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David's Mighty Men

"Eleazar ... was with David at Pasdammim. Now there the Philistines were gathered for battle, and there was a piece of ground full of barley. So the people fled from the Philistines."

1 Chronicles 11:12–13

1. Stand Firm and Don't Give Up!

"Eleazar ... was with David at Pasdammim. Now there the Philistines were gathered for battle, and there was a piece of ground full of barley. So the people fled from the Philistines."

1 Chronicles 11:12–13

Eleazar was one of David's warriors. His name means "God has helped." Even though many were fleeing for fear of the Philistines, this man stayed put and kept defending a field full of barley. Why? Good food must be kept away from the enemy and preserved for God's people. Also, Eleazar had learned from David and stayed with him even when others did not.

The people fled, but not Eleazar! He defended that parcel against the Philistines who had mobilized for battle. This warrior was "with David" and kept standing firm. He encouraged others to do so as well, as verse 14 shows. The Lord Jesus is absent from this present scene, but we still can be "with Him" and identify with His interests as His faithful companions, just as David's mighty men did. How? "They

stationed themselves in the middle of that field, defended it, and killed the Philistines. So the Lord brought about a great victory (11:14), or “salvation,” while Eleazar’s hand “stuck to the sword” (2 Sam. 23:10).

The term “mighty men” occurs in Chronicles more often than in the other Books of the Bible. God’s salvation was the reward of their commitment. As others were fleeing for fear of the Philistines, these men strengthened themselves in the Lord, just as David did at Ziklag, in his dire need (1 Sam. 30:6). The strength the Lord gave was the secret of their victory. We are all in God’s school and privileged to learn from our great David, the Lord Jesus Himself. May we strengthen ourselves in the grace which is in Christ Jesus and keep standing firm (2 Tim. 2:1).

2. Love’s Devotion

"Now three of the thirty chief men went down to the rock to David, into the cave of Adullam; and the army of the Philistines encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem."

1 Chronicles 11:15-16

How depressing for David! The town he was born in had been taken by the Philistines, who had made it their garrison. In this context we read, “David said with longing, ‘Oh, that someone would give me a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!’” So the three broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless David would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord (vv. 17-18).

This impressive story of commitment and love is recorded for our encouragement (Rom. 15:4). The three mighty men heard David express his desire and, because they greatly loved him, risked their lives to bring to him water from Bethlehem’s well. As true overcomers, they broke through the occupation, fetched water from the desired place, and brought it to David.

David honored the Lord by pouring the water out as a drink offering to Him, and doing so, he also honored his three mighty men. The Valley of Rephaim reminds us of the giants living in an area the Philistines had taken over. However, David’s

mighty men were even stronger. Why? Because of their great love for David. This made them stouter than the mighty Philistines or those giants.

Today, we are facing powers much stronger than we. Yet love for the Lord and His people will make us victorious: "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). Let us honor our Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ, by being truly devoted to Him!

3. Taking on the giants

"Abishai the brother of Joab was chief of another three. He had lifted up his spear against three hundred men, killed them, and won a name among these three."

1 Chronicles 11:20

Abishai means "my father is Jesse," or "my father is a gift," and his mother Zeruah was one of David's sisters (1 Chr. 2:15-16). Jesse was the father of David, while Abishai was one of Jesse's grandsons. Abishai was the most renowned of the thirty mighty men but was not one of the first three (11:21). His younger brother Asahel, a fast runner, was killed by Saul's general Abner (2 Sam. 2).

His other brother was the powerful Joab who became David's leading general, yet he was not counted among the mighty men – the three or the thirty. Joab may have been a believer, but he was full of selfish interests. Abishai, however, had real faith and genuine love for David, just as the other "mighty men" linked with the king after God's own heart. When King Saul hotly pursued them, Abishai advised David to kill King Saul on an occasion the Lord seemed to have given. David refused to do so because Saul was God's anointed (1 Sam. 26:9-11).

Abishai defended David several times because he remained his loyal supporter. "When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint" (2 Sam. 21:15). One of the remaining giants sought to kill David (v. 16), but "Abishai the son of Zeruah came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, 'You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel'" (v. 17). Four giants of Gath, including Goliath, "fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants" (v. 22).

Today, we fight a different kind of giant (2 Cor. 10:4-5; Eph. 6:10-20). Let us put on the "whole armor of God."

4. Courageous, devoted, and ready

"Benaiah was the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man from Kabzeel, who had done many deeds. He had killed two lion-like heroes of Moab. He also had gone down and killed a lion in the midst of a pit on a snowy day."

1 Chronicles 11:22

The name Benaiah means "Yah has built up," and his father Jehoiada, "Yahweh knows." He was from Kabzeel ("God gathers"), the southernmost town in Judah, close to Edom. Our text says that he had done many deeds, or was a doer of great deeds. He had struck down two heroes of Moab and a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. In other words, he was an amazing *fighter*.

"He killed an Egyptian, a man of great height, five cubits tall" (almost 2.5 meters, or 8 feet). This giant had in his hand "a spear like a weaver's beam; and [Benaiah] went down to him with a staff, wrested the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear" (v. 23). Benaiah was very courageous and won a name among the three mighty men, but was not ranked with them. He was counted with the thirty, probably their most honorable one, a *warrior* David could always rely on.

David appointed him over his guard corps, the Cherethites and the Pelethites (1 Chr. 18:17). After Absalom's rebellion and Ahithophel's death, Benaiah became David's *counselor* (27:34). Benaiah was marked by integrity, commitment, and faithfulness: what an example to follow! He was *always ready to serve* and was also an able *administrator*, as we may conclude from his position described next. "The third captain of the army for the third month was Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, who was *chief*; in his division were twenty-four thousand" (27:5).

He was involved in Solomon's coronation (1 Ki. 1:44) and functioned as *executioner* of those who opposed God's chosen king (2:25, 30). What a man!

5. Great faith and energy

"Now these were the men who came to David at Ziklag while he was still a fugitive from Saul the son of Kish; and they were among the mighty men, helpers in the war."

1 Chronicles 12:1

The first group of men who came to David at Ziklag belonged to Benjamin, Saul's very own tribe! Joining David, they risked their lives because King Saul was persecuting David and his men. David welcomed them and immediately started to train them. Eventually, they became some of his "mighty men" and "helpers in the war." They realized that Saul was not just fighting an outcast, but the king after God's heart, and thus, fighting God.

The kind of choice these men made is something all believers face, in one way or another, in every generation. To identify with the Lord Jesus Christ is to take sides with the One rejected by His own people. Sadly, many who profess to be Christian do the opposite, following what is popular but against God.

Taking sides with David, these warriors from Benjamin separated themselves from King Saul, their former leader. From a human perspective, they were "losers" as they gave up their income and privileges, a position of honor and favor that they had as members of Saul's tribe. Instead, they went along with one who was hotly pursued by Saul (v. 1).

These men had remarkable skills, were armed with bows, and used both hands to throw stones and shoot arrows. One of them became a mighty man among the thirty and received a position over them because of his abilities. They were real "overcomers" as they identified with the rejected David in Ziklag, which was under Philistine control at the time. It took great faith, great energy, and great commitment. May the Lord give us such faith, the zeal of "first love," because He alone is worthy, now and forever. Let us join His army and follow Him!

6. Courageous and qualified

"Some Gadites joined David at the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions."

1 Chronicles 12:8

It took great courage to identify with someone who was hotly pursued by King Saul. David had retreated to a stronghold in the wilderness, not a pleasant or attractive place. However, the men who joined David were *drawn to him*, the king after God's own heart, as God moved their hearts.

King Saul, on the other hand, was a strong leader, but people were afraid of him and followed *because of fear*. However, the warriors who came to David had overcome all kinds of barriers as they identified with him *because of love*. These men sacrificed family ties as well as the advantage of belonging to the same tribe as King Saul.

Others not only left their own tribe, in this case Gad, but also went on a long journey to join David. They overcame tremendous hindrances as they crossed the Jordan in the first month, when it overflowed all its banks (12:15). It was worth the effort, for they became "captains of the army; the least was over a hundred, and the greatest was over a thousand" (v. 14). They put to flight all those in the valleys, to the east and to the west, took on the opponents and scattered them (v. 15). David trained these men who became strong as lions and swift as gazelles on the mountains (v. 8).

Later on, others came from Benjamin and Judah to David, who asked them whether they came peaceably to help him (vv. 16–17). "Then the Spirit came upon Amasai, chief of the captains, and he said: 'We are yours, O David; we are on your side, O son of Jesse!'" (v. 18). What an encouragement for us who follow David's Son, the true King, and sacrifice all for Him!

7. Helpers in Trying Times

"When he went to Ziklag, those of Manasseh who defected to him were ... captains of the thousands ... And they helped David against the bands of raiders, for they were all mighty men of valor."

1 Chronicles 12:20–21

During a very difficult time, as King Saul continued to persecute him, David decided to take refuge in the Philistine town of Gath. The giant Goliath, whom David had killed while still a shepherd boy, had come from there (1 Sam. 17). However, after Saul had sought to kill him several times, David fled to King Achish in Gath, where he stayed for a year and four months (27:1–7). This king gave Ziklag to him and those with him. From there, David raided some of Israel's enemies. Achish, however, thought that David had become his servant forever (vv. 8–12).

During those trying times, some from the tribe of Manasseh defected from Saul to join David and help him (1 Chr. 12:20–21). "They were captains in the army ... at that time they came to David day by day to help him, until it was a great army, like the army of God" (vv. 21–22). Amazing! These men must have had great faith to identify with David, still being pursued by King Saul. They understood that God had rejected Saul (1 Sam. 15) and decided to commit all to David and to God's interests.

As the Philistines prepared to attack Saul and his army, King Achish wanted David and his men to join him for this battle. Thankfully for David, the Philistine leaders rejected this plan, as God sovereignly protected David from fighting against his own people. May we, like those of Manasseh who left all for David, commit to the Lord Jesus and to His interests, day by day, during the period of grace.

*In Thy grace Thou now hast called us sharers of Thy joy to be,
And to know the blessed secret of His preciousness to Thee.*

E. H. Chater

8. Understanding and Commitment

"Now these were the numbers of the divisions that were equipped for war, and came to David at Hebron to turn over the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the Lord."

1 Chronicles 12:23

It is beautiful to note that the Spirit of God was at work in many ways and in different people. During the years that Saul was persecuting David, several understood that he was the king after God's heart. One example was Abigail, whose husband refused to honor David after his men had faithfully cared for Nabal's shepherds and flocks. She completely understood the situation and honored David, taking quick action to prevent a disaster. After the Lord took her husband's life, she soon became David's wife (1 Sam. 25). The Lord had given her discernment about David's situation and Saul's wickedness, preventing David from taking matters into his own hands instead of relying on God.

One further example can be found in the sons of Issachar, who "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do." Their good insight enabled 200 chiefs to lead properly, as "all their brethren were at their command" (1 Chr. 12:32). Before this, the tribe of Judah had understood that God had chosen David, and they anointed him at Hebron (2 Sam. 2). Now, the Holy Spirit worked among the various tribes and gave them understanding, also among people of Benjamin, Saul's tribe, who saw Saul's wrong attitude. Many others were enlightened as well and made the right decision to follow David. They had the right understanding, for Saul's actions forced them to act quickly and join David.

It is true that today "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish ... the weak ... the base ... that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:26–29). Blessed be God for His grace!

9. Keeping Rank with One Heart

"All these men of war, who could keep ranks, came to Hebron with a loyal heart, to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest of Israel were of one mind to make David king."

1 Chronicles 12:38

Many joined David publicly and came to Hebron from every tribe. They did so according to the word of the Lord (v. 23) and with undivided heart (v. 33) or with a loyal, perfect heart. We sometimes say, “the matter of the heart is the heart of the matter.” Those who came had “one heart” and were of one mind, with a “right heart” (v. 38). Their hearts were in tune with God and with each other, as they had one and the same objective. Their hearts’ condition illustrates how the Lord would like us to be.

“They were there with David three days, eating and drinking, for their brethren had prepared for them” (v. 39). This fellowship and unity were beautifully expressed in a common meal as they were with David three days eating and drinking. “Moreover those who were near to them, from as far away as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, were bringing food on donkeys and camels, on mules and oxen – provisions of flour and cakes of figs and cakes of raisins, wine and oil and oxen and sheep *abundantly*, for there was *joy* in Israel” (v. 40).

This lovely picture of unity, harmony, and fellowship teaches us many lessons. They had joined David in his afflictions, now they enjoyed with him *abundance* and *joy*. When we are satisfied with the Lord Jesus, we have everything and are filled with joy. In this context, David (whose name means “beloved”) reminds us of our Lord Jesus, “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9). He is our Beloved, the true Center and Object of fellowship while we are in a world opposed to Him. Joy indicates true satisfaction, as we abide in Him: for without Him we can do nothing (John 15:4–5).

10. Taking a Stand in the Battle

"After him was Shammah ... The Philistines had gathered together into a troop where there was a piece of ground full of lentils. So the people fled from the Philistines. But he stationed himself in the middle of the field, defended it, and killed the Philistines. So the Lord brought about a great victory."

2 Samuel 23:11–12

This story is similar to what Eleazar had done, the second of David’s mighty men, defending a field of barley (1 Chr. 11:12–14). Lentils, mentioned in today’s passage, were used to feed the hungry. The first case was Esau who sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a dish of lentil stew (Gen. 25:34). When King David had to flee because of his son Absalom’s rebellion, he and those with him were hungry. Among

other things, they were fed with lentils (2 Sam. 17:28). During the captivity of Ezekiel, the Lord instructed him to prepare portions, including lentils (Ezek. 4:9), for every day, in the face of hunger and persecution.

As God's people in David's days faced much distress because of the Philistine occupation, there was evidently great need of food. Shammah, one of David's mighty men, saw the need and took immediate action by defending a field of lentils, instead of fleeing from before the Philistines. Shammah stationed himself ("he stood" JND) in the middle of the field, in a strategic position, whereas his colleagues were fleeing for fear of the Philistines. Taking a stand, not running away, he defended that field to keep the precious food for his people.

He killed the attacking Philistines and the Lord *worked* a great victory ("salvation"). This reminds us of an expression Balaam used: "Oh, what God has done!" (Num. 23:23). The believer, like Shammah, needs only to *stand* in the battle, "and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13). God will work the victory (Phil. 2:13). All praise to Him!

11. Strength Out of Weakness

"Who by faith ... became strong out of weakness."

Hebrews 11:33–34

Many of the heroes of the faith recorded in Hebrews 11 are inspiring examples for us today. One remarkable statement in this chapter is that some "became strong out of weakness." This is true of David and his mighty men and of many others, who "quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword ... became mighty in war, made the armies of strangers give way."

As a young shepherd boy, David took on Goliath, the giant. It was not because David was physically stronger. No, it was the power and wisdom of God that enabled David, through his faith, to slay the giant. Later, God strengthened David so as to train his "mighty men."

We face many giants: laziness, wasting time or talents, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. We need to acknowledge and confess what is wrong, and stop it. Only then, drawing all we need from the Lord Himself, may we

take His yoke and learn from Him (Mt. 11:29) so as to take on those “giants” for His name’s sake.

The apostle Paul had to learn that, despite his many great blessings, privileges, and experiences, he still had the flesh in him. He might become proud for the many revelations God had given him. To prevent this from happening, the Lord allowed an angel of Satan to buffet him so that Paul would only trust the Lord, not self (2 Cor.12:1–9). From a mere human perspective, this is not possible, yet like Paul and the “mighty men,” may we become “strong out of weakness.”

*“We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling,
And needing more each day Thy grace to know:
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing;
“We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go.”*

E. G. Cherry

