

# Why Did Jesus Ask for Two Swords?



Another of the mysteries of the story of the crucifixion is the curious dialog between Jesus and his disciples regarding the buying of two swords. You will find that story in Luke 22:35-38.

Then in Luke 22:47-53 Matthews 26:47-56 One disciples asks if they should attack with the sword (Luke 22:49) But before Jesus can answer, impetuous Peter unskillfully used his sword, missed and cut off the high priest's servant's ear, and got an earful of rebuke from Jesus. Jesus tells Peter he does not need his help and that if he needed help he could call ten thousand angels to assist him. (Matthews 26:53) Jesus then asks the arresting officers why they came with swords and clubs to arrest him when he was daily in the Temple courts and no one bothered to arrest him?

Finally, there is the comment Jesus made to Pilate in John 18:36 that *"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world then my servants would fight, so that I would not be delivered into your hands."*

So, we ask the question: Why did Jesus instruct his disciples to sell their coats to buy a sword? Watchman Nee seems to answer this best.

## TWO SWORDS - Watchman Nee

### Question:

In Luke 22:36 and 38 the Lord Jesus asked the disciples to sell their garments and buy swords. The disciples answered that there were two swords there. The Lord said that it was enough. But in Matthew 26:52 the Lord told the disciples not to use a sword. Is there any contradiction in these two portions of the Bible? How can one interpret Luke 22 which says that it was enough to have two swords. Please explain to me in detail. (Hsu, Kwangtung)

### Answer:

This question is one that Christians understand the least. We can examine and investigate it in detail. The passage where the Lord Jesus commanded the disciples to buy swords is recorded in Luke 22:35-38. This passage of the Bible has two problems that we must first resolve before we can begin to examine and investigate it. (1) Can we spiritualize the interpretation of these two swords? (2) If we cannot spiritualize it, then did the Lord Jesus ask the disciples to use the swords for fighting?

(1) We cannot interpret these two swords in a spiritual sense because, when the Lord Jesus commanded the disciples to prepare things, He did not command them to buy only swords. Verse 36 says, "Let him who has a purse take it, likewise also a bag; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." The Lord here commanded them to prepare three things. If the sword signifies something, then the purse must also signify something, and so must the bag. If the purse is the purse and the bag is the bag, then the sword must also be the sword. We cannot say that the two swords refer to the New and the Old Testaments, or to the two robbers, or to any other things. A sword is a sword; we cannot interpret it in a spiritual sense. How unfair it is if every time we come across a difficult verse that we do not understand, we try to interpret it in a spiritual sense!

(2) If the sword is a sword, then was it the intention of the Lord Jesus to ask them to buy swords and use them for fighting? No. There are three reasons:

(a) There were eleven disciples besides Judas. If the Lord Jesus were to ask them to solve the problem by force, how could two swords be enough for eleven people? When the disciples said that

there were two swords, the Lord Jesus stopped and did not say anything more. He did not ask them to buy nine more, which shows that it was not His original intention to buy swords and use force.

(b) If the Lord Jesus' original intention was to use force, then Peter had already done so; he had tried to solve the problem by force already. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus opposed him, saying, "Return your sword to its place, for all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

(c) If the Lord Jesus had wanted them to use force, then this would have been entirely contrary to the teaching that says "not to resist him who is evil" (5:38-44).

### **We have concluded that**

(1) the sword is a sword and that (2) buying the swords was not for the purpose of using force. What then was the Lord Jesus' intention in saying what He said? How do we get the true interpretation? To get the true interpretation, we must first know a few things:

(2) Although the sword the Lord Jesus spoke of was a real sword, His intention was not regarding the sword. If He really wanted the disciples to buy swords, but they had only two swords, should they not buy more so that there would be enough?

(3) The Lord Jesus' heart was not set on the sword only. What He spoke of was the purse, the bag, and the sword. The sword is just one of the three.

(4) At that time in Judea there were many robbers on the public roads (Luke 10:30), so that almost every Jew carried a sword. Swords at that time were just like today's walking sticks.

(5) This whole passage (Luke 22:35-38) is concerning the events of that night. Verse 37 seemingly has no connection with the rest of the passage. If we do not understand verse 37, then we surely cannot interpret this portion of the Scripture. To interpret the Bible we should take care of the context of the verses. We cannot carelessly delete a verse that we do not understand, and then go on to interpret the rest.

(6) We should know the background behind the Lord Jesus' word in verse 36. Why would the Lord Jesus say this? When did the Lord Jesus say this? We must know these things.

(7) We must remember that we cannot interpret this portion of the Word in a spiritual sense, and that the sword is not for fighting.

**Now we can follow these points to slowly examine and investigate these verses.**

Verse 35 says, *"And He said to them, When I sent you without purse and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you? And they said, Nothing."* Here the Lord Jesus reminded them of the way He first sent them out. When they went out at that time, they had no purse, no bag, and no shoes. But neither had they any lack. Why did they not lack anything? This record of sending is recorded in Luke 9 and Matthew 10.

Matthew's record is in more detail, so let us read it here. At that time the Lord Jesus sent them out to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the house of Israel. At that time, the Lord Jesus demonstrated His authority as the Messiah. When the disciples went to preach, they preached for the purpose that men would receive Him as the Messiah. The worker is worthy of his food (Matt. 10:10). Hence, they did not have to prepare their own sustenance (v. 9) and would have no lack (Luke 22:35). This was the result of the authority of the Lord Jesus as Messiah. What about now? The Lord Jesus had already manifested Himself to the children of Israel. But they would not receive Him. Rather, they rejected Him again and again. What should He do now? *"He was counted with the lawless"* (v. 37). He was to be crucified. Not only did men not want Him to be the Messiah, they swore to kill Him. (This is the meaning of verse 37.)

Now He was about to fulfill the Scriptures to suffer and to lose the authority of the glorious Messiah. As such, He could no longer exercise His Messianic authority to make preparations for His sent ones. Although earlier they were without lack even when they did not make preparations for the purse, the bag, or the shoes, by that time, it could not be so any longer. *"But now, let him who has a purse take it, likewise also a bag; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one"* (v. 36). *"Because I will be crucified and rejected by men as the Messiah, the supply and protection that you received before on account of My being your Messiah will now be stopped (temporarily). You have to prepare for yourselves."* This is what the Lord Jesus meant in these three verses.

The first part of verse 36, "*But now*," is most important. It shows us that by then the time had changed. "*But now*" refers to that period of time from the beginning of the supper to the time of crucifixion. During this period of time the Lord Jesus was in fact rejected by the world. The real intention of the Lord Jesus in speaking to His disciples was not that they would pay attention to their purses, bags, or swords, but that they would understand the position He was in at that time and that they would know that He was soon to be crucified. But the disciples did not understand what He meant. Instead, they thought the Lord Jesus was actually referring to the purse, the bag, and the sword. Their thoughts were totally dominated by material things. Even up to this time, they still had no spiritual knowledge. (*Please read John 21:22-23.*)

Also, deep within them, they were inclined to use force and to exercise the weapons of the flesh. This is why they answered the Lord, saying, "*Lord, behold, here are two swords*" (Luke 22:38). They thought that the Lord really wanted the swords! The Lord answered, "*It is enough.*" What does this word, *It is enough* really refer to?

First, it definitely does not refer to the swords. How can the two swords be enough for eleven people? The meaning of the Lord's word was not that the two swords were enough. Otherwise, when Peter used one of the swords, why did the Lord rebuke him? Therefore, the "*enough*" must refer to something else.

The Lord Jesus knew that His disciples were still not able to receive His word; their thoughts were still in the old creation. What He was saying was, "*It is enough --there is no need to say anything more. You cannot understand My word.*" "*It is enough*" here has the same meaning as the Chinese expression, "That is all," but with more gentleness and less coldness and harshness.

What a pity that just as the disciples did not understand on that day, in the same way people do not understand today. The disciples did not understand the Lord's word. That is why later they asked, "*Lord, shall we strike with the sword?*" (v. 49).

Today, those who do not understand the Lord's word (Matt. 5) still foolishly ask the same question. To the disciples' astonishment the Lord answered, "*For all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword.*" There should be no "Christ-soldiers" on this earth!

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<https://www.ministrysamples.org/excerpts/TWO-SWORDS.HTML>