

Text: Exod. 30:11-16

Title: "Raising an army for the Lord"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: In June of 2022, NBC News published an article titled, "Every branch of the military is struggling to make its 2022 recruiting goals." The article quotes Ret. Lt. Gen. Thomas Spoehr of the Heritage Foundation: "2022 is the year we question the sustainability of the all-volunteer force."

The previous month Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville told Congress that only 23% of Americans ages 17-24 are qualified to serve without a waiver. That is down from an already low 29% in recent years. The article cited obesity, drug use, and criminal records as causes for this drop.

Though overlooked by this NBC News article, the *New York Post* reported last month that the vaccine mandate has resulted in roughly 8,500 discharges of patriotic military personnel.

Having finished the section of Exodus that deals with the construction and furnishings of the tabernacle, we have come to a passage that explains from where much of the silver used in previous passages came. It came from the contribution of a half-shekel each from Hebrew males who were twenty years of age and older.

The reason that group paid the half-shekel, while the women and the children were exempt, is that in this passage Moses is receiving instruction for how the nation of Israel was to raise an army for the Lord. The same group of

people are described in Num. 1:3: "From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies."

In all the total force would number 603,550 troops (Exod. 38:26). One commentary defined the word translated *number* in our Bibles as "to review, or number an army or nation, for the purpose of enrolling in military service." So our passage is about the Lord's directions for enrolling an army and what those directions have to do with the tabernacle.

This morning I would like us to focus on three truths from this passage about raising an army for the Lord.

I. The Lord is the One who raises His army (v. 11).

Illustration: The reason recruitment numbers are important for our nation, of course, is that our nation has enemies who would destroy us if they could, and so we need a national defense. We must recruit people willing to serve, because there are battles to be fought and wars to be won. We rightly honor on Veterans' Day those who have served.

Application: Israel would have understood this. They had engaged the enemy already. You may remember the Battle of Rephadim in chapter 17, where Israel defeated Amalek.

At the end of that battle, Moses built an altar and gave it a name representing the key to the victory they experienced that day - *Jehovah Nissi, the Lord is My Banner* (Exod. 17:15).

When victorious, Israel's army fought under God's banner, at His command, and by His power. They did so because God recruited them out of Egypt under His banner, at His command, and by His power. They had been redeemed

from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, and now they could fight battles against the enemies of the Lord as His army.

Although the nation of Israel has lost her place in this fight for a time, the New Testament is clear that the fight between good and evil continues on today, and the Lord still raises His army to fight that battle.

The Lord's army today is not comprised of a literal fighting force with guns and ammunition. Instead, He saves souls from the forces of unbelief and darkness, and brings them to the ranks of faith and light.

He tells them they must "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself in the affairs of this life, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3-4). Every believer is a soldier of Jesus Christ, chosen by the Lord so to be.

The army is no longer a political entity that takes up arms, but a kingdom not of this world, whose "weapons of . . . warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4).

And so it is through prayer that we must put on the whole armor of God for our daily battle against "the wiles of the devil" - the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the greaves of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

The ancient fight between good and evil continues today. The Lord is the One who raises His army. Are you one of His recruits? Is it your life's ambition now to please Him who has chosen you to be a soldier?

II. The Lord registers His army with a fee (vv. 12-15).

Illustration: The NBC News article I saw noted that some military recruits were being offered up to \$50,000 bonuses for signing up. I imagine that most organizations would have little trouble finding recruits with an offer like that.

Application: In our passage, the Lord makes no such offer to the men of Israel. Instead, the Lord levies a registration fee of a half-shekel of silver from each recruit, making him a part of His army. What our translation calls a *contribution* was mandatory.

The Lord gives that half-shekel a special name. Half-shekels given for this purpose were given a technical term. They were called “a ransom for his soul unto the Lord” (v. 12). In order to be in the Lord’s army, the Israelite turning 20-years-old needed to pay this registration fee called “a ransom for his soul unto the Lord” (or we might translate “a ransom of his soul unto the Lord”).

Why does the Lord register His army this way? What does the half-shekel mean? I see three lessons for us here.

1. The half-shekel payment is something first received from the Lord. Every half-shekel anyone owns, whether a 20-year-old Israelite or a 59-year-old pastor, belongs to him because God first gave it to him.

For the Israelite, he got his shekels when God redeemed him from Egypt. You may remember that these former slaves plundered their oppressors, who gave them gifts so that they would leave. So the Israelite would remember the day he was redeemed from the bondage of slavery as the day he obtained from the Lord every shekel he possessed.

For this 59-year-old pastor, I am also redeemed, and in a spiritual sense, that was the day I received what I must give back to the Lord in order to become a member of His army.

The day I trusted Jesus as my Savior and asked God to save me from my sins, I was given new life in Christ. Matt. 20:28, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Before that happened I had nothing to give back to the Lord: "Nearer, still nearer, nothing I bring,  
Naught as an offering to Jesus my king,  
Only my sinful now contrite heart.  
Grant me the cleansing thy blood doth impart.  
Grant me the cleansing thy blood doth impart."  
The half-shekel payment represents a ransom we have first received from the Lord.

2. The half-shekel payment is something we give back to the Lord. The soldier of Christ understands that as the recipient of the gifts of redemption, we have a debt to pay back, and it is the same debt whether we be rich or poor, because it really has very little to do with money at all (v. 15). The half-shekel symbolizes the only acceptable registration fee when it comes to joining the army of the Lord.

Isaac Watts put it this way:  
"But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe.  
Here, Lord, I give myself to Thee. Tis all that I can do."

Only those who are willing to give their lives back to the Lord can do battle for Him in His army. This willingness must be a daily thing. "And he [Jesus] said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23-24).

3. The half-shekel payment is something very small. Currently, the price of silver is about \$22 an ounce. A half-shekel is about a half of an ounce, so worth today about \$11.

In light of what Jesus has done for us, dying on the cross in our place for our sins, our giving Him our lives back to Him in return is really a small price to pay to register in His army. Jesus said so: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do'" (Luke 17:10).

The Lord registers His army with a fee, and that fee is that we give our lives daily to Him. Have you been registered in the army of the Lord? Have you given Him the half-shekel of your life to fight the battle between good and evil on the side of good for the salvation of the souls of men?

III. The Lord reminds His army why they fight (v. 16).

Illustration: The soldier who no longer knows what he is fighting for is a soldier who is going to lose the war. Our nation has known this tragedy. We have fought wars in which those we sent into battle did not know why they were fighting. Few battlefield challenges are as dangerous as this one.

Application: Israel's army certainly knew times like this in their history. Wicked King Ahab's army had great successes, but none of those battles were waged by men who could remember why the Lord had raised up an army for Israel. They had forgotten the memorial of this passage, the half-shekel. The half-shekel was supposed to help them remember for what they were fighting. Saul used it to hunt David.

The payment of the half-shekel was to help finance the construction and maintenance of God's tabernacle, and this connection between God's tabernacle and God's army was a reminder to the soldier about what he was fighting for. This shekel reminded the soldier that every battle waged for the Lord was also a battle waged for the tabernacle.

King Ahab's army became the army of Baal, because when Northern Israel broke from Southern Israel, the connection between God's army and God's temple was lost. No soldier in the Northern Kingdom ever paid a half-shekel to the temple treasury at their commissioning ceremony. Instead, the northern kings raised their army to fight for other things.

What Israel had in the tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament, believers today have in their local church in the New Testament. In their assembly time and place, Jesus dwells in a special way, just as Yahweh did in the tabernacle (Matt. 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them [referring to a local church gathered for disciplinary purposes in this context].")

It is the local church congregation that must not be defiled, for it is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are"). The pillars and sockets of Moses's house of God are nowhere to be found today, but Paul is clear about how they have been replaced (1 Tim. 3:15, "But if I tarry long, [I write] that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth").

Just like the Lord wanted to remind the army of Israel that they fight for the God of the tabernacle, so he wants His New Testament army to remember that they fight for the God of the local churches.

When the connection between God's army and God's churches is broken today, God's Spirit is grieved and our cause is greatly weakened on the battlefield. Jesus loves His churches, and we cannot love Him well without loving them too. We represent God's churches fighting for truth.

Conclusion: As we close we turn to Isaac Watts again, who asks an appropriate question of each one of us in his hymn, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" "Am I?" Will you ask yourself that question this morning? Does not our time desperately need those determined to please the One who has chosen them to be His soldiers?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*