



Deuteronomy 20:1-9
Conduct for War, Part I
July 4th, 2021

“When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. ² So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. ³ And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; ⁴ for the LORD your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’

⁵ “Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: ‘What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. ⁶ Also what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. ⁷ And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.’

⁸ “The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, ‘What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.’ ⁹ And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.

Beginning in Chapter 19, legislations are put forth that are predominantly intended to reveal the sanctity of human life and how it is to be protected. This continues on in Chapter 20 which is, surprisingly, one concerning warfare.

This particular set of verses deals with those of the soldiers of Israel. It refers to those who are to be excluded from the battle, and it speaks of those who will remain in the battle. The primary concern here, though not explicitly stated at first, is the strengthening of the soldiers in order to bring about victory.

And there cannot be victory in battle if all of the soldiers are either killed or flee from the engagement. As for the Christian, however, there is a marked difference. The very thing that gives us the courage to not only enter the battle, but to continue on in it, is not what other armies rely on at all.

Instead, the thought of death is that thing which prompts us on to even greater things. First, we follow a crucified Christ. It is His death that even makes our engagement in the battle possible. But more, we follow a risen Victor. It is this that tells us that absolutely nothing can prevail over us.

Text Verse: *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1, 2*

Understanding what Christ has done gives us all of the motive we need to go forward in our battle. But there is another type of death that should spur us on as well. That is the death of those not in Christ. The devil is fighting hard in that battle, and he is gaining the victory over countless souls because of it.

The only thing – literally – the only thing that stands in the way of that is what the Lord has provided for us as we engage in this war. How important is it to you to know that people are dying apart from Christ and that you could stop that? He has equipped us, He has given us the mandate, and we should be expending ourselves in order to complete the task He has set before us.

Someday, our time of labor will end. What will we say when it comes? How are we using our time, our resources, our abilities, and our place – wherever that may be at the moment – to further the cause of Christ?

Deuteronomy 20 gives us the Conduct for War guidelines that Israel used in their physical battles. The entire Bible gives us the Conduct for War guidelines that we are to use in this spiritual battle. Let us live by them and let us employ every weapon of war provided to us to effect victories on our own path to glory.

Such great lessons as this are to be found in His superior word. And so, let us turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Today You Are on the Verge of Battle (verses 1-3)

¹“When you go out to battle against your enemies,

The words of this chapter deal with *milkhamah*, or warfare. The inevitable course of nations is that of warfare. In the case of Israel, they are pre-commissioned as a force that will enter into war, simply because of the land to which they are entering. It was promised to Abraham generations earlier with the expectation that eventually his descendants would occupy it.

However, there were already inhabitants in Canaan. In order to be the Lord’s people in the land promised to them by the Lord, and free from the practices of the nations already there, they were under obligation to clear them out.

Because of this, and because of other wars which would surely follow after they had possession of the land, Moses will now provide instructions concerning how to handle such matters.

Though it appears to be a passage condoning the brutal slaughter of others, the sanctity of life is actually at the forefront of what is conveyed. Only when the circumstances called for destruction of those they faced was it to be brought to bear. Otherwise, the care of the Lord for people is highlighted.

As far as the protection of Israel, the details of that are first conveyed...

¹ (con't) **and see horses and chariots *and* people more numerous than you,**

Moses conveys it as a certainty that these things will occur. There will be times when Israel will face armies that are greater in size, that are more fully equipped for battle, and that are in better positions for engaging in warfare. In the event of such a scenario, Israel is now being instructed.

And, indeed, the writings that follow – from Joshua through Chronicles – are filled with such instances. Early on in the conquest of Canaan, Israel had defeated Jericho. That was followed by the destruction of Ai.

When this occurred, the inhabitants of Gibeon realized that they were doomed for destruction and sent emissaries to Joshua to make a covenant of peace through deception. The covenant was made, and thus Gibeon fell under the protection of Israel. This is found in Joshua 9.

In response to this, and knowing that Gibeon was a great city and that it had simply capitulated to Israel without even raising a single sword in battle, a coalition of five kings came together in Joshua 10 to engage Gibeon. Being under covenant with Israel, they petitioned Joshua for assistance.

In this, Israel responded and destroyed those five kings and subdued all the land over which they ruled. This is recorded in Joshua 10. The chapter ended with –

“So Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country and the South and the lowland and the wilderness slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded. ⁴¹ And Joshua conquered them from Kadesh Barnea as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even as far as Gibeon. ⁴² All these kings and their land Joshua took at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel. ⁴³ Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.” Joshua 10:40-43

Because of this, the events of Joshua 11 came about. That chapter opens with a thought perfectly in line with Moses’ words now –

“And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor heard these things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph, ²and to the kings who were from the north, in the mountains, in the plain south of Chinneroth, in the lowland, and in the heights of Dor on the west, ³to the Canaanites in the east and in the west, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite in the mountains, and the Hivite below Hermon in the land of Mizpah. ⁴So they went out, they and all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude, with very many horses and chariots. ⁵And when all these kings had met together, they came and camped together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel.” Joshua 11:1-5

With such a massive and formidable foe, one would think that Israel would shrink in fear. Despite their success against the five kings, this coalition was enormous, and it was fitted with both horses and chariots. To an army ready to engage such a force in battle, it would appear to be a hopeless challenge. But Moses now tells them...

¹ (con't) **do not be afraid of them;**

Moses has already spoken to the people concerning this. In Chapter 7, he said to them –

“If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’ — ¹⁸you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt:” Deuteronomy 7:17, 18

There, he spoke in general terms about what lay ahead. Now, he is speaking in specific terms about facing an actual foe that is undoubtedly numerically superior to them. But he exactly repeats the sentiment, *lo tira mehem* – “Do not be afraid of them.”

Because of his words to the people, and because Joshua both trusted the Lord and the admonition of Moses, he repeated to the people of Israel the same sentiment now given –

“But the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.’” Joshua 11:6

Several times in Deuteronomy, Moses uses the same word, translated as “fear,” when speaking about the people’s relationship with the Lord.

In essence, “Do not fear the people of Canaan, and do not fear large armies that are well-equipped. Rather, it is the Lord your God that you are to fear, clinging to Him and relying on Him in all you do. It is in this that Israel will find success, as Moses next says...

1 (con't) for the LORD your God is with you,

If the Lord is with Israel, and if Israel both understands this and demonstrates a reverent fear of the Lord, then why should they have any reason to fear the multitudes? They had already faced such a force, and that force was utterly swept away. Again, as Moses continues. It is He, *Yehovah elohekha* – Yehovah your God...

1 (con't) who brought you up from the land of Egypt.

Here, in reference to the Lord the verb is used as a noun: *ha'maalkha me-erets mitsrayim* – “the Bringer up from Egypt.” He had brought them out, He had conducted them along the way, and He was still bringing them up as they prepared to enter the promise.

The words are similar to those already spoken to the people. As the words of Deuteronomy 7 (cited above) continue –

“the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the *LORD* your God brought you out. So shall the *LORD* your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.” Deuteronomy 7:19

It is the Lord who brought Israel out from under the yoke of one of the greatest nations on earth. They were without any means of resistance, they were sorely outnumbered in fighting force and capability, and yet the Lord had defeated the armies of Egypt.

As this was so, and as He brought them out of there, then they were to have every confidence that He would also deliver the land He promised to them into their hands. And He did, time and time again. Great multitudes are recorded as being arrayed against Israel not only in Joshua, but in Judges, 1 Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.

Israel was able to defeat these armies when they trusted the Lord and relied on Him. However, when the people turned from Him, Israel's own defeat was inevitable.

Concerning this verse, and the words from Moses now, Cambridge almost flippantly asks, “Was it on the strength of this verse that Josiah adventured on his fatal encounter with Pharaoh-Necoh in 612 b.c.?”

In other words, their statement implies that Josiah falsely trusted in the words of Moses and thus died in battle. At least, that is what they are hinting at.

First, half the time, Cambridge argues that Deuteronomy is a work pieced together long after the time of Moses, meaning they are arguing against their own analysis of the dating of the book by making such a stupid comment.

Secondly, Josiah was told – in advance – that he would be taken by the Lord so that he would not see the great calamities that would come against the land –

“Surely I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants.” 2 Chronicles 34:28

Whatever was going on in the mind of Josiah when he went out to face the king of Egypt in battle, the Lord had already told him that he would die before the time He brought His destruction upon the land –

“Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. ²⁷ And the LORD said, ‘I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, “My name shall be there.”’” 2 Kings 23:26, 27

The people had failed to fear the Lord. Because of this, the Lord would turn His wrath against them. What happened to Josiah was not a failure of the promises of Moses. Rather, it was a merciful act bestowed on him because of the failure of the people.

We can hope that the folks at Cambridge will also face the Lord’s mercy despite their constant failure to uphold the sanctity of the word of God. As for Josiah and what happened to him, that is all for later in Israel’s history. For now, Moses continues with his words to the people, saying...

² So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle,

The words of Deuteronomy have been in the singular for an extended period now – you Israel. Suddenly, it changes to the plural – you all. This is both expected and appropriate.

Moses is speaking to the people with the understanding that each is an individual and together they form a whole. Because the sanctity of life is the main focus of the passage, each life is precious in relation to the whole. Thus, it switches to the plural to acknowledge this.

² (con't) **that the priest shall approach and speak to the people.**

This is not referring to the high priest. Rather, a priest (or priests) other than the high priest would accompany the army to the engagement. This was seen first in Numbers 31 –

“Then Moses sent them to the war, one thousand from each tribe; he sent them to the war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles and the signal trumpets in his hand.” Numbers 31:6

During a battle in 1 Samuel 4, the Israelites were being defeated by the Philistines. At that time, they called for the ark to be brought to them as if was a talisman that could secure the battle for them. Along with the ark came the sons of Eli the priest. That is not what is being referred to in this passage. That is at a point of disobedience in Israel and cannot be used to correspond to Moses’ words now.

What is probably closer to Moses’ command, though not specifically in accord with what is said here, is recorded in 2 Chronicles –

“Now look, God Himself is with us as our head, and His priests with sounding trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O children of Israel, do not fight against the *LORD* God of your fathers, for you shall not prosper!” 2 Chronicles 13:12

The priests had accompanied the armies, and probably conducted the ceremony Moses refers to now before the battle was engaged. Moses’ specific words concerning the priest are...

³ **And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel:**

Here, the priest is given the words to speak. He is to first acknowledge that his addressees are Israel, or He who strives with God. They were to thus understand that a battle was about to ensue, that the Lord would be with them, and they were to strive with Him in the accomplishment of their task.

³ (con't) **Today you are on the verge of battle**

Moses uses a masculine plural verbal adjective to express the matter: *atem qerevim hayom lamilkhamah* – “You (all) approachings the day to war. As it is in the plural, the priest is speaking to all of the people as individuals. “Each of you is a part of what is drawing near to this engagement.” And it is to be...

³ (con't) **with your enemies.**

The word “with” is a poor choice of translation. It reads: *al oyevekhem* – “upon your enemies.” One could say “against,” but the word gives the sense of a downward aspect. It is, in itself, a word of encouragement. Israel is said to be coming down upon the enemy, even though the battle has not yet engaged.

Using the word “with” implies an equal footing, but this is not the intent of what is said. Just as the Lord is above them, so Israel will swoop down upon them. Therefore...

³ (con't) **Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them;**

Moses’ words that are to be repeated to the people by the priest are full of lively encouragement. Two of them are brand new in Scripture. The first is *rakak* – to be fainthearted, make soft, and so on. The second is *khaphaz* – to be in trepidation, hurry, or alarm.

Taken together, they are words of inspiration – “no do let soften to your heart, no you shall fear, and no you shall panic, and no you shall be terrified from their faces.” The priest is to speak these words confidently, knowing that Moses is the one who first spoke them, and that he was led by the Spirit of God as they came forth. As he says in the coming verse...

The Lord your God is the GOER with you
He will be with you each step of the way
The Lord your God; Faithful and True
Will be with you through the bloody fray

He is the Bringer up of you from where you were
As this is so, He has a plan for you
He will never leave you, this is for sure
The Lord your God; Faithful and True

Have no fear as you enter the battle; it is already won
Press into it without any fear; you shall prevail
God sent before you His beloved Son
And together you shall the enemy assail

II. Let Him Go and Return (verses 4-9)

⁴ for the LORD your God is He who goes with you,

As in verse 1, Moses uses a verb as a noun to describe the Lord. He is “the Goer with you.” It wasn’t that the Lord was watching over the battle as a coach on the sideline, but He is actively with Israel, stepping onto the field of battle with them in order to secure the victory for them. As Moses next says...

^{4 (con’t)} to fight for you against your enemies,

Again, the NKJV misses the translation and thus misses the unity of what is occurring. Instead of “to fight for you against your enemies,” it says, “to fight to [with regard to] you with your enemies.” It is the synergistic (working together) idea that Moses has put forth so many times already in Deuteronomy.

Israel has its part in the battle, but the Lord has His part. He will fight against the enemies of Israel as Israel comes down upon them. And this is then noted to have a purpose, which is...

^{4 (con’t)} to save you.’

Here, the word is *yasha*. It comes from a primitive root signifying to be open, wide, or free. Thus, it means to deliver. Here it is delivered in the form of victory. Israel is already the Lord’s people, but they have battles to face in this capacity. When they rely on the Lord, they will be delivered in the battle, triumphing over the enemy.

One should, hopefully, see the intended connection to the church in this. We are the Lord’s people. We have battles to face in this capacity. But we have been given the ability to overcome them and to be delivered in the battle, gaining victory over the enemy.

This is not speaking of salvation, which is already accomplished, but of deliverance in war. Just as Israel faced physical enemies in battle, so we face spiritual enemies –

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 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 6:10-13

And just as the Lord promised to be with Israel in battle, we have the same assurance as well –

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—” Ephesians 6:14-18

Israel had its part in what was expected, but the Lord also had a part in its outcome. The same is true with us. If not, Paul would not have written these words to us.

A part of preparing Israel for the battle was to remove from the engagement anyone who was not suited to participate in it at that time...

⁵ “Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying:

Here, Moses’ direction goes from the attending priest to the *shoterim*, or officers. The word comes from a root probably signifying “to write.” Thus, they are superintending magistrates who are likely responsible for the genealogical records.

Whether they were fighters or not, and probably not, it is they who would account for those who would go forth to engage the battle. And, to ensure that all who would go were both capable and qualified to do so, they would first call out any qualified exemptions, saying...

^{5 (con’t)} ‘What man *is there* who has built a new house and has not dedicated it?’

It is a personal question: *mi ha’ish asher banah bayit khadash v’lo khanako* – “Who the man who built house new and no dedicated it.” The magistrate is speaking to each and every person. “Does this apply to you?”

This is the same for each question that follows. Instead of “What man is there,” it should read, “Who *is* the man.” Each instance is personal and is directed to the life and conscience of the men.

The word *khanak*, or dedicate, is introduced here. It is used when referring to the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8. The noun form of the word is found in the introduction of Psalm 30 as well –

“A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the house of David.”

It appears that new homes were dedicated to the Lord, just as we dedicate houses or churches to the Lord today. Along with this would have been singing, a party, food, friends, and the like. If you have ever watched, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” a short ceremony like that was conducted at one of the new houses in the town.

Dedicating a house in this way would be as much of an appeal to the Lord for its protection and blessing as anything else. One can see how the word *khanak* is the verbal root for the word Hanukah, or dedication. If someone had not so dedicated his house...

⁵ (con’t) **Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it.**

Of this, John Lange says that such a person “if he had made efforts for life, should first rejoice in the result of his efforts. It was as humane as prudent.” We always look at such occurrences as tragic.

If a person wrote a great novel and died before it was published and it sold 10 million books, we would say, “How sad.” Such an instance, then, would not only be detrimental to the memory of the person, but it would also be detrimental to those soldiers who were aware of the event.

In this, they too would be disheartened, and it would then further affect the morale of those engaged in battle. The important point here is that though the battle is fought with the Lord, it is anticipated that the Lord will allow deaths within the ranks.

In other words, the synergistic (working together) concept of the battle is once again revealed. Soldiers could not just walk out onto the field of battle and assume they would prevail and come out unscathed. The lesson here tells us that we can expect no less in our own Ephesians 6 battles.

We must prepare as soldiers who are actually engaging the enemy. To fail to do so is an imprudent choice leading to an ineffective Christian in the ongoing war.

⁶ **Also what man *is there* who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it?**

The word *khalal* is used. It gives the sense of boring or piercing, and thus to open. The idea here is not of merely eating the fruit, but of bringing it into common use – whether for eating, selling, and so on. This is based on the precept stated in Leviticus 19 –

“When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to

you. It shall not be eaten. ²⁴ But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the LORD. ²⁵ And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am the LORD your God.” Leviticus 19:23-25

The person has planted the vineyard, he has cultivated it and brought it to maturity, and he has even brought it forth as a praise to the Lord, and yet he has not brought it into its common use, meaning he has not profited off its labors in eating, selling, giving to the neighbors, or whatever else he could do with it. If so...

⁶ (con't) **Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it.**

Again, the irony of the tragedy would be heartbreaking to friend, family, and any other who heard of it. And further, the other soldiers would become disheartened over it as well, knowing that he had died before receiving the blessing of his efforts.

Along with the first two tragedies, comes one more...

⁷ **And what man *is there* who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her?**

It is another humane act bestowed upon the people. Just as a person should be the one to benefit from dedicating a house or seeing a vineyard through to its maturity, so a person should be allowed to bring forth his intent to marry in like manner.

Nothing is said here of either a virgin or otherwise. The man is betrothed, and he is entitled to the blessing of that betrothal. Later in Deuteronomy, an explicit timeframe is given by Moses concerning this –

“When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.” Deuteronomy 24:5

Although it isn't always the case, apparently a good round number for man to no longer bring that special happiness to his wife seems to be at the one-year point. After that, the old saying, “Distance makes the heart grow fonder,” will hopefully help bring things back to that once delightful state.

All kidding aside, the word for a man so betrothed is...

⁷ (con't) **Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.'**

Again, the ironic tragedy of dying in battle without having been blessed with the fruit of the action is what is conveyed here. To see a man die in such a state would not only be harmful to the betrothed woman, but to all who saw it – including the other soldiers. Hence, the wisdom of Moses' words is clearly seen.

In these three aspects of the soldier's life, a hint of the work of Christ can also be seen. The Lord is building a house which is not yet dedicated (1 Peter 2:5). The Lord has a vineyard which is not yet complete (Luke 20:16, 22:18). And the Lord has a betrothed whom He has not yet married (1 Corinthians 11:2).

Despite this, He died in the battle before all three were realized. And yet, the victory remains His because He prevailed over death. Thus, the ironic tragedy of the soldier of Israel is overcome by the victorious Lord.

It should also be noted that the opposite of these humane blessings is stated as a curse to the people who fail to obey the terms of the covenant. In Deuteronomy 28, in the blessings and curses upon the people, it says in the curses –

“You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall lie with her; you shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but shall not gather its grapes.”
Deuteronomy 28:30

With these things understood so far, Moses next continues with...

⁸“The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, ‘What man *is there who is fearful and fainthearted?*”

The words are personal and specific, saying – “Who *is* the man, the fearful, and soft to heart.” Here, the adjective form, *rak*, of the word *rakak* seen in verse 3 is used.

This cannot be speaking of the normal sense of fear that any soldier would feel at the outset of a battle. Other than someone who is not quite right in the head, it is almost unimaginable to consider a person not being in some sort of mental anguish at the prospect of engaging in a battle.

This person, however, demonstrates an unhealthy fear that has abandoned trust in the Lord's ability to win the battle. It is a hopeless fear that has no place in the man prepared to serve according to the prospects that all responsible soldiers must face.

The reason I say this is because the Lord Himself demonstrated His own internal conflict in the battle that was set before Him. However, His trust in the Lord's ability to bring Him through the battle was stronger than the desire to run from it –

“And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, ‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.’” Luke 22:41, 42

The Lord understood that His mission was to accomplish the Father’s will. He sought that first and foremost, and He prevailed through the battle. He brought forth the victory because of this. And in His victory, we now have the same Source of strength open to us. This would not have been possible otherwise. As Moses says concerning the soft-hearted soldier...

⁸ (con’) **Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart.’**

v’lo yimas eth l’vav ekhav kilvavo – “And no melt to heart his brothers as his heart.” A cowardly heart cannot bring about victory. And in the face of defeat, the rest of the people will also flee from the battle. This is seen, for example, in Joshua 7:5 –

“And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.” Joshua 7:5

It is again seen in Judges 7 where the Lord whittled the soldiers down to an impossibly low number, many through this exact allowance by Moses –

“And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, “My own hand has saved me.”’ ³ Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, “Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.” And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.” Judges 7:2, 3

Despite the people of Ai being a much smaller force, the soldiers of Israel smelled defeat and their hearts melted. And despite being a much, much smaller force than the Midianites, Gideon and his three hundred men remained strong-hearted, and they prevailed.

Fear is contagious. What the people in a battle need is not the cowardly at their sides, but the heroic at their head. This is seen in the example of David when Israel faced Goliath and the Philistine army, and it is seen in the church today.

We know that we can prevail because we know the Lord already has prevailed. And more, we know He is with us in this battle, and He will deliver us safely to the victory. Our conduct will be based on who we fix our eyes on, and so, let us fix our eyes on Jesus. With that, we will have all the strength we need to endure the battle we are in, and to prevail.

***9 (fin) And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.**

This translation of this last verse is almost wholly conveyed in this manner – “When the officers are done, they shall make captains.” In other words, the action of appointing captains comes after the dismissal of the various exemptions, and it is conducted by these same officers.

However, there is a second possibility for the Hebrew. It reads, *u-paqedu sare tsevaoth b’rosh ha’am* – “and shall muster them captains armies in head the people.” In other words, the action of the second clause is not that of the officers, but of the army captains. This is reflected in the Aramaic Bible –

“And when the Scribes have finished speaking to the people, the Commanders of the armies shall stand at the front of the people.”

In this, the *sare*, or military leaders, already have their positions, and it is now their turn to accomplish the mustering of the troops that remain. This would actually be more in accord with the military designations made later in Scripture.

There are set military leaders who go before the soldiers. But for each battle, the officers would come forward, call out for exemptions, probably record those exemptions, and then cease their work to allow the military leaders to then muster their troops and prepare to engage the enemy.

Either way, the army is initially prepared for battle, those who are not to serve for the various reasons set down are then removed from the ranks, and then the final preparedness for the battle is made. It is with this thought in mind that the passage ends.

In the next eleven verses, the actual rules for conducting the battle will be laid out. And so, for now, we will close with the thought that even though this is not a heavily Christological passage, it still bears the mark of precepts that are actually fulfilled by the Lord.

Though His battle was not a physical battle on an open field, it was an actual battle, nonetheless. And with the continued war that Paul refers to in which we are – even now – engaged, we have the same assurance that the Lord is with us that Israel had. Yes, it may be even scary to live out our lives in this fallen, troubling world, but we have all of the implements that being a soldier of Christ calls for. It is, however, up to us to use them. The very fact that Paul implores us to make use of them means that it is up to us to do so.

If we fail in this, it is we who will be ineffective in the battle. There is the same synergistic (working together) idea now that there was for Israel. But, like Israel should have done, I will clue you into this... the more that we rely on the Lord, the more we set our eyes on Him, and the more we employ the implements He has provided us, the better off we will be.

Israel would often go it alone, and they would fail. But great leaders like David would acknowledge that the Lord was at their head, and they would prevail. Let us act in like manner, and in this, we will be effective in the battles we face – to the glory of the Lord who has and who does go before us.

Closing Verse: *“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. ³ You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ 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 2:1-4*

Next Week: Deuteronomy 20:10-20 What things are soldiers of the Lord required to do...? (Conduct for War, Part II) (60th Deuteronomy Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. But He also has expectations of you as He prepares you for entrance into His Land of Promise. So, follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

Conduct for War

“When you go out to battle against your enemies
And see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you
Do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God is with you
Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; He is faithful and true

So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle that day
That the priest shall approach and speak to the people
-----with words to convey

And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel:
Today you are with your enemies on the verge of battle
Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid
And do not tremble or be terrified because of them
-----or because of their prattle

For the LORD your God is He who goes with you

To fight for you against your enemies, to save you – so He shall do

“Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying:

‘What man is there who has built a new house

-----and has not dedicated it?

Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle

And another man dedicate it; a tragedy anyone would admit

Also what man is there who has planted a vineyard

And has not eaten of it? To it his tastebuds he did not it commit

Let him go and return to his house

Lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it

And what man is there who is betrothed to a woman

And has not married her? A tragedy for her

Let him go and return to his house

Lest he die in the battle and another man marry her

“The officers shall speak further to the people, and say

‘What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted from the start?

Let him go and return to his house

Lest the heart of his brethren faint like his heart

And so it shall be

When the officers have finished to the people speaking

That they shall make captains

Of the armies to lead the people, the ranks they shall be tweaking

Lord God, turn our hearts to be obedient to Your word

Give us wisdom to be ever faithful to You

May we carefully heed each thing we have heard

Yes, Lord God may our hearts be faithful and true

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone

We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise

Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown

Hallelujah we shall sing to You for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...