

# The Spiritual Legacy of the Messiah Wars

## *Overcoming the myth of redemptive violence*

The history of the Messiah Wars illustrates how institutionalized religion and religiously held political ideologies have worked to coopt spiritual forces and accumulate wealth and power. Nations fight over such things as access to natural resources, trade routes and tariffs, immigration policies, intellectual property, and national pride. They also fight over cultural and religious ideas of right and wrong. Given the complexity of these issues, finding lasting solutions to stop warfare is a seemingly insurmountable challenge.

There's certainly no dearth of ideas afoot about what should be done to establish justice and reduce inter-state violence, as prior Messiah Wars briefs have shown. Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and game theory experts all offer expert advice for how to deconflict people. New tech visionaries believe education mediated by AI algorithms and "psycho-data" will change the world by changing how children think. Some Marxists advocate for a "biological foundation for socialism" that re-educates "vital needs." Does this include implanting chips under the skin, and designing new buffets of psychotropic meds? Meanwhile, fervent secularists strive to legislate morality because they believe government is real but God isn't, while religionists do the same because they believe God is more real than government. Yet history teaches that enforcing morality by force precipitates forceful dissent at least as much as it diminishes conflict. If all else fails, then there's the option to enlarge state surveillance to manipulate people with fear so they'll toe the party line.

Whatever the solution, when it comes to what people are willing to fight to the death for, deeply held mindsets form immense strongholds that again and again kick remedies further down the road. Some cycles of violence span centuries, even millennia.

### The Myth of Redemptive Violence

The deep root of violence has been labeled the Myth of Redemptive Violence, described as one of the oldest continually repeated stories in the world. This myth advances the idea that victory over chaos and evil is ultimately *only* obtainable through violence. It enshrines the belief that war creates peace, violence saves lives, and human strength rewards victors with an absolute right to determine and enforce the ultimate values of a society. In short, the Myth of Redemptive Violence is an ideology of conquest.

Walter Wink, who coined the term, described it as the real myth of the modern world: **"It, and not Judaism or Christianity or Islam, is the dominant religion in our society today."**<sup>1</sup> Wink summarized it this way:

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Wink's study of the Myth of Creative Violence is found in his scholarly trilogy that includes *Naming the Powers*, *Unmasking the Powers*, and *Engaging the Powers*. These all refer to "powers and principalities" described in the New Testament. The quote above is from Wink's own summary here: <https://www2.goshen.edu/~joannab/women/wink99.pdf>. A good critical summary of Wink's work can be found in this Duke University Divinity School doctoral dissertation: *Powerful Practices: Paul's Principalities And Powers Revisited*, by Robert Ewusie Moses, Parts I.2 and I.3. pp 6-61, at: <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/items/e30e2bc8-129a-4465-9435-3b0f9a2ebd87>

**The belief that violence “saves” is so successful because it doesn’t seem to be mythic in the least. Violence simply appears to be the nature of things. It’s what works. It seems inevitable, the last and, often, the first resort in conflicts. If a god is what you turn to when all else fails, violence certainly functions as a god. What people overlook, then, is the religious character of violence. It demands from its devotees an absolute obedience-unto-death.**

Wink associated the myth of redemptive violence with the ancient creation story of Babylon called the *Enuma Elish*. In that story, creation of the world was itself an act of violence to establish cosmic order through overthrow of chaotic forces depicted as gods, goddesses and their offspring.<sup>2</sup> The victorious god in the story suspended his war bow over the heavens, which became a rainbow, symbol of the victory of violence. This myth positioned violence as a primordial fact of life that has influenced religions in many cultures, both ancient and modern. Today it permeates mindsets as diverse as Marxist theories of class struggle, evolutionary imperialism, chauvinism, cowboy legends, violent videogames and superhero movies.

Wink pointed out that people readily overlook the religious character of violence, which “demands from its devotees an absolute obedience-unto-death.” Warrior cults have been part of the culture of redemptive violence since time immemorial. Yet, the blood of battles past propels revenge, new sacrifices and fresh bloodshed to restore order, again and again.

## **Biblical Redemption**

Wink’s concept is descriptive but not curative. Wink, himself, became a radical protestor of wars and joined picketers sprinkling blood on missile stockpiles. That’s like using a watering can to put out a forest fire. Still, faith in redemptive violence certainly describes a large swath of military history. I take it as an elaboration of the Biblical observation that spiritual issues loom darkly behind human conflict and can only be addressed through profound spiritual transformation, what Jesus called being “born again.” In this, Christians align to a degree with secularists who long for a “new way of being human.” Wink, interestingly enough, does not appear to mention the Resurrection in his work, which is the pivotal moment in the Christian worldview about redemption.<sup>3</sup> Wink also dismisses the Christian Just War theory as simply re-affirming the underlying power of Redemptive Violence, which offers no solace to warriors who fight heroically against pogroms and holocausts.

The Bible introduced a radical revelation distinct from the Babylonian myth by describing creation not as the result of violent conflict but as the benevolent work of the “Maker of heaven and earth.” After the disaster of human self-will in Paradise, aka, the “Fall,” the God of the Bible has remained uniquely self-revelatory and always working to restore a corrupted, warring and dysfunctional world by blessing humanity with new life, goodness and fresh abundance. The entire Bible can be understood as a narrative about God’s redemptive plan, which culminates in the sending of His Son, Jesus the Messiah and Redeemer, because “God so loved the world.”

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<sup>2</sup> The ultimate violent act in the *Enuma Elish* was the murder of a primordial female goddess Tiamat by her own son, Marduk. Tiamet’s name means “Mother of them all.” Her son split her body with an arrow, then fashioned the heavens and the earth from her corpse. Some suggest this myth is an ancient projection of human trauma experienced when celestial bodies collided in the heavens or struck earth, radically altering human life. Recent advances in archaeology and science lend some credence to this idea. See: [Archaeology vs. Myth: Can Science Prove Ancient Legends Were Real?](#)

<sup>3</sup> For a compelling critique of the Myth of Redemptive Violence which nonetheless acknowledges the value of Wink’s insights, see: [Walter Wink and War and Peace – DANIEL DeFOREST LONDON](#).

For critical thinkers, the Bible seems not to explain why a good God made a world full of suffering, which I'll address specifically in *The Mystery of Messiah*. [\[LINK\]](#) To complete the present brief, permit me to elaborate a little further on the topic of redemption.

## Redemption and Mammon

Jesus famously said, "you cannot serve God and mammon." Mammon was eventually capitalized, likening it to a deity with supernatural powers, but scholars have not identified a deity by this name. "Accumulated wealth" best reflects the intended meaning of the word, which implies not merely piling up wealth but "serving" wealth as if it were one's master. Jesus advised His listeners to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth, and He commented extensively on the power of greed and stinginess to darken the human soul. Don't worry about such practical things, Jesus said, but pursue first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all the other necessary things of life will be added to them. "Because your heavenly Father knows you need them" (Matthew 6:31-34).

Later, the New Testament avers that **"the love of money is the root of all of evil"** which causes people to covet and stray from faith, producing many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10). Speaking about the last days, the apostle James wrote the rich have heaped up treasure that will be a witness against them. **"You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence and fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter"** (James 5:1-5).

The caution against serving Mammon becomes even greater when extended to kingdoms and empires. For rulers, wealth is a never ending lifeblood of accumulation meant to ensure security, which also seems inevitably to lead to corruption and separating the haves from the have nots.

## Redemption by Jubilee

God made a provision for redeeming the wealth accumulation of the people of Israel, as if He anticipated injustices that would follow their growth as a nation. The Book of Leviticus calls God's provision a "Jubilee," referring to a trumpet blast used to announce a Jubilee year once every fifty years. Here's the passage, a portion which (italicized below) is inscribed on the American Liberty Bell in Philadelphia:

**You shall make the fiftieth year holy, and *proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.* It shall be a jubilee to you; and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family [and]... to his property.** Leviticus 25:8-12

In addition to returning lands to their original holders, Israel was to release slaves and prisoners in a Jubilee year. Also, the price of buying and selling property hinged on the number of years left until the next Jubilee. The owner was, in effect, selling the remaining number of harvests.

The Torah instructed that Jubilee years were applicable only when the Jewish people lived in the Holy Land. Since the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel around 732-722 BCE, the Jubilee has not been considered applicable. On the other hand, Messianic rabbi Jonathon Cahn lays out a compelling case that events related to the rebirth of modern Israel were strongly influenced according to 50-year Jubilee-like cycles. In *The Oracle: The Jubilean Mysteries Unveiled*, he tells an amazing story of unusual historical events that occurred 50 years apart in 1867, 1917, 1967, and 2017, all connected to the redemption and restoration of the modern nation of Israel. Cahn's remarkable account makes a compelling case that God's Jubilee plan of redemption for Israel

serves a higher purpose that is still unfolding. It was not simply to manage agricultural and economic cycles.

## Job's Repentance

Perhaps the oldest story about redemption in the Bible is about a righteous man named Job who suffered the sudden, inexplicable loss of his family, wealth and property.<sup>4</sup> The story reveals that his losses were due to Satan, who had previously challenged God to remove Job's blessings to see if Job would remain righteous. Unaware of this heavenly backstory, Job's friends berated and accused him of having committed some hidden sin that must have caused God to punish him, rather like the law of karma. Job rejects their accusations, but also wallows in doubt and unanswerable questions about God until God finally shows up to challenge him to answer deep questions about Creation. This leads Job to acknowledge his own limitations and God's sovereignty. Deeply moved and humbled, Job concludes:

**Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know... My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore, I retract my words, and I repent in dust and ashes.** Job 42:3-6

People usually recount this story as a profound representation of the inexplicable sufferings of humanity, leading some to blame Satan. Others conclude there's no adequate explanation for suffering, while still others reject the idea of God altogether as a figment of the imagination. How could a good God allow such terrible things to happen? However, the dramatic force of the narrative derives from Job's repentance. When Job humbles himself and prays for his accusing friends, God ultimately restores Job and his family and doubles his previous wealth. Job lives to be 140 and see his children's children unto the fourth generation.

In the midst of this well-known story, Job utters powerful words of conviction that still resonate today:

**I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth... yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!** Job 19:25, 26-27

Job was convinced that God's redemption was not pie in the sky, reserved only for those who go to heaven when they die. He believed God would appear on earth as his Redeemer. Jesus fulfilled Job's faith, and still appears to us today to redeem our losses and restore us in real time to receive God's blessings.

## God Desires Justice

The story of God's redemption is ancient indeed. But what does redemption actually mean besides returning property and freeing slaves according to the laws of Jubilee? The scripture is very clear about this. Through the prophet Micah, God intones: **"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God?"** In Hebrew, the word for justice (*zedek*) also means righteousness and is the root word for "charity," forever linking God's idea of righteousness not only to justice but also with making practical provisions for the poor.

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<sup>4</sup> The Book of Job is believed by scholars to have been written around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, but the story itself is traceable by various internal references and language usage to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, making it one of the oldest narratives in the Bible.

Numerous scriptures attest to this. Here are a few that underscore the importance of activating charitable justice in God's redemptive plan:

**There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers, and toward the poor and needy in your land.** Deuteronomy 15:11

**Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.** Proverbs 21:13

**Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.** Proverbs 16:19

Jesus especially emphasized the importance of extending mercy and justice to the poor:

**Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.** Matthew 25:40

**Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.** Luke 12:33

**But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.** Luke 14:13-14

Like God's love, God's redemption is an action word always calling for people of faith to respond to the needs of those around them. The Apostle John summarizes this near the end of the New Testament saying: **"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."** 1 John 3:17-18

God's redemption is neither a myth nor magic. It's a plan of action to be carried out through humble acts of mercy and justice done in God's name. Our path to a clean conscience and a pure heart leads directly to and through God's redemptive mandate. To be redeemed is to be empowered to pay our redemption forward and help others to enter into God's redemptive plan.

## The Spirit of Christianity

The distinctive role of Christianity in the world's quest for peace and prosperity is that in its quintessential form, Christianity prioritizes radical inner transformation joined together with compassion and benevolence toward others. It's not just the Golden Rule to do unto others as you would have them do unto you, as if to gain some personal satisfaction. Christ modified this injunction: **"Love one another as I have loved you"** (John 13:34, italics added). We are to emulate His ultimate sacrifice by offering ourselves sacrificially in however small way we can to bless others and help them also be set free to do the same.

Jesus said He came to serve, not to be served. He also said His kingdom is not of this world. He was not interested in competing for power and wealth in this world, nor making a name for Himself. Instead, He directed His followers to follow His Spirit, go into our suffering world, model His truths and serve others no matter the personal cost. **"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me"** (Matthew 16:34, NLT).

The world often responds to sincere Christianity by squabbling over theology, doctrinal nitpicking, mockery and shameless scapegoating, especially whenever Christians can be linked in some way to injustices. Jesus cautioned: **“Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye”** (Matthew 6:42, NLT).

Have you noticed that the words “God” and “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” have become some of the world’s most widely used swear words? Tell me, have you ever heard someone exclaim “Oh, Buddha!” or “Hare Khrishna!” when they stub their toe?! <sup>5</sup> What does that tell you? To me, it suggests people avoid really learning about God and Jesus because they’re worried they’d have to change their lives if they learned the truth.

Here’s a little comfort: When traditional religious rulers once accused Jesus of doing the devil’s work, He said: **“Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man [His favorite name for Himself] will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the one to come.”** In other words, blaspheme Jesus all you want, but there’s no forgiveness if you blaspheme the power of God that permanently transforms human hearts and truly makes the world a more heavenly place.

Christ’s goal of inner transformation combined with sacrificial compassion for others is a tall order, as evidenced by how few people actually manage to live His way. Yet, the miracle of the ages is that so many anonymous Christians actually do live this way. Christianity has grown day after day, year after year, decade upon decade, over two millennia, like good yeast that leavens a whole loaf of bread. If, say, only 10% of the world’s 2.2 billion “nominal” Christians—Christians by name—are able to embody at least some small measure of Jesus’s sacrificial love and compassion, that’s still 220 million Christ followers at work like good yeast in our world today.

The next section, *The Mystery of Messiah* [[ADD LINK](#)], fleshes out this hope and offers evidence that the good leaven of the Christian life imbued with Holy Spirit insight and energy is at work every day on every continent uniting more people than any other solution the world has dreamt up since Jesus walked the earth.

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Christian comedian Daren Streblow for pointing this out.