

---

# Ælfric on Just War

## Introduction

This discussion forms the first of four sections constituting the conclusion of Ælfric's adaptation of the biblical Books of the Maccabees. Those books, originally written in Hebrew and Greek and considered part of the Catholic Bible, tell of a Judaic faction rising up against the Seleucid Empire in Judaea. As such, they contain a good deal of warfare even by the standards of the Hebrew Bible. After wrapping up his account of the Maccabees and their leader Judas, Ælfric here explains that violence which may have been justified under Mosaic law is not permitted after Christ's incarnation, at which point he seamlessly transitions into a primer on just war theory, i.e. a discourse on when war is morally justified, using a contemporary example.

Augustine of Hippo's *City of God* was a major early source on just war theory. Thomas Aquinas's thirteenth-century *Summa theologica* was to develop Augustine's thoughts further, and it in turn became a central pillar of modern just war theory as found in international law, with its distinction between *ius ad bellum* on the question when declaring war is justified and *ius in bello* on what is permitted in war.

---

## Manuscript

London, British Library MS Cotton Julius E. vii, fols. 150r–150v.

For a full account of witnesses, see Table 15 on pp. 140–141 of Aaron J. Kleist’s *Chronology and Canon of Ælfric of Eynsham*.

## Text

(1) Ne synd swaþeah awritene þæs ðe wyrðwriteras sæcgaþ ealle Iudan gefeoht for his freonda ware, (2) and ealle ða mihte þe he mærllice gefremode his folce to gebeorge, swa swa us bec secgað. (3) Menigfealde wæron his micclan gefeoht, (4) and he is eallswa halig on ðære ealdan gecyðnyse swa swa Godes gecorenan on ðære godspelbodunge, (5) forðan þe he æfre wan for willan þæs ælmihtigan Godes.

(6) On þam dagum wæs alyfed to alegegne his fynd, (7) and swiþost ða hæðenan þe him hetole wæron; (8) and se wæs Godes ðegen þe ða swiðost feaht wið heora onwinnendan to ware heora [leoda]. (9) Ac Crist on his tocyme us cydde oðre ðincg, (10) and het us healdan sibbe and soðfæstnyse æfre; (12) and we sceolon winnan wið þa wælhreowan fynd, (13) þæt synd ða ungesewenlican and þa swicolan deofla þe willað ofslean ure sawla mid leahtrum. (14) Wið ða we sceolon winnan mid gastlicum wæpnum, (15) and biddan us gescyldnyse simle æt Criste, (16) þæt we moton oferwinnan þa wælhreowan leahtras and þæs deofles tihtinge, (17) þæt he us derian ne mæge. (18) Þonne beoð we Godes ceman on ðam gastlican gefeohte, (19) gif we ðone deofol forseoþ þurh soðne geleafan, (20) and þa heafodleahtras þurh gehealtsumnyse, (21) and gif we Godes willan mid weorcum gefremmað.

---

(22) Þæt ealde Godes folc sceolde feohtan þa mid wæpnum, (23) and heora gewinn hæfde haligra manna getacnunge, (24) þe todræfað þa leahtras and deofla heom fram on ðære niwan gecyðnyse þe Crist sylf astealde.

(25) Secgað swaþeah lareowas þæt syndon feower cynna gefeoht: (26) *iustum*, þæt is rihtlic; *iniustum*, unrihtlic; *ciuile*, betwux ceastergewarum; *plus quam ciuile*, betwux siblingum. (27) *Iustum bellum* is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flotmenn, (28) oþþe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordon. (29) Unrihtlic gefeoht is þe of yrre cymð. (30) Þæt þridde gefeoht, þe of geflite cymð betwux ceastergewarum, is swyðe pleolic; (31) and þæt feorðe gefeoht, þe betwux freondum bið, is swiðe earmlic and endealas sorh.

## Notes

1 **Iudan**: Judas Maccabeus (*gsm*); **ware**: *gsf* of *waru* “protection,” not to be confused with *wara* (*m*) “inhabitant” or *waru* (*f*) “merchandise”