

OPERATION HONOR, 2015

Restoring the Soul After Service



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THE BIBLE AND PTSD



GEORGE WASHINGTON



From his original Charge to Chaplains:

“The blessing and protection of Heaven are at all times necessary, but especially so in times of public distress and danger...”

“A soldier who knows the Word of God
and honestly tries to observe God’s laws
is a man of power and influence among his fellows
and exalts his military service to the high level
of religious faith, courage and loyalty.”

Closing words of Afterword to the Holy Scriptures
Presented by the US Army to our GIs during WWII

CH (MG) William R. Arnold
Chief of Chaplains, 1937-45

NOAH: GLOBAL TRAUMA



...And what finally left him
When the deluge withdrew
And land that could still sprout olive branches
Revealed its litter of white and staring eyesockets?

...O Universe, you have been skewed
By the powers of our hands.
And we who taste your rain
And tornado, your typhoon and blizzard,
We who sweep the refuse of seed
After the cleansing wind has passed
We who float
Give you our own flesh
In apology and retribution.

Edward Tick, "Noah"

The Binding of Isaac



So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an Angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him, thy son. Behold!
A ram caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

“ The parable of the old man and the young”

Wilfred Owen, b. 1893

Killed in action, Nov. 4, 1918, Sambre Canal

AKEDAH:

THE BINDING OF ISAAC IN THE VIETNAM ERA

God said to Abraham, Kill me your son.
Abe said, Man you must be puttin' me on.
God said, No. Abe said, What?
God said, You can do what you want Abe but
the next time you see me comin' you'd better run.
Abe said, Where do you want this killin' done?
God said, Out on Highway 61.

Bob Dylan, From "Highway 61 Revisited," 1965

You who build these altars now
to sacrifice your children,
you must not do it anymore.
For you've never had a vision
and you never have been tempted
by the devil or the Lord.
Yes you who build these altars now
your hatchets blunt and bloody
you were not there before
when I lay upon the altar
and my father's hand was trembling
from the beauty of the Word.

Leonard Cohen, "The Story of Isaac," 1968

Vietnam is Moriah, the mountain of Genesis, place of sacrifice, where all bets are off, emotionality is eliminated, and one's belief system is emptied of understood moral sanction. With themes of obedience, trust, the call of higher authority, risk, and pumping it up to the heavyside layer..., Like the GI's Indochina, the Moriah of Scripture contains no coordinates, no statues or landmarks to denote the experience of its historical visitor.

Three days walk from Beersheba or 10,000 miles by plane or boat, what the hell? They're both nowhere now.... Only the experience of those who went and returned – the events, sacrifices, memories, the core granules stuffed inside – only these seek meaning now.

Stephen Sabom, "Judgment at Catecka," 1987

TRAUMATIZED WARRIOR-KINGS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Saul:

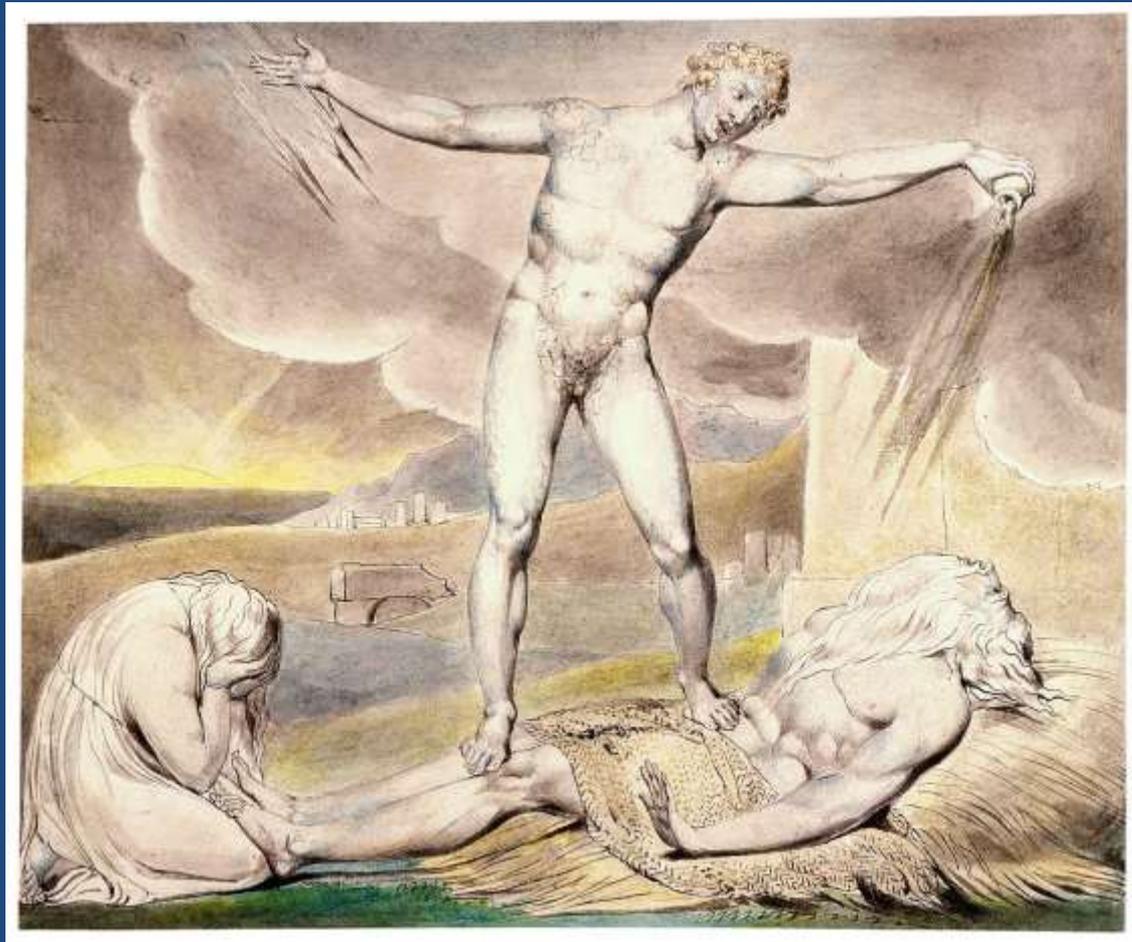
“The Lord’s spirit left Saul, and an evil spirit sent by the Lord tormented him...”
(*I Samuel 16:14*) “..and he raved in his house like a madman...” (*18:10*)

David:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
I have cried desperately for help
But still it does not come...
I am no longer a human being, I am a worm...
My strength is gone, gone like water spilled on the ground...
My heart is like melted wax.
My throat is as dry as dust...”

Psalm 22

THE GI AS JOB



BIBLICAL PRECEPTS ON MINIMIZING SPIRITUAL HARM FROM WAR

Genesis 14:22-24 No spoils of war:

Abram declares, “I will not take anything of yours, not even a thread or a sandal strap. Then you can never say ‘I am the one who made Abram rich.’ I will take nothing for myself. I will accept only what my men have used...”

49:5-7 Excess violence cursed:

Jacob curses sons Simeon & Levi for using their weapons to commit violence, killing people in anger, bulls for sport; anger too fierce, fury too cruel...”

BIBLICAL PRECEPTS ON WAR II: *NUMBERS*

Purification from sin, after touching corpse or direct exposure to the dying:

19:1-10 Red Cow Ceremony: week-long purification with ashes, burning herbs and sacred water

26 Men must be twenty years old to be fit for military service

Purification after battle:

31:19-20 Moses: all who have killed or touched a corpse remain outside camp for 1 week & purify yourself & everything you wear & carry on 3rd & 7th days

31:21-4 Eleazer the Priest – all who return from battle – purify everything that will not burn in fire & everything else by water. On 7th day wash clothes. Only then are you ritually clean and allowed to re-enter camp

31:50-52 Officers must offer special sacrifices & payments for surviving

35:33 Ritual purification after killing:

Murder defiles the land & except by the death of the murderer there is no way to purify the land.

BIBLICAL PRECEPTS ON WAR – III

Deuteronomy

20: “Geneva Convention of the Old Testament”

Many rules for practicing humane warfare, including protection of newly married and prohibition against destruction: “The trees are not your enemies...”

*Camp must be ritually clean

23:9-14 Keep your camp ritually clean & do not do anything indecent that would cause the Lord to turn his back on you

20: *24:5 Newly married men excluded from military service for one year

I Samuel

*Remain pure before battle: 21:5

*Do not kill without cause or for revenge, or do anything in battle you will later regret:
25:30

BIBLICAL PRECEPTS ON MINIMIZING WAR TRAUMA - IV

PSALM 7:

O Lord, my God...

If there is wrong in my hands,

If I have requited my friend with evil

Or plundered my enemy without cause,

Let the enemy pursue me and overtake me,

And let him trample my life to the ground,

And lay my soul in the dust.

PROVERBS:

Things that the Lord hates and cannot tolerate:

... a lying tongue,

hands that kill innocent people...

A lying tongue...

Doing evil...

KING DAVID'S MOVEMENT OF FAITH

“Rescue my soul from the sword...”

Psalm 22

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil;

For Thou art with me;

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me...”

Psalm 23

Healing from war trauma comprises a spiritual movement
from the conditions of Psalm 22 to Psalm 23

“THE REDEEMER”

I turned in the black ditch, loathing the storm;
A rocket fizzed and burned...
And lit the face of what had been a form
Floundering in murk. He stood before me there:
I say that he was Christ... His eyes on mine
Stared from that woeful head that seemed a mask
Of mortal pain in Hell's unholy shrine.

No thorny crown, only a woolen cap
He wore – an English soldier...
He faced me, reeling n his weariness,
Shouldering his load of planks, so hard to bear.
I say that he was Christ...

Siegfried Sassoon

First front line poem, November 1915



Necessities of Return

- Isolation and tending
- Affirmation of warrior destiny
- Purification and cleansing
- Storytelling
- Restitution in the community
- Initiation as an Elder Warrior



HEALING TRAUMA: MAKE IT SACRED AND RESTORE THE WARRIOR'S COMMUNITY

