



“Really, you don’t need to worry about it. You’ll be doing this for real in November.” Both soldiers had some trouble understanding what I meant, so I said plainly, “We are going to war. By November, we’ll be in Saudi Arabia, and perhaps in combat with Iraq.”

Then came the awkward moment. Neither of them had any clue until that instant that the alert was not simply another training exercise, but a genuine call to action. Apparently, they had not kept up with the events in the Middle East, nor connected those events with our unit’s area of interest. Thus, they were taken by surprise when the very contingency for which we had trained came upon us.

To their credit, these soldiers, and others who were caught by surprise, quickly recovered and jumped into the work of deployment. That was an agonizing three weeks of receiving new equipment and personnel, updating our medical records and legal documents, preparing our vehicles and equipment for a long sea voyage, and putting 20,000 soldiers on military and civilian charter flights to Saudi Arabia. Somewhere in all of that, we said goodbye to our families – again, and again, and again. Given the uncertainties of transportation schedules, we could not know from one day to the next if any particular day would be the long-awaited departure. All we could do was be ready and wait until called to the airfield. But by then we were ready, and when the call came, we went.

This event in my life is what comes to mind when I read the words of Messiah Yeshua:

Therefore stay alert; for you do not know what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what time the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and not let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Matthew 24:42-44 TLV

When you have lived through something like going to war, these words take on greater meaning and urgency. But how exactly are we to “be ready”? There is a clue in Yeshua’s instructions just before His betrayal:

Keep watching and praying, so that you won’t enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Matthew 26:41 TLV

So we watch and pray, but what do we watch for? How do we pray? Moses can help us here. In his last speech to the people of Israel, he said,

Only be watchful and watch over your soul closely, so you do not forget the things your eyes have seen and they slip from your heart all the days of your life. You are to make them known to your children and your children’s children. The day that you stood before *ADONAI* your God in Horeb, *ADONAI* said to me, “Gather the people to Me and I will make them hear My words, so that they learn to fear Me all the days that they live on the earth, and so that they teach their children.”

Deuteronomy 4:9-10 TLV

My soldier’s ears hear familiar admonitions in these words: Remember your training! You train as you fight, and you fight as you train! That is why instruction and repetitious drills are so important. Soldiers perform as they are conditioned by their training.

And so it is with soldiers in service to the King of Heaven. That's what Paul calls us – soldiers of Messiah Yeshua. Our training manual is the Bible, starting with Moses and continuing through Revelation. These are the basic instructions for life – instructions that we ignore to our own peril.

It is not enough simply to know the Bible. How do we apply it? How do we use it as a guide to help us be vigilant, ready to move when our King gives the alert? For that matter, how do we even recognize an alert when He gives it?

This is where experience and counsel come in. We watch, meaning we look at daily circumstances in the world, in our nation, in our community, our church, our family, to see what is developing that may require our attention in prayer or action. Watching, when informed by the Word of God, helps us recognize cues that the Spirit of God explains as we learn to listen to Him.

Wise counsel is part of the Spirit's communication. Good soldiers learn to rely on one another. In that long summer of 1990, my friends and colleagues and I conferred daily to share what we had learned and speculate on what was coming next, and how it might involve us. So it is with good soldiers in the Lord's army, just as Proverbs says:

Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Proverbs 15:22 TLV

We study prophecy – the signs of the times – and we watch events in the world to see where there may be indicators of movement in God's plan of redemption. We consult with others to compare notes, pray, and make such plans as may be necessary.

This is how we navigate perilous, uncertain times. We cannot know the day or hour of our Lord's return, but perhaps we can recognize the season. One thing is certain, however: we must learn to work together if we are to endure to the end, holding firmly what the Lord has entrusted to us.