

The nation of Israel had entered the Promised Land when God miraculously dried up the Jordan River at flood stage. Then God asked them to take a great step of faith by circumcising all the men leaving them vulnerable before their enemies. That was necessary for them to celebrate the Passover, just as it is necessary for us to be born-again pictured in baptism for us to celebrate Christ our Passover in communion (1 Corinthians 5:7ⁱ). The nation had consecrated themselves to live according to God's instructions. They were ready to begin the conquest of the land, but they needed God's directions. God had promised to drive out the enemies. How would He do that?

Joshua must have gone out of the camp at Gilgal, perhaps to pray and seek God's guidance. I wonder if he was looking for vulnerabilities in the walls of Jericho. Had he learned the lesson that it is God who gives the victory? When are we expected to try to figure things out and make plans while hoping for inspiration, and when are we to wait until God gives miraculous direction? I think all believers struggle with this. Do we go with what we already have been shown, or do we wait for specific instructions? It seems to me life is mixed with these two ways. We rarely know just what God is doing, but we should always be obeying the truth we know while we wait for His specific guidance. That is the life of faith.

What lay before Joshua was definitely one of those times when he needed divine intervention. Before the conquest of the land began, Joshua needed the reassurance that he was under the authority of the God of Abraham. The Lord had parted the Jordan River, but now they were facing forces that caused their fathers to retreat in fear (Numbers 13:32ⁱⁱ). Once their fathers heard of the consequences of their lack of faith in God, they decided to go ahead and attack, but God was not with them and they were defeated (Numbers 14:44,45ⁱⁱⁱ). Now Joshua is facing those armies. He needed to be reassured that God was with Him and would direct him. What was God's plan for the battle?

¹³ When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" ¹⁴ And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

Joshua 5:13-14 Joshua must have had his head bowed in prayer, for when he looked up he suddenly saw he was face to face with a man with a drawn sword. He asked whose side the man was on. That is the natural question to ask. Perhaps it was someone from another tribe wanting to be an ally. Two verses later the warrior will be called YHWH, the eternal covenant God of Israel.^{iv} Joshua had to sense this "man" was a supernatural being. The answer is very strange. No! Some translations take the little negative Hebrew word to mean "neither". That is fascinating. Once we realize He is the pre-incarnate Christ, why wouldn't He say, "I'm on your side"? That is because He is for everyone. He is not willing that any should eternally perish (2 Peter 3:9^v). All of Jericho, except for Rahab and her family, are on the other side. God does not take sides. He is on His own side, the side of righteousness, truth, justice, but also mercy and love.

The being declared, *"I am the commander of the army of the Lord."* That is the same as saying that He is YHWH Saba, the LORD of hosts, the God of angel armies, which is one of God's names (1 Samuel 1:3^{vi}). That is why Joshua responded by falling

on his face and worshipping Him. Some people refer to this as a Theophany and others as a Christophany. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15^{vii}) and so I prefer to call it a Christophany, an appearance of Jesus before the incarnation. Angels will not allow men to bow before them in submission, for that is a form of worship (Revelation 22:9^{viii}). It is unthinkable that an angel of God would allow himself to be referred to as YHWH! This is one of the clearest appearances of Jesus in the Old Testament. Yehoshua/Joshua is standing before the God/man he is foreshadowing whose name in Aramaic will be the same as his, Yeshua.

A later prophet named Elisha was surrounded by the Syrian army. His servant was so frightened that Elisha prayed that the eyes of his servant would be opened to see that there were more with them than there were with their enemies. He could see the hills surrounding them covered with chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:17^{ix}). That is the army this Commander leads. And if these are His forces, what earthly enemy can stand against Him? Joshua was being reminded that it is not up to his army to take Jericho, but the Lord of heaven and earth. The battle belongs to the Lord (Proverbs 21:31^x).

If Joshua had any remaining doubts after seeing the Jordan dry and hearing of the fear the inhabitants of the land had, now he should be completely assured that God is with him as He was with Moses. He is meeting face to face with Him as Moses did (Exodus 33:11^{xi}), for Jesus would later say that if you have seen me you have seen the Father (John 14:9^{xii}).

Joshua was facing a task that seemed impossible but knowing that God was directing him would make all the difference. I don't know what you are facing: illness, uncertainty about tomorrow, doubts, fears, betrayals, heartache, or temptations, and what we all face, the world, our flesh, and the devil. We need the same reassurance that Joshua needed. Are we with the Commander of the Lord's armies? Are we letting Him lead?

Joshua shows his heart in his response to Jesus' declaration about Himself. *"What does my lord say to his servant?"* In other words, "I am waiting for your command." That should always be our question when we sense the Lord is present, when our heart is made aware that it is time for Him to speak to us. When we face the insurmountable issue that lies before us, this should be our question. It is what the high priest Eli told little Samuel to respond to the Lord when he heard his name called: *"Speak Lord, your servant is listening"* (1 Samuel 3:9^{xiii}). We acknowledge His lordship over our lives and our place as His servant and our duty to hear and obey. We look to His Word and see what He has already commanded us. We go to prayer and ask Him to impress on our hearts the specifics of how we should go about obeying.

¹⁵ And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. Joshua 5:15 Joshua probably heard Moses' account of the burning bush a hundred times (Exodus 3:5^{xiv}). Now the very words God spoke to Moses are spoken to him.

Jesus' presence makes any ordinary place holy! That is why the Bible calls us saints. His presence is in us (John 14:23^{xv}). Sometimes when we worship together, I become so aware of His presence that I take off my shoes and drop to my knees. It happens in times of prayer as well. He is always with us, for He has promised to never leave us or forsake us, but there are times when our focus shifts from the physical world around us and we are overwhelmed by the sense of His glorious presence. We need those

moments like Joshua needed this encounter. But we can't stay there, or we would be of little earthly good. Those moments prepare us for the battles we face.

The presence of the Lord is overwhelming love, but it is also instructional. Like Joshua, we look at our problems that seem like a dark shroud over us, and suddenly the light bursts through. In prayer or the reading of God's Word, the answer suddenly becomes clear. God has spoken and given us His direction. We no longer ask if He is on our side. We declare that we are on His side. It is a matter of who is in charge. This truth gives us a whole new perspective on the problems we face. They are no longer our problems but His. The burden comes off our shoulders, and we realize all we must do is follow His lead.

The commander of the army of the LORD told Joshua the same thing the voice from the burning bush told Moses. The ground is holy because the Most Holy is standing on it, and what He touches becomes holy. God asked Moses and Joshua to take off their sandals for the same reason Jesus washed the feet of the disciples' feet (John 13). Our feet are what constantly come in contact with this world. The dirt that clings to our shoes represents the contamination of this fallen world. Putting our shoes aside represents us putting aside worldly distractions and uncleanness. Where Jesus manifests His presence is holy and holiness will not abide that which is unholy (Habakkuk 1:13a^{xvi}).

Jewish commentators have long recognized that a being appears periodically in the Old Testament who completely represents God. They refer to Him as the Prince of the Countenances.^{xvii} In other words, the faces of God. Well, think for a moment what the title means. A prince is the son of the king. There you have it. Jesus is the Son of God and perfectly represents the Father, so Jesus could say, "*I and my Father are one*" (John 10:30^{xviii}).

Here is the path to victory over the conflicts we face. We don't need to develop good plans. We need to be obedient to our Commander. That only comes when we fall on our faces before Him in full submission and reverence to do His will, hear His voice, and get up and obey. When we realize the battle is not ours but the LORD's, then we can go forward in obedience with assurance that the outcome belongs to the LORD (2 Chronicles 20:15^{xix}).

¹ *Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.* Joshua 6:1 Shut up inside and outside reminds me of the stay in home orders during the Corona virus. Since the fear of the God of Israel had come upon Jericho, they did not venture out to battle. Nor would they let anyone go out lest they be captured and made to give information about the city. The leaders of Jericho were hoping the Israelites could not penetrate their walls.

² *And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor."* Joshua 6:2 The angel is speaking but the text says YHWH said to Joshua... The LORD told Joshua He had given Jericho, its king, and its soldiers into the hand of Joshua. That is past tense. It is already done. We need to realize the promises of God are as good as done, for God is outside of time and sees them already fulfilled (2 Corinthians 1:20^{xx}). When God tells us something, there is no reason to ever doubt it. We may not understand the process or timing, but we can be sure it will come to pass. This declaration to Joshua is like a rock on which he can stand. The rest of the instructions tell how he is to go about it seeing it come to pass.

In a larger sense, God has already told him that everywhere the sole of his feet tread will be given him (Deuteronomy 11:24^{xxi}). This first battle in the Promised Land is a pattern, not in the details of how to take a city, but that in each case he was to look to the LORD for the tactic and trust Him to bring it to pass. God's instructions are not so much about the soldiers' actions, but that the ark of the covenant goes with them. If God is with them who can be against them (Romans 8:31^{xxii})?

That pattern has never changed. The Great Commission tells us to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, teaching them what Christ has commanded us and baptizing them. It is preceded with the declaration that all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Jesus. It is followed by the declaration that He is with us always even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20^{xxiii}). This is the same pattern. Jesus has the authority. He has sent us out to take the land (which is our full surrender and pointing souls to Jesus). He goes with us and gives us the tactics, and by that I don't mean a method, but the leading of the Holy Spirit in each situation.

Some men follow this pattern and find great success and then write a book telling you of the tactics God gave them for their battle. Then we imitate that tactic but not the pattern of first getting our instruction from the LORD and counting on His presence. Instead, we count on the tactics in the situation described in the book and expect God to show up and do the same thing. Millions of man hours have been wasted in this way. It is easier to follow what someone has written than to wait on the LORD and get His instruction. Why? Because we must give Him control and that makes us feel out of control unless we believe His promises are an accomplished fact.

³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. ⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. Joshua 6:3,4a The LORD gave them His battle plan. All Israel's warriors were to march around the city once every day for six days. The ark of the covenant was carried by the priests preceded by seven priests with shofars who would be in the middle of the army.

When the ark was out of the temple it was always covered so that people could not look on it (Numbers 4:5^{xxiv}). It was surely covered when they went through the Jordan. If Jericho had spies, they would have wondered about the god who stayed covered and could do such wonders. They would see this mysterious thing going around their city and wonder what this super weapon could do.

Joshua was being asked to perform another act of faith. Marching around the city meant they would be vulnerable to arrows and rocks hurled from the city walls. God would have to restrain the enemy if Israel marched around the city day after day.

^{4b} On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him." Joshua 6:4b,5 On the seventh day they were to march around the walls seven times and then blow the trumpets and give a great battle shout. Then the walls would fall flat, and they were to march straight in. It reminds me of some of the wild things God told His people to do in the past such as building a giant boat when they had never seen rain (Genesis 6:13,14^{xxv}), or to throw a stick in the water to make an axe head float (2 Kings 6:6^{xxvi}). What kind of assault is this seven-day march? And why

seven times on the seventh day? Isn't that going to wear out the soldiers? Wouldn't it be better to take lessons on how to scale walls? Or perhaps they would be better off building battering rams?

God's ways are higher than man's ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:8,9^{xxvii}). He does the unexpected that is often contrary to what man would think so that He gets the glory. I think God delights in showing us that He is the One in charge and is watching over us and working through us despite our weaknesses. He delights in using the least likely, the simple and the weak (1 Corinthians 1:26-29^{xxviii}).

⁶ So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." ⁷ And he said to the people, "Go forward. March around the city and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the LORD." Joshua 6:6,7 So Joshua did exactly what Jesus told him to do. Did he tell anyone the plan? What did they think after each day's march? If it were not for the miraculous crossing of the Jordan, there might have been some rebellion over this seemingly ineffective plan. But it seems they all had faith that Joshua heard from the LORD to the same degree that Moses did.

We should certainly have faith that our Joshua, the Lord Jesus, spoke the words His Father gave Him. He is still the Commander of angel armies. In addition, He has given us spiritual weapons to fight alongside the heavenly army. They are not carnal weapons, but they are weapons mighty through God. They pull down arguments and everything that exalts itself against God. We take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4,5^{xxix}). He has given great authority to pray His will into the earth. When our prayers come from a heart surrendered to God's will, they cause the enemy to tremble. And with this army and these weapons and the presence of our invincible Commander, we cannot lose. What seems to be losses are only steps to greater victories.

And yet we look at low church attendance, loved ones addicted to drugs or alcohol, the decline in our own culture, the divorce rate and prevalence of abortion and we wonder what we can do. We make our plans, read of others' successes, have our prayer meetings and conferences. We do our best only to find we are losing ground. That is when we wonder away from the camp and look to the heavens and suddenly come face to face with the Commander.

It was right to challenge the unknown warrior, for John tells us to test the spirits (1 John 4:1^{xxx}). But Joshua's mistake was to assume this One was on his side or the enemy's side. **We must always realize that there is only God's side versus all that is opposed to His goodness.** Then He gives us a plan that we would never have thought of.

As we continue our journey through Joshua, we will be reminded that our Commander single handedly won the final battle on the cross (Colossians 2:13-15^{xxxi}). Who of us would have come up with God's plan to restore mankind to Himself through the cross? That is one reason we can know man didn't make up this gospel.

To get an idea of how great a warrior our Commander is, remember that He let men do their worst, allowed Satan and his demons to fight Him with His hands and feet nailed in place, and He still won. He walked out of the grave with the keys of death and hell. He is the greatest of all warriors. And if we want to learn to fight this spiritual battle, we look to how He fought it with the Word of God as His weapon. He didn't do anything on His own. He looked to see what the Father was doing. (John 5:19^{xxxii}). Learn from the

best! Listen to the Commander of heaven's armies, and do what He says (Luke 1:38^{xxxiii}; James 1:22^{xxxiv}).

Questions:

- 1 What was Joshua's question and the angel's answer?
- 2 Who does the angel declare Himself to be?
- 3 What is His first command to Joshua? Why?
- 4 What does this mean to Joshua?
- 5 Why does God say the battle is won?
- 6 What is the battle plan?
- 7 Would it be the same for future battles? Lesson?
- 8 What is our overall battle plan?
- 9 What are our weapons? 10 How do we fight our battles?

ⁱ **1 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

ⁱⁱ **Numbers 13:32 (ESV)**

³² So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Numbers 14:44-45 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed out of the camp.

⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them, even to Hormah.

^{iv} Joshua 6:2 – LORD all capitals is the English translation of YHWH. The man's words are YHWH speaking to Joshua.

^v **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

^{vi} **1 Samuel 1:3 (ESV)**

³ Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD.

^{vii} **Colossians 1:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

^{viii} **Revelation 22:9 (ESV)**

⁹ but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

^{ix} **2 Kings 6:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

^x **Proverbs 21:31 (ESV)**

³¹ The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

^{xi} **Exodus 33:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

^{xii} **John 14:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

^{xiii} **1 Samuel 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

^{xiv} **Exodus 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

^{xv} **John 14:23 (ESV)**

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

^{xvi} **Habakkuk 1:13a (ESV)**

¹³ You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong,

^{xvii} See Judges 13:6, 22

^{xviii} **John 10:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ I and the Father are one."

^{xix} **2 Chronicles 20:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And he said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's.

^{xx} **2 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

^{xxi} **1 Samuel 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

^{xxii} **Romans 8:31 (ESV)**

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

^{xxiii} **Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

^{xxiv} **Numbers 4:5 (ESV)**

⁵ When the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it.

^{xxv} **Genesis 6:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.

^{xxvi} **2 Kings 6:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Then the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick and threw it in there and made the iron float.

^{xxvii} **Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

^{xxviii} **Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

^{xxix} **2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (ESV)**

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

^{xxx} **1 John 4:1 (ESV)**

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

^{xxxi} **Colossians 2:13-15 (ESV)**

¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

^{xxxii} **John 5:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

^{xxxiii} **Luke 1:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

^{xxxiv} **James 1:22 (ESV)**

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.