

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

Vol. # 770624 • June 2024 • www.bridgesforpeace.com

Armed for Battle



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The Roman Empire Was one of the most powerful empires in history. Depictions of ancient Rome have lit up the screens of entertainment for decades with productions such as *Masada* (1981), *Gladiator* (2000) or even *The Chosen* (2017–present). From the Gallic wars of Caesar, the speeches of Cicero, monuments such as Hadrian’s Wall or the Colosseum, the history of Rome has left a deep footprint upon Western Civilization.



The remains of ancient aqueducts in Caesarea are evidence of Roman occupation.

Ancient historians marveled as Rome’s conquering legions expanded its borders to encircle the Mediterranean Sea. Polybius, the 2nd century BC Greek historian, etched the famous statement about the Roman Republic, “For who is so worthless or indolent as not to wish to know by what means and under what system of polity the Romans in less than fifty-three years have succeeded in subjecting nearly the whole inhabited world to their sole government—a thing unique in history?”

Be Strong in the Lord

Prior to AD 70, when Roman General Titus laid waste to Jerusalem, the apostle Paul exhorted Ephesian believers by using the armor of a Roman legionary to symbolize faith and spiritual strength in challenging times. The depiction of the “Armor of God” has been a source of comfort for followers of Jesus (Yeshua) ever since it was written.

Ephesians 6:10 begins with an encouragement: “*Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*” Paul, a Jewish Pharisee (Phil. 3:5), used a Greek word related to “making something strong in an act of power” but would no doubt have thought of the Hebrew equivalent *chazak* which means “strength” or “might.” In Paul’s mind, this strength is only possible through faith in God, who is the source of all strength. He alone can replace our weak

bodily strength through supernatural, heavenly strength and courage. Think of Samson for a physical example of literal strength but also consider the incredible strength in the Lord biblical leaders like Moses or Deborah must have needed.

In the Bible, God shows His commanding strength as the victorious Warrior–King (i.e. Exod. 15:1–18; Ps. 18:32–39, Isa. 28:6). In 1 Chronicles 16:11 we are reminded to seek the strength of God; Psalm 20:6 assures us the Lord will respond from heaven with His strength of deliverance while in Psalm 28:7 this power is described as a shield. The ultimate source of this strength is not to trust in earthly military deliverance, although God can use it, but to lean upon Him.

Spiritual Protection



Roman legionary armor

Paul painted a picture of the Roman legionaries' armor (Eph. 6:11a) as a practical example to enable the righteous believer in God to withstand spiritual attacks. Paul's belief is that although there may be earthly challenges and enemies, even evil such as Israel faced on October 7, there

is a spiritual battle of demonic proportions which comes against God's *kedushim* (holy ones, saints). They will be persecuted and targeted by powers of wickedness that operate in a different realm than natural flesh (Eph. 6:12). Christians often describe this as spiritual warfare.

Paul uses strong language and declares that the source, or epicenter of evil, is the devil (Eph. 6:11b). He does not deny physical evil nor excuse or justify the actions produced by it, but he reminds his readers that there is a spiritual battle in "heavenly places" where principalities, powers, rulers of darkness and hosts of wickedness come against all that is righteous, ultimately against God (Ps. 83:1–5).

Due to the reality of these spiritual powers, Paul implored the believers in Ephesus to put on spiritual armor and be ready to do

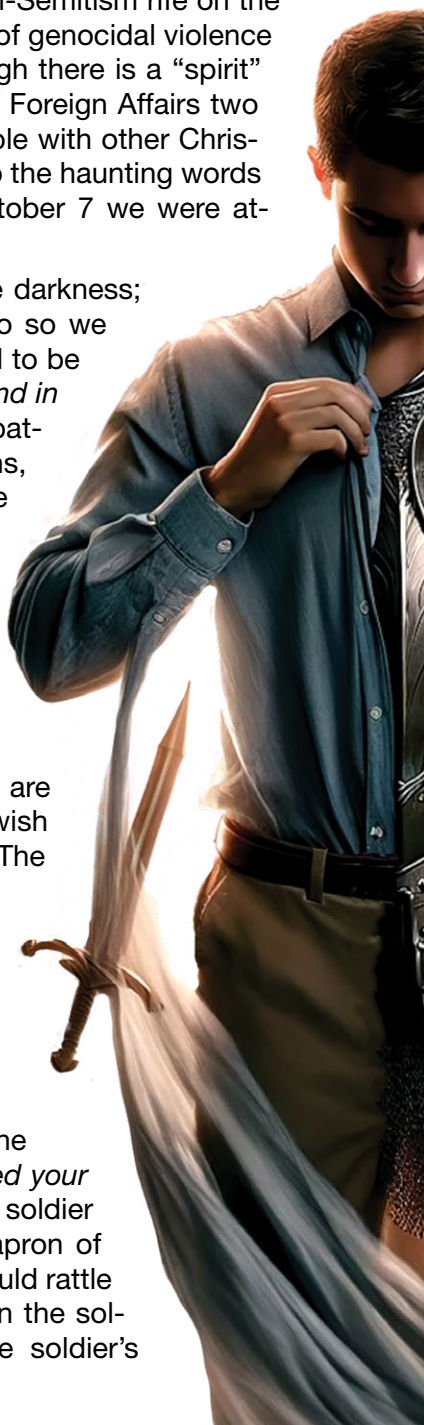
battle. When we pause and look at the anti-Semitism rife on the campuses of the world and the barbarism of genocidal violence against Israel, it certainly appears as though there is a “spirit” behind it all. When I visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs two weeks after October 7, I sat at a round table with other Christian leaders serving in Israel and listened to the haunting words of the foreign minister who said, “On October 7 we were attacked by the devil!”

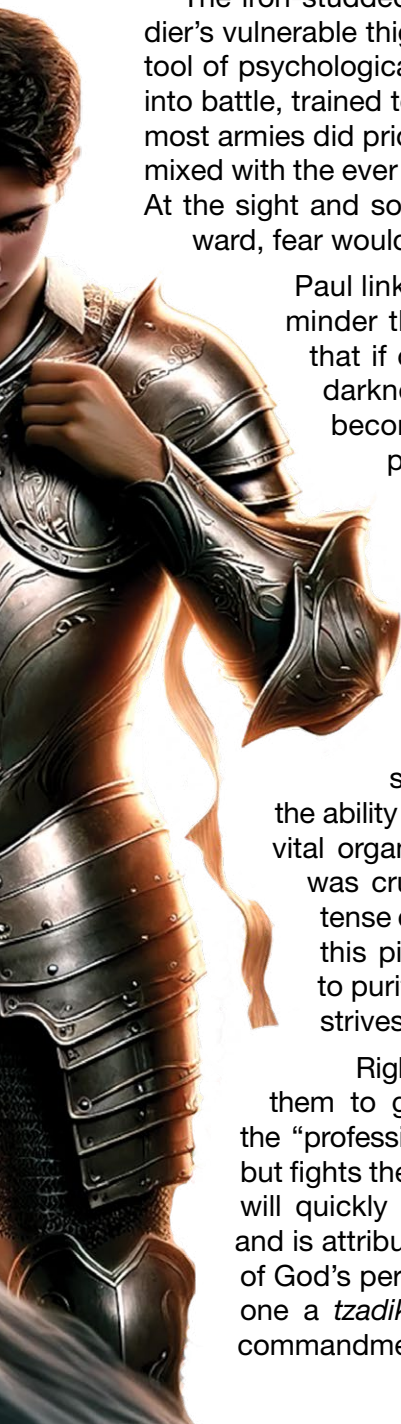
In these days we must be a light in the darkness; we must speak up and take action. To do so we need the strength of the Lord and we need to be “clothed” in the right equipment to *withstand in the evil day* (Eph. 6:13b). If we are not battle-ready, no matter how good our intentions, we will fall and be destroyed. We will be overwhelmed and stricken with fear when we face obstacles.

Many people are crippled by fear today, even within the Church and are unwilling to speak up and count the cost in the face of pure genocidal, anti-Semitic hatred. However, there is also an incredible wave of Christians around the world who are standing up, supporting Israel and the Jewish community, and pushing back darkness. The Lord will give His righteous ones courage. Psalm 27:14 says, *Wait for the LORD, be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD.* To be able to stand we must be equipped.

Belt of Truth

The first piece of armor, often called “the belt of truth,” is described as, *having girded your waist with truth* (Eph. 6:14a). The Roman soldier would wear a belt with an iron-studded apron of leather straps attached to it. This apron would rattle and give off a metallic jingling sound when the soldier marched. The belt also secured the soldier’s sword and dagger.





The iron-studded apron is key! Not only did it protect a soldier's vulnerable thighs and groin from attack but it was a clever tool of psychological warfare. A Roman cohort marched silently into battle, trained to suppress their urge to scream a war cry as most armies did prior to engagement due to terror and adrenaline mixed with the ever present reality of what was about to happen. At the sight and sound of the heavy Roman assault rolling forward, fear would grip the soul of the opposing force.

Paul links the belt with “truth” and the wonderful reminder that can be mined from this word picture is that if one is equipped with truth (John 8:32) then darkness, lies, deceit and evil are forced to flee or become subservient. To “gird” is an action of preparation, like securing a belt. One cannot be lazy. One just doesn't naturally have a “belt of truth” but one must “put it on securely” so they can stand strong.

Breastplate and Sandals

The next battle-ready symbol is the breastplate which Paul links to righteousness (Eph. 6:14b). The Roman soldier wore scaled, plate armor to battle which gave him the ability to move and be flexible. The armor protected vital organs as well as shoulders and forearms. This was crucial, enabling the soldier to fight under intense duress and threat from an enemy. Paul names this piece of armor “righteousness” which relates to purity of living and being right before God as one strives to be blameless.

Righteousness is noticed by people and can draw them to goodness. The breastplate is only worn by the “professional soldier” who not only serves his nation but fights the enemy. If one is not properly equipped, they will quickly perish. Righteousness in Hebrew is *tzedek* and is attributed to the perfect rule of a king but also part of God's perfect, blameless, purity in truth. To call someone a *tzadik* acknowledges their observance of God's commandments and their righteous, charitable nature.

One final point, the Roman breastplate could not be donned by oneself; a soldier needed a comrade to assist him. This is something to meditate on when we think of standing against darkness and striving for righteousness. It is not intended to be a solo pursuit (Matt. 18:20).

Then Paul encourages the believers of Ephesus to “shod their feet” in order to carry the “*gospel of peace*,” (literally glad-tidings of *shalom*). One of the most vital, basic things the Roman soldier wore were his sturdy, leather, hob-nailed sandals. They kept him from slipping, preserved his feet during endless miles of marching and gave him a grip to press forward. Simply put, everything we do should bear *shalom* and reflect what God is doing in our world as we reflect His light in the darkness.

The Finishing Touches

Roman soldiers would be lacking without three final things: shield, helmet and sword. Paul names the shield, *faith* (Eph. 6:16a). For the Roman, the shield was unquestionably crucial and they trained with them constantly. They were able to execute complicated formations such as the tortoise shell, deployed mostly in siege warfare, where men closed tight ranks into a square and overlapped their shields to protect against dangers before them and threats from above. The Roman shield was flexible. It could guard against arrows and spears or give cover for the soldier to kneel behind it for maximum protection.



The shield protects against dangers and threats.

In naming the shield *faith* (*emunah*), Paul echoes the truth found in James 2:14–26: “*Faith without works is dead.*” In Hebrew thought, faith is an action, not a state of mind or mental assent. Faith is **done** not just believed. Our faith needs to grow and mature, but the enemy seeks to destroy it through compromise

or his fiery darts (Eph. 6:16b) so we must be on guard and use our “shield.”

The Roman soldier’s helmet protected his cheeks, neck, head, brow, forehead and eyes. This was a crucial piece of the armor as



The helmet of salvation connects to God’s power of salvation.

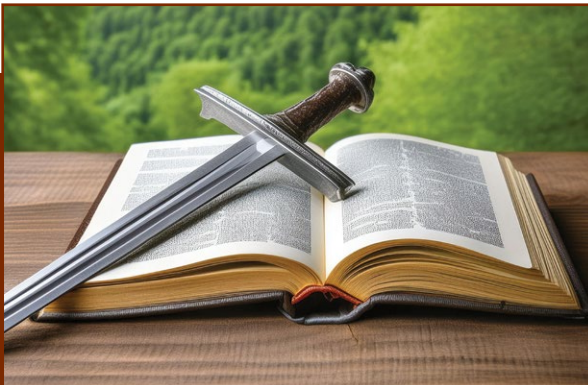
sword blows, projectiles and debris could easily cost a soldier his life. The head is one of the most vulnerable parts of the body for it contains the main sensory points (eyes, ears, mouth and nose) and any one of these, if incapacitated in battle, could be lethal. Where-

as one might survive a wound to the arm, leg, or chest, a strike to an unprotected head would most certainly spell the end.

Paul names this helmet “salvation” and his readers, most of them former pagans from the Greco-Roman city of Ephesus, would naturally think of the head as being the place of mind, reason, wisdom or the seat of intellect. Therefore a “helmet of salvation” which protects the head, would naturally connect to God’s power of salvation (Isa. 12:2) bestowed upon the person as well as their source of redemption (i.e. Horn of Salvation in 2 Sam. 22:3).

In closing, the accessory to the suit of armor which made the legionary deadly was the *gladius* sword. The *gladius* had a

double-edged blade two feet (0.6 meter) in length. It was extremely lethal. The Roman soldier trained to thrust with the blade, not slash, and so with an action of blocking with the shield and a thrust with the sword, a Roman cohort could annihilate an enemy force.



The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

Paul names this simple, yet effective weapon, the “*sword of the Spirit*” and quickly gives his Ephesian readers a further definition of the purpose of this “sword” when he states that it is, “*the word of God*” (Eph. 6:17b). As believers in Jesus (Yeshua), we must be grounded in the Word of God and be led by the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19–24) so we may discern what is righteous and what is evil. So we may know of God’s covenantal faithfulness to Israel and to us and that we may be on guard, watching for the signs of these times, and ready to answer the call of our King!

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Scripture from the New King James Version

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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