

# G.I. Jesus?

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I hope the title doesn't upset anyone, but I wanted to get my point across quickly. Other titles I considered were "Rambo Jesus" and "Who Would Jesus Shoot?" (as a play on What Would Jesus Do?). My point is this: Can you picture Jesus Christ dressed for combat (or perhaps only half dressed Rambo style) carrying an M60 machine gun ready to blow away His enemies? No? Then why do so many who name the name of Christ think it is perfectly fine for them to join the military and either directly participate in or support the killing of thousands of people in wars? And why do so many politically active Christians think it right to support or even lobby for war?

## What Jesus Said

Jesus' statements on this subject are so easily understood as teaching that Christians have no business being involved with war that we must truly go out of our way to misunderstand them to come up with any other interpretation. In Matthew 5:38-39; 43-44, Jesus teaches, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.... Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

Please tell me how it is possible to not resist evil and to love and pray for our enemies while trying to kill them in war? Certainly, it is not possible. How can a Christian obey the Golden Rule—"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12)—and fight in war? He cannot.

Peter said this about Jesus: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23).

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## **What His Followers Said**

The apostle Paul certainly had something to say on this subject: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.... Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:14, 17-21).

And in 1 Thessalonians 5:15, he wrote, "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." Paul was not just saying to not render evil to our Christian brethren. He included all men—even those our nation may happen to call the enemy. As Christians, our warfare is not against flesh and blood people. Our struggle is a spiritual one: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

I am astounded by the willingness of individual Christians and entire churches to shove aside easily understood passages of the Bible whenever these Scriptures don't support their biblically unfounded stand that Christians can, and even have a duty to, fight wars. I'm convinced that the reason for this Scripture twisting is a lack of faith. It takes faith to follow Christ's example and commit ourselves "to him that judgeth righteously."

## **Some Objections**

*Old Testament Scriptures:* Many examples can be cited of God telling the Israelites to slay the people of other nations. This is what Jesus was referring to when He said in Matthew 5:43, "Ye have heard...hate thine enemy." But Jesus says in the next verse, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies." One of the primary purposes Jesus had for the Sermon on the Mount was to show Christians that for them, Jesus' law now supersedes the laws of the Old Testament. The wars of the Old Testament were shadows that merely typified the spiritual battles we Christians fight today. They are not intended as examples for us to follow in a physical way. So, references to wars in the Old Testament do not justify Christians going to war today.

*The Destruction of Jerusalem:* "Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:41-44). "But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:28-31).

Those who use this objection rightly understand that the destruction of Jerusalem and the accompanying massive loss of life were the result of God's wrath upon the unbelieving generation of Jews who rejected and called for the crucifixion of their Messiah. Certainly, God can use the violence of the armies of this world for His purposes. But, as we have already seen, He specifically orders His people to be nonviolent. God never told a single Christian to raise a hand against those Jews. Instead, Jesus gave them a sign so they would know when to flee before the violence began (Matthew 24:15-22; Luke 21:20-21).

*Matthew 10:34:* "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." This verse is sometimes cited to defend Christians fighting in wars. But all we have to do is read the next couple of verses to know that Jesus did not mean a literal sword: "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." Jesus obviously did not mean that we are to hack up our relatives. He meant that our Christian beliefs will set us at spiritual odds with our non-believing relations.

*Christians Soldiers in the Bible:* In Acts 10, we read of Cornelius the centurion who became a Christian. The centurion in Matthew 8 may also have become a Christian. But nothing in the Bible says that these men remained soldiers after becoming Christians. If they stayed in the

service for any length of time, they would likely have faced some tough choices between serving God and serving their Roman rulers: Would they have followed orders to arrest Christians? Would they have participated in the sacking of Jerusalem? It seems likely that remaining a centurion would eventually have put them at odds with their Christians beliefs. Tradition (of course, not necessarily reliable) says that Cornelius became a bishop in either Caesarea or Scepsis in Mysia. So, Scriptures about people who happen to be in the military when they become Christians are not evidence that people who are already Christians are justified to enter the military.

*Jesus' Call for the Sword:* We read of the following dialog between Jesus and His disciples shortly before His arrest: "Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. 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. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough" (Luke 22:36-38). Those who use the Scripture as evidence that Christians can take up arms are misunderstanding what is going on. Jesus is about to be arrested and prophecy says that He is to be counted as being among the transgressors—that is, as if He were part of a band of brigands. To appear as such, Jesus tells his disciples to make sure they have money and a sword.

Now, it might seem unusual that the disciples would immediately be able to pull out two swords. But this is explained by two facts. The disciples were rough characters. Among the list of Jesus' disciples in Matthew 10, we read of "Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot" (verse 4). Of "Canaanite" in this verse, *Vincent's Word Studies* states, "The word has nothing to do with Canaan. In Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13, the same apostle is called Zelotes. Both terms indicate his connection with the Galilaeen Zealot party, a sect which stood for the recovery of Jewish freedom and the maintenance of distinctive Jewish institutions. From the Hebrew *kanná*, zealous; compare the Chaldee *kanán*, by which this sect was denoted."

In Acts 21, we read that the chief captain mistook Paul for being "that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers" (verse 38). The word "murderers" is translated from *sikarios*. It means "assassins" or, more literally, "dagger men." Many scholars rightly believe that Iscariot is a Hellenized transformation of the above word

for "dagger men." In other words, when the Bible says "Judas Iscariot" it is saying "Judas of the dagger men." *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says that these were "Jewish Zealots who attempted to expel the Romans and their partizans from the country, even resorting to murder to attain their object. Under their cloaks they concealed 'sicæ,' or small daggers, whence they received their name; and at popular assemblies, especially during the pilgrimage to the Temple mount, they stabbed their enemies, or, in other words, those who were friendly to the Romans, lamenting ostentatiously after the deed, and thus escaping detection (Josephus, 'Ant.' xx. 8, § 10; idem, 'B. J.' ii. 13, § 3)" (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13630-sicarii>).

The Zealots wanted to free the Jews from Roman occupation and to establish a Messianic Jewish kingdom. Jesus' disciples did not yet understand that the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke of was spiritual and not of this world. Even after His resurrection, they misunderstood for some time. Notice what they say in Acts 1:6: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" My point is that some, if not all, of Jesus' disciples were following Him believing that He would soon establish the Messianic Jewish kingdom. When He gave the word, they would be willing to fight. Therefore, they had swords.

But while under arrest, Jesus said to Pilate, "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" (John 18:36). So Jesus clearly explained that His kingdom is not of the world and, therefore, His servants would not fight. But, at the time of Jesus' arrest, Peter did not understand this. So, we read, "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. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:10-11); and, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

Some things are immediately obvious. Jesus was not happy that Peter actually used his sword. Jesus wanted them to have swords so that He could be counted as among transgressors and fulfill Scripture. Luke tells us that Jesus immediately healed the man's ear (Luke 22:51). Jesus told Peter to put the sword back into its sheath. Then Jesus said that those who take up the sword will perish with the sword. In saying this, He was speaking generally. That is, He was not saying that every individual who takes up the sword will be killed by the sword, but He

was saying that those who use violence will only provoke more violence. This was not to be the way for His disciples.

But there is another lesson to be found in this incident. I believe there is a very good reason why God ordained it that what Peter cut off was the ear of the man. The ear symbolizes hearing, listening, responding. In Matthew 11:15, Jesus said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." He repeated this several times. He also criticized the people in this way: "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13:15). I believe that Peter's cutting the servant's ear off symbolically shows us that violence deafens people to the Gospel. When Christians go to war or clamor for war, they turn people away from Jesus' Gospel. Hearing comes not by warring with our enemies but by loving them, which Jesus did when He healed the man's ear.

So we see that while some of the disciples may have had backgrounds as zealots and carried weapons, Jesus never approved of this. And, while Jesus called for His disciples to have a sword so He could be counted among transgressors when He was arrested, He was against their actually using the sword.

*Just War:* An argument that people often give in support of the propriety of war is that there is such a thing as a just war. As an example, World War Two is said to have been a just war because Hitler and his Nazis were so evil that they had to be stopped. The problem with this argument is that it does not apply to the biblical position concerning Christians. Whether or not nations are ever justified in fighting a war is a political question of this world.

But the Bible says, "For our conversation [Greek *politeuma*, a word from which we get our word "politics" and best translated here as "citizenship"] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). As we have already seen, Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world. And the Bible also says that "we are ambassadors for Christ..." (2 Corinthians 5:20). As citizens and ambassadors of the kingdom of God, we simply have no business fighting for or against any of the nations of this world. Yes, we may be incensed by the actions of a nation but we must follow Jesus' orders: "Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60; see also Matthew 8:22). In other

words, we must let the spiritually dead people of this world take care of their own affairs. We must do what is really the most important job on the planet—the only one that makes a real difference. We must follow the orders Jesus has given us: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

*Allegiance to Our Governments:* This argument has really already been addressed. The Christian's government is the kingdom of God. Our allegiance is to Christ. Yes, we are to obey the governments of the nations we live in (Romans 13; 1 Peter 2:13-21) so that we can live at peace with them. But we are to do this only as long as their demands are not contrary to God's (Acts 5:29). To fight for the nation we live in is certainly contrary to what Jesus and His followers taught as explained earlier in this article.

It is with good reason that the nations of this world are pictured in Bible prophecies as carnivorous beasts. They are animalistic in their continual attempt to devour one another. Jesus also used animals to picture His followers but they are of a far different kind: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

### **Conclusion**

I am not in any way trying to denigrate or question the good intentions or the bravery of anyone who has served or is now serving in the armed forces of any nation. I am also not questioning anyone's Christianity. What I am doing is showing that the Bible teaches that being in the military and being a political warmonger are both incompatible with the calling of a Christian. It is time for Christians to face the clear teaching of Scripture and stop being warmakers.

*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

*Matthew 5:9*