

“MORE THAN TWELVE LEGIONS OF ANGELS”

Bryan Matthew Dockens

As Jesus was being arrested, Peter, eager to defend the Lord, but failing to comprehend the necessity of His crucifixion, drew the sword and severed the ear of the high priest's servant Malchus. Christ ordered His apostle to sheathe his weapon and asked, *“Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?”* (Matthew 26:53).

Without any background knowledge whatsoever, it is simple to see the Master had at His disposal fighting forces far greater than a fisherman's blade. Still, it's worth exploring the depth of what Jesus communicated. One beloved hymn poetically declares, “He could have called ten thousand angels,” but that is a tremendous understatement. A legion is defined as “a regiment of the Roman army, the number of men composing which differed at different times. It originally consisted of three thousand men, but in the time of Christ consisted of six thousand, exclusive of horsemen, who were in number a tenth of the foot-men” (Easton's Bible Dictionary). Six thousand infantry plus six hundred cavalry amounts to 6,600 warriors. Ten thousand angels, as the song puts it, is barely one and a half legions. Twelve legions would have been 79,200 angels. While that is an impressive figure, recall that Jesus said He could readily summon *“more than twelve legions.”* He certainly did not need twelve apostles wielding the sword when He had more than twelve legions of angels standing by.

Angels were often employed as God's executioners in the Old Testament and one instance well illustrates how lethal they could be. *“The angel of Jehovah went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses — all dead”* (2nd Kings 19:35). If one angel could dispatch 185,000 Assyrian troops overnight, then 79,200 angels could easily defeat 14,652,000,000 enemies of the Lord; that's 14.6 billion with a “B,” which is nearly twice the current global population.

If Jesus was at all inclined to resist arrest, much less trial, sentencing, or execution, He had the means to do so. Instead, He went willingly to the cross, fulfilling a plan set forth in eternity past to redeem sinners to God.

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Paul criticized the church in Corinth, admonishing them, *“I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal”* (1st Corinthians 3:1-3). There is a difference between milk and meat, spiritually speaking. Milk is for infants and solid food is for those who have grown at least somewhat.

The strange thing is that so many Christians think they know the difference between milk and meat, but they don't. They'll compliment a sermon, “That was a good one, preacher. Had a lot of meat in it.” They mean well, yet the content was extremely basic stuff.

See, when the apostle told the Corinthians about milk and meat, he told them they still weren't able to receive solid food. That means nothing said in that epistle was anything but milk! When he wrote about the church disciplining the fornicator (5:1-13), that was milk. When he taught them not to go to law against one another (6:1-11), that was milk, too. When he taught them about sexual purity and marital fidelity (6:12-7:40), still baby food. When he explained they needed to refrain from idolatry, but not to assume that eating food someone else offered to an idol was necessarily idolatry, but to respect the consciences of those who could not bear eating such food (8:1-10:33), he had not left the kids' menu. Head coverings are milk (11:1-16) and so is the Lord's Supper (11:17-34). Spiritual gifts belong in that category (12:1-14:40), too. The resurrection (15:1-58) is not meaty. Nor is the collection (16:1-4). The book of First Corinthians is a book written to and for immature Christians. It is all important, but important in the way that milk is to a nursing child. These things should be fed on early and often, but just as children need to grow up and eat solid food, Christians need to understand these subjects well and move on to more mature themes in the gospel.

Like Paul, another inspired writer chastised his audience, saying, *“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of*

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"WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

"THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER"

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

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**Seekers Welcome.
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repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Hebrews 5:12-6:2). This writer made the same milk/meat comparison Paul did, but also specified in context what constitutes *"the first principles of the oracles of God"* or *"the elementary principles of Christ."* That list includes: repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection, and judgment. Few, if any, of those themes would be regarded by modern Christians as baby food, but every one of them fits the category.

To find meat in the New Testament, a reader should seek out letters written to Christians which generally lack correction. The epistle to the Philippians is an outstanding example. Those brethren were spiritual grown-ups, needing very little in the way of reproof, and so the apostle was able to call them *"mature"* (Philippians 3:15) and emphasize to them the joy of the Lord (3:1; 4:4). Yes, joy is an experience of mature Christians who have figured out the elementary principles. That makes it meat and thus suitable for novices only in small portions.

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

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THAT TIME HUNTER FED US TOFU BURGERS

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Several months ago, we were hosting friends from out of town for dinner. Since we didn't have any beef in the freezer, I sent Hunter to town to buy some. Although he is in the habit of cooking beef day and night at the steakhouse, he is not the one usually fetching it from the store. As I took the patties out of the package and threw the box away, it occurred to me these looked different, but I didn't want to criticize. As they finished heating up on the grill faster than normal, something seemed strange. When we bit into them, we all knew. This beef had something else going on. Since I had immediately discarded the box, it was necessary to scan the receipt on the Walmart app to figure out exactly what product had been purchased. Sure enough, it was a little bit of beef mixed with a lotta bit of tofu. Our guests were gracious enough to gulp down the soy sandwiches and we are still thankful whenever our sons run 30-mile round-trip errands for us, but we're counting on Hunter to get meat made of animals in the future.

This young man of ours cooks at a steakhouse and has been doing so a couple years now. He grew up in 4H clubs and has raised swine and poultry for our own consumption. He is not ignorant about meat; he just grabbed the wrong product.

Sometimes, Christians get mixed up about meat in the spiritual sense, even though they ought to know better.

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