

Joshua 5, Preparation for Battle

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Overview

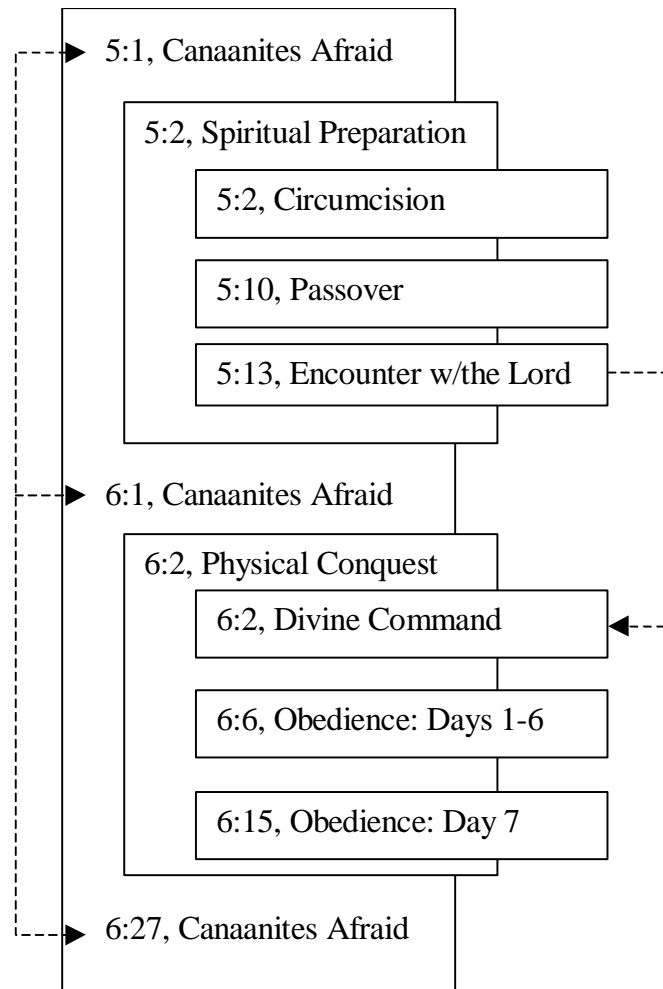
Overview of Joshua 5-6

Three short statements about the state of mind of the Canaanites (5:1; 6:1, 27) bracket two extended descriptions of the Israelite's actions.

- The first description (the bulk of ch. 5) is of three internal and spiritual events: circumcision, passover, and Joshua's encounter with the Captain of the Lord's Host.
- The second description (ch. 6) is outward and physical, their conquest of Jericho.
- These two are linked together because the Lord's angel, who appears at the end of the first section, gives the detailed instructions at the beginning of the second section.

Overview of Joshua 5

Big lesson: God prepares the enemy for defeat; we must prepare ourselves before him for victory. Three steps in the spiritual preparation of the people:



Event	Significance	NT Analog
Circumcision, 2-9	Position under the covenant	<i>Salvation</i>
Passover, 10-12	Practice in generalities	General biblical <i>disciplines</i> (church fellowship, personal devotional exercises, godly family and work life)
Encounter w/Capt. of the Lord's Host, 5:13-6:5	Submission in specifics	<i>Submission</i> : Approaching specific challenges in the spirit rather than in the flesh

5:1, The Enemy in Fear

The verse is deliberately parallel to 2:11. There the cause was the drying up of the Red Sea and the defeat of Sihon and Og. Here it is the parting of the Jordan. In the light of the Baal myth, we can understand why. For the first time they see in physical fact something that had only been part of their fairy tales.

Joshua 5, Preparation for Battle

The fear encompasses not only the Amorites on the west bank, but the Canaanites by the sea; the whole country.

Note how this fulfills the prophecy of Exod. 15:14-17, at the time of the Red Sea victory, that God would bring terror on the inhabitants of the promised land so that his people could enter in.

Application: We are often fearful in engaging in spiritual warfare, and need to remember that the Lord is able to intimidate our adversaries even more.

2-9, Circumcision

First requirement for victory: they must be members of God's covenant. Gen. 17:9-14. The most basic requirement for spiritual victory is being a believer.

2-3, Command Obeyed

God commands Joshua to restore the nation to the condition of being all circumcised, as they were when they first left Egypt, and this he obediently does. Such an operation would naturally render them unable to defend themselves for a time, and in fact Simeon and Levi took advantage of this to slay the inhabitants of Shechem (Gen. 34:25), but God here shields Israel by casting the Canaanites into deep fear.

4-7, Explanation of the Need for Circumcision

These verses distinguish those who came out of Egypt from those born in the wilderness. All of the former, and none of the latter, were circumcised.

By itself, this might be explained with reference to the rigors of travel. But note the insistence in v.6 on the failure at Kadesh Barnea and the judicial wandering for forty years. This carries us to Num. 14:33, which suggests a deeper reason that the children were left uncircumcised: their children were to "bear [their] whoredoms," to suffer for their sin, cf. Exod. 20:5. The nation as a whole is under discipline, and the sign of the covenant is withheld from them until all of the evildoers have died.

Application: Recognize the impact that your spiritual condition has on your children. It is true that they must stand before God individually and independently. It is also true that you have tremendous impact on them, and your godliness or lack thereof will be a major contributor to their later spiritual experience.

8-9, Sequel

The Lord declares that he has "rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off" them. This is probably a reference to the criticism ascribed to the Egyptians in Exod. 32:12 and elsewhere, that God brought them into the desert simply to slay them. By restoring them to their covenant status, he forever puts an end to this slander.

Once again, consider Gen. 17:7-8. The Abrahamic covenant is the basis of their possession of the land, so on the occasion of their entry it is particularly important that they conform to the covenantal requirements.

Application

We hear concern on all sides about the moral decay in our society. The forces of evil are evident all around, and many who do not know the Lord Jesus personally are nevertheless alarmed and eager to do battle for conservative causes. But the real conflict is spiritual, and political means will never be victorious. The only ones who can triumph in this environment are those who are bound to the Lord in covenant through his salvation.

Circumcision is a matter of *position*. It is done to a child without his consent, and marks him as a member of the covenant nation, but says nothing about his later *practice*. Victory in warfare depends on that practice as well as on position. The next two steps in Israel's preparation reflect two aspects of practical obedience to the Lord: first in our general spiritual exercises, then in the specifics of a given battle.

10-12, Passover

Exod. 12:14-20 makes observation of the Passover and the associated feast of unleavened bread obligatory on the nation. Passover comes up each year, regardless of whether the nation is about to attack Jericho or living at peace under King David. It is a regular discipline in the life of God's people, to stir them to thankfulness for his past blessings. So we must be faithful to basic spiritual disciplines if we are to enjoy victory in spiritual battles.

5:10 records the celebration of the Passover.

5:11-12 show how they observed the associated Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was closely associated with their presence in the land (Lev. 23:4-14).

- Calendar: Passover is 14 Nisan, the Sabbath after the Passover is 15 Nisan, the offering of the wave sheaf is 16 Nisan.
- The earliest they can eat of the current crop is thus 16 Nisan, yet we are told that they ate of the "old corn" on the morrow after the Passover, that is, on 15 Nisan.
- The term "old corn" appears only here, but the word literally means "past," and so the translation is apt. They (or the spies before them) had discovered some granaries belonging to the inhabitants, and so were able to eat of the previous year's provision. 5:12 uses a different word to refer to the new produce that they ate through the following year, after having waved it on 16 Nisan.

Application: What corresponds to these items of obedience in our lives? General disciplines, independent of any specific spiritual battle, such as

- regular participation in the public meetings of God's people, for "doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer," Acts 2:42
- diligence in personal devotional life
- faithfulness to biblical principles of family life and work responsibility.

These are the foundation for spiritual warfare, without which we can never expect victory. But they are not enough, as the next section shows.

13-15, Encounter with the Captain of the Lord's Host

Spiritual victory requires not only salvation and faithfulness in basic spiritual disciplines, but also attentiveness and submission to the Lord's leading in a specific conflict. In Joshua's case, this step takes the form of recognizing that Israel's army must be under the Lord's command, not just his.

Two study techniques illustrated here:

- Word study to open up the title of Joshua's nocturnal visitor, "captain of the host of the Lord."
- Structural comparison with Moses at the burning bush, an incident that the Lord is paralleling to emphasize the authority of Joshua.

Word Study: "Captain of the Host of the Lord"

Technique: start with basic expressions, then build them up. The fundamental principle throughout is determining usage. Usage, not etymology, is the most reliable guide to meaning. The best tool for finding out the meaning of a word is a concordance (or Bible search program), not a dictionary.

"Host"

Literally, "army."

First reference (Gen. 2:1) is to the heavenly bodies.

- "The host of heaven" (always singular) is frequently used to refer to them, usually as potential objects of illicit worship (Deut. 4:19).
- "Host of heaven" can also refer to the angels, 1 Kings 22:19. This is a later usage, first attested here in the reign of Ahab, 900 BC, five hundred years after Joshua. Is there a connection between angels and the heavenly bodies? Cf. Luke 2:13, "heavenly host." NB: Recognize the late appearance of this term. Lesson: sometimes words and expressions change their meaning over time, so we need to date the occurrences we find and let that guide our interpretation.

"Host of Israel"

- "Host" by itself to refer to the Israelites is often plural in its early uses, to emphasize the different tribes. Note in Numbers 2 that each of the four camps on the sides of the Tabernacle has its "hosts," consisting of the "host" of each of three tribes (e.g., 2:3,4). Num. 31:48 (war against Midian) may be the first singular usage referring to the nation, although some earlier instances translated "war" may actually refer to the host.
- This particular expression occurs from Judges 7:15 (Gideon) on, and is always singular, except in only 1 Kings 2:5, which refers to two armies, Saul's and David's. Reflects the growing sense of nationhood.

"Captain of the Host"

Now we move from a single word to an expression. NB: words often have special meanings in given syntactic contexts, so need to study these.

Plural: subordinate officers with lesser commands

Dt 20:9; 1 Kings 1:25, several anticipated for Israel; cf. 1 Chr. 12:21, *sarim bacaba*'. 1 Chr 27:3, 5, one for each month in the courses of the army (but v.34, Joab over them all)

1 Chr 25:1, associated with the priestly ranks as well as the military ones

2 Chr 33:11, many associated with King of Assyria

Singular: the commanding general of the Army

It is worth noting that the “host” is almost always associated with the king, not with a country. It is the host of Abimilech, not the host of Philistia; David’s host, not the host of Judah (but 1 Kings 2:5, where the desire is to emphasize the unity of Israel and Judah).

Gen. 21:22, 32; 26:36, Phicol, of Abimilech’s host

Judg 4:2,7; 1 Sam. 12:9, Sisera, of Jabin’s host

1 Sam 14:50; 17:55; 26:5; 2 Sam 2:8; 1 Kings 2:5, Abner, of Saul’s host

2 Sam 10:16, 18; 1 Chr 19:16, 18, Shobach, of Hadarezer’s host

2 Sam 19:13; 1 Kings 1:19; 11:15, 21; 1 Chr 27:34, Joab, of David’s host

2 Sam 19:13; 1 Kings 2:5, Amasa, of David’s host

1 Kings 16:16, Omri, of Elah’s host

2 Kings 5:1, Naaman, of king of Syria’s host

Dan 8:11, the one against whom the Little Horn exalts himself. This reference is closest to Josh 5, referring to the Lord himself.

Prestige

Associated with king, 1 Kings 11:21; 2 Kings 4:13

In line for the throne, Omri, 1 Kings 16:16

“Host of the Lord”

The plural already appears in Exod 12:41 to refer to Israel at the time of the Exodus. Cf. Exod 7:4, where “my hosts” is in apposition with “my people the children of Israel” (note that “and” is italicized). The singular, “host of the Lord,” is only here. (1 Chr 9:19 is lit. “camp of the Lord,” *maxaneh*). Keil cites Ps 148:2 (plural) and 103:21 (plural), to show that angels must be meant, but these are later (103 is Davidic). Meaning:

- Refers to Israel, as in Exod 12:41. Too early for a reference to angelic hosts.
- Singular because of the growing unity of the nation, most recently emphasized in the crossing of Jordan with RGM/2.
- Whose host is it? Not Joshua’s, as important as he may be. It is the Lord’s army, to do his will.

Joshua 5, Preparation for Battle

- Cf. the later expression, “Lord of Hosts.” First in 1 Sam. 1:3, then throughout the prophets; notably, never in Pentateuch, Josh, Judges, Ruth. He is a king, and has his armies. Why the plural?
 - The plural may reflect his dominion over two great armies: the host of heaven (angels) and the host of Israel. (And maybe also the hosts of the heathen nations, who are ultimately under his control.) Cf. Dan. 5:35, though “army” there is Aramaic *xayil*, perhaps because *cb*’ is not available.
 - 1 Sam. 17:45 “the Lord of hosts, the God of the ranks of Israel,” would thus be a refinement, not a synonym. On the other hand, this usage is before the use of “host of heaven” to describe the angels, so may be synonymous.

“Captain of the Host of the Lord”

One would have thought that Joshua would hold this title, but the newcomer makes it clear that it belongs to him. The question is not whose side he is on, but whether Joshua is for or against him. Note the emphasis in v.14, Heb: “For I [emphatic], the captain of the Lord’s host, am now come.” Who is this individual?

- He continues addressing Joshua in 6:2, where he is called simply, “The Lord.”
- This is a common pattern associated elsewhere in the OT with the Angel of the Lord:

Event	ID as Angel	ID as Lord
Hagar with child in the wilderness	Gen 16:7	:13
Offering of Isaac	Gen 22:11	:12 (“me”)
Moses at Burning Bush	Exod 3:2	:4
Balaam on his ass	Num 22:22ff	:35 (“I”)
Rebuke at Bochim	Judg 2:1	:1 (“I”)
Call of Gideon	Judg 6:11	:16
Annunciation of Samson’s Birth	Judg 13:21	:22

- Micah 5:2 declares that the ruler who is to come forth out of Bethlehem is one “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” These appearances in the OT are thus best understood as appearances of the pre-incarnate Son of God.

Application

1. We are God’s host. Today there is much fascination with angels, and they are indeed one of God’s armies, but we are the other one, and need to recognize our role in the battle. The motto “Let go and let God” may be cute, but it is inaccurate if it leads us to passivity in the work of the Lord.
2. He is our general. Human leaders are only lieutenants. Under the Old Covenant, without the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they were necessary, but today the mature believer can hear the general’s instructions directly and personally, and should obey them faithfully.

Comparison with Burning Bush

Bible study principle: comparing two similar passages helps bring out the salient points of each of them.

Joshua 5, Preparation for Battle

Exodus 3:1-6	Josh 5:13-15
<i>Setting: We are engaged in doing the work God has for us to do, not sitting around on our hands.</i>	
3:1 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, [even] to Horeb.	13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho,
<i>God presents himself in some way that gets our attention</i>	
2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush [was] not consumed.	that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand:
<i>We are curious enough to investigate; not frozen in the status quo</i>	
3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.	and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, [Art] thou for us, or for our adversaries?
<i>The Lord reveals himself to us.</i>	
4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses.	14 And he said, Nay; but [as] captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.
<i>We place ourselves at his disposal.</i>	
And he said, Here [am] I.	And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?
<i>He demands that we submit to his holiness.</i>	
5 And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest [is] holy ground. 6 Moreover he said, I [am] the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.	15 And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest [is] holy.
<i>We obey.</i>	
And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.	And Joshua did so.
<i>Subsequent instruction for the work at hand</i>	
3:7-4:17 [Detailed instructions for delivering Israel]	6:2-5 [Detailed instructions for conquering Jericho]

Application: While we are engaged in the work that God has given us to do, we must be attentive for his direction and instruction, and not assume that we have received the entire game plan. In both cases God attracted the attention of his servant; in both cases, they needed to turn aside and take a closer look in order to receive the Lord's instruction.