

“God did not design that the people should do any fighting. He led them through the wilderness, in order that they might not see war [Ex. 13:17-18]. Yet He knew that if they went the way that they did, the Egyptians would surely pursue them. The children of Israel never had any greater need of fighting than they did when the Egyptians closed in on them by the Red Sea; yet the word then was, 'The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace' [Ex. 14:14]. It may be said that the reason why the Lord did not wish them to see war was because they were as yet unprepared for fighting; but we must remember that on other occasions when they had many trained warriors, God often delivered them without their striking a blow. When we consider the circumstances of their deliverance from Egypt-how it was all accomplished by the direct power of God, without any human power, their part being only to follow and obey His word-**we must be convinced that it was not according to the plan of God that they should do any fighting, even in self-defence.”** (*Present Truth UK*, September 24, 1896, p. 612)

“But wait!” someone may object, “Didn’t God give them divine commands to fight?” Yes, He did, and here’s how Waggoner answers that very question:

“But the children of Israel did fight throughout all their natural existence, and under God's direction, too,' it will be urged. That is very true, but it does not at all prove that it was God's purpose that they should fight. We must not forget that 'their minds were blinded' by unbelief, so that they could not perceive the purpose of God for them. They did not grasp the spiritual realities of the kingdom of God, but were content with shadows instead; and the same God who bore with their hardness of heart in the beginning, and strove to teach them by shadows, when they would not have the substance, still remained with them, compassionately considerate of their infirmities.

God Himself suffered [permitted] them, because of the hardness of their hearts, to have a plurality of wives, and even laid down rules regulating polygamy, in order to diminish as far as possible the resulting evils, but that does not prove that He designed it for them. We well know that 'from the beginning it was not so.' **So when Jesus forbade His followers to fight in any cause whatever, He introduced nothing new,** any more than when He taught that a man should have but one wife, and should cleave to her as long as he lived He was simply enunciating first principles-preaching a thorough reformation.” (*Present Truth UK*, January 7, 1897, p. 4)

Here’s a great Scripture from the book of Ezekiel which also teaches this concept:

“Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity

before his face, and cometh to the prophet; **I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart,** because they are all estranged from me through their idols.” (Ez. 14:4-5)

Brenton’s Septuagint words it this way: “I the Lord will answer him according to the things in which his mind is entangled.” The minds of the Israelites (as well as the mind of Abraham) were entangled in the concept of physical warfare, therefore “by divine counsel” God answered them according to the things in which their mind was entangled. Why does He do this? “I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols” (Vs. 5, NIV). This all falls in line according to the Romans 5:20 principle that when the Law enters privately into one’s heart it will magnify their sin to lead them to the grace of God, which much more abounds.

We see the same happening with the prophet Hosea, who, by divine command, married a prostitute (Hosea 1:2-3), yet no one believes this is God’s ideal will for man. Let’s take a look at another incident concerning Abraham regarding him receiving a “divine direction”:

“By divine direction, Abraham sacrificed a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, each three years old, dividing the bodies and laying the pieces a little distance apart. To these he added a turtledove and a young pigeon, which, however, were not divided. This being done, he reverently passed between the parts of the sacrifice, making a solemn vow to God of perpetual obedience.” (Patriarch’s and Prophets, p. 137)

It was “by divine direction” that Abraham did these sacrifices. However, we know that it was not God’s ideal will that man offer Him sacrifices. This practice came as a result of sin, and even then, God had never desired nor required sacrifices in order to forgive us (Ps. 40:6). If it wasn’t God’s ideal will for sacrifices, why did He give Abraham this “divine direction”? Ellen White explains why at the beginning of the same paragraph:

“Still the patriarch begged for some visible token as a confirmation of his faith and as an evidence to after-generations that God’s gracious purposes toward them would be accomplished. **The Lord condescended to enter into a covenant with His servant, employing such forms as were customary among men for the ratification of a solemn engagement.** By divine direction, Abraham sacrificed a heifer, a she-goat, and a ram ...” (*ibid*)

There’s our answer. Even though God gave a “divine direction”, it was not based upon His ideal will but upon His permissive will. In the same sense, God condescended to employ such forms as

were customary among men when He gave Abraham “divine counsel” to rescue Lot – in this case, physical warfare! Just as “Abraham’s religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed”, it was Abraham’s religion (being brought up in Ur of the Chaldees) to practice such sacrifices, including human sacrifices. When Abraham perceived that God had commanded him to offer his son Isaac upon the altar, God was drawing his pagan mindset of blood sacrifices to appease the deities to the surface. God was causing Abraham’s religion to abound in order to lead Abraham into His grace and truth. (For a more detailed study on why God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, see our Q&A Section).

This incident with receiving the “divine command” to sacrifice these creatures happened after Abraham had received “divine counsel” to rescue Lot. After dividing the creatures down the middle, Scripture says, “And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him” (Gen. 15:12). Ellen White uses this same language to refer to the mindset of Abraham after rescuing Lot:

“Abraham gladly returned to his tents and his flocks, **but his mind was disturbed by harassing thoughts. He had been a man of peace, so far as possible shunning enmity and strife; and with horror he recalled the scene of carnage he had witnessed.** But the nations whose forces he had defeated would doubtless renew the invasion of Canaan, and make him the special object of their vengeance. **Becoming thus involved in national quarrels, the peaceful quiet of his life would be broken.** Furthermore, he had not entered upon the possession of Canaan, nor could he now hope for an heir, to whom the promise might be fulfilled.” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 136)

As we can clearly see, Abraham was experiencing PTSD by becoming involved in national quarrels and physical warfare. The “man of peace” became a man of war and “with horror he recalled the scene of carnage he had witnessed.” The same happened with Elijah, “a man subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17). He killed many with the sword and yet his mind was also disturbed by harassing thoughts:

“Then he [Elijah] went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, LORD,’ he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.” (1 Kings 19:4, NLT)

Again, by “divine counsel” God condescended to meet Elijah and Abraham where they were at. By His permissive will, God was bringing all of this horror, sin, and darkness to the surface, not to condemn them, but to save them! At the same time, God punished the sins of the kings (in the time of Abraham) and the

sins of the prophets of Baal (in the time of Elijah) with the sins of Abraham and Elijah in the use of the sword:

“When parents or rulers neglect the duty of punishing iniquity, God Himself will take the case in hand. **His restraining power will be in a measure removed from the agencies of evil, so that a train of circumstances will arise which will punish sin with sin.**” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 728)

In conclusion I'd like to draw your attention to something I find a little deceptive in the original post in question. Here are the last few sentences of the EGW comment as quoted in the post:

“It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed ... His example is a rebuke to self-seeking, mercenary spirits. Abraham regarded the claims of justice and humanity. His conduct illustrates the inspired maxim, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ Leviticus 19:18.”

I find the ellipses (the three dots) here to be deceptive because it appears that Ellen White is specifically speaking about Abraham's practice of warfare as being “a rebuke” regarding “the claims of justice and humanity.” However, she is specifically speaking about Abraham not taking any of the booty:

“On his return, the king of Sodom came out with his retinue to honor the conqueror. He bade him take the goods, begging only that the prisoners should be restored. By the usage of war, the spoils belonged to the conquerors; but Abraham had undertaken this expedition with no purpose of gain, and he refused to take advantage of the unfortunate, only stipulating that his confederates should receive the portion to which they were entitled.

Few, if subjected to such a test, would have shown themselves as noble as did Abraham. Few would have resisted the temptation to secure so rich a booty. His example is a rebuke to self-seeking, mercenary spirits. Abraham regarded the claims of justice and humanity. His conduct illustrates the inspired maxim, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ Leviticus 19:18. ‘I have lifted up my hand,’ he said, ‘unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich.’ He would give them no occasion to think that he had engaged in warfare for the sake of gain, or to attribute his prosperity to their gifts or favor. God had promised to bless Abraham, and to Him the glory should be ascribed.” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 135)

How do we reconcile the many references to the ancient patriarchs engaging in violent warfare with the words of Christ?

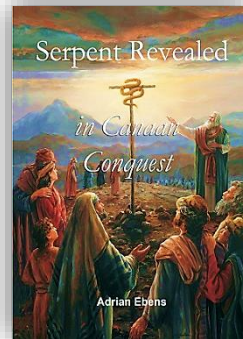
“...for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matt. 26:52)

Did not God “command” and give “divine counsel” to these men of war? Do these “commands” and “counsels” reveal God's ideal will for justice?

Within this short tract we will discuss this issue by using Scripture, Ellen G. White, and E.J. Waggoner. With careful comparison, we will see why Ellen White says:

“Seeking, first of all, divine counsel, Abraham prepared for war” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 135)

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Recently I read a post by someone who is very much against our message. In this post, the author was using the story of when Abraham rescued Lot as proof that God condones killing especially in times of war. Below is the passage from *Patriarchs and Prophets* he uses for this proof. Keep in mind that this is exactly how the author posted this quote, and I have not cut anything out from it (this is important as we will see):

“Seeking, first of all, divine counsel, Abraham prepared for war. From his own encampment he summoned three hundred and eighteen trained servants, men trained in the fear of God, in the service of their master, and in the practice of arms ... To Abraham, under God, the triumph was due. The worshiper of Jehovah had not only rendered a great service to the country, but had proved himself a man of valor. It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed ... His example is a rebuke to self-seeking, mercenary spirits. Abraham regarded the claims of justice and humanity. His conduct illustrates the inspired maxim, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ Leviticus 19:18. (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 135)

As you can probably guess, the author of the post is using the first sentence as his slam-dunk: “Seeking, first of all, divine counsel, Abraham prepared for war.” However, does the fact that Abraham received “divine counsel” prove that God's ideal will was for Abraham to participate in this type of warfare? We know from reading Scripture that, by divine command, there are many times when the Israelites entered into warfare with other nations. Again, was this due to God's ideal will or was this due to God's PERMISSIVE will? We know from reading Ellen White that “it was not His [God's] purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 392). So, even though it wasn't His purpose that they enter into warfare, He did permit it. Notice how E.J. Waggoner explains this concept when it comes to the warfare we see in Scripture: