

The Full Armor of God: The Roman Army: Organizational Structure: Components of the Legion; Categories of Legionaries; the Warrior's Panoply: Belt, Breastplate

The Full Armor of God: Ephesians 6:12-18

I. The Roman Army

A. The Organizational Structure:

1. The Roman army's basic unit was the legion (*legio*) and only Roman citizens were conscripted as legionaries. These men were highly trained and were the elite foot-soldiers of the ancient world.
2. There were never more than 30 legions and usually only 28. There was a basic structure to the legion although its population often varied from this standard.¹
3. The smallest unit was the "**tent group**" or *contubernium*, composed of eight men who shared a tent. They were assigned one mule and eating equipment.
4. These eight men were assigned to a "**century**" (*centuria*) made up of eight *contubernii* totaling 80 men and commanded by a "**centurion**" (*centurio*).
5. Six centuries composed a "**cohort**" (*cohors*) that totaled 480 men plus six centurions.
6. Ten cohorts were united to form a "**legion**" (*legio*). The first cohort of the legion was doubled and thus totaled 960 men. The next nine were made up of 480-man cohorts for a total of 5,280 legionaries.
7. In addition there were 120 horse assigned to the legion and each cohort was commanded by 6 centurions for a total of 66. This brought the total of a regular legion up to 5,466. (See Mark 5:9 (1) and Matthew 26:53 (12:65,592 plus.)
8. These numbers fluctuated and a century could approach 100 men and cavalry as much as 300 horse bringing a legion's size close to six thousand men.
9. There were three categories of legionaries: First were the *hastati*, front-line soldiers named for the javelins they carried (*hasta*: javelin). These were young recruits who had not seen combat. They were called "skirmishers" and their assignment was to throw their spears and then move to the rear.

¹ See PowerPoint visual "Roman Legionary Organization."

10. This arrangement is different from that deployed by the ancient Greek phalanx² where the commanding officer, the *polemarch*, positioned himself in the center of the front rank. The most experienced veterans, known as the *promachoi*, made up the front ranks and the less experienced in the middle and rear ranks.
11. The second group of legionaries was the *principes* (*principis*). These were well-trained, combat-tested infantry soldiers. Their job was to hold the formation; they were experts in the use of the *gladius*, the short Roman sword favored by the legionaries who preferred hand-to-hand combat. The Greeks called this weapon the μάχαιρα, *machaira*.
12. The third group was the *triarii*, the most experienced Roman soldiers who were positioned in the third tier of the battle line. They were battle-tested veterans who had achieved hero status. They were fully armed and served to stabilize the units.
13. A Roman legion in battle formation formed up with 1,200 *hastati* making up the first battle line, 1,200 *principes* in the second, and 1,200 *triarii* in the third.
14. There were 600 men held back in reserve plus a cavalry posted on the flanks totaling between 120 and 300 horse, together providing combat support.
15. The spiritual application of these three battle lines and the combat support groups can be developed as follows:
 - (1) The *hastati*, or young or new believers, are involved in learning the basics. They are functioning in the “spiritual childhood” portion of the divine power system, proficient at the first three gates.³ They are able to utilize the first three categories of the 10 problem-solving devices.⁴ From this inventory they are able to mount skirmishes in the Invisible War, i.e., hit-and run.
 - (2) The *principes* have logged enough time in doctrine to advance to “spiritual adulthood.” They are functioning at the first 7 gates of the divine power system and utilize the first nine categories of the 10 problem-solving devices. These believers are experts in the use of their panoply of armor and weapons described by Paul in Ephesians 6:13-17. Spiritual momentum keeps them moving forward through the challenges of the sophisticated spiritual life.⁵

² See PowerPoint visual: “Greek Phalanx.”

³ See PowerPoint visual: “Divine Dynasphere.”

⁴ See PowerPoint visual: “Problem-Solving Devices.”

⁵ See PowerPoint visual: “Sophisticated Spiritual Life.”

- (3) The *triarii* are those who have advanced to spiritual maturity. They have been through momentum testing at gate 7 of the divine power system and now reside at the high ground of the sophisticated spiritual life occupied with Christ. Veterans of the major battles of the Invisible War, they are able to utilize with great proficiency all 10 problem-solving devices. These are the invisible heroes of the Invisible War who are candidates for evidence testing and supreme decorations in both time and eternity.
- (4) The “combat support: units are those who provide artillery for those who confront the enemy in on battlefields of the Invisible War. Paul concludes his paragraph on the armor and weapons of the Christian Soldier with a plea for prayer in verse 18. Those who are prayer warriors play an essential and necessary role by their intercessions for those engaging the Dark Side in spiritual combat.
16. The elite forces among the Roman troops were the Praetorian Guard. At one point no legions were based in Rome or in Italy but were rather deployed around the frontiers of the Empire.
17. The word *Praetorium* means a “general’s tent.” It later referred to military headquarters in Rome when Augustus recruited nine cohorts exclusively from Italy. These men became the Imperial bodyguard of the Caesars.
18. These legionaries accompanied the emperor on all occasions. They were an elite corps of men who had a rank similar to a centurion’s but received double pay.
19. The passage we are building up to in Ephesians finds its genesis in Paul’s observance of this group of men. While imprisoned in Rome, Paul was able to observe their highly professional attitude and devotion to duty. Based in Rome, the Praetorians numbered around 10,000 men:

The great body of troops at Rome were the Praetorian Guards, amounting in this period to 10,000 men. These favored forces were recruited from Italy; their pay was higher, and their time of service shorter; and, for the most part, they were not called out on foreign service. Under Augustus there were nine cohorts. Under Tiberius they were raised to ten. The number was not increased again till after Paul’s time.⁶

B. The Roman Warriors Panoply:

1. The armor and weapons of the Roman soldier are referred to in Latin as *armatura*; the Greek equivalent is *πανοπλία*, *panoplia*, the latter is the noun used in Paul’s phrase in Ephesians 6:13, “the full armor of God.”

⁶ W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (1870; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 604.

2. The Roman soldier's *armatura* consisted of quite a number of items, but Paul selected six of them to illustrate the biblical doctrines that protect the believer's soul and enable him to fight the good fight as a good soldier for Christ in the Invisible War.
3. The first mentioned by Paul is the *balteus* (*cingulum militare*)⁷ to which was attached a sheath and a short dagger (*pugio*). This belt was worn around the waist with a strap that went over the shoulder. The device was fastened to the breastplate. Suspended from the belt were the scabbard for the sword and loops for ropes and rations, all easily accessible.
4. Thick strips of leather hung down from the belt to circle and protect the soldier's lower body. On these strips were placed ribbons and medals that proclaimed heroics in battle. In addition, items of golden and silver booty were attached.
5. The *balteus* was the basic item first donned by the Roman soldier and from it the rest of the panoply then followed. Paul refers to it as the "belt of truth" (NET) and it therefore refers to the doctrines of the Word of God stored in the soul.
6. The second item to be put on is the *lorica segmentata*:⁸ the breastplate; also called cuirass and corselet. There are differences. The *lorica* was constructed of leather and overlaid with metal strips while the cuirass covered both chest and back.
7. It was constructed to fit the muscular definition of the wearer and was attached in the front with studs and slots. There were hinges in the back to allow for flexibility of movement.
8. Paul refers to this piece of armament as "righteousness." He does not mean imputed righteousness here but rather the experiential righteousness of the believer whose integrity is imperative to successful combat in the Invisible War.
9. The Roman cuirass was made of metal; the enlisted man's was made of iron or bronze and the commissioned officer's was plated with silver and gold whose rank and decorations were inscribed into the metal.
10. In *Aeneid* \i-nē'id\, Virgil refers to the breastplate as *stadios* which means "to stand upright." The breastplate could stand by itself and was often used a campstool by the soldier. The believer to be effective in the angelic conflict must become spiritually self-sustaining.

⁷ See PowerPoint visual: "Roman Belt."

⁸ See PowerPoint visual: "Roman Breastplate."