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Military images in Paul's letter to the Philippians

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Abstract:

The city of Philippi was founded as a Roman military colony in 42 BC, directly following one of the largest battles in antiquity, the civil war battle of Philippi. This study shows that one hundred years later, at the time of Paul's letter to the Philippians, the identity of the city was still deeply connected to its military history. The apostle Paul's arrangement in the historical and sociological ties of the Philippians with the military reasons for drafting his letter is an arrangement similar to the historical reports of a commander's speeches to his assembled troops before battle. Not only does the vocabulary of Paul's ethical commands parallel the general's harangues, as has been pointed out by Biblical scholarship, but in Paul's letter one also finds correspondences to the three largest themes of the general's speeches: the objective of the war, the confidence for victory and the rewards for obedience. The major unified theme of Philippians is the mutual military-partnership for the advance of the gospel in a hostile context (Phil. 1:7-12; 1:20; 2:19-24; 2:25-30; 3:12-15; 4:3; 4:10-19). Paul in his letter to the Philippians consistently uses military imagery - and not once athletic imagery, as typically assumed by exegetical scholars - to demonstrate that the courageous sharing of the faith will always result in victory for the one who proclaims the gospel. This victory is guaranteed through the unsurpassable abilities of the supreme general, Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross and whose resurrection is portrayed as a military victory and whose exaltation by God acknowledges Christ as the victorious general in an universal extent (Phil. 2:8-11). The victory of the gospel is further guaranteed by the LORD's initiation of the war for the spread of the faith and by His presence in the messenger who fight in His behalf for the spread of the good news (Phil. 1:5-7; 2:12-13; 2:14-15; 3:1; 4:4). Victory in a hostile context means either the reception of the gospel by unbelievers or the death of the messenger (Phil. 1:19-25). The suffering of the messenger of the gospel serves to glorify Christ and is compensated by the superior enjoyment of Christ at the resurrection (Phil. 1:19-25). The reward, which is promised to the messenger of the gospel is several times stated in Philippians to be the exalted experience of the presence of Christ at the resurrection (Phil. 1:21; 3:8-11; 3:20-21; 4:3). The reading of Philippians in light of the an-

Christ at the resurrection (Phil. 1:21, 3:8-11, 3:20-21, 4:5). The reading of Philippians in light of the ap military terminology confirms that Paul's main purpose in writing Philippians is to encourage his partne to take risks, to be unafraid of suffering and to make sacrifices in order to boldly testify about Christ a to financially contribute to the mission of spreading the faith. The book of Philippians challenges the self-centred prosperity culture of the church to take risks and make sacrifices for the proclamatio unbelievers, sacrifices, which are supremely compensated by a life for the glory of Christ and the surpas of the enjoyment of the glory of God in His Son Christ Jesus.

Description:

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