

## **Peace in the New Testament and in the Writings of the Early Church Fathers**

### **Peace in the New Testament**

*Introduction.* In this chapter, we will discuss peace as this topic appears, first in the New Testament (“NT”), and then as it is treated in the early Fathers of the Church. We will look at relevant texts in the NT as a whole, seeking to expound the particular view of peace which the NT seems to be teaching. The task that has been presented to the participants in the writing of this book is that of finding texts which support peace, while acknowledging the existence of other passages which can more or less easily be used to support conflict and war. It is the thesis of this chapter that, indeed, the NT as a whole proclaims and promotes peace: good, cordial, friendly relations between all peoples and nations, and mandates non-violence. But the NT is also realistic about peace: peace is a gift from God, but also a human task, one that not everyone assumes or cooperates with. Peace requires sacrifice and effort, and does not come cheaply. Let us proceed to our study.

*The Hebrew Bible background of the NT.* Without trying to cover what is the subject of another chapter, it must be said that the NT, for the most part, if not totally, is Jewish literature. Its authors are probably all Jewish; the best candidate for being a Gentile is Luke, but I would not wager the house on it. In any case, he is completely soaked in the Jewish Scriptures, the Septuagint in particular. The Septuagint is the translation of the Jewish Scriptures—which were written mostly in Hebrew (there are some passages in Aramaic)—into Greek. The Jews, meaning those Israelites from the tribe of Judah who had adopted Judaism, a particular development of the Israelite religion which took shape in the Babylonian Exile (587-538 B.C.E. = before the “Common Era”), had spread all over the world as it was known at the time, and had an important colony in Alexandria, Egypt. This city was named after Alexander the Great, who had conquered most of the known world in 333 B.C.E., promoting Hellenization (the Greek language and customs) everywhere he went. So effective was this campaign that Jews in cities such as Alexandria forgot their Hebrew (the language of the Holy

Scriptures) and their Aramaic (the commonly spoken language, including that of Jesus himself). Thus the need arose to translate the Scriptures into Greek. It is in this form that, for the most part, the early Church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, read their Bible, which, in the first century of the Common Era (“C.E.”), consisted of what would later constitute the canonical Hebrew Bible (the “Tanak,” that is, the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings) plus some other Jewish books which were finally not included in the Jewish canon, or authoritative list books thought to be inspired by God.

Although any translation usually differs in some respects from the original text, and the Septuagint (“LXX”) is particularly egregious at times in this regard, the fundamental notions of Judaism as found in the Jewish Scriptures (including the LXX) are also those of the NT. That is to say, the NT is the product of a Jewish sect, one of many at a time —the first century C.E.— when Judaism was extremely pluralistic. One of the principal groups was that of the Pharisees, the “separated ones” (in Hebrew, *pěřúšîm*), a party that sought to renew Jewish identity and religion by careful observance of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible, traditionally attributed to Moses), according to their own strict interpretation (“halakah”). For the most part, as best as we can tell, the Pharisees were opposed to violence in politics, they themselves suffering extreme persecution at times (many hundreds of them were crucified under the reprobate Jewish king Alexander Jannaeus *ca.* 103 B.C.E.). That is, they favored more gradual change, even of oppressive conditions, although in the fervor of the first Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66 C.E., they, too, got caught up into the revolution. Their successors, the rabbis, eschewed violent messianism and revolution, excluding from the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures which was being formed at the time those books which glorified the political convulsion associated with the end of the world by the apocalypticists.<sup>1</sup> These were certain Jewish groups who continued a tradition begun in the Hebrew Bible (see, for example, Isaiah 63:1-6; Ezekiel 38-39; Zechariah 14) which foresaw a final defeat of the Gentile nations (*gôyîm*) which had historically oppressed Israel with great cruelty. As late as the time of the Bar Kochba revolt in 132-135 C.E., the notion that if valiant Jews would only initiate the End Time struggle, God would take over and achieve the final victory, inspired many Jews, and even the great Rabbi Akiba supported that messianic pretender.<sup>2</sup> This idea is reflected in Jesus’ saying at the

time of his arrest in Matthew 26:53 that his Father could send more than twelve legions of angels to rescue him, if only Jesus would pray for this.<sup>3</sup> We are here in what is perhaps the strongest basis for total pacifism in the NT, for the context of this saying is Jesus' telling Peter in the prior verse to put his sword back into its place, "for all those who take (up) the sword will perish by the sword," clearly a negative view of violent actions, at least by human beings.<sup>4</sup> Christianity, and Jesus himself, derive from this thought-world of Judaism. They thought of their period as the last days of the world (see, for example, Mark 9:1; Matthew 12:28 || Luke 11:20; Matthew 24:3; 1 Corinthians 10: 11), and expected a great tribulation to come upon the earth, the eschatological wrath of God, which only the just would successfully endure, thus obtaining salvation (Matthew/Luke 3:7; Luke 23:27-31; 1 Thessalonians 1:10). But Christianity provides no basis for human participation in the execution of this divine wrath, nor does it so interpret or utilize the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament (LXX) texts which might be so used. When the Jewish revolt of 66 C.E. broke out against Rome, the Christians fled to Pella.<sup>5</sup>

For the Bible does not envision a setting right of what is wrong with the world which takes place without violence. We have mentioned several texts already, which are apocalyptic in nature. Isaiah 63:1-6 is a vision of YHWH returning from the slaughter of Edom, Israel's traditional enemy. The imagery is that of a winepress: grapes are crushed, and the blood-like liquid splashes one's clothes and makes them red. Thus it will be when YHWH takes vengeance on the oppressors, but he will act alone, no human hand will help him. In the vision of the final days in Ezekiel 38-39, against Gog, king of Magog—who, like Edom, symbolizes all of Israel's enemies— God acts by means of earthquakes and tempest, wreaking havoc on the wicked. The Israelites will burn all the instruments of war, Ezekiel 39:9, and the wicked will be plundered and buried, Ezekiel 39:10-12. Finally, in Zechariah 14, it is YHWH who combats, with his angels, not human beings: in this part of Zechariah, the king who comes to Zion in 9:9-10 suppresses all of Israel's weaponry, and speaks (or orders) peace to the nations.<sup>6</sup> It is in this light that we must understand another of the Jewish groups contemporary with Christianity, the Essenes of Qumran, near the Dead Sea. Like the Christians, they have an "apocalyptic" outlook. Their whole endeavor was to be prepared for the final, eschatological (end of

the world, or End Time) battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness. Raymond E. Brown thus describes one of their scrolls, called the “Rule for the War”:

Although the author seems to have drawn upon the military terminology of his time, the war is conducted according to theological designs rather than according to scientific military strategy. The dominant theme is that if the forces of good (or light) are organized according to the proper semiliturgical scheme and if their standards and trumpets are properly inscribed with prayers, God will favor them and victory will be ensured. The camps of the sons of light are organized after the directives of [Numbers] 2:1-5:4; the troops receive ardent sermons from the priests, who also sound the battle signals. The angel Michael, with the aid of Raphael and Sariel, leads the forces of light, while Belial [the first century C.E. version of Satan] guides the forces of darkness.

The Pharisees and the Essenes, and Jesus and his first followers, stemmed from pious Jewish circles (called “hasidim”) that arose at the time of the Maccabean revolt against Syrian oppressors in 167-164 B.C.E. They were mostly pacifists, though the term “hasidic” is applied to warriors in 1 Maccabees 2:42 and 2 Maccabees 14:6 (Judas Maccabee is said to be their leader); they are the first to seek peace in 1 Maccabees 7:13. Many commentators believe that the group which is behind the book of Daniel is pacifistic and looks quite askance at the Maccabees’ actions; Daniel 11:34 would be describing them as providing but little help, and would be disapproving of those who joined up with them. The Maccabees, in fact, once in power, installed the Hasmonean dynasty, which became corrupt, leading to the emergence of the Pharisees as a separatist party and to the Essenes’ withdrawal to the desert “to prepare the way of the Lord.” This text, from Isaiah 40:3, is also associated with John the Baptist in all four Christian gospels (see, e.g., Mark 1:2-3). John the Baptist, indeed, has been linked to the Essenes: he lives in the same general desert area as them, baptizes (the Essenes were big on ritual baths), expects the day of wrathful judgment of God (for which all must be prepared with penance and repentance, Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-14), and like the Essenes, may have been from a priestly family (his father Zechariah was a priest, Luke 1:5, 8, 13). Jesus himself first appears publicly in the gospels in his baptism by John. This points to the somewhat embarrassing but ineluctable fact that Jesus started out as a disciple of John the Baptist. With this brief overview of the Jewish background to a study of peace in the NT, we are now in a position to turn to the NT itself.

*Peace as a greeting and a desire.* As in the Hebrew Bible, “peace” (the Hebrew “shalom”) is the greeting-desire used in the NT. That is, one greets another with the expression “peace (be) to you,” in Hebrew *šālôm lēkā*, in Aramaic, *šālôm lāk*, or if to more than one person, *šālôm ‘alēkem*. This is the greeting given by the risen Jesus to his disciples in John 20:19, 21, 26, and the greetings in all of Paul’s letters, even in Galatians 1:3, where Paul is extremely irate and impatient to begin his tirade against them! Desires for peace, or the “peace of God,” is also found in the endings of Paul’s letters. Jesus instructs his disciples in Luke 10:5-6 to greet the “houses” (households) to which they come with a greeting of peace, which will rest upon the addressee if he is “a son of peace” (a Hebraism for a “peaceful person”); otherwise, the peace will return to the disciples, having been eschewed by the non-peaceful person who was thus greeted.<sup>7</sup> This peace-shalom is really the profoundest desire of the human person in the Bible. Shalom is the setting right of all things, which results in peace, which Augustine defined as the “tranquillity of order” in the *City of God*, 19.13.1. Shalom comes from the Hebrew verb *šālam*, which means “to be whole, uninjured, safe and sound, peaceful;” in the Piel (factitive) form of the verb, it means “to complete, to restore, to give back, repay, requite, reward;” in the Pual (passive form of the Piel), it can mean “to be at friendship;” finally, in the Hophal (the passive form of the causative Hiphil), it means “to be a friend.”<sup>8</sup> It is an all-encompassing term for all well-being and, as such, is synonymous with “salvation.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Luke 19:41-44 has Jesus cry over Jerusalem for not recognizing the ‘things that lead to peace,’ i.e., those pertaining to the divine “visitation” of that city.<sup>10</sup>

*The Gospel of peace.* The NT sees itself as “good news,” “Gospel.” “Gospel” is a Middle English term from the Old English *gōdspel*, from *gōd*, “good,” and *spell*, “tale,” which is a translation of the Late Latin *evangelium*.<sup>11</sup> This latter term comes from the Koine Greek for “good news,” used by the LXX to translate the Hebrew term.<sup>12</sup> The NT sees Jesus Christ as the eschatological fulfillment of all of Israel’s hopes, such as found in Second Isaiah, the anonymous prophet of the late Babylonian Exile who announced the end of Israel’s suffering in a foreign land; this announcement is to be brought by a “herald of good news,” a Hebrew term found in both the masculine and the feminine form in Isaiah 40:9, which we could very literally render, based on the

Greek translation, as “evangelizer.” “Good News” is indeed the title of what is chronologically the first gospel, that of Mark, who seems to have been the first to give this name (in 1:1) for the new literary genre that he uses to tell the story of Jesus. In Luke 2:10-11, the angel of the Lord tells the shepherds not to fear, “for behold, I *evangelize* to you (that is, bring you the good news, or gospel, concerning) a great joy,” namely, that “a savior has been born to you today, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.” The “sign” for this —“sign” being in the Bible a divine indication of something important— will be the newborn child Jesus. Then it is said that a “multitude of the army of heaven” appeared praising God and saying, “Glory in the highest to God, and upon the earth peace among human beings of goodwill.” “Of goodwill,” in Greek *eudokias*, in the Bible refers in the first place to what God is pleased with, his “good pleasure,” in Hebrew *rāsōn*.<sup>13</sup> Thus the first meaning of this phrase would be that peace is wished (or perhaps more exactly, declared to exist) upon humans who are pleasing to God. But *eudokia* in the NT also has the meaning of human goodwill, such as in “having good motives,” as in Philippians 1:15, so that the phrase’s built-in ambiguity may be deliberate, one of the many instances in which the biblical writers purposefully use a “double-duty” word pregnant with more than one meaning or possible interpretation. In this way, the mysterious symbiosis (cooperative relationship) between God and humans in working for peace is intimated.

So, according to Luke, Jesus is a sign of peace upon the earth among persons “of goodwill.” As Jesus enters Jerusalem for his final visit to that city before his death, it is now the multitude of his disciples that praises God for all the miracles they had seen, saying “Blessed is the one who comes, the king in the name of the Lord; in heaven peace and glory in the highest,” Luke 19:37-38.<sup>14</sup> This verse strangely corresponds to Luke 2:14, just discussed. Peace is now proclaimed in heaven. The meaning would seem to be that Jesus’ passion, about to begin, will reconcile humanity with “heaven” (God). This meaning is borne out by another Lucan passage, in Acts 10:36-43. Peter, on the occasion of the conversion to Christianity of the first Gentile, the Roman centurion Cornelius, declares that there is no human preference (or discrimination) with God, but rather, “among all the nations the one who fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”<sup>15</sup> Peter then says that God sent his word to the children of Israel

“evangelizing them” (bringing them the good news of) peace through Jesus Christ. After setting forth the Christian kerygma (the primitive preaching of the apostles about Jesus), Peter finishes his speech by stating that everyone who believes in Christ obtains the forgiveness of sins. We can thus interpret these passages as saying that in Luke’s view—and, as we hope to see, in the NT view as whole— God’s peace is upon persons of goodwill who do what is pleasing to God, fearing him and acting righteously, and that for these kinds of people, forgiveness of sins (or “salvation”) is available through faith in Jesus Christ.

In line with this reasoning, there is another passage which refers to the “gospel of peace,” Ephesians 6:10-20. There the author, ostensibly Paul in prison, exhorts the Ephesian Christians, in military terms, to take up the weapons of God in order to resist the devil, specifying that the struggle is not against “flesh and blood” (biblical terms for human beings), but against the mysterious evil powers that these ancients believed exercised nefarious influences over human beings. Similarly to the Qumranites, and in line with late Second Temple period spirituality, evocative military terms are used in a clearly pacifistic way, for it is God alone who really fights the evil powers. ‘Our weapons are truth and righteousness, our zeal is for the Gospel of peace, faith is our shield against the fiery arrows of the Evil One. Our sword is the word of God, and we are always in prayer and supplication,’ Ephesians 6:14-18. Only a perverse hermeneutic (interpretation) could turn these verses into an inspiration for violence or war. But their peaceful meaning must be demonstrated by the discussion which follows.

*Christ Jesus is peace.* Staying with the letter to the Ephesians for the time being, there is another passage which is probably the most important one in the NT for a discussion of peace among human beings. It is in Ephesians 2:14-18. The context, Ephesians 2, is that of a discussion of the salvation that has come to the Gentiles through Christ. The Pauline author contrasts the before and after stages.<sup>16</sup> Prior to Christ, the Ephesians were pagans living in sin, and therefore “dead,” Ephesians 2:1, 11-12. They lived under the power of the aforementioned evil spirits, who work in the “children of disobedience,” Ephesians 2:2.<sup>17</sup> This was a merely human (“fleshly,” unspiritual, not of God) mode of existence, which destines one for divine wrath, Ephesians 2:3. But the merciful God raised these sinners up with Christ to sit with him

in the heavenly realms, that is, to live a godly life through good works, though undeservedly, Ephesians 2:4-10.

But the thrust of the passage is that the inimical division which existed between Gentile and Jew has been overcome in Christ. Before Christ, these Gentiles were strangers to the citizenship-status of Israel, they were foreigners to the “covenants of the promise,”<sup>18</sup> they were without hope and without God in this world. But now, in Christ, these once far-removed Gentiles have been brought near to God through (their faith in) the blood of Christ, Ephesians 2:11-13. “For he is our peace, having made of the two [sectors of humanity] one [people], demolishing the dividing wall of enclosure, hatred, in his flesh.” According to this Pauline view, Christ came to unite all humanity in himself, who is the eschatological sphere of God’s justification and, hence, salvation. The Jewish Torah (“Law”) divided humanity between Jew and Gentile, whereas *in Christ* there is a new humanity born (or risen from the deadness of sin), reconciled with God and with itself.<sup>19</sup> Division and hatred (must) come to an end in Christ, who has come to include those who were far away with those who were near: all now have access to the one God in the same Spirit, Ephesians 2:14-18.<sup>20</sup> There are thus no longer any foreigners or strangers, but rather all are fellow-citizens of the saints (angels?) and members of God’s own household, all are one body in Christ (Ephesians 2:16), forming one Temple of God, where God dwells, Ephesians 2:19-22. This is a lofty view indeed of the peaceful harmony that should prevail among human beings. It acknowledges the priority of Israel in knowing and, in biblical terms, having an intimate relationship with, God. But it views the coming of the Christ-Messiah as bringing in the former pagans who were estranged from God and living a life of sin, and who therefore were hateful to the Jews. The basis for this division, the Torah, is abolished (in Paul’s terms, the Torah would come to an end or be fulfilled with Jesus —such is the double meaning of the expression in Romans 10:4), and thus the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile disappears.<sup>21</sup> Whatever we are to make of this type of theological expression —clearly Jews are not going to give up their Torah, which even Christians keep as part of their Bible, although they interpret it differently— it is clear that the gist of the passage is peace among humans rather than hateful division.



*Background of the concept of the Kingdom of God.* Undoubtedly the most authentic kernel of what Jesus announced in his ministry, and what he in some way saw himself as inaugurating, was that the “Kingdom of God” had drawn near (Mark 1:14-15). The Kingdom or Kingship of God became an important eschatological expectation and desire in the Second Temple period, though the notion was already in existence in texts which probably must be dated before. In Exodus 15:18, it is announced that “YHWH will reign forever.” Less directly, the idea is expressed in Leviticus 25, in the context of the legislation concerning the Jubilee Year, when *děřôr*, “manumission, liberation,” is to be proclaimed: all debts are cancelled and every slave can return to his home.<sup>22</sup> In Leviticus 25:23, YHWH prohibits selling the land forever, for it belongs to him, and we are all mere “sojourners and squatters” in it. Many psalms celebrate YHWH’s kingship (Psalms 91:3; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1 etc.), but he actually governs through a just king concerned for the poorest, as in Psalm 72. There was a strong tradition in Israel against human kings, reflected in 1 Samuel 8, where the people’s desire to be like the (other) nations and have a human king is disapproved of as being a rejection of YHWH as their only king. Nevertheless, because of the strong tradition regarding the covenant with David, that his dynasty would forever rule over Israel, found in 2 Samuel 7:1-17, the idea of a good and humble king who would in the end establish righteousness upon the earth was maintained and developed, in texts such as Jeremiah 23:5-6 and Ezekiel 34:23-31. This last text, from the Babylonian exile, envisions David (or his descendant) as the servant of YHWH who rules in his place, though not really as king, but as mere “prince.” A “covenant of peace” will be established by virtue of which the “wild beasts” (typically, the pagan nations which historically oppressed Israel) will be gone; all will dwell in safety.<sup>23</sup>

The best examples of the late Second Temple period hopes for the peaceful kingdom of God are found, firstly, in Zechariah 9:9-10, where the humble king comes to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, and eliminates weapons of war from Israel and proclaims (or dictates) peace to the nations, ruling from sea to sea. The gospels see the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus’ “messianic entry” into Jerusalem towards the end of his ministry.<sup>24</sup> But in Zechariah 14, after YHWH has defeated the nations (leaving as

survivors only those who will submit to him in worship, Zechariah 14:16), YHWH will be the only king over all the earth, Zech 14:9, only YHWH.<sup>25</sup>

Leaving aside other Hebrew Bible texts portraying the eschatological peace of the kingdom of God, or of the messianic age, which are the subject of another chapter, we must discuss an important passage which is in the background to Jesus' central proclamation of the kingdom of God. It is Daniel 7, in the apocalyptic second part of this book. Daniel has a dream and visions in the night; from his Babylonian exile (according to the fictional setting of the book) he beholds human history, especially as it concerns Israel, and sees that God's original intention at creation has been perverted, turned upside down. Whereas humanity was to have ruled over the beasts (Genesis 1:28), in fact "beasts" (oppressor nations) have ruled over the world, Daniel 7:1-8 — Israel as victim of these beasts is of course what is primarily in mind. But then Daniel has an apocalyptic vision (a revelation) in which he sees the majestic throne of God and God taking away the dominion from these cruel beasts, and giving it to "one like a human being" (Daniel 7:13-14), literally "one like a son of man." This one is given dominion, honor and kingdom, and all the nations and peoples will serve him; his dominion and kingdom shall last forever. In Daniel 7:18, 27, it is said that those who are to receive this kingdom are "the saints of the Most High;" the "one like a son of man" is to be understood then as a collective, or corporate personality, representing Israel, or at least those Israelites who remained faithful to God's Torah in the terrible persecution of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV "Epiphanes," who during 167-164 B.C.E. attempted to wipe out Judaism. He was finally defeated by the Maccabees, but "Daniel" had not quite gotten to see this. He therefore can only encourage his fellow Jews to persevere until the end, prophesying to them God's final victory, and resurrection for judgment (reward or punishment, Daniel 12).<sup>26</sup>

However, the concept of the "son of man," depicted as an individual though being a collective in Daniel, underwent a process of evolution in the pseudepigrapha, Jewish books written partly in the period between the two Testaments. Thus, in 1 Enoch, composed from about 170-104 B.C.E.,<sup>27</sup> what were originally separate concepts: the Messiah, the Righteous One (from the Servant poems in Isaiah), and the Son of man, are combined into one individual. This is the background to the use of Son of man

as applied to Jesus (and as a title that was perhaps used by Jesus himself) in the NT.<sup>28</sup> What we are interested now in exploring is the Kingdom of God as envisioned by Jesus, or at least, by the NT.

*The Kingdom of God is one of peace and means living in peace.* In the famous “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7), Jesus declares “happy” or “fortunate” persons with certain characteristics; these are the “beatitudes” (Matthew 5:3-12), from the Latin translation of the Greek and, ultimately, Hebrew concept.<sup>29</sup> The description of these persons who are eligible for the Kingdom of God is varied, but the reference is to a set of common traits. They are “poor in spirit,” they mourn and are “meek,” terms which in Hebrew are often just one, the *‘ānāw*, one who is “afflicted, bowed down, meek and humble,” even “doing penance, fasting.” Moses is so described in Numbers 12:3, on the occasion of Miriam and Aaron’s criticism of him for marrying a Cushite woman (normally, an Ethiopian).<sup>30</sup> The humble, peaceful king in Zechariah 9:9 is so described, as is Jesus in Matthew 11:29.<sup>31</sup> The other characteristics of these members of God’s Kingdom are being hungry and thirsty for righteousness, being merciful and clean of heart. They are peacemakers, and thus shall be called children of God, Matthew 5:9. They are also persecuted for righteousness’ sake, and for this, the Kingdom of God is theirs.<sup>32</sup>

We have a concrete example of “peacemaking” in the NT, and it is from the Hebrew Bible, in the story of Moses; it appears in Acts 7:23-29. Moses is depicted here as God’s instrument, since he is said to “visit” his brethren, the Israelites, Acts 7:23. “Visit” in Hebrew can mean God’s saving help, as in Genesis 50:24-25, when Joseph, in Egypt, promises his brothers that God will certainly “visit” them and make them go out of Egypt up to the Promised Land. This promise is fulfilled in Exodus 3:16, when YHWH instructs Moses to tell the elders of Israel that he has “visited” them (seen their oppression as slaves), and will make them go up from Egypt to the Promised Land.<sup>33</sup> The verb “to visit,” however, is not used in regards to Moses in either the Hebrew or the Greek texts of Exodus, but Luke portrays Moses as God’s saving instrument in Acts 7:25, when he slays the Egyptian who was “doing wrong” to the Israelite. The following day, Moses tried to “reconcile into peace” (Acts 7:26) two Israelites who were fighting, telling them that they are brothers, and pointing out that they should not wrong each

other. The wrongdoer of the two rejected Moses' leadership (recall the episode with Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12:1-3). This is what Moses' "visit" on God's behalf here implies.<sup>34</sup> So this specific example of peacemaking in the NT —Luke's (the author of Acts) portrayal of Moses— is a rather activist one, to put it mildly.

The Gospel of Matthew is one of the most "Jewish" of the Jewish writings of the NT; the Letter of James is perhaps the most Jewish. It reflects the late Second Temple period spirituality of the pious poor, the *'ānāwīm* (whose foundational text may be said to be Zephaniah 3:11-13), where it is prophesied:

On that day, you will not (have to) be ashamed of your (wanton) deeds,<sup>35</sup> which you rebelliously did against me, because I will then remove from your midst your exultant proud ones, and you will not continue to aggrandize yourself any more on my holy mountain. I will let remain in your midst a people humble and poor (*'ānī wādāl*), and they will seek refuge in the name of YHWH. The Remnant of Israel will not do wrong, and they will not speak falsehood, and there shall not be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue, for they will graze lie down (to eat) and there shall be none to terrify (them).

James defends the poor against the rich (James 1:9-10; 2:1-9; 5:1-6), and warns against discrimination against those who are disadvantaged. He is at pains to have peace in his community. In James 3:18, we have another instance of the word "peacemaker" (though in a slightly different form in Greek than in Matthew 5:9). James 3 begins by warning the members of his congregation not to aspire too much to teach others, for teachers will be judged more severely. The human tongue is very dangerous; it can be incendiary (James 3:5-6), like the very fire of Gehenna (hell). From the same mouth which blesses God can come out curses against fellow humans, like a spigot which issues forth both sweet and bitter water.<sup>36</sup> James recommends that if anyone wants to show wisdom, he or she should demonstrate it by "good conduct with a wise meekness," James 3:13.

But if you have bitter zeal and strife in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth. That is not the wisdom that descends from above, but (rather) it is earthly, merely human, demoniacal. For where (there is) zeal and strife, there is unrest and every evil deed. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, and then peaceful, moderate,<sup>37</sup> full of mercy and good fruits, indiscriminating, without hypocrisy. And fruits of righteousness in peace are sown for those who make peace. James 3:16-18.

James proceeds to discuss the cause of wars and fights among his people: they stem from inordinate desires which wage war in their (bodily) members; they covet and do not obtain, they kill and envy, but cannot attain, they fight and wage war. They do not have because they do not ask; they ask and do not receive because they ask wrongly, in order to spend on their inordinate desires (James 4:1-3).<sup>38</sup> In James 5:6, after a diatribe against presumptuous rich merchants, where they are specifically accused of withholding wages from the poor (whose cry rises up to the Lord of hosts), a further accusation is made: they have “condemned and killed the just one; he does not resist you.”<sup>39</sup> Repeated exhortations to patience follow in James 5:7-11, where the prophets (who were persecuted) and Job are set forth as models to imitate.<sup>40</sup>

Another NT passage describing what life should be like in the Kingdom of God is Romans 14:17, 19, where Paul states that “the Kingdom of God is not (about) food and drink (issues), but (about) righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” and that we should “then, therefore, pursue peace and those things which promote our mutual edification.”<sup>41</sup> The context is that of the differences and disputes in the Christian community regarding food issues. These could arise in both Jewish and pagan contexts. Those Gentiles who were influenced by Judaism, or Jewish converts to Christianity who maintained the dietary laws, at times were scandalized by the other members of the community who did not keep kosher. Or pagans newly converted to Christianity may have been squeamish about eating meat which they considered to be food sacrificed to idols (see 1 Corinthians 8). Paul is in favor of even giving up one’s rights in order to avoid problems in the community. He has given up his right to maintenance for his ministry; he has even given up his right to a wife! (1 Corinthians 9:4-15). He will give up meat-eating (all meat purchased in pagan markets in the Greco-Roman empire came from ritually-slaughtered animals) if that causes offense to his brother, 1 Corinthians 8:13. Addressing the Romans, Paul counsels peace and understanding, love and accommodation. There are “weak” members in the community, squeamish about what they eat. But neither should the “omnivorous” disdain the vegetarian, nor should the vegetarian unfavorably judge the omnivorous, Romans 14:1-3. The same applies to other points of contention, which should be avoided, Romans 14:1, 5, 13. As we saw in Ephesians 2:19-22, in the Pauline view we have been made into one body in Christ, we

are God's dwelling. Therefore Paul in Romans 14:20 admonishes that community not to destroy the "work of God" over food disputes. What is more, "we who are strong" are obligated to bear (or put up with) the weaknesses of those who are not strong, and not please ourselves. We should rather seek the good of the other, his edification ("build him up"), following the example of Christ, Romans 15:1-3. In this way, we live out the Kingdom of God, in righteousness, peace and joy, Romans 14:17.<sup>42</sup>

Other examples of the call to Christians to live in peace are found in 1 Corinthians 7:15 (allowing separation of the unbeliever married to the believer, since the Lord has called us to live in peace); 2 Corinthians 13:11 (Paul exhorts the Corinthians to rejoice, to agree, to live in peace, so that the "God of love and peace" will be with them); Galatians 5:19-23, where Paul contrasts the "works of the flesh" (merely human ways, considered as hostile to God), which include enmities, strife, jealousy, anger (or rage), contention, quarrels and divisions, with the "fruit of the (Holy) Spirit," which is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, meekness and self-control. In Ephesians 4:3, the Ephesians are urged to maintain the "unity (or concord) of the Spirit in the binding-together of peace." Finally, in Hebrews 12:14-15, the speaker's audience is exhorted to "pursue peace with everyone, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord," and to beware lest any "bitter root" spring up and cause trouble, so that many are contaminated.<sup>43</sup>

*A concluding word on the Kingdom of God and the Sermon on the Mount.* In Matthew 5:20-48, Jesus is said to contrast two ethics. The contrast is probably between the halakah (legal interpretation of the Torah) of the Pharisees and scribes (see Matthew 5:20), Jesus' (and primitive Christianity's) great rivals,<sup>44</sup> and Jesus' own eschatological return to the divine creator's primitive intention (a specific example is his teaching on divorce in Mark 10:1-9; Matthew 19:3-8).<sup>45</sup> Jesus states that, in order to enter the Kingdom of "heaven" (= of God), one's righteousness must comport with that which was intended by God in the beginning of the world, Matthew 5:20. Thus his contrasts in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:21-48. We are interested here in Matthew 5:38-48. The contrast is between the law of talion ("an eye for an eye," etc.), in its day a *limitation* of revenge (see Leviticus 24:19-22), and the new eschatological ethic, where one is to imitate God's own "perfection," Matthew 5:48. In the age of the

Kingdom, one is not to resist the evildoer (“turn the other cheek”), nor the one who would take your tunic (“give him your cloak as well”), but one is to go the “extra mile” with the one forcing you to walk with him, Matthew 5:39-41. The surrounding context indicates that the import of this teaching is a great love which does not insist on one’s rights, a central Christian teaching, as we have seen in Paul.<sup>46</sup> Thus the admonition to give to the one who asks you, and to not turn away from the one who would borrow from you, Matthew 5:42. The final contrast is between an interpretation of Leviticus 19:18 (“love your neighbor as yourself”) which allows one to “hate one’s enemy” —the debate as to who was included in “neighbor” is reflected in Luke 10:29, which is followed by the famous parable of the “Good Samaritan.” Matthew 5:44-48 calls for love of one’s enemies and prayer for one’s persecutors as a requirement for being “children of your Father who is in the heavens.” God makes his sun shine over righteous and unrighteous, as he does with his rain. In the time of the Kingdom, a new behavior is called for: doing more than common, sinful people (“publicans,” “Gentiles”) do, which is to love and greet only one’s own group.<sup>47</sup> No, Jesus calls his disciples to be “perfect,” to imitate God’s own goodness towards all.

*Some practical New Testament statements about peace.* Jesus shows a practical common sense on many occasions. He can apply this to his ethical and eschatological teaching. In Luke 14:25-33, Jesus discusses the demanding ethic of discipleship. The pericope (literary unit) begins and ends with calls to renounce —give up— all group ties and possessions for the sake of being a disciple of Jesus (following his teachings). In order to warn against taking up this challenge thoughtlessly, he gives two illustrations. The first is that of someone who begins to build a tower without knowing whether he has the means to finish it. When he runs out of material, what he half-built will remain as an object of ridicule in that honor and shame culture. The second example is of interest to our concern: a king who wants to do battle with another must first calculate the relative strength of the force each has, and decide whether it is wise to “go at it” with a vastly superior enemy. If it appears that it is not, a king with common sense will seek terms of peace with his enemy. There is here no “apocalyptic hothead” illusion about God coming down and helping the weak-but-willing warrior; rather, the image is that of prudence and level-headedness. This is the same mentality that led the

rabbis after the Jewish revolt of 66-73 C.E. to greatly discourage apocalyptic writings which led the more excitable to fool themselves into thinking that they could do the impossible against Rome, because somehow God would finally intervene. No, the messianic age would take time. It has been said that the main difference between Christianity and rabbinic Judaism is that the former believes the messianic age has already come, while the latter believes it is still a long way off. Rabbinic Judaism learned the hard way that imprudent revolts against a great superpower like Rome brought disaster. Christianity never had any literal interpretations of holy war in its foundational texts, as we are seeing. The fact that later Christians identified with, or became, “superpowers,” finds no support, at least clearly or directly, in their sacred texts.<sup>48</sup>

It is also the gentle Luke who, in Acts 12:20, cites a specific example of people seeking to make peace with a king for prudential reasons (their country depended on the king for their food).

*Peace depends on a good life lived in patience and harmony with others.* Even as late as the latest writing in the NT, the second letter of Peter (*ca.* 125 C.E.), the early Christians awaited the return of Jesus their Lord. Associated with this was the final judgment, wherein the destruction of the wicked, as in Judaism, would take place (2 Peter 3:7). The fact that it was taking so long to occur was not to be taken as grounds for sarcasm and scoffing, but rather as a sign of God’s patience: God wants everyone to repent of their wrongs. Then the end will indeed come; 2 Peter 3:3-10. Meanwhile, we are called upon to live holy, pious lives, thus “hastening the coming of the Day of God,” when this present evil world will be destroyed by fire and a new heaven and earth will take their place, wherein justice dwells, 2 Peter 3:11-13. We are to be found living in peace when this happens, blameless, taking advantage of God’s patience as being meant for our salvation, 2 Peter 3:14-15. The good, peaceable life is described in 1 Peter 3:8-17. The Christians are to “have one mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender compassion, humble minds, not returning evil for evil or curses for curses, but rather blessing, for for this you have been called, to inherit a blessing.” The author next cites Psalm 34:13-17, which exhorts to seek peace —if one loves life and happy days— by not lying or uttering evil words, by shunning evil deeds and pursuing peace, since God looks upon



the righteous with favor and hears their prayers, but confronts evildoers. If one avoids evil, no one will harm them, but even if one is to suffer on account of righteousness (as in Matthew 5:10-12), he or she should consider themselves fortunate and not fear or be disturbed, because they are thus “sanctifying” God (in Judaism, “sanctification of the Name” is called *Kiddush haShem*, which in Medieval times denoted martyrdom), 1 Peter 3:13-14.<sup>49</sup> One is to give an account of one’s faith with “meekness and fear (respect),” so as to put to shame those who insult. Finally Peter contrasts this kind of holy suffering for a godly cause with suffering for wrongdoing.

Likewise, 2 Timothy 2:22-26 instructs to leave the passions of one’s youth in order to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with all who call upon the Lord from pure hearts, avoiding foolish and ignorant debates, which engender fights. The servant of the Lord should not quarrel, but should be “friendly” (or “soothing,” *ēpios*) to everyone, skilled in teaching and tolerant. He or she should educate his adversaries with meekness (that word again!): perhaps God will grant them repentance in order to know the truth, so that they may escape the devil’s trap and return to their good senses, after having been snagged by him (the devil) in order to do his (evil) will.

*But peace does not come cheaply.* We have spoken above about the Letter of James and its concern for the poor. This writing is contesting an interpretation of Paul which would insist that the only important thing for the Christian is to simply have faith in Jesus, that this alone will save (as in the Protestant principle of *sola fides*, “faith alone [suffices]”). In fact Paul, in bitter polemics with the “Judaizers,” individuals who sought to convince his congregations in Galatia that they ought to adopt certain Jewish (and perhaps also occult) practices—even though they were Gentiles—insisted that they were not saved through performing the “works” (requirements) of the Torah, but rather through the faith in the gospel that Paul had preached and that they had accepted.<sup>50</sup> But Paul states that this faith “is effective through love,” Galatians 5:6, and contrasts, as we saw above, the “works of the flesh” (odious behavior, including fighting, quarrelling and divisions, Galatians 5:16-21), which prevent one from entering the Kingdom of God, with the “fruit of the (Holy) Spirit,” which is peace, patience, meekness, amiability, etc., Galatians 5:22-24. Paul had used, in his argument, his interpretation of the example of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9, 15-18). According to this interpretation,

Abraham was “justified” (considered righteous, a good person) in the sight of God not by any works, but because he believed (trusted and obeyed) God, Genesis 15:6. Now James, following the Jewish tradition, which speaks of the many works or good deeds of Abraham,<sup>51</sup> asks rhetorically, “Abraham our father: was he not justified by works, having offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? You see that faith worked together with his works and by the works faith was perfected (or completed),” James 2:21-22.<sup>52</sup> It was thus, by his works also, that Abraham, the “father of all believers,”<sup>53</sup> was justified and became a “friend of God.” “So you see —says James— that one is justified by works and not just by faith,” James 2:24.

The situation which gave rise to this discussion in James is the neglect of the poor by the rich who proclaimed themselves believing Christians.

What use is it, my brother, if someone says that he has faith, if he doesn't have works? Can it be that that faith will save him? If a brother or a sister are naked and lack their daily food, and some one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm and have your fill,” without giving them what the body needs, what good is it? Thus, even faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself,” James 2:14-17.<sup>54</sup>

*Conclusion.* There is therefore no easy peace in the NT.<sup>55</sup> The peace of God is desired, and is promised “in Christ,” Philippians 4:7. If the peace of Christ rules in our hearts, then we will be one united body, as we are called to be, Colossians 3:15. Christ is the “Lord of peace,” 2 Thessalonians 3:16. Jesus left his disciples his peace as a bequest in his “last will and testament” at the last supper, John 14:27. It is a peace unknown in this world, in which there are many tribulations, but Jesus says that we are to have courage, because “I have overcome the world,” John 16:33. However, not all are for this peace, and insofar as one is unwilling to accept this peace, Jesus tells him or her not to “think that he came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace but sword,” Matthew 10:34. This is because, in the Christian view, Jesus has come at the end of time, in the last days awaited by the Jews, and in that view, there will be an eschatological division of humankind, division within one's own family. The original image comes from the prophet Micah, who describes the day of judgment (of the “visitation”) of God against evildoers as one of division, in which there is mutual mistrust and division in the family, Micah 7:4-6. One's enemies are within one's own house.<sup>56</sup> It is thus that in the last book of the NT (and of the Christian Bible), Christ is

depicted as having a sword in his mouth: the final judgment will be based on whether his teaching of love and non-violence was followed.<sup>57</sup> In this apocalyptic scenario, peace is taken away from the earth, Revelation 6:4, and there will be terrible destruction. We can only hope that we will then be found among the peacemakers who lived meekly and amiably in the Kingdom of God.

## **Peace in the Writings of the Early Church Fathers**

*Introduction.* Among the “early Church Fathers,” some would include figures as late as Augustine and Pope Leo the Great in the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. But we have good reason not to do so here, not only because we can only devote a limited amount of space to this topic, but because if we stick to a more proper use of “early” in regards to the doctrine of these Fathers on peace, we can stay within a period in which the teaching of the NT was strictly followed and applied in concrete ways to civic and political life. In other words, we can draw a great dividing line at 313 C.E., when Constantine’s Edict of Milan “brought an end to the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire” and put Christianity on the road to being the official religion.<sup>58</sup> The first two centuries of Christianity were characterized by pacifism, though it would be wrong to deny that there were not other opinions.<sup>59</sup> However, three voices stand out in the period before Constantine: these are Tertullian, Origen and the early Lactantius, and all three agree that “violence of any kind is incompatible with the Christian faith.”<sup>60</sup> We shall here briefly view these writers and some others from this early period, in order to get a picture of how the early Christians applied the teachings of the NT, and thus bring our study to a close.

An early and important figure is Justin Martyr (Palestine, *ca.* 100-165 C.E.). Writing about 150 C.E., he gives us a picture of the Christian ethos at this time: Christians

pay their taxes, obey the authorities, and pray that the emperor be blessed with ‘sound judgment,’ but he also assumes that the faithful are living in a new age which eschews violence in all its forms. Although formerly they killed one another, Christians now pray for their enemies (*First Apology* 14) and follow the injunction of Christ about turning the other cheek (16). They are living in the time which was prophesied by

Isaiah [2:1-4, the famous passage about beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Revised Standard Version)] and which demands a new ethic.<sup>61</sup>

This is the period of the Christian martyrs, who preferred to be killed than to kill. Christians would not even lie to the persecutors, who prohibited Christianity under penalty of death, going to their “deaths confessing Christ” (*First Apology* 39.2-3).<sup>62</sup> Justin’s pupil, Tatian (Syria, *ca.* 120-173 C.E.), thought that wars were inspired by demons (*Address to the Greeks* 19.2-4), and refused a military command (*ibid.* 11.1).<sup>63</sup>

Tertullian (North Africa, *ca.* 160-220 C.E.), is “the first articulate spokesman for pacifism in the Christian Church.”<sup>64</sup> In his *Apology* (notice that in this period Christians are at pains, as Jews have often been, to show to outsiders that there are no grounds to be suspicious of them or to persecute them), he states that Christians pray for the emperor and

for a secure empire, for protection of the imperial palace, for brave armies . . . a peaceful world (30.4) . . . We know that Rome’s continuance holds back the great force which menaces the world, that is, the very end of time which threatens frightful calamities. We have no desire to experience these things, and while we pray for their deferral, we are promoting the continued existence of Rome (30.4).<sup>65</sup>

Notice that the expectation of an approaching end of the world which will entail great suffering and calamity is still alive in Christianity, but it is not desired. For all of Tertullian’s squeamishness about even implicit approval of Roman paganism and idolatry—a Christian cannot, in his view, hold public office or serve in the army—he still prefers the peace secured by Rome to the chaos that barbarian invasions would bring.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the great catalyst that made conscientious Christian thinkers like Augustine and Pope Leo I (“the Great”) abandon pacifism and approve of the “just war” were the ruthless barbarian invasions which overran Rome in the fifth century.

But before that time, pacifism prevailed. A document known as the *Apostolic Tradition*, dated to the early third century, prescribes the following rules for Christian soldiers:

A soldier in the lower ranks [the only permissible kind] shall kill no one. If ordered to do so, he shall not obey, and he shall not take an oath. If he does not want to comply with this directive, let him be dismissed [i.e. from the Church].<sup>67</sup> If anyone exercises the power of the sword or is a civil magistrate who wears the purple, let him give up

the office or be dismissed. A catechumen or a member of the faithful who wants to join the army should be dismissed because he has shown contempt for God. Canon XVI.<sup>68</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (*ca.* 150-215), “Tertullian’s Greek contemporary,” was a “theologian of stature” who agreed with Tatian and Athenagoras (second century) before him that wars were inspired by demons.<sup>69</sup> He calls Christians “a peaceful race” and says that “In peace, not in war are we trained.”<sup>70</sup> The human being is a “‘peaceful instrument’ who honors God with ‘the sword of peace alone’.”<sup>71</sup>

The greatest biblical scholar and theologian of the pre-Constantinian Church was Clement of Alexandria’s pupil, Origen (*ca.* 185-254),<sup>72</sup> the most articulate pacifist in early Christianity.<sup>73</sup> Origen had to respond to a very thorny issue, one we have alluded to above: if everyone followed the Christian way of non-resistance to evil, would this not “expose the empire to the ravages of ‘the most lawless and uncivilized barbarians’,” as his opponent Celsus claimed.<sup>74</sup> Origen, in his *Against Celsus* (248 C.E.), argues that if everyone followed his lead, the barbarians would convert to the Christian way and “would become most law-abiding and civilized.”<sup>75</sup> Origen acknowledges the benefits of the *pax Romana*, which facilitated the spread of the Christian message, but says that “when the occasion arises, we provide the emperors with divine assistance, as it were, by putting on the ‘armor of God’ (*Ephesians* 6.11).”<sup>76</sup> This is more effective than killing troops on the field. At one point, Origen “acknowledges the possibility of just wars and the role they play in protecting the empire from external threats;”<sup>77</sup> however, for him

The need for defending the empire’s borders was real, but it was not the only reality. In Origen’s scheme of things Christians are, “the entering wedge of the eschatological kingdom” (Caspary 128),<sup>78</sup> and that because their role in society is to work toward that kingdom, warfare for them has become spiritualized. Their battle is against the powers of evil both within and outside man that stir up conflicts and prevent a lasting peace. Christian service to the empire, then, must be in the realm of the spirit or not at all.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, Origen provides a most pregnant statement articulating the early Christian interpretation of the “Jesus event” in regards to peace and non-violence. It is,

in line with some of the things we said in our introduction to this chapter, an *eschatological* view:

To those who ask about our origin and founder we reply that we have come in response to Jesus' commands to beat into plowshares the rational swords of conflict and arrogance and to change into pruning hooks those spears that we used to fight with. For we no longer take up the sword against any nation, nor do we learn the art of war any more. Instead of following the traditions that made us 'strangers to the covenants' (*Ephes.* 2.12), we have become sons of peace through Jesus our founder (*[Against Celsus]* 5.33).<sup>80</sup>

*Conclusion.* With Lactantius (*ca.* 240-320), we come to a transitional figure.<sup>81</sup> In his early work (*Divine Institutes*, composed between 304-311), he unambiguously opposes any kind of bloodshed, and is against Rome's wars of expansion.<sup>82</sup>

The Roman spirit of reverence (*pietas*), he says, is found "among those who have nothing to do with war, who preserve a spirit of peace with everyone, who are friendly even with enemies, who love all men as their brothers, and who know how to control their anger and to temper their wrath with a tranquil spirit" (*Div. Inst.* 5.10.10).<sup>83</sup>

However, a change is evident in Lactantius after 312 C.E. He praises the military victories of Constantine over Maxentius in 312 and of Licinius over Maximinus in 313;<sup>84</sup> "the emperor [Constantine] is looked upon as the vice-gerent of the one true God in punishing wrongdoers and restoring justice to the earth."<sup>85</sup> Christianity's persecutors were now defeated, and a new and different atmosphere prevailed in which to further reflect on the justifiability of war and on the exact repercussions of the NT message of peace. But this is the subject of another chapter, or perhaps another book.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Apocalyptic" refers to a type of literature and religious movement in Judaism which was based on visions (or revelations, the Greek word for which is *apokálipsis*, which is the first word in the Book of Revelation) of the final intervention of God in human history to set right all the injustice which reigned over the world. These visions often speak of terrible battles on earth which are mere reflections of the real struggle taking place in the heavenly realm between the good angels and the powers of darkness. Good examples would be Daniel 12:1-3; Revelation 19:11-21.

<sup>2</sup> The rabbis are by and large the successors of the Pharisees, so it is noteworthy that this great rabbi/martyr would support such a messianic pretender as Bar Kochba at so late a date (i.e., over sixty years after the terrible defeat of the first Jewish revolt in 66-73). Other rabbis would denigrate him with a pun on his name, calling him Bar Kosiba ("son of a lie") rather than Bar Kochba ("son of a star"). The bitter defeats of such liberation movements at the hands of the mighty Romans led the rabbis to strongly discourage and prohibit texts which incited to violence certain individuals, whom they saw as delusional hotheads.

---

<sup>3</sup> In the late Second Temple period (which ran from 515 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.), it was expected that YHWH would come with his angels to defeat the evil nations who had caused so much suffering in the world; see Zechariah 14:1-5 (the “holy ones” are angels); cf. Matthew 16:27.

<sup>4</sup> Peter is reported in all four canonical gospels to have struck with his sword a servant of the high priest who was among those who came to arrest Jesus, cutting off his right ear, or part of it.

<sup>5</sup> “*Seemingly* [original italics] the Jewish Christians refused entirely to join the revolt and withdrew across the Jordan [River] to Pella [in the north Jordan valley, in the Decapolis; reference omitted],” Raymond E. Brown, “Early Church,” in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. R.E. Brown – J.A. Fitzmyer – R.E. Murphy, eds. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1343. In such eschatological turbulence, Jesus had recommended flight, not fight, Mark 13:14.

<sup>6</sup> See also Zechariah 4:6; cf. Hosea 1:7.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Matthew 10:11-15.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Feyerabend, *Langenscheidt Pocket Hebrew Dictionary to the Old Testament. Hebrew-English* (Berlin – Munich: Langenscheidt, no date), 353.

<sup>9</sup> This is indeed the better translation for shalom in, e.g., Isaiah 53:5.

<sup>10</sup> In the Bible, “visit” often refers to God’s visit, either for salvation, as in Genesis 50:24-25; Exodus 3:16, etc.; see also Luke 1:68; or to call to account and punish, as in Hosea 1:4; 2:15; 4:9, etc.

<sup>11</sup> *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1990), 528.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2 Samuel 4:10, where *euangelia* (plural) appears in the LXX for the Hebrew *bēsôrâ*; otherwise, it is quite rare to find a match of the two nouns, Hebrew and Greek. Normally, we find the verbs, as in Isaiah 61:1.

<sup>13</sup> As in Psalms 5:13; 19:15 (LXX 18:15); 51:20 (LXX 50:20) etc. We give the verse numbers in the Hebrew Bible as in the standard Masoretic text, which differs at times from other versions, such as the *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Bible are my own translation from the original languages.

<sup>15</sup> It is clear that these expressions are all typical of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>16</sup> I say “Pauline” because I do not consider Ephesians to be directly from Paul, but rather from his school, a generation or so later.

<sup>17</sup> This expression refers to rebellion against God, as in Exodus 23:21; Leviticus 26:15; Numbers 11:20; Deuteronomy 1:26 etc.

<sup>18</sup> Notice the heavy emphasis on belonging-not belonging through the use of native-foreign terminology.

<sup>19</sup> See Romans 6:1-11; 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.

<sup>20</sup> In Romans 2:9-11, Paul states that tribulation and anguish (shall come) upon all evildoers, first to the Jew and also to the Greek (Gentile), and that glory, honor and peace (shall come) to all who do good, first to the Jew and also the Greek.

<sup>21</sup> See Paul’s views in Galatians 3:6-29.

<sup>22</sup> For the Near Eastern background of this practice, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem – Minneapolis: Magnes Press, 1995), especially page 67. He notes that allowing one to return to his or her family, as in Leviticus 25:10, is considered to be a return to the service of the gods; the Sumerian term for freedom, *amargi*, means “to return to the bosom of the mother.”

<sup>23</sup> Only in Ezekiel 37:24 might it be said that “David” will be king, but see the following verse, where he is back to being just a prince. In Ezekiel 37:26, the covenant of peace is assimilated to the eternal covenant, as in YHWH’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17, and perhaps even more importantly, God’s covenant with Noah and with every living creature in Genesis 9. Second Isaiah, the prophet of the late Babylonian exile (*ca.* 540 B.C.E.), democratizes the covenant with David (Isa 55:3) and renews the covenant with Noah (Isaiah 54:9-10).

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 21:1-11 and parallels in the other gospels. In the background is the oracle of Judah in Genesis 49:8-12.

<sup>25</sup> In other words, the great prayer of Israel, the Shema’, (“Hear oh Israel”), Deuteronomy 6:4, will be fulfilled. John 7 seems to be a NT picture of the fulfillment of Zech 14, which envisions the end time as one in which the survivors of God’s final judgment, both Jews and Gentiles, will come to Jerusalem to celebrate Succoth.

<sup>26</sup> It is debated by scholars whether the resurrection of “many” means “all” or only the very good and the very bad, who will be respectively rewarded with eternal life (the *maskilim*, the spiritual leaders of the

---

resistance, will shine like the stars) or suffer *dērāôn*, the extreme form of disgrace and dishonor which elsewhere appears only in Isaiah 66:24, in the context of the unquenchable fire and undying worm reserved for those who rebelled against YHWH.

<sup>27</sup> See E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1. James H. Charlesworth, ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 7.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Mark 2:10; 8:31; 10:33, 45 (combined with the Servant of YHWH in Isaiah); 14:62 (combined with the Messiah via use of Psalm 110, which is linked to Psalm 2 in the midrash, the Jewish biblical commentary tradition; see also Mark 12:35-37); Matt 11:19; 13:37; 16:13-20 (Jesus the Son of man is the Messiah), 28 (Jesus the Son of man has a kingdom); John 3:14; 5:27; 6:27, 53 (the Son of man gives food for eternal life). In Matthew 13:43, in the context of the Son of man’s sending his angels to punish evildoers at the end of the world, it is said that “the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of his Father.”

<sup>29</sup> In Hebrew, this form of blessing is the first word of the first psalm, declaring fortunate and blessed the one who follows God’s Torah and does not keep company with evil persons. The root of the word means to “walk straight,” in the Piel form, “to direct the right way, to make happy,” in Pual “to be made happy,” Feyerabend, 31. From this comes the name Asher (one of the tribes of Israel; see Genesis 30:13).

<sup>30</sup> But based on Habakkuk 3:7, some think it may refer to Midian. The Midianites, a nomadic tribe, are also called the Ishmaelites in the story of Joseph in Genesis 37:25, 27, 28, 36. In this view, Moses would have been married to an Arab woman, since according to Genesis 25:12-18, Ishmael is the ancestor of several Arabian tribes; see also Genesis 17:20.

<sup>31</sup> See also Psalms 25:9; 37:11 (“the *‘anāwīm* [plural form] shall inherit the land, and shall thoroughly delight in an abundance of shalom”).

<sup>32</sup> “Righteousness” is an important term in Matthew. It is the Hebrew *šēdāqā* (Abraham’s trusting obedience which makes him right with God in Genesis 15:6, and thus puts him in the sphere of “salvation,” since *šēdāqā* is synonymous with this term, which can mean “victory,” as in Isaiah 56:1; 59:17; 62:1), but with its own flavors. Joseph, Jesus’ (putative) father, is a *šaddīq*, “a just man,” Matthew 1:19, which means he will apply the Torah, the “Law” (Numbers 5:11-22; Deuteronomy 22:20-21 (for what he thinks is adultery) mercifully, not harshly. One is to seek God’s Kingdom and its righteousness, and everything else will then come, Matthew 6:33. In the NT’s only description of the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), the righteous are separated from the wicked on the basis not of faith or religious confession, but on whether they performed works of mercy (feeding, clothing, visiting the sick or imprisoned) to needy humanity (specifically, Jesus calls them “the least of my brethren,” and says that such acts done or not done really had himself as their object, they were really done to him, or not).

<sup>33</sup> See also Exodus 4:31 and especially 13:19, where explicit reference is made to Joseph’s promise.

<sup>34</sup> Luke, however, is really interested in drawing parallels between Moses and Jesus. Jesus is the ‘prophet like Moses’ promised in Deuteronomy 18:15 (Acts 3:22); Jesus is “leader and savior” (Acts 5:31), Moses is “leader and redeemer” (Acts 7:35; in Exodus 2:17, 19, Hebrew “salvation” verbs are indeed used of Moses). Luke draws a parallel between “visit” and “redeem” in Luke 1:68.

<sup>35</sup> This word in Hebrew is related to arrogance, against which Zephaniah violently rails.

<sup>36</sup> In James 4:11-12, James cautions against speaking ill of, or judging, others.

<sup>37</sup> *Epieikēs*; *epieikeia* is used in Catholic moral theology to soften the demands of the moral law in cases where this would be “fitting or clement,” two other meanings of this word, which would adequately describe Joseph’s above-mentioned moderate discretion in Matthew 1:19.

<sup>38</sup> *Hēdonē* normally means “pleasure,” whence “hedonistic.”

<sup>39</sup> Some see here a reference to Jesus in his passion. Jesus would be following his own axiom in Matthew 5:39, “do not oppose the evil one.” In John 18:23, Jesus, after being slapped (presumably on the cheek) by one of the attendants of the high priest who did not like his answer, did not “turn the other cheek,” but gently protested, seeking an explanation. Cf. James 4:7.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Matthew 5:12.

<sup>41</sup> The language in Rom 14:19 is very similar to that of the Greek version of Psalm 34:15 (LXX 33:15).

<sup>42</sup> We cannot address here in any extended way the issue of whether the Kingdom of God is a present or future reality for the NT. Clearly, it has drawn near or arrived (Luke 10:9; 11:20), and is within or among us (Luke 17:21), but it is also a future which is awaited (Luke 13:28; 21:31; 22:16, 18; 23:42), to cite from only one gospel. Cf. the chronology in 1 Corinthians 15:22-28. See the earthy expectations of the disciples in Matthew 20:20-23; Acts 1:6.



---

<sup>43</sup> Cf. LXX Deuteronomy 29:17.

<sup>44</sup> But cf. Matthew 23:1-32, a great diatribe against the scribes and Pharisees's *conduct* which, however, begins with the instruction to follow their teaching nevertheless!

<sup>45</sup> Note that in Matthew 5:17-19, it is said that Jesus has not come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets (the Jewish Scriptures), but to fulfill them. One cannot violate this divine revelation and be great in the Kingdom of heaven.

<sup>46</sup> See especially his famous "hymn to love" in 1 Corinthians 13. Love "is not self-seeking" and "does not take into account injury," 13:5, but rather "it puts up with everything, it believes everything, it hopes for everything, it bears with everything," 13:7.

<sup>47</sup> Paul in Galatians 2:15 retains the Jewish conception of the pagan Gentiles as sinners, while maintaining that "*in Christ*," these differences no longer apply, Galatians 3:27-29; we are now all children of Abraham (in Christ). In Romans 12:14-21, Paul exhorts the Romans to "bless those who persecute you," not to curse, seeking to live agreeably with everyone, not taking revenge but seeking everyone's good and being, insofar as possible, in peace with every human being. He quotes in support Deuteronomy 32:35, 'Vengeance is mine, says the Lord'. One is to give one's enemy food and drink, if he is hungry or thirsty; thus will one "heaps coals upon his head," following Proverbs 25:21-22, which means that the evildoer/enemy will be moved to repentance. This kind of conception was behind Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of non-violence: convert your enemy into a friend, or at least, show by your non-violence (*ahimsa*, "non-injury") that you have right on your side, while he—who does not—must resort to irrational violent acts to try to "prove" his cause is right. That is, violence as a substitute for reason.

<sup>48</sup> The Jews, however, did show some "holy war" prowess against overwhelming odds in the early wars of the State of Israel against much more numerous enemies who would engulf them.

<sup>49</sup> *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*. Jacob Neusner, ed. in chief; William Scott gen. ed. (Peabody: Hendrikson, 1996), 370.

<sup>50</sup> See Galatians 2:15-16; 3:1-5, 10-14; 4:8-11.

<sup>51</sup> See James L. Kugel, *The Bible as it was* (Cambridge, MA – London: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ., 1997), 165-178.

<sup>52</sup> This letter was not Luther's favorite, to say the least; he called it "straw," and it had some difficulty getting into the Protestant NT canon. The Protestant Reformers protested against what they viewed as the Roman Catholic insistence on "good works" to the detriment of the belief that we are saved only by the grace of God manifested in Christ. Paul was thus their great champion.

<sup>53</sup> Romans 4:11.

<sup>54</sup> The expression "in itself" has variously been parsed as "totally (dead)," "by itself."

<sup>55</sup> Just as the Lutheran opponent of the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who attempted to kill Hitler, and was martyred, said there was no "cheap grace."

<sup>56</sup> See also Jeremiah 9:3-8; 12:6; Luke 12:51-53.

<sup>57</sup> See Revelation 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21; cf. Hebrews 4:12-14, where the Word of God is portrayed as a two-edged sword which lays everything bare and out in the open for judgment.

<sup>58</sup> *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*. Jonathan Z. Smith, ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 287.

<sup>59</sup> See Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 27.

<sup>60</sup> Swift, 27-28.

<sup>61</sup> Swift, 34. Romans 13 counsels obedience to the civil authorities (they are instituted by God), for they only punish wrongdoers (!), and urges payment of taxes. Let us not forget, however, that St. Paul suffered capital punishment by the Roman government.

<sup>62</sup> Swift, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Swift, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Swift, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Swift, 39. In this early period, the eschatological expectation of the NT, and of Jesus himself (derived from the Hebrew Bible), of the End Time calamity that would precede the final judgment, reflected in such texts as Mark 13:14-27; Luke 21:20-28, and which is the original meaning of "temptation" in the line from the Lord's Prayer ("lead us not into temptation," that is, the terrible eschatological trial), was still very much alive.

---

<sup>66</sup> Swift, 40-42. Tertullian asked: “Is it right to make a profession of the sword when the Lord has proclaimed that the man who uses it will perish by it. Will a son of peace who should not even go to court take part in battle. Will a man who does not avenge wrongs done to himself have any part in chains, prisons, tortures and punishments;” from his treatise *On the Crown* 11.1-7, quoted in Swift, 43.

<sup>67</sup> What is contained in the first set of brackets is my own explanation; what is in the second set of brackets is that of Swift.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Swift, 47.

<sup>69</sup> Swift, 50.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Swift, 50. The first citation is from *Exhortation to the Greeks* III.42.1, the second from *The Teacher* 1.12.99.

<sup>71</sup> From *The Teacher* 1.12.99, quoted in Swift, 50. Note the continued *metaphorical* use of military imagery.

<sup>72</sup> Note the continued importance of Alexandria as a center of culture, the “new Athens.”

<sup>73</sup> Swift, 60.

<sup>74</sup> Swift, 53.

<sup>75</sup> Swift, 53, quoting from *Against Celsus*, 8.68.

<sup>76</sup> From *Against Celsus*, 8.73, quoted in Swift, 54.

<sup>77</sup> Swift, 55, referring to *Against Celsus*, 4.82.

<sup>78</sup> The reference is to Gerard E. Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979).

<sup>79</sup> Swift, 56.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Swift, 57.

<sup>81</sup> Swift, 61.

<sup>82</sup> Swift, 61, 64.

<sup>83</sup> Swift, 63.

<sup>84</sup> Swift, 66.

<sup>85</sup> Swift, 67.