

Joshua 5:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?

Analysis

This encounter reveals a theophany—an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ as "commander of the army of the LORD" (verse 14). The mysterious figure holds a drawn sword, symbolizing readiness for divine judgment and conquest. Joshua's question—"Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"—reveals human tendency to enlist God for our purposes rather than aligning ourselves with His. The commander's response (verse 14) is profound: "Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come." God doesn't take sides in human conflicts; rather, He pursues His own purposes, and humans must choose to align with Him. The drawn sword indicates God comes as warrior to execute judgment on Canaanite wickedness and fulfill covenant promises to Abraham. Joshua's immediate response—falling on his face in worship and asking "What saith my lord unto his servant?"—demonstrates proper recognition of divine authority and submission to God's leadership. The command to remove sandals (verse 15) echoes Moses' experience at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5), identifying this as holy ground where God's presence manifests. This encounter reorients Joshua from military commander to God's servant executing divine strategy. The conquest succeeds not through human military brilliance but through obedience to the divine Commander who fights for Israel.

Historical Context

This encounter occurred as Joshua surveyed Jericho, assessing the city's formidable defenses before the assault. Jericho's walls were massive—archaeological excavations reveal walls up to 30 feet high and 10-15 feet thick, with towers providing strategic defense. The city controlled the Jordan River crossing and access to Canaan's interior, making it the strategic key to conquest. Joshua needed divine guidance for attacking such a fortress. The appearance of the divine warrior assured Joshua that supernatural power would achieve victory beyond human tactics. Ancient Near Eastern warfare involved invoking deity's aid, but Israel's experience was unique—their God personally appeared to lead battle. The title "commander of the army of the LORD" (sar-tseva Yahweh, שַׂר־צֶבָא יְהוָה) designates supreme military authority. The term tseva (צֶבָא, "host") can refer to earthly armies or heavenly hosts (angels), suggesting this commander leads both realms. This christophany parallels other Old Testament appearances where the Angel of the LORD speaks as God Himself (Genesis 16:7-13, 22:11-18, Exodus 3:2-6). The encounter established that the conquest was Yahweh's holy war—divine judgment on Canaanite wickedness rather than Israelite imperialism. God fought for Israel when they obeyed His commands, but fought against them when they sinned (Joshua 7).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life are you trying to enlist God's support for your plans rather than submitting to His purposes and aligning with His will?
2. How does recognizing Christ as the Commander of the LORD's army change your perspective on spiritual battles and the challenges you face?
3. What does Joshua's immediate worship and submission teach about the proper response when encountering God's holiness and authority?

Exodus 23:23 (Parallel theme): For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off.

Daniel 10:5 (Parallel theme): Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz:

Acts 1:10 (Parallel theme): And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

1 Chronicles 21:27 (Word): And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

Zechariah 1:8 (Parallel theme): I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white.

Judges 13:11 (Parallel theme): And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am.