

Peter's Sword

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This article first appeared in our church paper, *The Messenger of Living Righteousness*, April 1972. Brother Bill Race was a friend of Fred Wright, and fellow-believer in the message at least as early as 1962, when they were both involved in the Brinsmead Awakening.

John 18

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

¹¹ Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up your sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

Matthew 26

⁵¹ And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's and smote off his ear.

⁵² Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again your sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

Luke 22

³⁵ And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, did you lack any thing? And they said, Nothing.

³⁶ Then said he unto them, But now, he that has a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.

³⁷ For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end.

³⁸ And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.

So then the sword which Peter carried to the Garden of Gethsemane was carried there at the command of Jesus. But the question may well be asked as to why Jesus would want a sword in the Garden when He knew perfectly well that He would surrender Himself to the Jews without resis-

tance of any kind. When Jesus stood before Pilate a little later He said,

John 18

³⁶ Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

For a kingdom of this nature, a sword has neither use nor value. But in the minds of the apostles the concept was quite different. They expected that on this very night the great battle would begin whereby the kingdom of Christ would be established in the earth.

They were familiar with the way in which the kingdom of God had been established on the earth in the past. They knew the story of Joshua, of David and of the other great warrior leaders of Israel. They knew that by sword and by valor they had established the nation in the land and they expected that it would be the same again. Therefore, the sword was to them not only a thing of value on this night but also of absolute necessity.

Yet, Jesus said, “he that has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.” When they showed Him that they had two swords, then He said to them, “It is enough.”

It would certainly appear that the words of Jesus then were somewhat inconsistent with the course He was pursuing and with the principles He stood for. But we know that there is no inconsistency with Jesus. Therefore we are to understand that there was some message which Jesus was seeking to convey to the minds of the apostles to whom He was then speaking directly and in turn to us for whom all these things are written.

The answer, I believe, is indicated by the words of Christ,

Luke 22

³⁷ ...for the things concerning Me have an end.

Bearing in mind that the history of the Old Testament was to the disciples a guide as to what to expect so far as the coming kingdom was concerned, it is necessary for us to go back and study that history.

In doing so, it is to be seen and understood that the history of the Old Testament, as they understood it, provided them with a false concept of God's way of doing things, because the things done for the most part in the history of the Old Testament, were not done as the Lord would have had them done but as they had to be on account of the lack of faith of the people of God.

The deliverance from Egypt and the entrance into the earthly land of Canaan, was a type of the deliverance of God's people from the land of sin and their entrance into the heavenly Canaan. To achieve that back then, Israel took the sword and slaughtered vast numbers of the Canaanites in order to come into possession of the land, but it was never the purpose of the Lord that it should be done this way.

Moses knew that he was the divinely chosen leader to lead the people out from the land of Egypt for it is written that...

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 245:

The elders of Israel were taught by the angels that the time for their deliverance was near, and that Moses was the man whom God would employ to accomplish this work.

When he was forty years old, he went to his brethren to prepare them for deliverance. His deliverance of one of his own countrymen from the savage cruelty of the Egyptian slave master, he saw as the incident which would rally the Israelites around him, but he was disappointed.

Acts 7

²³ When he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.

²⁴ And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyp-

tian:

²⁵ For he supposed that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

At that point of time Moses, who had been trained by the Egyptians as a military commander, did not know the way of the Lord and had yet to learn the very lesson which the apostles also had to learn, and which in turn it is important that we learn today. Moses expected as did the disciples, that the kingdom of God was to be established by the power of the sword in the hand of the people themselves. It was to be established by the sword, it is true, but that sword was to be in God's hands and not in the hands of the people at all.

Moses had then to flee for his very life and it was not until forty years later that the Lord did deliver the Israelites from the land of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, but Moses did not have a sword in His hands this time but only a rod. Without the Israelites raising their hands to fight at all, the Lord slew the first born of Egypt and then destroyed the armies of Egypt in the Red Sea.

This is as it would always have been if the people of God had possessed the faith to trust the Lord to bear the sword for them. The fact that they did go forth to war and that they did carry the sword and that they did shed the blood of thousands of the enemies of God, was due not to the fact that the Lord planned that it should be that way, but because of their lack of faith.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 392:

The Lord had never commanded them to "go up and fight." It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands.

But the Israelites could not see this and therefore could not believe it just as the apostles in the days of Christ, could not see it or believe it. To say that this was a tragic situation is to say the least in view of the fact that the Lord had been seek-

ing all these many centuries to get this lesson across to them but to this point, without avail.

The Jewish nation believed that if they were to possess the land of Canaan as the Lord had promised they would, then they would have to fight for it. Likewise the disciples believed that if they were to see the Messiah's kingdom set up as the Lord promised it would be set up, then they would have to fight for it. It was from this concept born of a low condition of faith and experience that the Lord was seeking to deliver them, and He still seeks to deliver us from it today as well.

An Objection

At this point some may well object that we have instances in the Old Testament when the words of the text would indicate that the Lord gave a direct command to go out with the sword and to utterly and completely slay the enemies of Israel. An example of such Scriptures is found in

Deuteronomy 7

² And when the Lord your God shall deliver them before you; you shall smite them, and utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them.

It may well be argued that the explicit wording of this Scripture is that the Lord commanded the Israelites to go out with the sword in their hands and destroy the Canaanites. They were to leave none. They were to shew no pity or mercy whatsoever.

It is true that this is the wording of this text; it describes a direct command of God for those people to gain the land by warfare involving not only the shedding of blood but the actual extermination of a race of people.

But let us not misunderstand what the Lord was saying here. What he was saying here was not a declaration of His will but a declaration of the way things would have to be done in view of the absence of faith in the people to do things

His way.

An experience which gives clear proof of this is found in the desire of the Israelites to set aside His way of government for His people and to have a king like the nations around them. The story is told in *1 Samuel* 8:1-22.

The people came and asked for a king like the nations around. Samuel was sore distressed by this request knowing that it was a very evil course into which they were seeking to enter, and which would in turn bring evil results upon their own heads.

In answer to the prayer of Samuel the Lord said,

1 Samuel 8

⁷ They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them...

⁹ Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

In response to this warning and appeal the people...

¹⁹ ...refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;

²⁰ That we also may be like the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

This is what the people wanted, and they wanted it because of their low level of faith and experience. It was not what the Lord wanted, nor was it what was good for them.

Now the fact is that although it was not what was good for them, when they wanted it that way, the Lord did not force them to have it His way. He solemnly warned them of the consequences of doing that which they proposed to do, and then gave them what they wanted. More than that, He actually chose the king for them and had the prophet anoint that king under the direction of the Lord.

Now here we have a case where we can read as we can in *1*

Samuel 8:9, 10, that the Lord explicitly commanded His prophet to anoint Saul to be the king of Israel. But do we understand that by God's saying that, that this was a revelation of what the Lord desired; that it was a revelation of the way in which the Lord planned that things should be done? We know that it certainly *was not*.

The Lord had called upon them to do things His way, which way was the only way of success and achievement. This way called for a high degree of faith, for to human eyes it appeared as the way of failure and defeat.

The people did not learn this faith, not because of any fault on God's part but because of their own slowness of heart. So they asked for another way, their way.

In response to this, the Lord said to them that if they wanted to do things that way, then He and they would do it their way even though the Lord knew that it would prove to be a failure.

So with God still as their leader, He entered into an agreement to do things their way as distinct from His way. Of course, He would ever be seeking to have them to learn the futility of their way so that they might come back to His way and success. But until they learned, He would go along with them and try to do it their way.

Now because He was still the Leader, then He would still give the orders, but remember that now the orders given were in harmony with their way of doing things. So it was that inasmuch as they wanted a king, and inasmuch as the Lord would go along with them in this plan, He then as the Leader would command the appointment of the king.

Again, inasmuch as they could only see the conquest of the land being achieved by the power of the sword in their hands, then the Lord agreed to go along with this plan. He, with them, would do things their way.

But He was still the Leader and as such would be giving the orders. But remember that the orders given now were not orders according to His way of doing things, but according to their way of doing things.

Hence it was that the Lord commanded them to go out and fight the battles with the sword in their hands and to destroy the people utterly and completely.

It was so unfortunate that the people did insist on their own way. The Lord had warned them of the certain failure of the method, yet they would still have it that way.

The whole of the Old Testament history is a witness to the result of their having their own way, for the kingdom was never established in righteousness in all the world. There were times when some progress was made and in the days of David it did reach its peak and came the nearest to success, but that still fell so far short of the full achievement and it still had in it the seeds of its own destruction.

The Captain of the Lord's Hosts

That the Lord remained their Captain and Leader despite their unbelief and their insistence on doing things their own way is evidenced by the vision of Christ as given to Joshua before the overthrow of Jericho.

Joshua 5

¹³ And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, there stood a man over against him with His sword drawn in His hand: and Joshua went unto Him, and said unto Him, Are You for us or for our adversaries?

¹⁴ And He said, No; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto Him, What says my Lord unto His servant?

The sword carried in the hand of Jesus that day when He appeared unto Joshua was a symbol of the fact that He was

their Captain and would fight for them while ever they accepted Him as their Leader.

Some years later, when Gideon with his three hundred went out to war, he instructed them to shout “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.”

When Jesus came to this earth, He still carried that sword. He was still the Leader of Israel and the door was still open whereby in God’s way, the nation of Israel might have been established as a nation of righteousness in the earth according to the original plan of God.

But when Jesus came to His own, His own received Him not. They declared that they would not have this man to reign over them. This was a declaration of how they wanted things now. First of all they rejected God’s way whereby the sword was in the hand of God alone. Instead they took the sword too, but retained the Lord as the Leader, as the Captain of the Lord’s host.

But one step away from God, one taking into their own hands that which should be in God’s hands alone, will inevitably lead to the taking of all things into their own hands with the result that they rejected God completely. So it was with them.

When they wanted to share the sword with the Lord, He let them. Now when they wanted to take it all into their own hands, He let them. So then it was that Jesus submitted Himself, who rightfully was their Captain and Leader, to be taken captive by them and put to death by them. In this act Jesus not only submitted Himself into their hands but also the sword which He had held so long. Things which concerned Him had come to an end, and from henceforth things were going to be different. He had come to the end of one dispensation and was about to open another.

Ancient Israel had been a combination of Church and

State. The power of the State had carried out the decrees of the Lord through the Church, but that now was to be forever a thing of the past.

Christ had laid down the sword and woe to him who should attempt to pick it up. To do so with Christ as the Leader was bad enough, and brought the miserable failure of the Old Testament attempt to build the kingdom of God upon the earth. But to do so without Christ is certain self -destruction. The fact of this too is the witness of history.

The Foolishness of Preaching

There is a prophecy in *Zechariah* to which I would now direct your attention. That the prophecy is concerning Christ is made clear by the words:

Zechariah 11

¹² And I said unto them, if you think good, give me my price; and if not forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.

This is a prophecy which was fulfilled by Judas and the Pharisees when they bargained over Christ for this amount of money. A little further down there follows this verse which is the point of this study:

Zechariah 11

¹⁵ And the Lord said unto me, Take you yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd.

Thus He who had been bartered for thirty pieces of silver, was commissioned to take up the instruments of a foolish shepherd. This is an interesting prophecy indeed. Something of its meaning is revealed in the words of Paul:

1 Corinthians 1

²¹ For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

This is not to say that preaching is a foolish thing in itself.

Far from it. It is to say that in the eyes of the world it is a foolish thing,

1 Corinthians 1

¹⁸ For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

This then, is the instrument of the “foolish” shepherd. No longer does the sword appear in the work of the kingdom at all. No longer is the work of God in any sense of the Word tied to the existence of a nation. Christ as the Leader of His people laid down that sword forever when the Jews said that they would not have Him for their Leader anymore.

So today the commission is to

Mark 16

¹⁵ Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

¹⁶ He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.

The weapons used in this warfare are entirely spiritual and not material or literal. It is the sword of the Spirit appealing to the hearts of men which is to build the kingdom of God.

Revelation 22

¹⁷ And the Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let him that hears say, “Come.” And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

Isaiah 55

⁸ For My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 605, 606:

The Lord had, through his prophets, foretold that Israel would be governed by a king; but it does not follow that this form of government was best for them, or according to his will.

He permitted the people to follow their own choice, because they refused to be guided by his counsel. Hosea declares that God gave them a king in his anger.

When men choose to have their own way, without seeking counsel from God, or in opposition to His revealed will, He often grants their desires, in order that, through the bitter experience that follows, they may be led to realize their folly and to repent of their sin.

Human pride and wisdom will prove a dangerous guide. That which the heart desires contrary to the will of God, will in the end be found a curse rather than a blessing.