



YCT YEMEI IYUN IN TANACH **IS THERE A BIBLICAL RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS?**

Weapons Ownership in Tanach

Rabbi Haggai Alexander Resnikoff

Owning Weapons and Self-Defense

1. David French, "The Biblical and Natural Right of Self Defense", *National Review*, 1/25/13
<https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/biblical-and-natural-right-self-defense-david-french/>

... In Mosaic law, God obviously continued his mandate of the death penalty for murder...but not for all killing. He specifically carved out an exception for the defense of one's home: "If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him . . ." (Exodus 22:2).

... the morality of self-defense is not only presumed, the act of self-defense is permitted and even mandated by key Biblical figures. This principle flows of course from a moral law that reveres human life. It should be protected, not merely avenged. Nehemiah, when he was rebuilding Jerusalem in the face of hatred (not in wartime, but when tribal neighbors were seeking to carry out vigilante attacks on Jews) instructed his people: "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes." (Nehemiah 4:14)...

It's often-forgotten that the climax of the Book of Esther involves the Jews gathering together in an act of self-defense, where a despotic king was persuaded to allow them to fight against their attackers: "The king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods." (Esther 8:11). The Jews then "struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those that hated them." (Esther 9:5).

Weapons in Biblical Culture

2. Judges 3:31	שופטים פ"ג
After him came Shamgar son of Anath, who slew six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad. He too was a champion of Israel.	לא ואחריו הנה שמגר בן-ענת ויך את-פלשתים ישש-מאות איש במלמד הבקר וישע גם-הוא את-ישראל:

3. Ibid. 5:6	שם פ"ה
In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, In the days of Jael, caravans ceased, And wayfarers went By roundabout paths.	ו בימי שמגר בן-ענת בימי יעל חָדְלוּ אַרְחוֹת והלכי נתיבות ילכו אַרְחוֹת עֲקֻלְקֻלוֹת:

1. Why does Shamgar use an ox goad rather than a sword? What was the level of safety for civilians at that time?
2. What does Shamgar's use of the ox goad suggest about the Torah's values regarding private ownership of weapons?

4. Ibid. ch. 14	שם פי"ד
5 So Samson and his father and mother went down to Timnah. When he came to the vineyards of Timnah [for the first time], a full-grown lion came roaring at him. 6 The spirit of the LORD gripped him, and he tore him asunder with his bare hands as one might tear a kid asunder; but he did not tell his father and mother what he had done.	ה וירד שמשון ואביו ואמו תמנתה ויבאו עד-כרמי תמנתה והנה כפיר אריות שאג לקראתו: ו ותצלח עליו רוח יהוה וישסעהו כשסע הגדי ומאומה אין בידו ולא הגיד לאביו ולאמו את אשר עשה:

1. What is the significance of the emphasis in the text that Samson killed the lion with his bare hands? What is the source of Samson's success in self-defense?

5. 1 Samuel 13:19	שמואל א' פי"ג, י"ט
19 No smith was to be found in all the land of	יט וחרש לא ימצא בכל ארץ ישראל כִּי- [אֲמָרוּ]

<p>Israel, for the Philistines were afraid that the Hebrews would make swords or spears... 22 Thus on the day of the battle, no sword or spear was to be found in the possession of any of the troops with Saul and Jonathan; only Saul and Jonathan had them.</p>	<p>(אמר) פִּלְשְׁתִּים פֶּן יַעֲשׂוּ הָעֵבְרִים חֶרֶב או חֲנִית... כב וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם מִלְחָמָת וְלֹא נִמְצָא חֶרֶב וְחֲנִית בְּיַד כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אֶת־שָׂאוֹל וְאֶת־יֹונָתָן וְתִמְצָא לְשָׂאוֹל וְלִיֹונָתָן בָּנוּ:</p>
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1. How does the fact that weapons were banned by the Philistines affect the way we read the preceding sources?

6. 1 Samuel 17	ש"א י"ז
<p>34 David replied to Saul, "Your servant has been tending his father's sheep, and if a lion or a bear came and carried off an animal from the flock, 35 I would go after it and fight it and rescue it from its mouth. And if it attacked me, I would seize it by the beard and strike it down and kill it... 37 The LORD," David went on, "who saved me from lion and bear will also save me from that Philistine..." 38 Saul clothed David in his own garment; he placed a bronze helmet on his head and fastened a breastplate on him. 39 David girded his sword over his garment. Then he tried to walk; but he was not used to it. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk in these, for I am not used to them." So David took them off. 40 He took his stick, picked a few smooth stones from the wadi, put them in the pocket of his shepherd's bag and, sling in hand, he went toward the Philistine... 43 And the Philistine called out to David, "Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?" The Philistine cursed David by his gods...</p>	<p>לד וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־שָׂאוֹל רַעְיָה הָיָה עֹבְדֵךָ לְאֶבְיֹוֹ בְּצֹאן וּבְאֵי הָאֲרִי וְאֶת־הַדּוֹב וְנִשָּׂא שָׂה מִהַעֲדָר: לֵה וַיִּצָּאֲתִי אֲחֲרָיו וְהִפְתִּיו וְהִצַּלְתִּי מִפְּיֹו וַיִּקָּם עָלַי וְהִחַזְקָתִי בְּזַקְנֹו וְהִפְתִּיו וְהִמִּיתִיו... לז וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד יִקְוֶה אֲשֶׁר הִצַּלְנִי מִיַּד הָאֲרִי וּמִיַּד הַדּוֹב הוּא יִצַּלְנִי מִיַּד הַפִּלִּשְׁתִּי הַזֶּה... לח וַיִּלְבַּשׁ שָׂאוֹל אֶת־דָּוִד מְדִיו וְנָתַן קוֹבַע נְחֹשֶׁת עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּלְבַּשׁ אֹתוֹ שָׁרְיוֹן: לט וַיַּחְגַּר דָּוִד אֶת־חַרְבּוֹ מֵעַל לְמַדְיוֹ וַיֹּאֲלֵ לְלָכֶת כִּי לֹא־נִסָּה וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־שָׂאוֹל לֹא אוֹכַל לְלָכֶת בְּאַלְהֵ כִּי לֹא נִסִּיתִי וַיִּסְרַם דָּוִד מֵעַלְיוֹ: מ וַיִּקַּח מִקְלוֹ בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּבְחַר־לוֹ חַמְשָׁה חֲלָקֵי־אֲבָנִים מִן־הַנַּחַל וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָם בְּכַלֵּי הָרַעִים אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וּבִיקוּט וְקָלְעוֹ בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּגַּשׁ אֶל־הַפִּלִּשְׁתִּי... מג וַיֹּאמֶר הַפִּלִּשְׁתִּי אֶל־דָּוִד הַכֶּלֶב אֲנֹכִי כִּי־אַתָּה בָּא־אֵלַי בַּמְּקֹלוֹת וַיִּקְלַל הַפִּלִּשְׁתִּי אֶת־דָּוִד בְּאַלְהֵיו... מה וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־הַפִּלִּשְׁתִּי אַתָּה בָּא אֵלַי בְּחַרְבַּ וּבְחֲנִית וּבְכִידוֹן וְאֲנֹכִי בָּא־אֵלֶיךָ בְּשֵׁם יְקוֹק אֲבָאוֹת אֶל־לְקִי מֵעַרְכוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר חָרַפְתָּ...</p>

<p>45 David replied to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Hosts, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied...</p> <p>49 David put his hand into the bag; he took out a stone and slung it. It struck the Philistine in the forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.</p> <p>50 Thus David bested the Philistine with sling and stone; he struck him down and killed him. David had no sword;</p>	<p>מז ויַדְעוּ כָּל־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה כִּי־לֹא בַחֶרֶב וּבַחֲנִית יְהוֹשִׁיעַ יִקְנֶה כִּי לִיקוּם הַמַּלְחָמָה וַנָּתַן אֶתְכֶם בְּיַדְנוּ... מִט וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד אֶת־יָדוֹ אֶל־הַפְּלִי וַיִּקַּח מִשָּׁם אֶבֶן וַיִּקְלַע וַיִּד אֶת־הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי אֶל־מִצְחוֹ וַתִּטְבַּע הָאֶבֶן בְּמִצְחוֹ וַיִּפֹּל עַל־פָּנָיו אֶרְצָה: ג וַיַּחֲזֹק דָּוִד מִן־הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי בְּקִלְעוֹ וּבְאֶבֶן וַיִּד אֶת־הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי וַיְמִיתֵהוּ וַחֲרַב אֵין בְּיַד־דָּוִד:</p>
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1. Which side of the argument does this story support? What are the arguments in both directions?
2. How does it seem that David encounters the lion and the bear? What does he use to kill them? Who gets the credit?
3. What is Goliath’s attitude towards the sling? What is David’s attitude? What is the Tanakh’s attitude? How does this relate to question 1 above?

7. Nehemia 4	נחמיה ד'
<p>1 When Sanballat and Tobiah, and the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that healing had come to the walls of Jerusalem, that the breached parts had begun to be filled, it angered them very much,</p> <p>2 and they all conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to throw it into confusion.</p> <p>3 Because of them we prayed to our God, and set up a watch over them day and night.</p> <p>4 Judah was saying, “The strength of the basket-carrier has failed, And there is so much rubble; We are not able ourselves To rebuild the wall.”</p>	<p>א וַיְהִי כַאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע סַנְבַלַּט וְטוֹבִיָּה וְהָעֲרָבִים וְהַעַמֻּנִים וְהָאֲשֻׁדּוּדִים כִּי־עָלְתָה אֲרוּכָה לְחַמּוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם כִּי־הִחִלוּ הַפְּרָצִים לְהַסְתֵּם וַיַּחֲר לָהֶם מְאֹד: ב וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ כָלֶם יַחְדָּו לָבוֹא לְהִלָּחֵם בִּירוּשָׁלַם וְלַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ תוֹעָה: ג וַנִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַנַּעֲמִיד מִשְׁמֶר עֲלֵיהֶם יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה מִפְּנֵיהֶם: ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה כָּשֵׁל כַּח הַסִּבֵּל וְהָעֶפֶר הָרַבָּה וַאֲנַחְנוּ לֹא נוֹכֵל לְבַנּוֹת בַּחֹמָה: ה וַיֹּאמְרוּ צָרִינוּ לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יֵרְאוּ עַד אֲשֶׁר־נָבוֹא אֶל־תּוֹכֶם וְהִרְגָנוּם וְהִשְׁבַּתְנוּ אֶת־הַמְּלָאכָה... אֶת־הַמְּלָאכָה...</p>

<p>5 And our foes were saying, “Before they know or see it, we shall be in among them and kill them, and put a stop to the work.” ...</p> <p>10 From that day on, half my servants did work and half held lances and shields, bows and armor. And the officers stood behind the whole house of Judah</p> <p>11 who were rebuilding the wall. The basket-carriers were burdened, doing work with one hand while the other held a weapon.</p> <p>12 As for the builders, each had his sword girded at his side as he was building. The trumpeter stood beside me.</p>	<p>י וַיְהִי מִן־הַיּוֹם הַהוּא חָצִי נְעָרֵי עֲשִׂים בְּמִלְאָכָה וְחָצִים מְחַזְּקִים וְהָרַמְחִים הַמְּגַנִּים וְהַקְּשָׁתוֹת וְהַשְּׂרִינִים וְהַשָּׁרִים אַחֲרֵי כָּל־בֵּית יְהוּדָה: יֵא הַבּוֹנִים בַּחוּמָה וְהַנְּשָׂאִים בְּסָבֵל עִמָּשִׁים בְּאַחַת יָדוֹ עֹשֶׂה בְּמִלְאָכָה וְאַחַת מְחַזְּקָת הַשֶּׁלַח: יב וְהַבּוֹנִים אִישׁ חֶרֶבֹו אֲסוּרִים עַל־מְתָנּוֹ וּבּוֹנִים וְהַתּוֹקֵעַ בְּשׁוֹפָר אֶצְלֵי... </p>
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1. Who are the people bearing arms in this story? When and why do they take them up?
2. Based on this story, what seem to be the conditions under which non-soldiers bear arms in the Tanakh? How does this relate to French’s citation of this text in support of his argument?

Our World and the Messianic World

8. Mishna Shabbat 6:4	משנה שבת פ"ו ה"ד
<p>A man may not go out with a sword, nor with a bow, nor with a shield, nor with a round shield, nor with a spear. If he has gone out [with any of these] he is liable for a Chattat. Rabbi Eliezer says: They are ornaments for him. But the Sages say: They are nothing but an indignity to him, for it is said, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears unto pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).</p>	<p>לֹא יֵצֵא הָאִישׁ לֹא בְּסִיף, וְלֹא בְּקֶשֶׁת, וְלֹא בְּתַרְסִים, וְלֹא בְּאַלְהָה, וְלֹא בְּרִמְחָה. אִם יָצָא, חַיֵּב חֲטָאָת. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, תְּכַשִּׁיטִים הֵם לוֹ. וְחַכְמִים אוֹמְרִים, אֵינָן לוֹ אֶלָּא לְגִנְאֵי, שְׁנֵאמַר (ישעיה ב) וְכָתְתוּ חֶרְבוֹתָם לְאֵתִים וְחַנִּיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמְרוֹת, לֹא יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.</p>

1. According to Rabbi Eliezer, what does the aesthetic quality of weapons mean about the reasons people carry them? How is this different from French’s argument above?
2. According to the Sages, what is the relationship between the Messianic age and the present day. What is naive about their attitude? What is deeply practical?