

# Biblical Offense and Defense?



**Why it matters:** It will enable you to better understand ‘when’ or ‘if’ physical attack or defense is justifiable according to the Bible.



## 🔍 **Has God ever said to attack or defend with physical force?**

Three examples of God using physical force in the Old Testament are the Great Flood ([Genesis 6:5-7](#)), Sodom & Gomorrah ([Genesis 18:20-21](#)), and the death of the Egyptian firstborn ([Exodus 12:12](#)). In the New Testament God-the-Son, “made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables;” in defense of the holy temple ([John 2:15](#)). Before God-the-Son returns, he will release angels to kill a third of mankind ([Revelation 9:15](#)). God-the-Son will return with armies from heaven and make war ([Revelation 19:11-16](#)). Three examples from the Old Testament where God directed a group of men to attack are: God had Moses go to war ([Numbers 31:1-7](#)), Joshua was told to attack Jericho ([Joshua 6:2](#)), Gideon and three hundred men were told to attack ([Judges 7](#)). God has directed groups of people to fight and go to war, but what about leaders declaring war when it has not been specifically commanded by God? Should those under the leader blindly obey if the command is not in accordance with God’s will, and how do we know what God’s will is on these questions?

## 🔍 **Has God said not to attack or defend with physical force and instead to submit?**

In [Matthew 26:52](#), it reads “Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” This does not seem to be a salvation issue, but rather refers to a likely method of death based upon how one decides to live one’s life. After all, Jesus told the Apostles they should purchase swords in [Luke 22:35-38](#), but we read in [Matthew 5:3](#), “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.” thus preventing the escalation of hostility when life is not being threatened. In [Romans 12:19](#), “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” This verse appears to be against personal retribution. Where murder is concerned, it was often the duty of the next of kin (called the avenger of blood) to execute the murderer ([Numbers 35:16–21](#); [2 Samuel 14:7](#); [2 Samuel 14:11](#); [Deuteronomy 19:11-13](#)). The avenger of blood was not given license to act in instances of accidental manslaughter ([Numbers 35:10–15, 22–25](#); [Deuteronomy 19:4–6](#); [Joshua 20:1–6](#)). No ancient Israelite would ever have thought that the commandment to “love thy neighbour as thyself” ([Leviticus 19:18](#)) was an all-encompassing prohibition against engaging in warfare (see a ‘neighbor’ example in [Luke 10:29-37](#)). God told the Israelites to annihilate, via war, certain evil groups of people, and to also defend themselves at times through warfare. What about the 6th Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” [Exodus 20:13](#)? The expanded meaning for the Hebrew word רָצַח ([râtsach](#)) translated as kill or murder, which are both accurate translations, has the broader and more specific meaning of not to murder or by willful negligence create the circumstances for a person to die ([Exodus 21:28-29, Deuteronomy 22:8](#)).

## 🔍 **Are there other examples of attack, defense, or submission?**

In [Nehemiah 4:16-18](#) laborers worked with one hand while carrying a weapon in the other. In [Nehemiah 4:22-24](#) it describes that they slept with their clothes on and their weapons near them for defense. God-the-Son said to those who followed him, to purchase a sword if they did not already own one, even if that meant selling their garment, but they already owned two in their group and Jesus said it was enough ([Luke 22:35-38](#)). If there are already swords present, and Jesus was a pacifist, why would Jesus allow these men to carry weapons? During the Maccabean Revolt, the Jews started a battle in c. 167 B.C in defense of God’s temple (a building),<sup>1</sup> and remember you are also God’s temple ([1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#); [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#); [2 Corinthians 6:16](#); [Ephesians 2:19-22](#); [1 Peter 2:5](#)). Various Torchbearer groups fought against attacking invaders.<sup>2</sup> Allied countries fought the Nazis<sup>3</sup> for which Gandhian pacifism<sup>4</sup> would miserably fail.

## 🔍 **Can we obtain an understanding of when attack, defense, or submission is appropriate?**

In [Exodus 22:2-3](#) we understand that the thief (whose intentions are to rob and not to kill) is caught while breaking in (at night when it is dark and you cannot determine his intentions) and is struck so that he dies, then you will not be held accountable for murder. But if the sun has risen on him, you will be held accountable for murder, because you killed a thief whose identifiable intentions were to rob and not to kill. So in this example, how are the thief’s intentions being determined if the home is well lit by the sun? The answer appears to be: if unarmed they are a thief but armed with a weapon they are a clear threat and potential murderer, and if it is dark you cannot know if they are armed.

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## 🔍 Do God's people have sovereign unalienable rights?

Throughout history, God-fearing kings would often (if possible) seek the counsel of priests or prophets before attacking or even defending in many circumstances (1 Kings 22:6, etc.), and the priests or prophets would in turn pray to God for guidance on behalf of their King. In Revelation 1:5-6 and Revelation 5:10 it states that those who are God's followers are "Kings and Priests unto God", and that God's followers shall "reign on the earth". This has been said to allude to sovereignty, freedom, rights, duties, and obligations (similar to that of kings and priests) being given by God to God's followers. Unfortunately, God has not provided examples for every single type of situation that could arise for us to know with certainty when a follower of God has a duty to attack, defend, submit, compromise, or make peace. This is likely because a follower of God is taught throughout the scriptures how to make that prayerful discernment on a case-by-case basis since different circumstances impact the actions required. Regardless of what decision is made, the decision should never compromise God's ways, though other compromises might be acceptable. It is also worth noting that it has often been said that a righteous man is like a king of his home, and a man's home is his secure castle which has been treated as such by many God-fearing countries and kingdoms throughout the world (see the following examples).

The Fourth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States reads, "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence of the United States reads, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world..." See full text.

## Bibliography

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<sup>1</sup> In *Understanding the Maccabean Revolt 167 to 63 BC*, by Michael Avi-Yonah, Ze'ev Safrai, and Shmuel Safrai. Carta Jerusalem, May 1, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> In *Chart of New Testament lineage Streams: Unbroken Chain-of-Custody*, by Peter D. Arvo, 2018. \*Download the full document for free online at <http://www.TheTorchbearerSeries.com> within the Page Briefing section of the site or click the link to an archived PDF [here](#). Other document formats and sizes are available in the Page Briefing area of the site.

<sup>3</sup> John Graham Royde-Smith and Thomas A. Hughes. "World War II". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. September 10, 2020. [https://web.archive.org/web/20210119181351if\\_/https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II](https://web.archive.org/web/20210119181351if_/https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II) (accessed January 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Shmuley Boteach. "Repudiating Gandhian pacifism in the face of mass murder". *The Jerusalem Post*. March 31, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20201112024122/https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Repudiating-Gandhian-pacifism-in-the-face-of-mass-murder-449885> (accessed January 2021).

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