

"The whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:13)

Protecting our faith

John Nicholls

This contribution will:

- *trace the metaphor of the armour of God in the Old Testament*
- *consider each piece of the armour and how it is derived from God's Word*
- *see how we can increase and improve our witness to the Truth.*

THE ARMOUR of the Roman soldier was a familiar sight to our brethren and sisters in the first century, and especially to the Apostle Paul, who spent a long time chained to such soldiers. When he writes of "the whole armour of God" in Ephesians 6:13-17 he is therefore using figurative language based upon things well known to his readers.

The theme of the armour of God, however, goes back thousands of years to the time of Abraham. After Abraham's defeat of the confederacy from the north, his receiving of the blessing from Melchizedek, and his refusal to accept the spoils of war from the King of Sodom, God declared to him: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). Abraham was promised protection for the present life and a very great reward in the future.

"Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in Thy word", said the psalmist (Ps. 119:114); "[God] is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him" (Prov. 30:5). God is a protector of His children, and in Proverbs we also read: "He is a buckler [a small shield] to them that walk uprightly" (2:7).

The girding of loins (Eph. 6:14) is another Old Testament theme. The earliest reference to this is in Exodus 12:11, where the Israelites are commanded to have their loins girded on Passover night, ready to leave Egypt when Moses gave the command. In the Psalms David speaks of God girding him with strength and with gladness (Ps. 18:39; 30:11). Isaiah speaks of the rod out of the stem of Jesse having righteousness as the girdle of his loins (11:5).

Isaiah also speaks of some of the items of spiritual armour referred to in Ephesians: the helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness (59:17); feet that bring good tidings and

publish peace and salvation (52:7); and the sword of the spirit (49:2).

All six pieces of armour referred to in Ephesians 6 are thus derived and developed by Paul from the Old Testament, and the seventh item of protection, prayer, is of course also a common theme in Scripture.

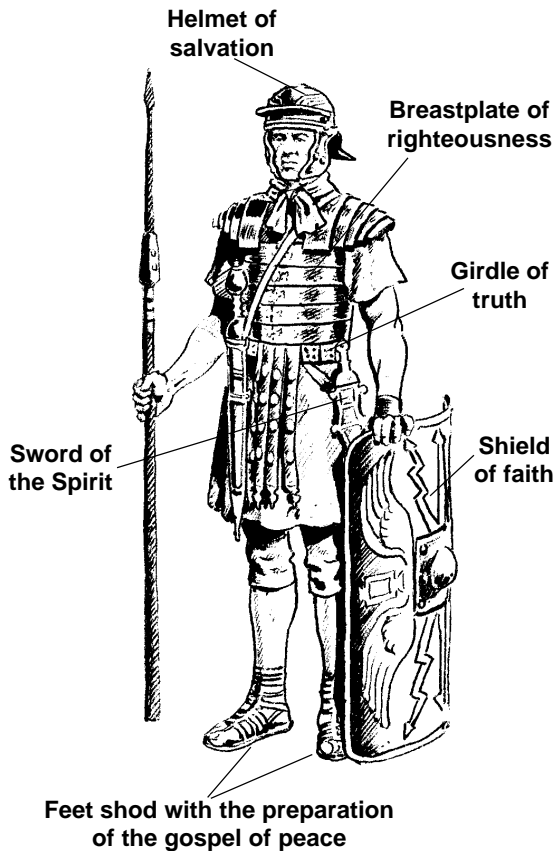
The seven items

We will now look at the seven items which make up "the whole armour of God" one by one.

The girdle of truth. The girdle kept the rest of the soldier's clothes in place during rapid movement and combat. It is the basic clothing of the soldier of Christ. Truth in dealings between man and man, and between God and man, is vital. The psalmist speaks of that internal honesty with ourselves that is a characteristic of the future citizens of Zion: "He that . . . speaketh the truth in his heart" (15:2). We need to be totally honest with ourselves and with each other, otherwise our relationships with God and Jesus are marred.

The breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate covered the heart and lungs. Righteousness is imputed because of faith. The psalmist spoke of how God's Word, the guide to right and wrong, was concealed or treasured in his heart that he might not sin against God (119:11). The keeping of God's righteous laws is our defence in the wicked world in which we live.

Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace would call to mind the usual footwear, consisting of heavy sandals studded with hobnails to give a secure footing. The background to this figure is Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!".



A Roman legionary

The warrior is shod for errands of peace while he opposes the foe; his feet carry *the* message of peace, the tidings of salvation.

The shield of faith. This refers to the great shield (Gk. *thureos*), a large oblong shield which would cover almost the whole body. These shields were made of tough hide or wood ringed with brass and covered with oiled hide to provide a deflective surface against arrows. Faith is trust in God, that firm persuasion that what He has promised He will surely perform. The fiery darts referred to by Paul could induce panic and terror in the ranks of soldiers, but the spiritual warrior is not moved by such things. The psalmist said: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee . . . In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me" (56:3,11). Christ's true soldiers know that God is able to defend them from any weapon used against them: "no weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you" (Isa. 54:17, RSV).

The helmet of salvation. The helmet protected the head and brain, the source of all thought. It is the hope of salvation that protects our minds. Jesus made this our urgent priority: "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). Jesus "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). The hope of the resurrection to eternal life, and the prospect of living in the Kingdom, in an earth full of the glory of God, sustain us and give the right balance to our minds. The helmet was made of metal. David said: "O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle" (Ps. 140:7).

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, the sixth part of God's armour, is an offensive weapon, in contrast to the others, which are all defensive. "Sword" here is the Greek word *machaira*, a short sword, a slaughter knife, in contrast to *rhomphaia*, which is the long sword. It would be used for close hand-to-hand combat. It represents the living Word (Heb. 4:12) of Spirit origin. Just as training in swordsmanship was necessary to perfect the use of the literal sword, so we need practice and knowledge of the Word of God before we can use it effectively in the work of preaching and building up our ecclesias. 2 Corinthians 10 suggests that the Word of God can destroy arguments and opposition to the gospel (vv. 3-5). As Hebrews 4:12 shows, the Scriptures are a discernor (Gk. *kritikos*) or critic of our motives. These motives are opened up and revealed to us, as the slaughter knife would have exposed the internal organs of the sacrifice.

Prayer is the seventh and final item of protection, giving completion and perfection to our defence. That prayer is centred on our fellow saints: "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18).

The verb 'stand' or 'withstand' occurs four times in Ephesians 6:10-17 (in verses 11, 13 and 14). It means 'to hold one's ground'. A similar idea is expressed in 1 Corinthians: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye *stedfast, unmoveable*, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (15:58). In an age where steadfastness is unfashionable, it is good that we remember the soldier's unflinching loyalty to his commander and his steadfast defence of his king and his country, even unto death. Jesus set his face steadfastly towards Jerusalem and the death that he knew would overtake him there.

Lessons for today

The lessons from the armour of God are many. The armour is introduced as being a defence against “the wiles of the devil”, and Paul goes on to explain this: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood [we are not engaging in physical wrestling], but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [heavenly, margin] places” (Eph. 6:12). Principalities are the rulers or governments. Powers are the authorities, national or local. Rulers are world rulers. Believers have been delivered from the “darkness” that world rulers are surrounded by. Spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies describes the condition of world rulers.*

In Ephesians 3:10 Paul says that the ecclesia has a duty to make known to “the principalities and powers in heavenly places” “the manifold wisdom of God”. Do we give such a witness? The Apostle Paul certainly did, declaring the gospel to kings and rulers on more than one occasion.

Brother Thomas sent a copy of *Elpis Israel* to the Czar of Russia. In the 1980s many brethren and sisters wrote to the Russian Ambassador in the UK about the plight of Jews in Russia. Was it a coincidence that a few years later in the 1990s the floodgates were opened and millions of Jews from the countries of the former Soviet Union were allowed to emigrate, many to Israel? The present writer has written to a British Foreign Secretary about British policies towards Israel, expressing the Divine purposes of Britain and Israel.

There is much debate in the UK at present about Britain’s place in the European Union and the adoption of the euro. Perhaps Christadelphians should make representations to the British Government about what the Scripture says in Ezekiel 38 of the position of Britain with regard to Europe in the future, and her role in Isaiah 60:9 as a friend of the Jews. If we take the lessons of Ephesians about the armour of God, we should witness more effectively to the powers that be.

In some lands outside the UK the Truth is prospering despite tremendous opposition from the powers that be and the religious authorities. For our brethren and sisters who live and labour for the gospel in such conditions, the exhortation of the armour is very real. They can be encouraged to continue, knowing that, just as Paul and the apostles were blessed in their witness in the

first century, so will they in the twenty-first if they hold fast to the Truth.

Another lesson is that we should be more forthright and vigorous in our witnessing, especially as we see the signs among the nations that God is at work. Public talks are only one facet of our witness. One-to-one arguments and discussions (using the short *machaira* sword of the Spirit) can be much more effective. Brother Ron Abel in his lively book on Ephesians¹ discusses some of the lessons of the spiritual warrior that we can take to ourselves. He concludes his discussion with these words:

“Never miss an opportunity to discuss the Truth with people of other faiths like the Jews, Mormons . . . or Evangelicals. The Truth has nothing to fear from such continual cross-examination. It is simply untrue that these engagements are a ‘waste of time’. If they are ineffective to the ‘pulling down of strongholds’, they sharpen the sword of the wielder. For those who regard such as a waste of time, it will probably be determined that the newspaper will still be read and an hour or two of television watched at night. Meanwhile an opportunity to witness has been missed. Such an attitude is unbecoming to the spiritual soldier on active duty whose feet are prepared with the gospel of peace”.

Finally, our witness to the Truth, as God’s spiritual warriors, depends very much on our personal knowledge and appreciation of the Word of God which, as we have seen, is the basis of all the parts of the armour. When Joshua led Israel into the promised land the Israelites were literally warriors, whose success depended on their spiritual status. God exhorted Joshua to be an outstanding leader:

“There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the

* For a different view of this passage see “[In heavenly places in Christ](#)” (p. 179).

1. *Quenching All the Fiery Darts of the Wicked*, published by the Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, UK agent Peter Talbot, 6 Ridge Lane, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham, NG12 1BD.

law, which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:5-9).

When Israel and Joshua heeded this exhortation and encased themselves in the armour of God's Word they succeeded; they failed when they neglected to obey God and were exposed to their enemies the Canaanites. Our great consol-

ation is that the Captain of our salvation has already won the battle, and that, if we follow his example, we shall, as Paul says, be "more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

Points for thought and discussion

- *How vigorously is your ecclesia witnessing to the Truth, knowing that, if God is for us, who can be against us?*
- *Is the Brotherhood witnessing effectively to those in authority—rulers, church leaders, etc.?*
- *Are there gaps in your personal armour, and, if so, are you using the Word of God to develop and complete your armour?*

Conscientious objection

John Morris

CONSCIENCE IS that inner voice that forbids a particular course of action. "David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people" (2 Sam. 24:10), and, in the presence of the woman taken in adultery, the scribes and Pharisees were "convicted by their own conscience" (Jno. 8:9).

The servant of God must strive always to have a "good conscience" (Acts 23:1; 1 Pet. 3:16), "a conscience void of offence toward God" (Acts 24:16). He will cultivate a 'sensitive conscience', what Paul refers to as a "weak" conscience (1 Cor. 8:7-10), and he will be careful how he acts "for conscience sake" (10:25-29; Rom. 13:5; 1 Pet. 2:19).

Military service

Our conscience objects to any action contrary to the commandments of Christ, hence the expression 'conscientious objection'. In its usual context, this is shorthand for the revulsion which the disciple of Christ feels towards acts of violence against a fellow human being, and even the bearing of arms. A brother or sister is a conscientious objector because he or she has chosen to declare to the authorities an unwillingness to be called up for military service in time of war, and a willingness rather to face the consequences,

including the hardships of alternative national service and the scorn of those who see the disciple's stand as a mark of weakness rather than strength of character.

A conscientious objector is not a pacifist. Those who appeared before tribunals often had to explain why God allowed participation in war in Bible times and may sanction it in the age to come, and yet forbids it now. In the Old Testament, in spite of the specific command not to kill, great men such as King David were involved in the slaying of individuals and whole armies. Yet God's distaste for David's actions is evident: "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto My name" (1 Chron. 22:8).

The law of Christ is unambiguous, and, whilst the false church has found it convenient to cooperate with the state, to bless war, and to encourage the individual to take up arms, the follower of Jesus Christ has taken his Lord's commands very literally: "Love your enemies . . . do good to them that hate you" (Mt. 5:44); "avenge not yourselves" (Rom. 12:19); "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim. 2:24); "Render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Mt. 22:21). Brethren down the ages,