**Going to War**

The core values of the US Army are posted on their web site and include: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. It is fitting that loyalty is listed first as that characteristic is often the catalyst that motivates people to serve. The Army’s description of this reads: Bear true faith and allegiance to the US Constitution, the Army, your unit and other Soldiers. I think that country can be substituted for the constitution as most patriotic people feel a sense of loyalty to their country. During times of national crisis, many volunteer due to a desire to protect the homeland and their family. I have often heard that after joining, loyalty narrows its focus to protecting fellow soldiers. In our study of Deuteronomy chapter 20, Moses prepares the army of Israel for its mission of defeating their enemies in Canaan.

The chapter begins with Moses telling their army that they need not be afraid in combat when they see superior forces of the enemy because God would be with them. He reminded them that God was the same God who brought them out of Egypt and defeated the army that was pursuing them. Prior to battle, the priest would address the army and tell them no to be afraid because God would go with them and fight for them. God was present with Israel during their successes on the battlefield, first seen in Ex. Chapter 17 when Israel fought the Amalekites at the battle at Rephidim. God often did the miraculous by defeating armies much larger than Israel. God ordered Gideon to reduce the number of his troops to 300 before defeating the Midianites who had an army of 120,000 men. There were times, however when Israel went into battle without God. After regretting their failure to go into Canaan as God had commanded, they went into battle against the Amalekites and Canaanites. Moses warned them that God would not be with them and they would be defeated. Moses and the ark remained in the camp and Israel’s army was routed (see Num. chapter 14). The ark was seen as a powerful instrument to help them in battle. In 1st Samuel chapter 4, the army cheered loudly as the ark entered their camp as they prepared to battle the Philistines. The ark, however was accompanied by the priests Hophni and Phineas. These men were wicked, having no regard for God (1st Sam. 2:12). God did not ordain the battle due to the leadership of Israel and Israel lost 30,000 soldiers and the ark in the battle.

Moses then gave instructions regarding men who were to be relieved of their obligation to fight. Those who had built a new home which had not been dedicated, planted a new vineyard or was pledged to be married could be dismissed from duty. Moses also instructed the officers to dismiss any man who was faint hearted. A man who was thinking about what he was leaving behind would not have his mind on war and could be distracted at a time when his fellow soldier needed him. The faint hearted could not be trusted and their attitude could have spread to the rest of the army.

Next Moses gave instructions that before they attacked a city, they were to offer terms of peace. Those who accepted became servants of Israel. Those who refused were put to the sword and women and children taken as plunder along with livestock and other possessions. While this seems harsh, God knew that any man who lived would eventually rise up against Israel. Any city that was in the land that God was giving as their inheritance was to be completely destroyed, even the women and children. This was to be done to prevent any survivors from luring the Israelites into idol worship. The clans affected by this command were the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizittes, Hivites and Jebusites. At the end of the chapter, Moses instructed the army that they were not to use fruit trees to build siege works. Such trees would provide food for the people when they entered Canaan and God did not want them wasted.

As Christians today the battle we face is spiritual warfare. God provides us with weapons to defend ourselves: the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, readiness from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (see Eph. Chapter 6). The web site Studylight.org has the following quote by J. Orr: Religious courage is needed in war and warlike courage needed in religion. He noted that we battle the evil within us, the spiritual forces of evil around us and with the hydra-headed incarnations of that evil in the institutions and customs, sins and follies of society.