be more dramatic: a vulnerable and inexperienced youth versus a well-armed, experienced mercenary. David, however, was the easy victor in this well-known confrontation, and in his challenge to Goliath he expressed the heart of *herem* warfare:

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands." (1 Sam. 17:45-47)

David fully understood that his victory was really God's victory. Nonetheless, we should take careful note of the fact that David had to act. He had to face Goliath and throw the stone that stunned him. He then had to take the sword and cut off the giant's head. Certainly God did not need him to do this since he was perfectly capable of destroying Goliath without David's involvement at all.

After the Battle

The march back. Of course, once the battle was completed, the army with the ark made the journey back to the sanctuary. This is likely the situation that is behind the liturgy in Psalm 24. After an assertion of God's sovereignty over his creation (24:1-2), verses 3-6 describe the type of person who may enter the sacred precincts. This may imply that someone or some group is seeking access to the sanctuary, and from verses 7-10 we suggest that it is the army that is in mind as they return to Jerusalem to place the ark back in the Most Holy Place.

Thus, we understand the conversation that takes place in 24:7-10 to be that between a Levitical gatekeeper and the priests who carry the ark at the head of the army. The first to speak are the latter, who demand access through the city gates:

Lift up your heads, O you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in. (Ps. 24:7)

The only possible way of understanding how God can be envisioned entering the gate of the city would be as represented by the ark. In any case, this request is followed by a response from the gatekeeper:

Who is this King of glory? (Ps. 24:8a)

Now, of course, the priests knew full well who the King of glory was. But the question allowed for the descriptive praise of God the warrior. Again, the priests leading the army speak:

The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in. (Ps. 24:8b-9)

This allows for an emphatic restatement of the question and answer:

Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory. (Ps. 24:10)

The celebration. Music played a key role in connection with *herem* warfare. We have seen how Jehoshaphat's army marched into battle singing hymns and how Psalm 24 was sung upon the return to the sacred precincts. Indeed, elsewhere I have shown how many psalms find their original setting before (Ps. 7), during (Ps. 91), and after (Ps. 24; 98) the waging of *herem* warfare.¹¹

In terms of the last category, it is clearly the norm that hymns were sung in celebration of victory. After all, God had won the battle, so he deserved the praise. Many of the great

¹¹Tremper Longman III, "Psalm 98: A Divine Warrior Victory Song," *JETS* 27 (1984): 125-31.

early poems of Israel were victory hymns for specific battles. Perhaps most remarkable is the Song of the Sea, sung on the occasion of the defeat of Egypt at the Re(e)d Sea. This is likely the earliest explicit mention of God as warrior:

I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.
Pharaoh's chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea. (Ex. 15:1-4b)

Another memorable occasion when music broke out as a result of victorious holy war was after Jephthah's victory against the Ammonites. In this case, however, the story comes to a sad end. It was Jephthah's daughter who first came out of the house "dancing to the sound of tambourines" (Judg. 11:34); in fulfillment of a vow, her father had to reluctantly dedicate her as a "whole-burnt sacrifice" (Heb. *olah*) to the Lord.

The *herem*. We have been using *herem* as a term to describe the waging of war in Israel, in essence as a synonym for holy war or Yahweh war. In actuality, *herem* refers to the climactic aspect of divine warfare: the offering of the conquered people and their possessions to the Lord.

(1) We must point out once again that *herem* indicates that warfare is worship in the Old Testament. God won the victory, so he was due the spoils. The biblical account is not strictly consistent on this account,¹² but what this typically meant for the plunder is that it was turned over to the priestly establishment for their use or distribution. In terms of the prisoners of war and the captured citizens of an enemy town, it meant only one thing: death. The principle behind the latter practice appears to be that because they were unclean, these ungodly people brought into the presence of God had to be destroyed.

¹²1 Samuel 30:16-26 appears to be an exception to the following rule.

(2) Deuteronomy 20:10-18 makes a clear distinction between battles fought outside the Promised Land and those waged "in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance." The full text describing the fate of the latter group is instructive. After saying that the cities outside of the Promised Land could be given the opportunity to surrender and thus be subject to servitude, God commanded that Israel

not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God. (Deut. 20:16-18)

The two opening battle accounts of the Conquest illustrate the importance of keeping *herem*. After the battle of Jericho and after separating Rahab from the group, "they devoted [*herem*] the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys" (Josh. 6:21). Thus ended the most powerful city within Palestine at the time.

The next battle was against puny Ai, whose very name means "ruin." Even so, as a force of Israelites moved against Ai, they were repulsed. Joshua was shaken to the core by this turn of events. Inquiring of the Lord, he discovered that someone had not observed *herem* after Jericho. Through divine guidance, they discovered that Achan had stolen some of the plunder and did not turn it over to the Lord. Once the sin was dealt with, the Israelites returned to Ai, and this time the conflict came to a successful conclusion.

Jericho and Ai thus serve as a didactic statement and warning about the importance of keeping *herem*. Obedience brings victory against the toughest opponents, while disobedience means defeat even against the weakest.

In conclusion, we must point out that the Bible does not understand the destruction of the men, women, and children of these cities as a slaughter of innocents. Not even the children are considered innocent. They are all part of an inherently

wicked culture that, if allowed to live, would morally and theologically pollute the people of Israel. The passage in Joshua 6 quoted above was prefaced by the motivation to avoid their own destruction. Indeed, from the perspective of the Bible, God had practiced great patience with the people who lived in Palestine. The reason why the descendents of Abraham had to wait so long before entering the Promised Land was because "the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Gen. 15:16).

HOW DOES THE GOD WHO ORDERED HEREM RELATE TO THE GOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Many people would pit the above picture of a violent God who destroys his enemies against the New Testament understanding of God as a God of love who sends his Son to the cross to die for evil people. To be sure, Jesus even tells his disciples (and through them the church) to "put your sword back in its place" (Matt. 26:52). However, quoting from the book of Revelation immediately belies such a simplistic view of the Bible. No more fearful picture of a vengeful, violent God may be found than that described in Revelation 20:11-15:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

How does the Old Testament relate to the New Testament? We find it helpful to answer this question by describing what might be called five phases of holy war in the Bible.

Phase 1: God Fights the Flesh-and-Blood Enemies of Israel

We do not have to dwell long on this phase, because this is the type of *herem* warfare that we have been describing in the earlier part of this chapter. The list of battles is long, and we have already cited parts of a number of them, but here we would include Jericho, the wars against the southern coalition of Canaanite kings, and the wars against the northern coalition. God fought on behalf of many of the judges as well as faithful kings such as David and Jehoshaphat. Indeed, at times God even used foreign nations to fight against Israel's enemies in a way that helped his people. In the latter instance, we think of the prophet Nahum, who announced the appearance of the divine warrior who would fight (in this case through the Babylonians) against Israel's long-time oppressor, Assyria.¹³

Phase 2: God Fights Israel

It would be wrong to say that "God was on Israel's side" pure and simple. Israel's election was not a *carte blanche* to wage war against anyone at any time. It should be clear by now that God used Israel as an instrument of his judgment against evil, oppressive nations. This raises the question of what would happen when the nation of Israel itself turned against God and committed evil acts.¹⁴

The answer to this question may be found in the form of the covenant itself, and here we see the connection between covenant theology and *herem* warfare. As has been well established, the covenant is a legal-political metaphor of God's relationship with his people.¹⁵ The great king Yahweh makes a treaty with his vassal people, Israel. In this arrangement, Yahweh promises to be their God and protect them, and Israel promises to be his people and obey the law he has given them. In the covenant treaty, the law is backed up by sanctions: Blessings

¹³See Tremper Longman III, "Nahum," in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. T. E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 2:765-829.

¹⁴W. L. Moran, "The End of the Unholy War and the Anti-Exodus," *Bib* 44 (1963): 333-42.

¹⁵Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); D. J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Recent Opinions*, 2d ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978).

flow from obedience and curses for disobedience. The book of Deuteronomy, a covenant renewal of the relationship established at Sinai, is particularly expansive with its blessings and curses. Many of them have to do with military success and failure. Illustrative is the following pair, the first contingent on obedience and the second the result of disobedience:

The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. (Deut. 28:7)

The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. (Deut. 28:25)

The history of Israel has many examples of the outworking of these covenant curses. We have already observed one in the discussion of postbattle *herem*, namely, Ai. A second example surrounds the defeat of the Israelites at the hands of the Philistines at the end of the reign of Eli (1 Sam. 4–6). The text describes Eli as good-hearted but incompetent. He was particularly incompetent as a father, and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were evil men, who were also in charge of Israel's army.

In an initial encounter with the Philistines, the Israelites were soundly defeated, losing about four thousand men. Hophni and Phinehas then realized that their mistake was in forgetting to bring the ark onto the battlefield. From their actions as well as the consequences, it appears that this realization came about not because of any deeply held faith in God but rather from the misconception that the ark was like a magical box by which God's presence and power could be manipulated.

The two brothers then sent for the ark, which arrived in the war camp before the second confrontation with the Philistines. God's reputation as a warrior apparently preceded this act, because the Philistines were visibly shaken by the news that the ark was now in the possession of the Israelite army. Nonetheless, they gathered their courage and engaged the Israelites. The Israelites were soundly defeated, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and perhaps most terrible of all, the ark was captured and taken by the Philistines.

That God was able but unwilling to save the Israelites on that day becomes clear in the aftermath of the battle. The Philistines followed typical ancient Near Eastern custom and moved the captured ark into the temple of their chief god, Dagon. This act demonstrated their acknowledgment that Yahweh was a god, but one who was inferior to their god. The next day, however, events belied this belief when they discovered the statue of Dagon flat on its face before the ark, as if in worship. After they hoisted the statue to an upright position, the same thing happened the next day. Finally, they got the message. The Israelites were defeated not because of God's inability but because he had determined to defeat the Israelites as judgment for their sin.

Our next example is a climactic moment in the history of Israel, namely, the Babylonian defeat of Jerusalem followed by the Exile. Though only a small portion of the Old Testament actually narrates the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile, close analysis reveals that a number of books offer a theological rationale for it. Many scholars, for instance, are convinced that the final redaction of Samuel–Kings, if not also Joshua and Judges, took place during the Exile and provided a rationale for these horrific events. These books helped answer the question why the people of God were defeated and sent into exile. It was not because Babylon was a stronger nation but because God used this pagan nation, unwitting to be sure, as an instrument of his judgment.

The first few verses of Daniel are a case in point (Dan. 1:1–3). The events of these verses purport to have taken place in 605 B.C. and thus would be the first time that Nebuchadnezzar exerted pressure against Judah. He was successful in reducing them to a form of vassal status, indicated by taking hostage sacred objects from the temple and a token of the youth of the noble class. However, these verses give a deeper meaning to the events than would have been recognizable on the surface. It is not that Nebuchadnezzar was so powerful but rather because God gave Jehoiakim into his hand.

The one book that reflects on the destruction of Jerusalem from a theological and emotional perspective is the book of Lamentations. This book is filled with talk of the divine warrior, but in this case the warrior was not protecting his people—he appeared as their enemy:

The Lord is like an enemy;
 he has swallowed up Israel.
 He has swallowed up all her palaces
 and destroyed her strongholds.
 He has multiplied mourning and lamentation
 for the Daughter of Judah. (Lam. 2:5)

Thus, from these accounts it is clear that God was not for Israel without question but would come as a warrior against his people when they disobeyed. The Exile was a dramatic expression of this second phase. However, it was not definitive. Indeed, it is not even the last statement of *herem* warfare in the Old Testament.

Phase 3: God Will Come in the Future As Warrior

God did not allow his people to come to an end in the Exile. Though probably connected to the exile of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C., the following oracle of Hosea expresses God's unwillingness to completely give up on his people:

How can I give you up, Ephraim?
 How can I hand you over, Israel?
 How can I treat you like Admah?
 How can I make you like Zeboiim?
 My heart is changed within me;
 all my compassion is aroused.
 I will not carry out my fierce anger,
 nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim.
 For I am God, and not man—
 the Holy One among you.
 I will not come in wrath. (Hos. 11:8-9)

In the light of this we may not be surprised to discover that one of the dominant themes of the postexilic prophets was the future appearance of the divine warrior, who would free his people from their present oppressors.

Daniel 7 is a good example. This chapter may be divided into two parts: Daniel's vision (7:1-14) and the angelic interpretation of that vision (7:15-28). In this retelling of the vision, we will combine the two. The vision itself may be divided into two parts by virtue of the setting. The first part is set on the earth,

specifically at the coastline of a turbulent sea. By the time of Daniel, the sea was a well-established symbol for those forces ranged against God and his created order. This symbolic value for the sea goes back to ancient Near Eastern myths, such as the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* and the Ugaritic Baal myth.¹⁶ In other words, the very setting of the vision elicits horror.

Out of this chaotic sea come four beasts. The first is a hybrid animal: part eagle, part lion, part human. The very fact that this is an animal of mixed essence would also have made the Israelite reader uneasy; it was an offense to creation order. The following beasts are of similar threatening appearance. The fourth is beyond description, with only its metallic teeth and destroying claws being described. From this fourth beast come ten horns, and Daniel's description ultimately focuses on one boastful horn. This part of the vision describes those evil human kingdoms that oppress God's people.

In verses 9-14, the scene shifts. We are now in the divine throne room, and God is the Ancient of Days, who sits to render judgment on these beasts. Into his presence comes a humanlike figure riding a cloud. Like the sea, cloud-riding is also a well-established symbol, in this case for the warrior God. We can only speculate how Daniel's original audience understood how God could appear before God (see below for the use of this passage in the New Testament). In any case, this figure, along with the saints of the Most High, destroys the beasts' grip on God's people.

This is the note on which the Old Testament closes. It is a hopeful message: One day God will come again and free them from their oppression.

Phase 4: Jesus Christ Fights the Spiritual Powers and Authorities

The first voice we hear in the New Testament is that of John the Baptist, sounding remarkably like the Old Testament prophets of phase 3:

¹⁶M. K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975); C. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt. 3:7-10; see also vv. 11-12)

John expects that the one coming after him will fill the role of the violent warrior who will rid the land of its oppressors. Imagine his shock later when the one he does recognize through baptism preaches the good news, heals the sick, and exorcises demons. As a matter of fact, we have a record of his reaction in Matthew 11:1-19. John is now in prison and hears reports about Jesus' ministry. His doubts lead him to send two of his disciples to Jesus to ask the skeptical question: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (11:2).

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." (Matt. 11:4-6)

Through his actions, Jesus informs John that he has in fact chosen the right person. However, Jesus is also subtly changing—indeed, enriching—John's understanding of his mission. In a nutshell, Jesus is the divine warrior, but he has intensified and heightened the battle. No longer is the battle a physical battle against flesh-and-blood enemies, but rather it is directed toward the spiritual powers and authorities. Furthermore, this battle is fought with nonphysical weapons.

The exorcisms of the New Testament are a case in point. Here we see the violent nature of the conflict. Matthew 8:28-34 (see also Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39) narrates the story of Jesus' ordering the demons in two demon-possessed men to enter into pigs, which then throw themselves into a lake and are destroyed.

The climax of phase 4 is violent but in an ironic way. Paul looks back on the crucifixion and pronounces it a military victory over the demonic realm:

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:13-15)

Jesus' ascension into heaven is also described in military language, indeed by the citation of a holy-war hymn from the Old Testament, Psalm 68:

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men." (Eph. 4:8)

Jesus defeated the powers and authorities, not by killing but by dying!

Indeed, the transition from the old way of physical warfare to the new era of spiritual warfare was dramatically illustrated by the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. As Jesus was being arrested, Peter, always impetuous, grabbed a sword and chopped off the ear of the high priest's servant (Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:1-11). Jesus then declared:

Put your sword back in its place ... for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 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? (Matt. 26:52-54)

When Jesus told Peter to put away the sword, he was telling the church that would follow that physical violence could not be used to further his cause.¹⁷ The object of Christ's warfare is spiritual, not physical, and the weapons used are spiritual, not physical (see comments below on Eph. 6).

¹⁷In my opinion, this does not settle the debate between just-war advocates and pacifists. It only declares that wars in the name of Christianity are not legitimate.

Phase 5: The Final Battle

Does this mean that John the Baptist was wrong? As it turns out, he was not, but like a typical prophet, he did not have a clear sense of how his prophecy would work out (1 Peter 1:10–12).¹⁸ According to the fuller revelation of the New Testament, Jesus' first coming was not the end of the story. He will come again, as warrior. Jesus himself cites Daniel 7:13 (Mark 13:26; Rev. 1:7) and describes his future return riding on the clouds. In our examination of Daniel 7 above, we indicated that the cloud is the divine war-chariot. When Jesus returns again, he will complete the victory assured by his death on the cross. Of the many passages in the apocalyptic portions of the New Testament that could be chosen as an example, Revelation 19:11–21 is among the most graphic:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 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. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

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."

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. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed

¹⁸On my understanding of the workings of prophecy, see my *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 163–79.

the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 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.

We quote this passage at length to communicate the violence associated with the Second Coming. In essence, we are reading a highly symbolic description of the final judgment. This terrifying conclusion to history is, in actuality, good news to the oppressed people of God to whom the book of Revelation is addressed.

The passage is clear in terms of showing the violent nature of the return of Jesus, the warrior. However, we would like to make two additional points. (1) This description of Jesus is built in large out of passages from Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah, passages that describe Yahweh as the divine warrior. (2) The description of Jesus here contrasts with the enemy, the unholy warrior known as the beast in Revelation 13:1–10.

FROM THE CANAANITES TO SATAN HIMSELF: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN HEREM WARFARE

With a background on Old Testament *herem* warfare and a survey of its practice from the Old Testament into the New, we are well prepared to explore the question of the relationship between the Testaments. First, however, we must make some *general* comments about the relationship between the Testaments.

It appears obvious that there is continuity between Old and New Testaments. Jesus twice gives what is essentially a lesson in hermeneutics when, after his resurrection, he appears to two different groups of disciples. (1) He speaks to two disciples who have yet to recognize their resurrected Lord:

"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

"All the Scriptures," "Moses and all the Prophets"—by which is meant the entire Old Testament—anticipate the coming suffering and glorification of Christ.

(2) This same theme is underlined when Jesus soon speaks to a broader group of disciples and declares:

This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. (Luke 24:44)

No wonder so much of the New Testament looks back and cites the Old Testament. Augustine was surely correct when he famously said: "The New is in the Old Testament concealed; the Old is in the New revealed."

As we go back to the Old Testament, we must admit that the way Jesus fulfills the Old Testament is not always obvious. Of course, there is enough that was clear that people like John the Baptist had messianic expectations, but as we have already seen in reference to John, he was surprised by the form that the fulfillment took.

I have found helpful an analogy with a detective novel. A detective novel is filled with hints and clues pointing to the one who committed the crime. In a well-written example of this genre, however, readers will not be sure who the culprit is until it is revealed by the expert sleuth at the end. However, if one were to go back to read the beginning again, it would be with a fuller understanding. All the clues and hints would make more sense in the light of the knowledge of the end. One could never read the beginning of the story quite the same, and this holds true for the Christian reader of the Old Testament, who now knows the surprising end of the story.

The surprise element of the fulfillment also imparts a sense of discontinuity as well as continuity. In some cases, the fulfillment radically changes the practice of God's people. When Jesus offered himself as a once-and-for-all sacrifice on the cross, it does not mean that sacrifice is no longer a crucial theological category, but it does mean that Christians no longer offer animal sacrifices.

I argue that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments on the issue of *herem* warfare. The God of the Old Testament is not a different God from the God we encounter in the New Testament. Nor did God

change his mind. The war against the Canaanites was simply an earlier phase of the battle that comes to its climax on the cross and its completion at the final judgment. The object of warfare moves from the Canaanites, who are the object of God's wrath for their sin, to the spiritual powers and principalities, and then finally to the utter destruction of all evil, human and spiritual.

Indeed, it must be said that those who have moral difficulties with the genocide in the conquest of Canaan should have even more serious difficulties with the final judgment. In the latter, all those who do not follow Christ—men, women, and children—will be thrown into the lake of fire. The alternatives to embracing this picture are either rejecting the biblical God or playing the Marcionite game of choosing those Scriptures that suit us, or perhaps treating the final judgment as a metaphor for total annihilation. However, even the latter is not a pleasant thought and still raises issues about how a loving God can exercise any kind of penalty toward the wicked.

A number of years ago Meredith Kline, a brilliant Old Testament theologian whose writings have unfortunately been neglected, introduced the concept of intrusion ethics into the discussion of *herem* warfare.¹⁹ Kline reminds us that the punishment for sin is death. The lesson that rebellion—and all sin is rebellion—leads to death is made clear in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:17). It is only because of God's extraordinary grace that Adam and Eve were not killed on the spot when they ate the fruit of the tree. Indeed, it is because of that grace that *any of us* breathe. The period of God's extraordinary grace, often called common grace, is a special circumstance. In this light, we should not be amazed that God ordered the death of the Canaanites, but rather we should stand in amazement *that he lets anyone live*. The Conquest, according to Kline, involves the intrusion of the ethics of the end times, the consummation, into the period of common grace. In a sense, the destruction of the Canaanites is a preview of the final judgment.

Of course, we are left with disturbing questions. Why the Canaanites? Why not some other people? Are the Canaanites really extraordinarily evil? While perhaps the case can be made from their own texts that the Canaanites were evil, I do not think it can be shown that they were more evil than the Assyrians or

¹⁹The discussion may be found in his book, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

the Israelites themselves. Here, like Job, we are left unanswered as to why suffering comes to one and not another.

Even so, the Bible makes it clear that we are still involved in *herem* warfare; but rather than being directed toward physical enemies, it is a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6:10–18 is a programmatic statement in this regard:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Here we see that the church is commanded to join in the struggle against the spiritual enemies of God. We also can see that the weapons employed in such a battle are spiritual, not physical (i.e., truth, righteousness, and so on).²⁰

Though this is a programmatic statement, attention to this theme reveals that there are many passages that use military language to describe the Christian's spiritual battle in the world. Interestingly, war language is associated with the spiritual struggle that goes on within our own hearts and minds:²¹

²⁰See the development of this idea in Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991).

²¹Interestingly, some Muslim clerics also speak of a transition from a physical *jihad* to a spiritual one, in which the battle goes on in the heart and mind of the individual believer. This seems to be based on a wide use of the term *jihad* in the Qur'an and also in the Hadith.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3–5)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can see discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments in regard to the topic of *herem* warfare. While in the Old Testament the Israelites were often used by God as an instrument of his judgment, it is now a betrayal of the gospel to take up arms to defend or promote the interests of Christ.

However, this discontinuity is not absolute. There is also continuity, especially as we look to the New Testament's picture of the final judgment. In addition, though it is not a main theme, the Old Testament prophets sometimes draw the curtains back and allow the reader to see the spiritual battle that has been waged throughout history.²² Indeed, all *herem* warfare, spiritual and physical, derives from the conflict anticipated in the curse against the serpent at the time of the Fall:

I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel. (Gen. 3:15)

²²Daniel 10 discusses the spiritual battle behind the battle between nations as a conflict of the (angelic) princes of Persia, Greece, and Israel. See Longman, *Daniel*, 244–66.