



## The Call to Arms

**Lesson Subject:** God approves wars undertaken after deliberation to correct injustices.

**L23. Date:** May 1984. **Text:** Amos 5:8, 9; II Samuel 22:1-3, 33-35.

**Topic:** War.

We live in a world that is filled with “*wars and rumours of wars*” (Matthew 24:6). At times our nation has required its young men to report for military service and sent them off to fight on foreign battlefields.

What is the Christian's position concerning war? More important, what is the Bible position concerning the people of God engaging in war? Should a Christian register for the military? Should he report for duty if called to military service? Should he engage in battle in which people will be killed if he is assigned to that duty?

This study of “The Call to Arms” is not an attempt to argue the philosophical or ethical problems related to war and peace. It is rather a review of Bible teachings on the subject. It is approached with this belief based on previous study of the Bible: “God approves wars undertaken after deliberation to correct injustices.” Let us see if the Bible supports that conclusion as we study “The Call to Arms.”

### I. WAR AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

The God of the Old Testament is a God of war. There are more than eighty specific references to war in the Old Testament. How did God express himself in relation to war?

**A. At times God commanded His people to engage in war to possess the land of Canaan** (Deuteronomy 20:10-18).

**B. At other times God commanded the total extermination of the people against whom Israel fought in battle** (Deuteronomy 20:16, 17).

King Saul was rejected from being king over Israel because he disobeyed such a command (I Samuel 15). War was used to exterminate a society which was beyond turning because of its gross sin, as were Sodom and Gomorrah whom God destroyed with fire (Genesis 19).

**C. God often used war to bring judgments against nations, including Israel.** The prophets Habakkuk and Jeremiah made it clear that the war leading to the Babylonian captivity of Judah was the result of sin. (See II Chronicles 36:11-23.)

And yet, there are indications in the Old Testament that God disapproved of war. (1) The Golden Age which was promised is always pictured as a time of universal peace. Swords will be made into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 2:1-4). Even animals will live in peace with one another (Isaiah 11:6-8) and defended cities will be needed no longer (Isaiah 27:10). Weapons of war will be forsaken and there will be no more training for military expeditions (Micah 4:1-3). In that day “The Prince of Peace” shall reign (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

(2) David was not permitted to build the temple of God in Jerusalem because he was a man of war (I Chronicles 22:6-10). That indicates God does not approve war.

(3) It is God's will that peace reign in human hearts and in human society. *“He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire”* (Psalm 46:9).

Some who object to war claim this is an incorrect view of God who dealt with the ancient people according to their understanding and not according to His true desire. He could not have accomplished His will otherwise, they say. But that seems to be an attempt to “explain away” clear statements in Holy Scripture to make its teaching agree with one's opinion. The God of the Old Testament is a God of war.

## II. WAR AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are no specific teachings in the New Testament concerning war and the Christian's relation to it. Any conclusions drawn must be based on interpretations of verses rather than direct teachings by Jesus or the apostles.

**A. Some references seem to be opposed to war and violence.** Matthew 5:39 does not deal with relations between nations and so does not apply to war. To “turn the other cheek” means not to engage in personal retaliation or vengeance.

The beatitudes "*Blessed are the meek*" and "*Blessed are the peacemakers*" (Matthew 5:5, 9) do not relate to war. Those are principles by which citizens of the kingdom of God are to guide personal relations and do not apply to nations.

To be "*wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*" (Matthew 10:16) refers to personal conduct by which one does not do injury or provoke violence. It applies to individual conduct, not to the citizen's duty to his nation. The warning that those who take the sword shall perish with the sword (Matthew 26:52) means the disciples were not to take up arms to defend Jesus from arrest. It does not apply to national armament.

**B. Some references seem to support war and the violence it produces.** Jesus spoke of "*wars and rumours of wars.*" He said, "*See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass*" (Matthew 24:6). Jesus did not condemn the wars or forbid His disciples to take part in them.

Jesus' further statement that He did not "*come to send peace on earth, . . . but a sword*" (Matthew 10:34) is made without objecting to those consequences of His ministry.

Jesus instructed His disciples to buy a sword during the crucial times of His arrest, trial, and crucifixion (Luke 22:36-38). Self-defense might be necessary in the days of hatred which would follow.

On the other hand, Jesus explained that His kingdom would not be promoted through the use of weapons of war (John 18:36).

Mark 12:17 commands obedience to the law of the state as one will "*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.*"

Romans 13:1, 2 commands obedience to national laws, adding, "*Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.*"

The true Christian is one who fears God and honors his national rulers. Nothing in Old Testament or New Testament teaching prohibits war under certain circumstances.

### III. WAR AND THE CHRISTIAN

Three positions have been drawn by Christians according to their understanding of Bible teaching on the subject of war and their relationship to it. These are Militarism, Pacifism, and Christian Militantism.

**A. Militarism is the position which approves war in general.** Its advocates believe war is inevitable and is the means by which justice is maintained in international relations. The basis for this view is materialistic. It overlooks the sovereign government of God in the world.

**B. Pacifism maintains that all war is wrong and that no one is**

**justified to engage in acts of war which take the life of another person, under any circumstance.** It takes the forms of passivity (doing absolutely nothing at all to stop injustice), non-resistance (which means obeying promptly the commands of an opponent in a spirit of friendliness), and passive resistance (which means a non-violent refusal to cooperate with one's opponent). All these would refuse to bear arms or handle munitions in times of war to resist an invader. But when invasion has started, they would fraternize as much as possible with members of the invading force in a spirit of love.

**C. Christian Militantism means one earnestly seeks peace, but he will also insist that the state maintain law and order by the force of the police and the army.** He regards war as a right of the state in dire necessity if the cause is just and if the only alternative to war is the surrender of principle, the loss of righteousness, or the infliction of greater wrong and evil than war would entail. This is based on the belief that the state is authorized by Scripture to protect its citizens from criminals within and outside its borders. The position reconciles Christian love and witness to the world with the use of military force. It recognizes that there are evils greater than war.

The ultimate ideal is the absolute abolishment of war and violence. Until that time comes, citizens should obey the laws of the land in registering for the military, reporting for military duty when called, and serving faithfully as a soldier in the place assigned during times of war.

Meanwhile, the Christian must work actively for peace by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person possible. Only Jesus can bring peace and the end of war.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why is our society plagued with so many wars?
2. Why do you agree or disagree with the central truth of this study?
3. What does Deuteronomy 20:10-18 say about war today?
4. How does II Chronicles 36:11-23 show God uses war to discipline a nation for sin?
5. What will the millennial kingdom of Jesus be like, according to Isaiah 4:1-3; 9:6, 7?
6. What New Testament passages seem to indicate opposition to war?
7. What passages seem to support war?
8. Why are you a Militarist, a Pacifist, or a Christian Militantist?
9. How can the gospel help reduce wars among men?

10. What should be the Christian citizen's attitude toward military service?