

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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A Study for Judaism • Christianity • Islam*

DOCUMENT 297

PROCLAIM PEACE TO IT

A Covenant Deep Dive into Deuteronomy 20:10 — *ve-qarata eleha le-shalom* (and you shall proclaim peace to it), וְקָרַאתָ אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁלוֹם

What Does the Covenant Require Before the Sword Is Drawn, How Far May the Sword Go When a City Refuses, Is the Modern State of Israel Bound by This Law, and How Is That State Breaking It Today? — A Three-Religion Covenant Response

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The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

✧ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
Maimonides rules: <i>“No war is waged against anyone in the world until peace has been offered to him, whether a discretionary war or a commanded war”</i> (Mishneh Torah, Kings and Wars 6:1). He adds that a besieged city is surrounded on three sides only, so that whoever wishes may flee for his life (6:7). Rashi, following the Sifre, limits the verse to discretionary war; Nachmanides answers that the offer goes to every city. From Deuteronomy 20:19 rabbinic tradition draws its rule <i>bal tashchit (do not destroy)</i>. The written verse stands under all of them: the proclamation of peace comes first.	The New Testament assumes the same order. A king facing war <i>“sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace”</i> (Luke 14:32), and the believer is told, <i>“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with all”</i> (Romans 12:18). Augustine wrote that peace is to be the aim and war only a necessity (Letter 189), and Catholic teaching allows war only when every other means has proved impractical or ineffective (Catechism 2309). Yet many churches read Genesis 12:3 as a pledge to bless whatever the modern State of Israel does in war. The Tanakh speaks first: what the covenant required of Israel itself before a sword was drawn.	The Qur’an commands: <i>“If they incline to peace, incline to it also, and trust in Allah”</i> (Q. 8:61), and <i>“Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress”</i> (Q. 2:190). Abu Bakr charged his army not to kill women, children, or the aged, and not to cut down fruit-bearing trees (Muwatta Malik 21.10), and the Prophet ruled that envoys are not killed (Sunan Abi Dawud 2761). These rules stand close to Deuteronomy 20:10–20. They bind those who fight in Islam’s name as well, and they condemn the killing and seizing of civilians on October 7, 2023.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur’an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur’an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by

overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh**'s own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh**'s covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh* to four questions about **Deuteronomy 20:10**: what the covenant requires before the sword is drawn, how far the sword may go when a city refuses, whether the modern State of Israel is bound by this law, and whether that State is keeping it today. **Yahweh** (יהוה) and **Elohim** (אלהים) appear in bold throughout. Tanakh books are cited by their English names. Hebrew transliterations appear in ***bold italic*** with English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. **Verse numbers follow the English version. In a few chapters the Hebrew Bible divides the chapter at a different point, so the same verse carries a different number in the Hebrew text. Where that happens, the Hebrew number is given in brackets on first citation, for example Numbers 30:13 [Hebrew 30:14].** Scripture is rendered in a literal working translation from the Hebrew. Each finding is graded under the two-or-three-witness standard as **Corroborated** (two or more independent witnesses), **Single witness**, or **Not in the text**. The present-day record in Section VII is graded the same way: a fact is Corroborated when two or more independent records carry it, a charge is reported as a charge, and the answer of the State of Israel is reported beside it. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, New Testament texts, church teaching, and the Qur'an and hadith are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	The law of the offer of peace and its limits; Moses and Sihon; the lands given to Edom, Moab, and Ammon; Shechem; the stranger and the Land

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk, Zechariah	The law kept and broken: Gibeon, Jephthah, Benjamin, Abner, the wise woman of Abel, Elisha; the oath of Zedekiah; the prophets on false peace and on the wars of the nations
Ketuvim (Writings)	Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, 2 Chronicles	Seeking peace; the smooth mouth and the drawn sword; Oded and the captives; the oath sworn by Elohim

COMPARATIVE TEXTS CITED — HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE REFERENCE ONLY

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Rabbinic literature	Sifre Deuteronomy 199–200; Rashi and Nachmanides on Deuteronomy 20:10; Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Kings and Wars 6:1, 6:4–5, 6:7–10; Jerusalem Talmud Shevi'it 6:1; Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:13–14	The offer of peace and its scope; the tradition of Joshua's three letters; the open side of a siege; the rule against waste
Ancient versions	Septuagint (Greek) Deuteronomy 20:17	Adds the Gergashite to the six nations of the Hebrew verse
New Testament	Matthew 5:9; Luke 14:31–32; Romans 12:18	Words before war in the Christian scriptures
Church teaching	Augustine, Letter 189; Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 40; Catechism of the Catholic Church 2307–2309	The just-war tradition and its rule of last resort
Qur'an and hadith	Q. 2:190; 4:90; 8:61; 9:6; Sahih Muslim 1731; Muwatta Malik 21.10; Sunan Abi Dawud 2761	The call before fighting, the answer to an offer of peace, the protection of women, children, trees, and envoys
State documents and statements	Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel (May 14, 1948); statements of the Prime Minister of Israel (Oct. 28, 2023; Sept. 9, 2025); B. Smotrich, interview in Haaretz (Dec. 3, 2016)	The State's own appeal to the prophets, to Amalek, and to Joshua

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Mediators and monitors	Prime Minister of Qatar (July 31, 2024); Foreign Minister of Oman (Feb. 28, 2026); UNIFIL (Nov. 2025); Lebanese Army and Lebanese Ministry of Public Health (Sept. 2026); Gaza Ministry of Health (Oct. 5, 2026)	Negotiators struck, talks overtaken by war, and killing under ceasefire
Studies and assessments	Gaza Mortality Survey, The Lancet Global Health (reported Feb. 2026); FAO–UNOSAT assessment of Gaza cropland (Sept.–Oct. 2025)	Who has died, and what has become of the trees and fields
News records	Associated Press and NPR; Reuters; Agence France-Presse; The Times of Israel; Haaretz; Al Jazeera; L'Orient-Le Jour; Shafaq News	Dated events from July 2024 to the first week of October 2026

I. FRAMING THE QUESTION — ONE VERSE, FOUR QUESTIONS

I-A. The Questions as They Are Usually Asked

Deuteronomy 20:10 is one sentence. It is the first rule the covenant gives for the conduct of war, once it has sent home the men who should not fight. Four questions are put to this Institution about it:

First: what does the verse require, and of whom?

Second: when a city refuses the offer, how far may the sword go?

Third: is the modern State of Israel bound by a law given to Israel in the plains of Moab?

Fourth: is that State keeping this law today, in Gaza, in Lebanon, and in its wars with its neighbors, or is it breaking it?

This study builds on earlier work in the Library and does not repeat it. **Doc 202** (*The Covenant of War*) surveyed the whole of **Deuteronomy 20**. **Doc 253** (*Yahweh Is a Man of War*) examined **Exodus 15:3**. **Doc 259** (*Two Sticks in One Hand*), Section VII, set out the covenant charge against the present government of Israel under nine heads, among them the killing of children, the cutting of olive trees, starvation, and the seizure of land. **Doc 260** and **Doc 262** examined who the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples are, and **Doc 263** answered the letter of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. The present document takes one verse and the law that hangs on it, and tests what those documents did not settle:

the law of the offer of peace. That law covers words before weapons, envoys, terms, treaties, and ceasefires.

I-B. The Questions in the Tanakh's Own Terms

The verse does not say, “make war humanely.” It says:

“When you draw near to a city to fight against it, you shall proclaim peace to it” (Deuteronomy 20:10).

The phrase is *ve-qarata eleha le-shalom* (and you shall proclaim peace to it), וְקָרַאתָ אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁלוֹם. The four questions therefore become these. Who must speak first, and when? What becomes of a city that answers with peace? What limit stands when it refuses? Which people stand outside the offer, and who decides? And what does the Tanakh say of the one who speaks peace and then draws the sword?

Every finding below is graded. A finding is Corroborated when two or more independent witnesses carry it (Deuteronomy 19:15). It is Single witness when only one text carries it. It is Not in the text when it is taught but the Tanakh does not say it.

I-C. The Standard for the Present-Day Record

Three limits govern Section VII, as they governed **Doc 259**.

First, the charge is against a government and its conduct, not against the Jewish people: *“the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father”* (Ezekiel 18:20; Deuteronomy 24:16). Many Israelis, hostage families and soldiers among them, have protested the conduct recorded here.

Second, every fact is dated and sourced, and the answer of the State of Israel is set beside it. Where the State denies a charge, the denial is recorded. Where the purpose behind an act cannot be known, this document says so and does not guess.

Third, the same law is laid on those who fight Israel. The killing and hostage-taking of October 7, 2023 stand condemned on their own (Section VII-A), and so does every rocket aimed at a town. **Yahweh** judged Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab for their wars before He turned to Judah and Israel (**Amos 1:3–2:6**).

The record is stated as it stood in the first week of October 2026.

II. THE WORD STUDY — WHAT THE HEBREW SAYS

The vocabulary of the law is exact. The table sets out the terms this study relies on.

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>qarav (to draw near)</i> , קָרַב	H7126	To approach; here, an army coming up to a city	Deuteronomy 20:2, 10
<i>qara le-shalom (to proclaim peace)</i> , קָרָא לְשָׁלוֹם	H7121 / H7965	To call out an offer of peace aloud, as a herald does	Deuteronomy 20:10; Judges 21:13
<i>shalom (peace / wholeness)</i> , שָׁלוֹם	H7965	Peace, soundness, a settled state between two parties	Deuteronomy 2:26; 20:10–11
<i>anah (to answer)</i> , עָנָה	H6030	To reply; the city's answer decides what follows	Deuteronomy 20:11
<i>patach (to open)</i> , פָּתַח	H6605	To open the gates	Deuteronomy 20:11
<i>mas (tribute labor)</i> , מַס	H4522	Labor owed to an overlord by a subject people	Deuteronomy 20:11; 1 Kings 9:21
<i>bishlim (to make peace)</i> , הִשְׁלִים	H7999	The causative of <i>shalam (to be whole)</i> : to come to terms	Deuteronomy 20:12; Joshua 10:1; 11:19
<i>tsur (to besiege)</i> and <i>matsor (siege)</i> , צוּר, מְצוֹר	H6696 / H4692	To shut a city in; permitted only after the offer is refused	Deuteronomy 20:12, 19–20
<i>zakhur (male)</i> , זָכוּר	H2138	The males of the city that chose war	Deuteronomy 20:13
<i>taph (little ones)</i> , טָף	H2945	Small children, named with the women as those not to be struck	Deuteronomy 20:14
<i>rachok (far)</i> , רָחוֹק	H7350	Distant; the cities outside the Land	Deuteronomy 20:15
<i>charam (to devote to destruction)</i> and <i>cherem (the ban)</i> , חָרַם, חֲרָם	H2763 / H2764	To give over wholly to Yahweh's judgment; applied to named peoples only	Deuteronomy 20:17
<i>shachat (to destroy)</i> , שָׁחַת	H7843	To ruin or lay waste; forbidden against food trees	Deuteronomy 20:19–20

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>berit</i> (covenant / treaty), בְּרִית	H1285	A sworn agreement, between men or with Yahweh	Joshua 9:15; Ezekiel 17:13
<i>shevuah</i> (oath) and <i>alah</i> (oath / curse), שְׁבוּעָה, אָלָה	H7621 / H423	The sworn word that binds a treaty	Joshua 9:20; Ezekiel 17:13, 19
<i>mirmah</i> (deceit), מִרְמָה	H4820	Treachery; speaking one thing and intending another	Genesis 34:13; Jeremiah 9:8 [Hebrew 9:7]

Four lexical observations govern what follows.

First, the order of the verbs is the law. The sentence runs: *ki tigrav (when you draw near) ... ve-qarata (then you shall proclaim)*. The second verb continues the first with the force of a command. The verb *tsur (to besiege)* does not appear until verse 12, after the city has refused. The Hebrew gives the army nothing to do between arriving and speaking.

Second, the idiom *qara shalom (to proclaim peace)* occurs again in two places that fix its meaning. After the war with Benjamin the assembly “*proclaimed peace to them*”, וִיקְרְאוּ לָהֶם שָׁלוֹם (Judges 21:13), and the killing stopped. And the prophet turns the same words against leaders who use them falsely: they “*proclaim, Peace*,” וִקְרְאוּ שָׁלוֹם, while “*against him who puts nothing in their mouths they sanctify war*” (Micah 3:5). The Tanakh knows a true proclamation of peace and a false one.

Third, the *shalom (peace)* of verse 10 is defined by verse 11, and it is not friendship. It is terms: the city opens its gates and its people become *mas (tribute labor)*. This study does not soften that (Section III-C).

Fourth, the verb for a city coming to terms is *bishlim (to make peace)*, and the Tanakh uses it of a Canaanite city. Gibeon “*had made peace with Israel*” (Joshua 10:1), and the summary of the conquest says that no other city did (Joshua 11:19). The word assumes the door was real.

III. THE LAW READ IN ORDER — DEUTERONOMY 20:10–20

III-A. Before the Offer: Who Is Sent Home

The chapter narrows the war before it begins. The priest tells the people not to fear, because **Yahweh** goes with them (Deuteronomy 20:1–4). The officers then send home the man who has built a house and not dedicated it, the man who has planted a vineyard and not eaten of it, the man betrothed and

not yet married, and the man who is afraid (**Deuteronomy 20:5–9**). **Doc 202**, Section III-A, treats these in full. Only then does the law turn to the enemy, and its first word about the enemy is peace.

III-B. Verse 10: Words Before Weapons

“When you draw near to a city to fight against it, you shall proclaim peace to it” (**Deuteronomy 20:10**).

Three things are in the verse.

The duty falls on the one who draws near. The verse speaks to the army that is approaching, the side that has the power to begin. It does not wait for the city to sue for peace. Israel must speak first.

The offer is made city by city. The word is *ir* (*city*), עִיר, H5892. Each city receives its own offer and gives its own answer. One city’s refusal is not charged to the next.

The verse carries no exception. It does not say “unless they strike first,” or “unless they cannot be trusted.” The exception the chapter does make comes in verses 16–18, and it is a list of names (Section III-E).

III-C. Verse 11: What the Terms Were

“And it shall be, if it answers you with peace and opens to you, then all the people found in it shall be tribute labor to you and shall serve you” (**Deuteronomy 20:11**).

The phrase is *im shalom ta’anehka u-fatechah lakh* (*if it answers you with peace and opens to you*), אִם-שָׁלוֹם תַּעֲנֶךָ וּפְתַחָהּ לָךְ. The terms are hard. The city submits and its people owe mas (tribute labor), the same word used of the peoples Solomon put to work (1 Kings 9:21). This is the peace of an overlord, and no reader should present it as a model treaty for today.

Yet the verse holds a promise that later sections will lean on. A city that answers peace lives. Its people are not put to the sword, its houses are not burned, and its fields are not laid waste. Whatever else verse 11 allows, it forbids killing those who have accepted terms.

III-D. Verses 12–14: If the City Refuses

“But if it will not make peace with you, but makes war with you, then you shall besiege it. And when Yahweh your Elohim gives it into your hand, you shall strike every male of it with the edge of the sword. Only the women and the little ones and the cattle, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as plunder for yourself” (**Deuteronomy 20:12–14**).

These verses are harsh, and they are also a fence. Three limits stand in them.

First: the siege comes only after refusal. The city must both refuse peace and “*make war with you.*” A city that neither accepts nor fights is not addressed.

Second: the sword falls on the men of the city that chose war. In a walled city under siege these are its fighting men.

Third: the women and the little ones are not struck. The phrase is *raq ba-nashim ve-ba-taf* (*only the women and the little ones*), רַק הַנָּשִׁים וְהַטָּף. The word *raq* (*only*) sets them apart from the sword. They are taken, not killed, and the law that follows gives the captive woman a month to mourn, the standing of a wife, and freedom if she is put away: “*you shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her as a slave*” (Deuteronomy 21:10–14).

One narrative runs the other way and must be named. After Midian drew Israel into the sin of Peor, Moses ordered the death of the Midianite boys and of the women who had lain with a man (Numbers 31:15–17; compare 25:16–18). That was a single judgment, tied to a named offense and given through Moses. Deuteronomy 20:14, spoken after it on the plains of Moab, is the standing statute, and it spares them.

Finding — under the standing law of war, the women and the little ones of an enemy city are not to be killed: **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 20:14; 21:10–14; and in practice 2 Kings 6:22 and 2 Chronicles 28:9–15, Section IV).

III-E. Verses 15–18: The Closed List

“Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. Only of the cities of these peoples, which Yahweh your Elohim gives you as an inheritance, you shall keep alive nothing that breathes. For you shall utterly devote them: the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as Yahweh your Elohim has commanded you; so that they do not teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your Elohim” (Deuteronomy 20:15–18).

The phrase is *lo techayyeh kol neshamah* (*you shall keep alive nothing that breathes*), לֹא תַחְיֶה כָּל־נֶשְׁמָה. It is the hardest line in the chapter, and the text hedges it on every side.

It is a list of names. Six peoples are named here; a seventh, the Girgashite, is named with them elsewhere (Deuteronomy 7:1). The law does not say “your enemies.” It says these.

The reason is stated, and it is not race or land. The reason is what those nations did for their gods (Deuteronomy 20:18), which the covenant elsewhere names as the burning of sons and daughters (Deuteronomy 12:31). Israel is told plainly that it is “*not for your righteousness*” (Deuteronomy

9:4–5), and Abraham was told the judgment would wait four generations because *“the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full”* (Genesis 15:16).

The list was never lengthened. In the same book **Yahweh** forbids Israel to touch Edom, Moab, and Ammon, because He gave those peoples their lands (**Deuteronomy 2:4–5, 9, 19**). He says He brought the Philistines from Caphtor and Aram from Kir as He brought Israel from Egypt (**Amos 9:7**). When a later war of devotion was commanded, against Amalek, it came by a prophet’s direct word and not by a king’s judgment (**1 Samuel 15:1–3**).

Finding — the ban attaches to named peoples, by **Yahweh**’s own word, for a stated cause: **Corroborated** (**Deuteronomy 7:1–2; 9:4–5; 20:16–18; Genesis 15:16**). That any later ruler may place another people under it: **Not in the text**.

III-F. Verses 19–20: The Tree and the Food

“When you besiege a city many days, making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat of them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man, that it should come before you in the siege? Only the trees which you know are not trees for food, those you may destroy and cut down, and build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it falls” (Deuteronomy 20:19–20).

The command is *lo tashchit et etsah* (you shall not destroy its trees), לֹא-תִשְׁחִית אֶת-עֵצָהּ, and the question that follows is *ki ha-adam ets ha-sadeh* (for is the tree of the field a man?), כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה. The tree is not a combatant. The reason given is food: *“for you may eat of them.”* The law protects what feeds people, on both sides, after the war is over.

The prophets carry the same charge to the empires. **Yahweh** says to Babylon, *“the violence done to Lebanon shall cover you ... because of the blood of man and the violence done to the land, to the city and to all who dwell in it”* (Habakkuk 2:17), and the trees themselves rejoice when the tyrant falls: *“since you were laid low, no woodcutter comes up against us”* (Isaiah 14:8).

Here too one narrative runs the other way. In the campaign against Moab, **Elisha** foretold that the armies would fell every good tree and stop every spring, and they did (**2 Kings 3:19, 25**). The text reports it; it does not amend the statute. That campaign ends with *“great wrath against Israel”* and a withdrawal (**2 Kings 3:27**). **Doc 259**, Sections VII-B and VII-C, applies the statute to the olive tree and to siege famine.

Finding — food trees may not be destroyed in war, and the land’s food is not a weapon: **Corroborated** (**Deuteronomy 20:19–20; Habakkuk 2:17**).

III-G. The Law in One Table

STEP	VERSE	WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES
1. Speak first	Deuteronomy 20:10	Before any attack on a city, peace is proclaimed to it.
2. Honor the answer	Deuteronomy 20:11	A city that answers peace and opens its gates lives. Its people are not killed.
3. Only then besiege	Deuteronomy 20:12	Siege follows only a refusal to join the war.
4. Limit the sword	Deuteronomy 20:13–14	The men of the city that chose war fall. The women and the little ones are not struck.
5. Keep to the list	Deuteronomy 20:15–18	The ban applies to six named nations for a stated cause. Every other city comes under steps 1–4.
6. Spare the trees	Deuteronomy 20:19–20	Food trees are not cut down. The tree of the field is not a man.

IV. THE LAW KEPT — SEVEN WITNESSES

A statute can be tested by whether Israel’s own history knows it. The Tanakh records the rule of the first word being kept, by Moses before the statute was spoken and by judges, elders, and prophets after it.

IV-A. Moses and Sihon

Witness One — *“I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, Let me pass through your land; I will go by the road only ... You shall sell me food for silver, that I may eat”* (Deuteronomy 2:26–28; Numbers 21:21–22).

The phrase is *divrei shalom* (*words of peace*), דְּבָרֵי שָׁלוֹם. Two things make this the first witness. **Yahweh** had already told Moses that Sihon’s land was given into his hand (Deuteronomy 2:24), and Moses still sent words of peace before a sword was drawn. And Sihon was king of the Amorites (Numbers 21:21), one of the peoples later named in Deuteronomy 20:17. War came only when Sihon refused and marched out (Deuteronomy 2:30–32).

IV-B. Edom, Moab, and Ammon

Witness Two — Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom asking passage, offering to pay for water and to keep to the highway. Edom refused and came out with a strong force, *“so Israel turned away from him”* (Numbers 20:14–21). There was no battle. The reason is given later: *“Do not contend with them, for I will not give you of their land, not so much as a foot’s tread, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession”* (Deuteronomy 2:5). The same is said of Moab and of Ammon (Deuteronomy 2:9, 19). The covenant recognizes that **Yahweh** gives lands to other peoples, and it forbids Israel to take them.

IV-C. Jephthah and the King of Ammon

Witness Three — Ammon made war on Israel first (Judges 11:4). Even so, Jephthah did not answer with the sword. He *“sent messengers to the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What have you against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?”* (Judges 11:12). When the king answered with a claim to the land, Jephthah sent a second time and argued the history at length (Judges 11:14–27). He fought only when *“the king of the children of Ammon did not listen”* (Judges 11:28). The attacked side still spoke first, and twice.

IV-D. Israel and Benjamin

Witness Four — Before the tribes went up against Gibeah, they sent men through all Benjamin and asked for the guilty alone: *“Deliver up the men, the worthless fellows who are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and burn out the evil from Israel”* (Judges 20:12–13).

Benjamin refused, and a ruinous war followed. When it was over, *“the whole congregation sent and spoke to the children of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them”* (Judges 21:13). The words of Deuteronomy 20:10 open that war and close it.

IV-E. The Wise Woman of Abel

Witness Five — Joab besieged Abel of Beth-maacah because the rebel Sheba had taken refuge there, and his men were battering the wall (2 Samuel 20:15). A woman called from the wall: *“I am of the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the inheritance of Yahweh?”* (2 Samuel 20:19).

Her words are *shelumei emunei Yisrael* (*the peaceable and faithful of Israel*), שְׁלֵמֵי אֱמוּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Joab answered, *“Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy ... Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city”* (2 Samuel 20:20–21).

The city gave up the one guilty man, Joab blew the horn, and the army went home (2 Samuel 20:22).

The witness matters for our day. A guilty man was hiding in a city full of people who had done nothing. The Tanakh's answer was to seek the man and spare the city.

IV-F. Elisha's Table

Witness Six — When a raiding force of Aram was delivered into the king of Israel's hand inside Samaria, the king asked, *“My father, shall I strike them? Shall I strike them?”* Elisha answered: *“You shall not strike them. Would you strike those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master”* (2 Kings 6:21–22). T

he king made them a great feast and sent them away, *“and the bands of Aram came no more into the land of Israel”* (2 Kings 6:23). Mercy to men who were in his power ended the raids, where the sword had not.

IV-G. Oded and the Captives

Witness Seven — The northern kingdom defeated Judah and carried off two hundred thousand women, sons, and daughters (2 Chronicles 28:8).

The prophet **Oded** went out to meet the returning army: *“Because Yahweh, the Elohim of your fathers, was angry with Judah, He gave them into your hand; and you have slain them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. And now you intend to subdue the children of Judah and Jerusalem as male and female slaves. But are there not with you, even with you, trespasses against Yahweh your Elohim?”* (2 Chronicles 28:9–10).

The captives were clothed from the spoil, fed, anointed, set on donkeys where they were weak, and brought back to Jericho (2 Chronicles 28:15).

Oded grants that the victory was given by **Yahweh** and that Judah had sinned. He still condemns the rage of the victors and the seizing of women and children. A just cause does not excuse what is done in winning.

IV-H. Did the Offer Reach the Cities of the Land?

Two readings of verses 15–16 stand side by side, and this study presents both.

The narrower reading: verses 10–14 govern only the far cities, and the cities of the six nations received no offer. In its favor: *“you shall make no covenant with them, nor show them favor”* (Deuteronomy 7:2; compare Exodus 23:32–33), and the hesitation of Israel's own men before

Gibeon: *“Perhaps you dwell among us; how then shall we make a covenant with you?”* (Joshua 9:7).

The wider reading: the offer goes to every city, and verses 16–18 govern only what follows a refusal. In its favor: Moses sent *divrei shalom* (*words of peace*) to an Amorite king (Deuteronomy 2:26); Rahab and her father’s house were spared at Jericho (Joshua 6:25); and the summary of the conquest reads as though peace had been possible:

“There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; they took all in battle. For it was of Yahweh to harden their hearts, to come against Israel in battle” (Joshua 11:19–20).

Finding — that peace was to be proclaimed before war on every city outside the list: **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 20:10–15; 2:26; Judges 11:12; 21:13). That the offer also reached the six nations: the witnesses divide, and this document leaves it open. The question does not touch the present day. No people now living are named on the list (Section VI-E).

V. WHEN PEACE IS ANSWERED WITH THE SWORD

Deuteronomy 20:10 has a second half that the chapter does not spell out, because the rest of the Tanakh does. What of the one who speaks peace and then strikes? What of the treaty once it is sworn? What of the envoy who comes to talk? Five witnesses answer.

V-A. Shechem: Terms Accepted, Then Slaughter

Witness One — After the wrong done to Dinah, the sons of Jacob *“answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceit”* (Genesis 34:13), offering terms they did not mean to keep. The city accepted. Its men said of Jacob’s family, *shelemim hem ittanu* (*these men are at peace with us*), שְׁלֵמִים הֵם אִתָּנוּ (Genesis 34:21). On the third day Simeon and Levi came to the city while it felt secure and killed every male (Genesis 34:25).

Jacob’s last word on it is a curse: *“Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel”* (Genesis 49:5–7).

The men of Shechem were Hivites (Genesis 34:2), one of the peoples later placed on the list, and the wrong done to Dinah was real. Neither fact cleared the brothers. They had offered peace as a cover for killing.

V-B. Gibeon: An Oath Kept, an Oath Broken, and a Famine

Witness Two — The Gibeonites won their treaty by a lie, and still *“Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore to them”* (Joshua 9:15).

When the lie came out, the people wanted blood. The leaders refused: *“We have sworn to them by Yahweh, the Elohim of Israel; now therefore we may not touch them ... lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swore to them”* (Joshua 9:19–20).

When five kings attacked Gibeon for making peace, Joshua marched all night to defend it (Joshua 10:6–9).

Centuries later Saul broke that oath. *“Saul sought to strike them down in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah”* (2 Samuel 21:2).

The land suffered three years of famine, and Yahweh named the cause: *“It is for Saul and for his house of blood, because he put the Gibeonites to death”* (2 Samuel 21:1).

Three rules stand in this account.

1. A peace once sworn binds, even when the other side obtained it by fraud.
2. A later ruler’s national zeal does not release it.
3. And the bloodguilt for breaking it falls on the land.

V-C. Abner: The Envoy Who Went in Peace

Witness Three — Abner commanded the army of Saul’s house, at war with David, and he had killed Joab’s brother Asahel in battle (2 Samuel 2:23). He came to Hebron to negotiate. David made him a feast and heard him, *“and David sent Abner away, and he went in peace”* (2 Samuel 3:21). The text says it three times (2 Samuel 3:21, 22, 23). Joab called him back, took him aside in the gate *“to speak with him quietly,”* and killed him there (2 Samuel 3:27).

David’s answer was immediate: *“I and my kingdom are guiltless before Yahweh forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it fall on the head of Joab”* (2 Samuel 3:28–29).

On his deathbed he named the crime exactly. Joab *“shed the blood of war in peace,”* דְּמֵי-מִלְחָמָה בְּשָׁלָם (1 Kings 2:5).

Solomon returned that blood on Joab’s head, *“that you may take away from me and from my father’s house the blood which Joab shed without cause”* (1 Kings 2:31–33).

Abner was not innocent. He was an enemy commander with a brother's blood on his hands. Tanakh still counts his killing as murder, because he had come to talk and had been sent away in peace.

V-D. Zedekiah: An Oath to a Foreign King Is Yahweh's Oath

Witness Four — The king of Babylon made a treaty with Zedekiah and *“brought him under an oath”* (Ezekiel 17:13). Zedekiah broke it and sent it to Egypt for horses.

Through Ezekiel, Yahweh asks: *“Shall he break the covenant and escape?”* (Ezekiel 17:15).

And He claims the broken treaty as His own: *“As I live, surely My oath that he has despised, and My covenant that he has broken, I will return it upon his own head”* (Ezekiel 17:19).

The Chronicler gives the same reason for the fall of Jerusalem: Zedekiah *“rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by Elohim”* (2 Chronicles 36:13).

Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan conqueror, and the treaty had been imposed. **Yahweh** held Judah's king to it all the same. An agreement sworn with an enemy is kept before Yahweh.

V-E. The Prophets on the Mouth That Speaks Peace

Witness Five — The Psalms and the Prophets return to this sin again and again.

“He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; he has profaned his covenant. His mouth was smoother than butter, but war was in his heart” (Psalms 55:20–21 [Hebrew 55:21–22]).

“With his mouth one speaks peace to his neighbor, but in his heart he sets an ambush for him” (Jeremiah 9:8 [Hebrew 9:7]).

“The envoys of peace weep bitterly ... He has broken the covenant, he has despised the cities, he has no regard for man” (Isaiah 33:7–8). The phrase is *malakhei shalom* (envoys of peace), מַלְאֲכֵי שְׁלוֹם.

“Their feet run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood ... The way of peace they do not know” (Isaiah 59:7–8).

Against this the Psalm sets the one who may dwell on **Yahweh's** holy hill: *“he swears to his own hurt, and does not change”* (Psalms 15:4).

V-F. The Tanakh Is Not Naive About Peace

None of this makes the Tanakh a pacifist book. There is *“a time for war and a time for peace”* (Ecclesiastes 3:8).

Some enemies do not want peace: *“I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war”* (Psalms 120:7).

The prophets condemn those who cry *“Peace, peace, when there is no peace”* (Jeremiah 6:14).

And when Ahab made a treaty with a king whom **Yahweh** had given into his hand for judgment, a prophet rebuked him for it (**1 Kings 20:34, 42**).

The law does not ask Israel to trust every enemy. It asks three things: to speak before striking, to keep its word once given, and to hold the sword within the limits of verses 13–14 and 19–20 even when the enemy has refused.

Finding — to offer or accept peace and then strike, to break a sworn peace, or to kill one who came to talk, is bloodguilt before **Yahweh**: **Corroborated** (Genesis 34; 49:5–7; Joshua 9:18–20; 2 Samuel 3:27–29; 21:1–2; 1 Kings 2:5; Ezekiel 17:15–19; Psalms 55:20–21).

VI. IS THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL BOUND BY THIS LAW?

VI-A. To Whom the Law Was Given

Deuteronomy 20 was spoken to Israel on the plains of Moab, with a priest to address the army and officers to send men home (**Deuteronomy 20:2, 5**). **Doc 259** found that the modern State, founded by a declaration in 1948, is not the regathered twelve-tribe nation the prophets promised. Someone could conclude from this that the law of war simply does not reach it. The Tanakh closes that door in four ways.

VI-B. Whoever Claims the Covenant Is Bound by Its Terms

The State’s founding Declaration calls the Land *“the birthplace of the Jewish people”* where they *“gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.”*

It promises a State *“based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel,”* and it says: *“We extend our hand to all neighbouring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness.”*

That last sentence is *qara le-shalom (to proclaim peace)* written into the State’s own charter. Its present Prime Minister has said of the Land, *“This place is ours”* (**Doc 259**, Section VII-F).

The covenant does not let anyone take its grant and leave its law. The statutes bind *“the native and the stranger who sojourns among you,”* and the warning is the same for both: *“lest the land vomit you out when you defile it”* (Leviticus 18:26–28).

The ruler is bound to read the law all his days, *“that his heart be not lifted up above his brothers”* (Deuteronomy 17:18–20).

And to those who said, *“the land is given to us for a possession,”*

Ezekiel answered: *“You stand upon your sword ... and shall you possess the land?”* (Ezekiel 33:24–26).

A government cannot claim the Land by Genesis and decline to be judged by Deuteronomy.

VI-C. The State’s Own Leaders Invoke the Law of War

On October 28, 2023, as the ground war in Gaza began, the Prime Minister told the nation:

“You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible. And we do remember.” The words are from Deuteronomy 25:17.

His office later said he meant Hamas and not the Palestinian people. A minister of the present government, Bezalel Smotrich, set out his program for the Palestinians in 2016 in these words:

“When Joshua entered the land, he sent three letters to its inhabitants: Those who want to accept [our rule] will accept; those who want to leave, will leave; those who want to fight, will fight.”

Whoever opens the scroll at Deuteronomy 25:17 has opened it five chapters after 20:10. Leaders who take their authority for war from this book are answerable to its limits on war.

VI-D. Yahweh Judges the Wars of Every Nation

Even a nation that never stood at Sinai answers to Yahweh for how it fights. Amos names them in turn.

Damascus *“threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron”* (Amos 1:3).

Gaza and Tyre each *“carried into exile a whole people,”* and Tyre *“did not remember the covenant of brothers”* (Amos 1:6, 9).

Edom *“pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity”* (Amos 1:11).

Ammon *“ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border”* (Amos 1:13).

Moab burned the bones of a king (Amos 2:1). None of these had the Torah. Habakkuk says the same of every empire: *“Woe to him who builds a town with blood”* (Habakkuk 2:12).

So the standard reaches every party to the present wars: the State of Israel, Hamas, Hezbollah, the rulers of Iran, and the United States where it has joined the fighting. It reaches Gaza by name.

VI-E. The Peoples Now Under the Sword Are Not on the List

The six nations of Deuteronomy 20:17 are the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. The Palestinian, the Lebanese, the Syrian, and the Iranian are not among them.

Tanakh speaks of their forebears in other terms altogether.

Hiram of Tyre *“was always a lover of David,”* and *“there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a covenant”* (1 Kings 5:1, 12 [Hebrew 5:15, 26]).

Yahweh calls Cyrus of Persia *“My shepherd”* and *“His anointed”* (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

Doc 260 sets out the evidence that many Palestinians and Lebanese descend in part from the ancient peoples of the Land, Israelites among them, and **Doc 262** examines the Philistine question. Even the Philistines were never on the list (**Amos 9:7**).

Finding — that the modern State of Israel answers to the law of **Deuteronomy 20:10–20: Corroborated**, by its own claim on the covenant (**Leviticus 18:26–28; Ezekiel 33:24–26**) and by the standard **Yahweh** applies to every nation (**Amos 1:3–2:3**). That any people it now fights falls under the ban of verses 16–18: **Not in the text.**

The only law of this chapter that can apply to these wars is the law of the far city: speak first, honor the answer, spare the women and the little ones, and leave the trees.

VII. THE RECORD TODAY — HOW THE STATE OF ISRAEL IS BREAKING DEUTERONOMY 20:10

The six steps of Section III-G are now laid beside the record. The limits of Section I-C apply to every paragraph. Each subsection gives the record, the State’s answer, the covenant law, and a graded finding.

VII-A. October 7, 2023: The First Blow Was Not Israel’s

The record. On October 7, 2023, Hamas-led fighters crossed from Gaza, killed about 1,200 people in Israel, most of them civilians, and carried 251 hostages back into Gaza. From the next day Hezbollah fired on northern Israel.

The covenant law.

“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13).

“He who steals a man ... shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 21:16).

No one dies for another’s sin (**Deuteronomy 24:16**). Gaza itself stands in the prophet’s indictment for delivering up a whole people (**Amos 1:6**).

Deuteronomy 20:10 speaks of Israel drawing near to a city. On October 7 others drew near to Israel’s towns, and they did not come with words of peace. This document does not charge the State of Israel with having struck first that day.

Finding — that Israel broke the rule of the first word on October 7: **Not in the record**. The guilt of Hamas for the killings and the hostage-taking: **Corroborated**, and condemned by **Exodus 20:13; 21:16**. What follows concerns what the State did afterward.

Tanakh’s own example stands over it: Jephthah was attacked first, and he still sent messengers twice (Judges 11:12–14).

VII-B. Killing Those Who Came to Talk

The record. On July 31, 2024, Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas’s political bureau and its chief figure in the indirect ceasefire talks, was killed in Tehran. The Prime Minister of Qatar, the principal mediator, asked that day “how can mediation succeed when one party assassinates the negotiator on other side?” In December 2024 Israel’s Defense Minister publicly acknowledged that Israel had killed him.

On September 9, 2025, Israeli aircraft struck a building in Doha, the capital of Qatar, where Hamas’s negotiating delegation was meeting to discuss a new ceasefire proposal from the United States. Five Hamas members and a Qatari security officer were killed; the senior negotiators survived.

The Prime Minister of Israel said: ***“Israel initiated it, Israel conducted it, and Israel takes full responsibility.”*** Israel said it was answering a shooting attack in Jerusalem the day before. On September 29, 2025, he expressed regret to Qatar’s Prime Minister for the death of the Qatari officer and for the breach of Qatar’s sovereignty.

The covenant law. This is the case of Abner (Section V-C). He was an enemy commander with blood on his hands, he had come to negotiate, ***“and he went in peace” (2 Samuel 3:21)***. Tanakh calls his killing ***“the blood of war in peace” (1 Kings 2:5)***, and David would not let it rest on his throne (**2 Samuel 3:28–29**).

The prophet describes the result: ***“the envoys of peace weep bitterly” (Isaiah 33:7)***.

Finding — that the State of Israel killed the other side’s chief negotiator and struck its negotiating delegation while a proposal was before it: **Corroborated**, by Israel’s own statements. That the men struck were leaders of an organization guilty of blood is true. It was true of Abner.

VII-C. Striking While the Talks Were Set

The record. First: on June 13, 2025, Israel opened its air war on Iran two days before a sixth round of nuclear talks between Iran and the United States, set for June 15 in Muscat. The round was cancelled. Israel said it acted to remove an imminent nuclear threat.

Second: on February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel struck Iran and killed its Supreme Leader. Further talks had been scheduled for the following week in Vienna. Oman’s Foreign Minister, the mediator, said that *“negotiations have yet again been undermined.”*

Third: on April 8, 2026, as a ceasefire between the United States and Iran took effect, Israel said it did not cover Lebanon and launched its heaviest wave of strikes of that war; more than 300 people were killed, by the count of Lebanese authorities. The next day the Prime Minister ordered direct talks with Lebanon, which Israeli media reported would be held *“under fire.”*

The covenant law.

“His mouth was smoother than butter, but war was in his heart” (Psalms 55:21).

“With his mouth one speaks peace to his neighbor, but in his heart he sets an ambush for him” (Jeremiah 9:8).

“Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but to the counselors of peace is joy” (Proverbs 12:20).

The law asks for an order: words first, and the sword only if the words are refused (Deuteronomy 20:10, 12).

Finding — that in each case the attack came while talks were scheduled or about to begin: **Corroborated** (dated public record; mediators’ statements). That the purpose was to wreck the talks: **Not established.** Israel gives other reasons, and “Yahweh looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The breach of **Deuteronomy 20:10** does not depend on the motive. In each case the sword came while the words were still on the table.

VII-D. When the City Answered Peace

The record. A three-phase ceasefire in Gaza took effect on January 19, 2025. Talks on its second phase were not held as scheduled. On March 2, 2025, Israel stopped all aid entering Gaza, and on March 18 it resumed its strikes; more than 400 people were killed in one night, by the count of Gaza’s Ministry of Health. Israel said Hamas had refused proposals to extend the first phase and free more hostages.

Twice Hamas announced that it accepted a proposal the mediators had put to it: on May 6, 2024, after which Israel said the terms were far from its requirements and sent its army into Rafah; and on August

18, 2025, for a sixty-day truce, after which Israel gave no acceptance and pressed its assault on Gaza City.

The other side of the record must be stated. Hamas refused or stalled on other proposals. On July 24, 2025, the American envoy said its latest reply showed *“a lack of desire to reach a ceasefire.”* And through all of it Hamas held hostages, which was a standing wrong of its own.

One incident shows verse 11 at its plainest. On December 15, 2023, three Israeli hostages who had escaped their captors came toward Israeli soldiers in Gaza City, shirtless and holding up a white cloth. The soldiers shot them dead. The army said the shooting broke its rules of engagement.

The covenant law. *“If it answers you with peace and opens to you”* (Deuteronomy 20:11), the people live. Simeon and Levi were cursed for striking a city after its men had said,

“these men are at peace with us” (Genesis 34:21, 25; 49:7).

“Do not devise evil against your neighbor, who dwells trustingly beside you” (Proverbs 3:29).

Finding — the events and their dates: **Corroborated.** That the State of Israel alone closed the door to peace: **Not established;** each side refused terms at different times, and the mediators blamed each in turn. What verse 11 does establish is that an answer of peace must be honored. The return to war in March 2025, with a signed agreement’s second phase still unnegotiated, falls under that verse.

VII-E. Ceasefires Signed, and the Killing Went On

The record — Gaza. A ceasefire under an American plan took effect on October 10, 2025, and the last twenty living hostages were freed three days later. Since that ceasefire began, Gaza’s Ministry of Health counts 1,460 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire, as of October 5, 2026. Israel holds more than half of the Strip, and talks on the second phase, which covers the disarming of Hamas and the withdrawal of the army, are deadlocked. Israel says its strikes answer violations and are aimed at fighters. Hamas has not disarmed. Each accuses the other.

The record — Lebanon. A ceasefire took effect on November 27, 2024. In its first year the United Nations force in Lebanon recorded more than 10,000 Israeli air and ground violations, and Israeli troops stayed on five hilltops inside Lebanon after the date set for withdrawal. Israel says it acts against Hezbollah’s rearming. On March 2, 2026, Hezbollah opened fire on Israel after the killing of Iran’s Supreme Leader, and a new war followed. Lebanon’s Ministry of Public Health counts 4,383 people killed and 12,406 wounded between March 2 and September 10, 2026. A framework agreement was signed on June 26, 2026. The Lebanese Army reports about 7,700 Israeli violations since that date. Seven rounds of talks have been held and an eighth was announced for October 2026. Hezbollah has rejected the framework and has not disarmed.

The record — Syria. On December 8, 2024, the day the government in Damascus fell, the Prime Minister declared that the 1974 Disengagement Agreement had collapsed and sent the army into the buffer zone that the United Nations patrols. The army said it carried out about 480 strikes in Syria in forty-eight hours. Israel called these steps temporary and defensive.

The covenant law. Israel’s leaders kept their oath to Gibeon though Gibeon had lied to obtain it: *“we may not touch them ... because of the oath”* (Joshua 9:19–20).

Saul broke it *“in his zeal”* and the land paid with famine (2 Samuel 21:1–2).

Zedekiah’s treaty with a conqueror was, in Yahweh’s words, *“My covenant that he has broken”* (Ezekiel 17:19). The one who may stand before Yahweh *“swears to his own hurt, and does not change”* (Psalms 15:4).

Finding — that Israeli fire has gone on killing under signed ceasefires in Gaza and in Lebanon: **Corroborated** (Gaza Ministry of Health; in Lebanon two independent monitors, the United Nations force and the Lebanese Army). Israel’s answer, that it responds to violations by armed groups that have not disarmed, is recorded, and those groups answer for their own breaches by the same law. The Tanakh’s rule does not turn on who broke faith first. A sworn peace is kept.

VII-F. The Women and the Little Ones

The record. Gaza’s Ministry of Health counts 74,243 Palestinians killed since October 2023, as of October 5, 2026. The count does not separate fighters from civilians. In January 2026 an Israeli army official told reporters the army accepted a figure of about 70,000. An independent household survey published in *The Lancet Global Health* estimated 75,200 violent deaths between October 7, 2023 and January 5, 2025, and found that 56.2 percent of the dead were women, children, or the elderly. **Doc 259**, Section VII-A, records the United Nations’ counts of children. Israel says that it aims at fighters, that Hamas fights from among civilians, and that it works to reduce civilian harm.

The covenant law. *“Only the women and the little ones ...”* (Deuteronomy 20:14).

“You shall not strike them” (2 Kings 6:22).

“You have slain them in a rage that has reached up to heaven” (2 Chronicles 28:9).

“The innocent and the righteous you shall not slay” (Exodus 23:7).

And Abraham’s question over a guilty city still stands: *“Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?”* (Genesis 18:23, 25).

Finding — that women, children, and the aged are more than half of the dead: Corroborated (independent survey; ministry records). These are the very persons the hardest clause of the far-city law set apart from the sword.

VII-G. The Trees and the Food

The record — **Gaza.** A satellite assessment by the United Nations’ food agency found in late September 2025 that nearly 87 percent of Gaza’s cropland was damaged, with 89 percent of its orchards and 90 percent of its olive groves, and almost 87 percent of its farm wells.

The record — **Lebanon.** Lebanon reported that on February 1, 2026, Israeli aircraft sprayed farmland and woodland along the border. Lebanon’s environment and agriculture ministries, sampling together with the United Nations force, reported the weed-killer glyphosate at twenty to thirty times the normal level. Israel said it used an approved substance to clear growth that could hide fighters.

The record — **the West Bank.** The 2026 olive harvest opened this month under attack. On October 3 settlers beat a man harvesting his olives near Osarin, and the army confirmed that Palestinians and property there were *“attacked by Israeli rioters.”* About fifty-five olive trees and a family’s picked harvest were burned near Abu Dis. The newspaper Haaretz counted four harvests halted by the army that weekend. Israel’s President said the country’s leaders *“have not done everything”* to stop such attacks, and police have opened an investigation. **Doc 259**, Section VII-B, records the army’s uprooting of some 3,100 olive trees at al-Mughayyir in August 2025.

The covenant law. *“You shall not destroy its trees ... for you may eat of them ... For is the tree of the field a man?”* (Deuteronomy 20:19).

“The violence done to Lebanon shall cover you” (Habakkuk 2:17).

Finding — the destruction of orchards, olive groves, and farmland in Gaza, in Lebanon, and in the West Bank: Corroborated (United Nations assessment; Lebanese ministries; the army’s own statement; Israeli and Palestinian press). Condemned by **Deuteronomy 20:19–20**.

VII-H. The List Reopened

The record. The Prime Minister’s appeal to Amalek and Mr. Smotrich’s appeal to Joshua are quoted in Section VI-C. The Prime Minister’s office says his words were aimed at Hamas alone. Mr. Smotrich’s words speak of *“inhabitants,”* and the plan he published in 2017 sets the same three roads before the Palestinians: to stay without national rights, to leave, or to fight and be defeated. The three letters he cites come from post-biblical rabbinic commentary; the book of Joshua does not record them.

The covenant law. The list of **Deuteronomy 20:17** is closed (Section III-E). The command to remember Amalek (**Deuteronomy 25:17–19**) gives no ruler authority to name a living people Amalek; when that war was fought it took a prophet’s direct word (**1 Samuel 15:1–3**). And no one bears another’s guilt: “*The soul that sins, it shall die*” (**Ezekiel 18:20**).

Finding — that leaders of the State have framed the present war in the terms of Amalek and of Joshua’s conquest: **Corroborated**, by their own words. That any people now living may be placed under those laws: **Not in the text**.

VII-I. What the State of Israel Answers, and What the Text Says

THE STATE’S ANSWER	WHAT IS TRUE IN IT	WHAT THE TEXT SAYS
“ Hamas began this war. ”	It did, on October 7, 2023 (Section VII-A).	The first blow does not suspend verses 13–14 and 19–20. The attacker may still be asked to speak first (Judges 11:12), and the guilty are sought, not the city (Judges 20:13; 2 Samuel 20:21).
“ Hamas hides among civilians and holds hostages. ”	Stealing a man is a capital crime in the covenant (Exodus 21:16).	Sheba hid in a city, and the city was not swallowed up (2 Samuel 20:19–22). “ <i>Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked?</i> ” (Genesis 18:23).
“ We offered terms: free the hostages and lay down your arms. ”	That is a proclamation of terms, as verse 11 describes.	Then the rest of the law binds: an accepted truce is honored (Joshua 9:19), and a refusal still leaves the women, the little ones, and the trees protected (Deuteronomy 20:14, 19).
“ Our strikes during the ceasefire answer their violations. ”	The armed groups have broken ceasefires too.	Israel kept its oath to Gibeon though Gibeon had deceived it (Joshua 9:19–20). The broken oath brought famine (2 Samuel 21:1).
“ Those we killed in Tehran and Doha were terrorist leaders, not diplomats. ”	They led an organization guilty of blood.	So did Abner, and his death was “ <i>the blood of war in peace</i> ” (1 Kings 2:5).
“ The laws of an ancient covenant do not bind a modern state. ”	The State is not the covenant nation of the prophets (Doc 259).	Then it cannot claim the Land by that covenant (Ezekiel 33:25–26). And Yahweh judged Damascus, Gaza, and Ammon without it (Amos 1:3–13).

VII-J. The Charge Summarized

CHARGE	COVENANT LAW	RECORD	GRADE
Striking first on October 7	—	The attack was Hamas's	Not in the record; Hamas's guilt corroborated
Killing those who came to talk	Deuteronomy 20:10; 2 Samuel 3:27–29; 1 Kings 2:5	Tehran, July 2024; Doha, September 2025	Corroborated (Israel's own statements)
Striking while talks were set	Deuteronomy 20:10, 12; Psalms 55:21; Jeremiah 9:8	Iran, June 2025 and February 2026; Lebanon, April 2026	Timing corroborated; purpose not established
War after peace was answered	Deuteronomy 20:11; Genesis 34:21, 25	Return to war, March 2025; proposals accepted by Hamas, May 2024 and August 2025	Events corroborated; blame for each failure disputed
Killing under signed ceasefires	Joshua 9:19–20; 2 Samuel 21:1–2; Ezekiel 17:19	Gaza: 1,460 killed since October 2025. Lebanon: over 10,000 violations in a year (UN force); about 7,700 since June 2026 (Lebanese Army)	Corroborated (Israel answers: responses to violations)
Women and little ones killed	Deuteronomy 20:14; 2 Kings 6:22; 2 Chronicles 28:9	More than half of the dead (Lancet survey; ministry records)	Corroborated
Trees and food destroyed	Deuteronomy 20:19–20; Habakkuk 2:17	Gaza cropland and olive groves; spraying in Lebanon; the olive harvest	Corroborated
The list reopened	Deuteronomy 20:17; Ezekiel 18:20	Amalek (2023); Joshua's letters (2016)	Words corroborated; authority not in the text

The prophets never spoke a charge without leaving a door. *“When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you ... your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean ... cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice”* (Isaiah 1:15–17).

And of any nation: *“if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the evil that I thought to do to it”* (Jeremiah 18:8). The door stands open to the government of Israel, and to those who fight it.

VIII. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — THE OFFER OF PEACE IN THE THREE TRADITIONS

The table sets the three traditions against the Tanakh’s own findings. Comparative texts are cited as historical reference only, in keeping with the standing rule of this document.

ELEMENT	☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✱ ISLAM
Teaching and practice today	Rabbinic law requires the offer of peace before any war (Maimonides, Kings and Wars 6:1) and an open side in a siege (6:7). The Israeli army’s own code teaches <i>“purity of arms.”</i> Within religious Zionism some rabbis and ministers apply the laws of Joshua and Amalek to present enemies; other rabbis and Israeli rights groups oppose them and stand beside Palestinian farmers at the olive harvest.	The just-war tradition asks for lawful authority, just cause, right intention, and last resort (Aquinas, Summa II-II, q. 40; Catechism 2309). Many evangelical churches teach that Genesis 12:3 requires support for the State of Israel in its wars. The heads of the historic churches in Jerusalem have called repeatedly for a ceasefire and the protection of civilians.	Classical law requires a call before fighting (Sahih Muslim 1731), commands that an offer of peace be accepted (Q. 8:61; 4:90), grants safe conduct to one who asks it (Q. 9:6), and forbids killing women, children, and the aged or cutting fruit trees (Muwatta Malik 21.10). Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran’s Revolutionary Guards each claim to fight under this law.
Covenant strength	Maimonides’ ruling that peace is offered in every war, and Nachmanides’ agreement, keep the plain order of Deuteronomy 20:10 . The open side of the siege keeps the purpose of verse 14: those who want to live may go. <i>Bal tashchit (do not destroy)</i> keeps verse 19.	Last resort is Deuteronomy 20:10 in other words. Luke 14:31–32 and Romans 12:18 agree with Psalms 34:14 [Hebrew 34:15]: seek peace and pursue it.	Q. 8:61 stands close to Deuteronomy 20:11 : when the other side inclines to peace, the answer must be honored. Abu Bakr’s charge matches verses 14 and 19 almost point for point, and the rule that envoys are not killed matches the judgment on Joab.

ELEMENT	☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✡ ISLAM
Covenant departure	Reading verse 10 as binding only in a discretionary war (Sifre; Rashi) narrows a verse that carries no exception. Applying Amalek or Joshua's conquest to a living people adds a name to a closed list. The tradition of Joshua's three letters (Jerusalem Talmud Shevi'it 6:1) is commentary; it is not in the book of Joshua, and it gives no ruler today Joshua's commission.	Reading Genesis 12:3 as a blessing on every act of a modern government has no Tanakh witness; the prophets served Israel by rebuking its kings. Just-war language has also been used to bless wars it would not pass.	The attack of October 7, 2023 broke Islam's own rules: civilians were killed and carried off. Rockets fired at towns break them as well. Holding hostages as bargaining pieces has no support in Q. 8:61, and the Tanakh condemns it (Exodus 21:16).
Covenant witness	This chapter is read aloud in the synagogue every year, in the portion called Shoftim. The tradition that has guarded the verse has the standing to ask whether the State that bears Israel's name keeps it.	Matthew 5:9 calls the peacemakers blessed. Read from the Tanakh outward, that blessing rests on the one who proclaims peace before the sword and keeps the peace he has sworn.	The Qur'an's rule, to incline to peace when the other side inclines, asks of Muslims what Deuteronomy asks of Israel. Each community is judged first by its own book.

IX. CORRECTIONS TO EARLIER LIBRARY MATERIAL

The Library's rule is that its own earlier work is tested by the same standard as everyone else's. Three points in earlier material need correction, and each has been corrected in its Google Doc so that the website copy can be replaced. Three further points are left for the Founder's decision.

Correction 1 — six nations at Deuteronomy 20:17, not seven. Doc 202 (*The Covenant of War*), Section III-C, was headed *"The Herem of the Seven Nations,"* and the 613 Laws listing, Nos. 601–602, cited the *"seven Canaanite nations"* to **Deuteronomy 20:16–17**. The verse names six. The seven, with the Gergashite, are listed at **Deuteronomy 7:1**. The Doc 202 heading and its Scripture Index entry now read *"the Nations of the Land,"* a sentence has been added to the section, and a note has been added at No. 601.

Correction 2 — “a permissive war.” The 613 Laws listing, No. 600, gave the command of **Deuteronomy 20:10** as applying “*in a permissive war (as distinguished from obligatory ones).*” That limit is the later rabbinic reading. The verse itself commands that peace be proclaimed to a city before fighting against it, and the only distinction the chapter draws is between the far cities and the cities of the six nations (**Deuteronomy 20:15–16**). A note has been added at No. 600.

Correction 3 — Ammon and Moab. The 613 Laws listing, No. 607, read “*Not to offer peace to the Ammonites and the Moabites before waging war on them*” and cited Deuteronomy 23:7. The verse is **Deuteronomy 23:6** [Hebrew 23:7], and it says, “*You shall not seek their peace or their good.*” It stands in a passage about who may enter the assembly, and it does not speak of war. Applying it to the offer of peace before battle is the later rabbinic reading; in Moses’ day Israel was forbidden to make war on Moab and Ammon at all (**Deuteronomy 2:9, 19**). The citation has been corrected and a note added.

Left for the Founder’s decision. First: Doc 202, Section V-A, describes the Mesha inscription as written “*from the losing side’s perspective.*” Mesha writes as the victor, and **2 Kings 3:27** ends with Israel’s withdrawal; “*from Moab’s side*” would be more exact. **Second:** Doc 202 is still in the old format, with Hebrew book names, the earlier contact lines, and verse numbers given Hebrew-first (for example Joel 4:10, which is Joel 3:10 [Hebrew 4:10]). It could be rebuilt in the Doc 250 format, as was done for Docs 151 and 260. **Third:** the figures in Doc 259, Section VII, were correct when written and have since moved; the Gaza total stood at 74,243 on October 5, 2026.

X. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON THE OFFER OF PEACE

Per the **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard, no doctrine may stand on a single text. Each declaration below draws on more than one witness.

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	The covenant puts words before weapons. No city is attacked until peace has been proclaimed to it.	Deuteronomy 2:26; 20:10; Judges 11:12–14; 21:13
II	A city that answers peace is not put to the sword, and a peace once sworn is kept, even at cost and even with an enemy.	Deuteronomy 20:11; Joshua 9:18–20; 2 Samuel 21:1–2; Ezekiel 17:18–19
III	The one who comes to talk goes in peace. His blood is the blood of war shed in peace.	2 Samuel 3:21–29; 1 Kings 2:5, 31–33; Isaiah 33:7–8

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
IV	When a city refuses, the sword is still limited. The women and the little ones are not killed, and the guilty are sought, not the city.	Deuteronomy 20:13–14; 24:16; 2 Samuel 20:19–22; 2 Kings 6:22; 2 Chronicles 28:9–15
V	Food trees are not cut down. The land and its food are not weapons of war.	Deuteronomy 20:19–20; Habakkuk 2:17
VI	The list of the devoted nations is closed. No ruler may add a living person to it.	Deuteronomy 2:4–5, 9, 19; 9:4–5; 20:16–18; Amos 9:7
VII	Whoever claims the Land by the covenant is bound by the covenant’s law of war, and Yahweh judges every nation that breaks it: the State of Israel, and those who fight it.	Leviticus 18:26–28; Ezekiel 33:24–26; Amos 1:3–2:3

XI. THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THE TANAKH SAYS TO THOSE WHO HOLD THE SWORD

The verse is short, and what it asks is plain. Tanakh’s answer is sixfold.

First: to the government of the State of Israel. You have taken your name, your claim to the Land, and your words about Amalek from this book. Then keep its first law of war. Speak before you strike, and mean what you say. Let the one who comes to talk go in peace. Keep the ceasefires you have signed. Stop the killing of women and children, and leave the olive trees standing. “You stand upon your sword ... and shall you possess the land?” (Ezekiel 33:26).

Second: to Hamas, to Hezbollah, and to the rulers of Iran. The same law judges you. You struck first on October 7, you took captives, and you have aimed at towns. “He who steals a man ... shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 21:16). The prophet named Gaza for delivering up a whole people (Amos 1:6). When peace is proclaimed to you, answer it and keep it.

Third: to the Christian who has been taught to bless every war of this State. The blessing of Abraham is for “all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3). To bless Israel is not to bless bloodshed. “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to Yahweh” (Proverbs 17:15). The prophets loved Israel most, and they are the ones who said, “your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:15).

Fourth: to the Jewish reader. This verse is yours, and you hear it read every year. The prophets asked of your fathers what they ask now: *“Speak the truth, each man to his neighbor; judge with truth*

and the judgment of peace in your gates ... therefore love truth and peace” (Zechariah 8:16, 19).

Fifth: to the Muslim reader. The rule you know from your own teachers, to call before fighting and to answer peace with peace, is the rule of this verse. Hold those who fight in your name to it.

Sixth: to the covenant believer in every nation. You command no army, but the verse still reaches you. Be the one who speaks first. *“Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it”* (Psalms 34:14). The words are *baqqesh shalom ve-rodfehu* (*seek peace and pursue it*), בִּקֶּשׁ וְרִדְפוּהוּ שָׁלוֹם. Pray for the day the prophets saw, when *“nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). And until that day, ask with Abner: *“Shall the sword devour forever?”* (2 Samuel 2:26).

SCRIPTURE INDEX

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
Genesis 12:3	The blessing of Abraham for all the families of the earth	Opening; XI
Genesis 15:16	The iniquity of the Amorite not yet full	III-E
Genesis 18:23–25	Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked?	VII-F; VII-I
Genesis 34:2, 13–25; 49:5–7	Shechem: terms offered in deceit, the city struck, the anger cursed	II; V-A; V-F; VII-D; VII-J
Exodus 15:3	Yahweh a man of war (Doc 253)	I-A
Exodus 20:13; 21:16	You shall not murder; the one who steals a man	VII-A; VII-I; VIII; XI
Exodus 23:7	The innocent and the righteous you shall not slay	VII-F
Exodus 23:32–33	No covenant with the nations of the Land	IV-H
Leviticus 18:26–28	One law for native and stranger; the land vomits out	VI-B; VI-E; X
Numbers 20:14–21	Edom refuses passage; Israel turns away	IV-B

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
Numbers 21:21–22	Messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites	IV-A
Numbers 25:16–18; 31:15–17	Midian: a single judgment, not the standing statute	III-D
Deuteronomy 2:4–5, 9, 19	The lands Yahweh gave to Edom, Moab, and Ammon	III-E; IV-B; IX; X
Deuteronomy 2:24–32	Words of peace to Sihon before the battle	II; IV-A; IV-H; X
Deuteronomy 7:1–2	The seven nations named; no covenant with them	III-E; IV-H; IX
Deuteronomy 9:4–5	Not for your righteousness	III-E; X
Deuteronomy 12:31	What the nations did for their gods	III-E
Deuteronomy 17:18–20	The ruler under the law	VI-B
Deuteronomy 19:15	The two-or-three-witness standard	Opening; I-B; X
Deuteronomy 20:1–9	The priest’s word; those sent home	II; III-A; VI-A
Deuteronomy 20:10	Proclaim peace to the city before fighting	Opening; I-A; I-B; II; III-B; III-G; IV-D; IV-H; V; VII-A; VII-C; VII-J; VIII; IX; X
Deuteronomy 20:11	The city that answers peace and opens	II; III-C; III-G; VII-D; VII-J; VIII; X
Deuteronomy 20:12–14	Siege only after refusal; the women and the little ones set apart	II; III-D; III-G; VII-C; VII-F; VII-I; VII-J; X
Deuteronomy 20:15–18	The far cities; six nations named, and the reason	II; III-E; III-G; IV-A; IV-H; VI-E; VII-H; VII-J; IX; X
Deuteronomy 20:19–20	Food trees not destroyed; is the tree of the field a man?	Opening; II; III-F; III-G; VII-G; VII-I; VII-J; X
Deuteronomy 21:10–14	The rights of the captive woman	III-D
Deuteronomy 23:6	Not to seek the peace or good of Ammon and Moab	IX

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
Deuteronomy 24:16	Each one dies for his own sin	I-C; VII-A; X
Deuteronomy 25:17–19	Remember what Amalek did	VI-C; VII-H
Joshua 6:25	Rahab and her father's house spared	IV-H
Joshua 9:7, 15–20	Gibeon: the treaty, the oath, and the refusal to break it	II; IV-H; V-B; V-F; VII-E; VII-I; VII-J; X
Joshua 10:1, 6–9	Gibeon made peace; Joshua marches to defend it	II; V-B
Joshua 11:19–20	No city made peace except Gibeon	II; IV-H
Judges 11:4, 12–28	Jephthah's messengers to the king of Ammon	IV-C; IV-H; VII-A; VII-I; X
Judges 20:12–13	Deliver up the guilty men	IV-D; VII-I
Judges 21:13	The congregation proclaims peace to Benjamin	II; IV-D; IV-H; X
1 Samuel 15:1–3	War on Amalek only by a prophet's word	III-E; VII-H
1 Samuel 16:7	Yahweh looks on the heart	VII-C
2 Samuel 2:23, 26	Asahel killed in battle; shall the sword devour forever?	V-C; XI
2 Samuel 3:21–29	Abner goes in peace and is killed in the gate	V-C; V-F; VII-B; VII-J; X
2 Samuel 20:15–22	The wise woman of Abel; the guilty man, not the city	IV-E; VII-I; X
2 Samuel 21:1–2	Saul breaks the oath to Gibeon; famine	V-B; V-F; VII-E; VII-I; VII-J; X
1 Kings 2:5, 31–33	The blood of war shed in peace	V-C; V-F; VII-B; VII-I; VII-J; X
1 Kings 5:1, 12	Hiram of Tyre: peace and a covenant	VI-E
1 Kings 9:21	Tribute labor	II; III-C
1 Kings 20:34, 42	Ahab rebuked for a treaty Yahweh had not allowed	V-F

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
2 Kings 3:19, 25, 27	The trees of Moab felled; great wrath against Israel	III-F; IX
2 Kings 6:21–23	Elisha: you shall not strike them; set bread before them	III-D; IV-F; VII-F; VII-J; X
Isaiah 1:15–17	Hands full of blood; cease to do evil	VII-J; XI
Isaiah 2:4	Nation shall not lift up sword against nation	XI
Isaiah 14:8	No woodcutter comes up against us	III-F
Isaiah 33:7–8	The envoys of peace weep; the covenant broken	V-E; VII-B; X
Isaiah 44:28; 45:1	Cyrus of Persia, My shepherd, His anointed	VI-E
Isaiah 59:7–8	The way of peace they do not know	V-E
Jeremiah 6:14	Peace, peace, when there is no peace	V-F
Jeremiah 9:8	Peace in the mouth, an ambush in the heart	II; V-E; VII-C; VII-J
Jeremiah 18:8	The nation that turns from its evil	VII-J
Ezekiel 17:13–19	Zedekiah's broken treaty is Yahweh's broken covenant	II; V-D; V-F; VII-E; VII-J; X
Ezekiel 18:20	The soul that sins, it shall die	I-C; VII-H; VII-J
Ezekiel 33:24–26	You stand upon your sword, and shall you possess the land?	VI-B; VI-E; VII-I; X; XI
Amos 1:3–2:6	Yahweh judges the wars of every nation	I-C; VI-D; VI-E; VII-A; VII-I; X; XI
Amos 9:7	The Philistines from Caphtor and Aram from Kir	III-E; VI-E; X
Micah 3:5	They proclaim peace and sanctify war	II
Micah 4:3	Neither shall they learn war any more	XI
Habakkuk 2:12, 17	A town built with blood; the violence done to Lebanon	III-F; VI-D; VII-G; VII-J; X

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
Zechariah 8:16, 19	Love truth and peace	XI
Psalms 15:4	He swears to his own hurt and does not change	V-E; VII-E
Psalms 34:14	Seek peace and pursue it	VIII; XI; Closing
Psalms 55:20–21	A smooth mouth and war in the heart	V-E; V-F; VII-C; VII-J
Psalms 120:7	I am for peace; they are for war	V-F
Proverbs 3:29	The neighbor who dwells trustingly beside you	VII-D
Proverbs 12:20	Joy to the counselors of peace	VII-C
Proverbs 17:15	He who justifies the wicked	XI
Ecclesiastes 3:8	A time for war and a time for peace	V-F
2 Chronicles 28:8–15	Oded and the captives; a rage that reached up to heaven	III-D; IV-G; VII-F; VII-J; X
2 Chronicles 36:13	An oath sworn by Elohim	V-D

“Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”

Psalms 34:14 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

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