

Soldiers of Christ, Arise!

By Allen Dvorak

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The end of king Saul's reign was inglorious. He had been rejected by God from being king because of his disobedience. David had already been anointed as the next king of Israel, but Saul had fought against God's choice, attempting to kill David on several occasions. He had chased David from one hiding place to another in the southern wilderness of Judah. Eventually, the Philistines would gather against Israel and Saul would be killed in a battle whose outcome had been predicted by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 28:19).

As David fled from Saul in the wilderness, many warriors came to fight on his side. The author of First Chronicles listed them by tribe. The way that he described those warriors is interesting.

For example, some of the men who came to help David were from Saul's own tribe of Benjamin. They were ambidextrous, able to shoot a bow or hurl a stone with a sling with either hand – valuable warriors indeed (1 Chronicles 12:1-2)!

Some of the Gadites came to David; they were “men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as gazelles on the mountains,” i.e., fast and fierce (12:8).

The men from the tribe of Manasseh and Ephraim were “all mighty men of valor” (12:21, 30). The men from the tribe of Issachar “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (12:32).

The description of the warriors from Zebulun is intriguing – “of Zebulun there were fifty thousand who went out to battle, expert in war with all weapons of war, stouthearted men who could keep ranks” (1 Chronicles 12:33; NKJV).

The expression “stouthearted men” seems to refer to the courage of these men, undoubtedly a necessary trait in soldiers. However, other translations describe these men as being of “singleness of purpose” (ESV, LEB), “undivided loyalty” (NIV, NET), “undivided heart” (NASB), “completely loyal” (NLT), or “not of double heart” (ASV). The idea seems to be that these men didn't have any doubts about fighting on David's side. They were totally committed to him as their leader.

Furthermore, they were “expert in war with all weapons of war” (NKJV). They were “equipped for battle” (ESV, LEB), “prepared for battle” (NIV, NET) – “skilled warriors” (NLT). A soldier who can't handle his weapons with skill is of little or no value in battle.

Finally, they were men “who could keep ranks.” The Hebrew word behind this phrase can sometimes mean “help” and some versions follow this meaning, translating “to help David.” The ASV follows the same translation path as the NKJV. These were men who could keep rank, a skill extremely important in battle. I suspect that more is meant than simply being able to march in formation. Like their brethren from Asher, they were “able to keep battle formation” (12:36).

In battle, soldiers typically need to work together, depending upon one another. In the heat of the fighting, particularly if the enemy forces are pushing hard, there is the temptation to “break formation.” If soldiers do, they often leave their comrades unprotected or endanger them with “friendly fire.” Soldiers have to trust their commander and “keep formation.”

One of the metaphors used to describe Christians is that of a soldier. Paul instructed Timothy to wage the good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18) and “endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3).

That metaphor didn’t apply only to Timothy. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the spiritual struggle that they faced.

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:11-13)

The apostle even described the armor available to soldiers of Christ. Christians are able to “stand” by using the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, proper footwear, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:14-17).

Like the warriors of the tribe of Zebulun, Christians must have “undivided hearts.” Changing the metaphor a bit, Jesus told His disciples that “no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). In His answer to a lawyer who asked about the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus indicated the need for the undivided heart, saying that one must “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:34-37). Paul wrote to Timothy that a soldier must be “of singleness of purpose” (“no one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” - 2 Timothy 2:4).

The soldiers from Zebulun were expert in war with all weapons of war. The weapons of our warfare are neither physical nor carnal, i.e., Christians are not to resort to carnal tactics. The weapon available to the Christian is the sword of the Spirit, which Paul identified as “the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). Jesus is pictured in the book of Revelation as One with “a sharp two-edged sword” coming out of His mouth, symbolizing the way that He fights against evil (1:16; see also 2:16 and 19:15). As soldiers of Christ, we must become proficient in the use of God’s word – “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 3:15) and “casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:5). We must not only know *how* to use our weapon, but must not be afraid to use it!

The men from Zebulun were able to keep ranks. Christians likewise need to follow the instructions of their Commander, trusting Him to order the battle against Satan and the forces of evil. Do we “keep formation” or are we always “out of place”? Are we waging the good warfare in harmony with our fellow soldiers of Christ?

If the Lord were to describe us as the author of Chronicles described the men who came to fight for David, what would He say about *us*?
