

## **Matthew 10:34—Not Peace but a Sword**

Jesus's words about bringing a sword instead of peace are preserved in Matthew 10:34: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Interpreters have usually insisted that Jesus was speaking metaphorically: the "sword" is a symbol for "that which divides."

Jesus's point is that his radical call to pursue love and justice will prove divisive.

Such an interpretation would make better sense of what follows in Matthew 10:35–36, where Jesus speaks of family members being "set against" each other (but not attacking or killing each other).

Likewise, Jesus tells a disciple who would defend him when he is arrested in the garden, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52; but see Luke 22:36–38).

And, of course, a claim that he intends to incite military violence would seem out of place with his counsel regarding love for enemies and turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:38–45).

Nevertheless, the biblical witness that Jesus came to bring a sword rather than peace would be cited throughout Christian history to justify conquests, Crusades, and all manner of atrocities committed in his name.

The American poet Howard Nemerov was twice chosen Poet Laureate for the US Congress, and won both the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for poetry. One of his best-known works is the 1973 couplet, "Morning Sun" which centers around the concept of bringing peace instead of a sword.