

Every aspect of life was holy in ancient Israel, including warfare. However, the conquest of Canaan has special rules set by God, making them *Holy Wars*. Israel's war traditions included some practices observed by other cultures in the ancient Near East.

• Before Battle: spiritual preparation—making sacrifices and vows

In Israel, all wars required spiritual preparation. Seeking God and purifying the war camp as well as the combatants was necessary so God could dwell among them to aid and advise. ⁵⁵ Vows showed devotion. Only God could initiate a *Holy War* involving *herem* (a vow devoting something or someone for total destruction). ⁵⁶ *Holy Wars* have specific rules and limitations (Deut. 7, 20). Israel is not free to attack other nations at will and ask God to bless her. In a *Holy War*, Yahweh gives specific instructions for the battle, either through a mediator (such as a prophet) or through direct revelation. Israel and her leaders are expected to obey. ⁵⁷

During Battle: icons representing a nation's gods go before or with the warriors.⁵⁸

The ark of the covenant becomes Israel's divine standard. The ark itself has no power, but it represents the spiritual reality that God is with Israel and fights for her.⁵⁹ In the Bible, heavenly armies and even creation helps those who are on God's side.⁶⁰

• After Battle: praise for the victorious god is immortalized in poetry, often set to music.

Epic hymn poems become part of the nation's oral tradition.⁶¹ "The Song of Moses and Miriam" in Exodus 15, "Deborah's Song" in Judges 5, and hymn psalms such as Psalm 98 are examples of victory poems.