

What is the 'rod of iron'?

*"I myself have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain."*

*"I will proclaim the decree:
The Lord said to me,
'You are my son;
today I became your father.
Ask of me, and I will make
the nations your inheritance;
the whole wide world
will be your possession.
You will break them with an **iron rod**,
shatter them like a clay pot.'" Psalm 2:6-9*

*The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with **a rod of iron**, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. Revelation 2:26-27*

*⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a **rod of iron**, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.
Revelation 12:5*

Let us briefly examine who has the **rod of iron** in these passages. The first is generally thought to be a Psalm composed by King David and to refer to him. He is the king of Zion (Jerusalem) and God is his Father. Later it was interpreted by Jews and Christians to refer to the messiah who would be a descendant of David. The second passage refers to anyone who overcomes and lives a Christian life receiving the **rod of iron**. It does not refer to the messiah himself as it is Jesus who is encouraging his followers. The last one is generally understood to refer to the messiah, the returning Christ.

Based on these verses the **Rod of Iron Ministries** was founded by Hyung-jin Moon the founder with his brother of the Sanctuary Church. So how is the expression "**Rod of Iron**" to be interpreted?

This is a typical Christian interpretation:

A familiar scripture to those who read the Bible and who look for the coming reign of Christ, is in the second Psalm "*Thou shall break them with a rod of iron; thou shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*". Many gentle disciples have felt a thrill run through them as they

picture a day in which all opposition to the Kingdom of righteousness is relentlessly crushed. Many have solaced themselves in present distress by anticipation of a coming day in which the tables will be turned on those who set themselves against the Lord's Anointed, and the proud and mighty of this world are compelled to bow at the feet of earth's rightful Sovereign.

A number of Scriptures, mostly in the Books of Psalms and Revelation are habitually cited to buttress this idea of an all-powerful Dictator ruthlessly crushing all opposition and setting up his rule of absolute righteousness and justice by the exercise of brute force. The end is considered to justify the means, and the scriptural assurance that as a result of Christ's reign all humanity will come into harmony with the Divine law of selflessness and love is held to stamp the means employed with the hallmark of Divine approval.

However, the whole tenor of Christ's teaching discountenances the use of coercion or force. He himself resolutely refused to employ any other agency than love, even although He faced death. He refused to call upon the twelve legions of angels to come to his aid and trod the winepress alone. When in surprise and mystification Pilate queried "*Thou art a King then?*" Jesus uttered those memorable words which have resounded down the ages, "*My kingdom is not of this world else would my servants fight*". Not for him the standards of kingship by which this world measures kings. It was in the passive and yet overpowering force of love that the early Church went forth conquering, and they conquered.

But if the teaching of Christ at his first advent definitely repudiated the use of force as a means of accomplishing the work of his Kingdom, how shall statements of so definite a nature as Psalm 2.9 and Revelation 2.27 be understood? Certain it is that as students of the Divine Word, we can neither afford to ignore them nor to wrest them to mean the opposite of their plain implication. We can only approach them, armed first with a clear knowledge of the principles upon which Christ will deal with mankind in the future age, and then look at these scriptures in the light of their local meaning and the significance they had for the Israelites who lived in the day in which they were uttered. So, we can deduce what prophetic indication is there given, in the guise of a familiar reference to some everyday incident or custom.

It is generally agreed that the work of the age to come is portrayed in miniature and in principle by the life of Jesus Christ, by his words, actions, miracles, and so on. It is equally definite that He preached the overcoming of hate by love, of greed by selflessness, of force by persuasion, of selfishness by service for others. This then is the law of the Kingdom, and however the rule of the iron rod is to be understood it must in no sense do violation to the principles which underlie the teaching of Jesus. In a very real sense it must represent fairly and accurately the law of the Kingdom of God on earth. What then is this rod of iron?

The figure, like so many in the Psalms, is a pastoral one. The shepherds of David's day, in the unchanging East, went about their occupation provided with two implements, the pastoral staff and the iron club. The iron club was the shepherd's weapon of defence, not only for himself, but also for his sheep. The Palestinian shepherd followed his calling in very different circumstances from those that are associated in our Western minds with the care of the flock. The pastures were often found in mountainous and desolate places, and whilst roving bands of robbers threatened danger to the shepherd, wild beasts such as hyenas, jackals, bears, leopards and lions were liable to attack the flock, and the safety of the defenceless sheep depended entirely upon the watchfulness and strength of the shepherd.

The people of Israel were familiar with the fact of wild beasts in their midst and to realise this aspect of the shepherd's work is to understand more clearly the import of our Lord's own

words in John 10. 11-12 (RSV) *"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them"*.

The rod of iron (Hebrew - *Shebet*) was the shepherd's iron club, his weapon of defence and his means of defending the sheep. But since in the ordinary course of events the shepherd's care for his sheep transcended all thought for himself, the iron club became in a very special sense associated with the protection of his flock from every kind of danger. This is borne out by the Scripture in a very remarkable manner. The quotation in Rev. 2.27 *"He shall rule them with a rod of iron"* employs a Greek word (*poimaino*) which has the significance of 'shepherding' in the sense of 'feeding'; and the phrase would be more correctly translated *"He shall shepherd them with the shepherd's club"*. In addition to its use for defence against robbers and wild beasts, the club was used for beating a way through jungle or undergrowth in the search for fresh pastures, and so its association with feeding as well as defence became obvious.

The same word is translated "feed" in John 21.16 *"Feed my sheep"* 1 Pet. 5.2 *"Feed the flock of God"*; Rev. 7.17 *"The Lamb which is in the midst of them shall feed them"* and in several other places. In the Old Testament the same allusion occurs in Micah 7.14 *"Feed thy people with thy rod"*, where rod again is translated from '*shebet*'.

In the same connection also is the word of the Lord to the Israelites of Ezekiel's day, *"I will cause you to pass under the rod (shebet) and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant"* (Ezek.20.37). *"He will smite the earth"* says Isaiah, *"with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked"* (Isa. 11.4). This 'iron rod' is in very truth a means of sustenance and defence to those who are the "children of the Kingdom", who stand in need of that which the Kingdom is designed to provide.

http://www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk/2010/May_Jun/RuleIron.htm

As we can see the 'rod of iron' and other such expressions in the Bible have traditionally been understood symbolically by Christians. Jesus' kingdom was not to be based on force, as were the kingdoms of the world, but on love and truth. That is why Jesus repudiated the use of force to build God's kingdom:

And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Matthew 26:51-52

To understand the teachings of Jesus one needs to understand the context in which he was teaching. Israel was occupied by the Romans who ruled the country very harshly extracting taxes from the people to send back to Rome. That is why the tax collectors were so hated by the ordinary people. When four towns refused to pay, the inhabitants were all sold into slavery. After an uprising against the Romans in 4 A.D. 2000 Jews were crucified. There were a number of other revolts which were

put down very cruelly. As well as such abuses the Romans violated the sanctity of the temple and disrespected Jewish traditions. The Roman governor Pilate's rule was described by his contemporary Philo of Alexandria as being "*associated with briberies, insults, robberies, outrages, wanton injustices, constantly repeated executions without trial, and ceaseless and grievous cruelty.*" The Romans treated the Jews with contempt and the Jews in turn hated the Romans. The situation was a tinder box ready to explode which it did in 70 A.D. when the Jews tried to overthrow Roman rule and regain their independence. The result was the Roman legions invaded and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and slaughtered the inhabitants. A second revolt in 132 A.D. resulted in the death of half a million Jews, the destruction of nearly 1000 villages in Judea with any surviving Jews being sold into slavery.

Jesus understood this political reality and sought to defuse the tension through his teachings. He wanted to change the relationship between Jews and Romans and to bring about a peaceful resolution of the problem. Here is a traditional interpretation of Jesus teaching based upon an understanding of the context in which he was speaking:

"Most of us have heard about Jesus' command to "*turn the other cheek*" (Matt 5:39). This adage has been mistakenly interpreted as Jesus' support for becoming a doormat underneath the feet of aggressors. We often think the message is to let people beat us up. To take Jesus' advice as a call to compliant capitulation is a dangerous mistake. It is an interpretation that fails to see his cultural context.

In Jesus' day Roman soldiers strutted arrogantly around Israel. The Jewish land was Roman occupied territory. There was no love lost between the occupying soldiers and the Israelite population. When a soldier decided that he needed a Jew's goods or services, resistance was futile. The Jewish subject better be quick to fetch water, strong enough to carry a load, and ready to give away his shirt or else. If the subject could not perform the request to the soldier's liking, then a quick backhand to the face was not far behind. This was the situation Jesus addressed in the Sermon on the Mount. "*If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek toward him.*" The statement seems to imply that one should invite an aggressor to leave no part of the face out of a good beating. This statement does not sit well among Bible readers who believe that a man should protect his property and family against aggression. Jesus does not just tell someone who takes a fist to the face to expose the uninjured side. He gives clear instruction to expose the left cheek. This leads to a couple important questions. Why would Jesus indicate that the first blow will come to the right cheek? Why would he instruct someone to offer the left cheek to an attacking Roman soldier? The answer is simple. Roman soldiers tended to be right-handed. When they struck an equal with a fist, it came from the right and made contact with the left side of the face. When they struck an inferior person, they swung with the back of their right hand making contact with the right cheek. In a Mediterranean culture that made clear distinctions between classes, Roman soldiers backhanded their subjects to make a point. Jews were inferior. No one thought twice about the rectitude of treating lesser people with less respect.

When Jesus tells fellow Jews to expose the left cheek, he is calling for “peaceful subversion.” He does not want them to retaliate in anger nor to shrink in some false sense of meekness. He wants to force the Roman soldiers to treat them like equals. He wants the Jews to stand up and demand respect. He wants to make each attacker stop and think about how they are mistreating another human being. It is the same motivation behind his command to “*go an extra mile*” after a soldier forced you to carry water for the first mile (Matt 5:41). It is intended to activate the soldier’s conscience. Jesus’ command to “*turn the other cheek*” is ultimately a call to peaceful resistance. It is the mantra of great men inspired by Jesus like Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. It is a peaceful plan to subvert cultural evils, a long-term plan for change. “Turning the other cheek” is not blanket acceptance of brutality. It is a strategy for motivating others to change. If you meet evil with evil and blow for blow, the cycle of vengeance will never end. Violence will beget violence unless someone is strong enough to rise above.”

<http://www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/turning-the-other-cheek-jesus-peaceful-plan-to-challenge-injustice>

Martin Luther King Jnr. understood what Jesus meant by the rod and the sword:

Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon, which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals. Martin Luther King, Jnr.

Non-violence didn’t bring immediate results as both sides had to change. It took time but it worked and brought long term inner and outer change.

Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. I am not unmindful of the fact that violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. Martin Luther King, Jnr.

One wonders how the United States of America might have turned out had there been a person of the stature of Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jnr. during the 18th century when the American colonists came into conflict with the British Crown. It is conceivable that through civil disobedience and non-violent resistance the British authorities could have been persuaded to grant the colonists a growing degree of self-government. The colonies of Canada, Australia and New Zealand achieved independence without resorting to violence and maybe as a result are less violent societies to this day than the USA.

Let us now turn to our own spiritual tradition. These are the passages in the Divine Principle where the expression ‘**rod of iron**’ occurs:

A staff, which smites evil, leads the way and provides support when one leans on it, is a symbol of the Messiah. Jacob crossed the Jordan River and entered the land of Canaan while leaning on a staff. This foreshadowed that one day fallen humanity will cross the waters of this sinful world and arrive on the shore of the ideal world by following the Messiah: smiting injustice, following his guidance and example, and depending on him. Moses guided the Israelites across the Red Sea with a staff. Jesus at his Second Coming will guide humanity across the turbulent waters of this fallen world to reach the shore of God's ideal with the **rod of iron, symbolizing himself.** EDP, 190

At the shore of the Red Sea, upon God's command, Moses stretched out his staff and parted the waters; then he led the Israelites across on dry ground. The Egyptians chasing them in chariots were drowned when the waters closed up and engulfed them. As was explained earlier, Moses represented God before the Pharaoh, and Moses' staff symbolized Jesus, who would manifest God's power in the future. Hence, this miracle foreshadowed what was to happen when Jesus came. Satan would pursue the faithful ones who followed Jesus in walking the worldwide course to restore Canaan, but **Jesus would raise the rod of iron and strike the troubled sea of this world.** The waters would divide and reveal a smooth path upon which the believers would walk, while Satan in pursuit would perish. EDP, 200

Since Christ will be born on the earth at his Second Advent, it is written: "She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne." **The rod of iron here signifies the Word of God, with which the Lord will judge the sinful world and restore the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.** It was earlier explained in detail that judgment by fire is judgment by the Word. Hence, the Word of Jesus, which will be our judge on the Last Day, is the same Word by which heaven and earth will be cast into the fire of judgment, and is the very breath of the Lord's mouth by which he will slay the lawless one. **The Word Jesus speaks is also called "the breath of his lips" and "the rod of his mouth." It is symbolized by the rod of iron, as it is written, "He shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces."** EDP, 209

Let us look for some biblical examples concerning judgment by the Word: "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day." "The lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth," that is, by his word. Moreover, **"He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked."** "He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." It follows that the judgment by fire which Jesus came to bring was the judgment by the Word. EDP, 81

The 'rod of iron' therefore represents the Messiah and the 'Word of God' which brings judgement because it reveals clearly the difference between truth and falsehood. It exposes lies. So, it is clear that Hyung-jin and Sanctuary Church are not teaching the Principled interpretation of the Bible but a literalistic one from some other tradition. Equating the **'rod of iron'** with an AR-15 is a perversion of the Biblical and Principle tradition of interpretation. Father was not a pacifist. But he had a very clear understanding that the struggle was ultimately ideological:

Communism is the true antichrist of this age. We cannot defeat Communism on the physical level alone. We must win with a superior ideology. We battle by proclaiming our inner ideology. We proclaim the power of Christ so that the power of the antichrist is automatically doomed. Sun Myung Moon, *A Prophet Speaks Today*, 1975

And this is why he initiated the International Federation for Victory Over Communism, CAUSA, PWPA, and many other organisations including the *Washington Times*, to mobilise churches, academics, politicians, religious leaders and others and educate them about the true nature of communism, a critique of Marxism-Leninism and a counterproposal. This counterproposal developed the social, economic and political implications of the Principle. And so, when Father went to meet Kim Il Sung he went to meet him naked. Neither he nor his companions carried guns. The **rod of iron** Father carried with him was the Word of God. He fearlessly spoke truth to power and critiqued the false ideology of Juche. He lived the pledge:

"I will charge bravely forward into the enemy camp, until I have judged them completely, with the weapons with which he has been defeating the enemy, Satan, for me, throughout the course of history, by sowing sweat for earth, tears for man, and blood for Heaven..."

You can watch Father challenging the North Korean ideologists here between 3.00-4.30 <https://vimeo.com/74797503> The whole video describes very well Father's approach to peacefully solve the conflict in Korea by putting Jesus teachings into practice.

At the same time Father encouraged Western governments to be well armed to be able to deter communist aggression. Our movement encouraged the arming of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan during the 1980s to fight against the Soviet occupation. In hindsight it is debatable as to whether or not this was a good idea. Father also instructed various businesses that were associated with the Unification Movement in Korea to be involved in the production of armaments for the South Korean military. As a Korean patriot naturally proclaimed that if necessary Unificationists would fight to defend South Korea if it was attacked by the North. But he didn't try to build his own military force. Why not?

We live in a liberal democratic society where we have given the state a monopoly on the use of military force within the law to defend the country and to uphold the law. This was Thomas Hobbes' solution to put an end

to the civil war that was plaguing England in the 17th century. He recognised that, *“The right of nature . . . is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life.”* *“In such condition,”* Hobbes realised, *“there is no place for industry . . . no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”*

This is the condition of a failed state from which people flee as refugees. The solution Hobbes thought was not to increase the number of guns people owned as this would just make things worse. Instead it was to disband private armies and establish a strong government with a monopoly on the use of force which he called Leviathan. This government would have the limited task of protecting the people by upholding the law. Thus, a police force and courts of law so that people do not need to take the law into their own hands and punish criminals.

Of course, governments are not perfect. They are made up of human beings with all their frailties including the tendency to misuse power. There are corrupt policemen and bureaucrats as well as politicians. But government is a necessary evil. The advantage of democracy is that one can peacefully replace a government. One does not need to have an uprising to replace it. Instead one needs to win elections. To do this one needs to form a party of like-minded people and educate and persuade the electorate that one's platform and policies are better than that of other parties. It is hard work of course and requires dedication. But it is possible as Nigel Farage and UKIP have shown. So, if one dislikes the policies of a government or the direction the country is going in one can engage in argument and debate and persuade people to change their views. That is what it means to use the **'rod of iron'**.

William Haines

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