

Joshua 5:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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. And Joshua did so.

Analysis

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. And Joshua did so.

The command to remove shoes parallels Moses' burning bush encounter (Exodus 3:5), establishing explicit connection between the two great leaders and their divine commissions. The Hebrew *shal-naalcha me'al raglecha* (שַׁל-נַעֲלֶךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶךָ, "loose thy shoe from off thy foot") uses identical language to God's command to Moses, confirming this figure's divine identity—only God sanctifies places by His presence.

The phrase "the place whereon thou standest is holy" (*hamakom asher-atah omed alav qodesh hu*, הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו קֹדֶשׁ הוּא) indicates that divine presence makes ordinary ground holy. Holiness is not inherent in the location but derived from God's manifest presence. This teaches that spaces become sacred through divine inhabitation, not magical properties or human ritual. The ground near Jericho was ordinary dirt until God appeared there.

Joshua's immediate obedience ("And Joshua did so") without question or hesitation demonstrates appropriate response to divine authority. The shoe removal signifies multiple things: reverence (approaching holy ground), submission (removing protection before God), and humility (becoming vulnerable in divine presence). Theologically, this encounter consecrates Joshua's leadership and the coming

conquest—God personally commissions and will personally command the campaign. From a Reformed perspective, this demonstrates that all Christian ministry must begin with personal encounter with God's holiness and submission to His authority.

Historical Context

The parallel with Moses' commission establishes Joshua as Moses' legitimate successor. Both received divine commissioning at crucial transition points—Moses at the burning bush before delivering Israel from Egypt, Joshua before leading Israel to conquer Canaan. Both were commanded to remove shoes in acknowledgment of holy ground. This literary parallel assured Israel that Joshua possessed the same divine authority Moses had.

Ancient Near Eastern practice involved removing shoes when entering holy spaces or approaching superior authorities. Egyptian and Mesopotamian art depicts worshipers and servants barefoot before gods and kings. Israel's practice had deeper theological meaning—recognizing that sinful humanity must approach God's holiness with reverence and acknowledgment of unworthiness. Shoes representing human strength and independence must be removed before divine majesty.

The location—near Jericho, Israel's first conquest target—sanctifies the coming military campaign. This was not mere human warfare but holy war, divinely commanded and executed. The divine warrior's appearance with drawn sword signaled that Yahweh Himself would fight for Israel. This encounter transformed conquest from political/military venture into participation in divine judgment on Canaanite wickedness. Israel served as God's instrument, executing His righteous judgments (Deuteronomy 9:4-5).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the command to remove shoes—acknowledging holy ground—challenge casual or presumptuous approaches to God in worship?
2. What parallels exist between Joshua's commissioning and your own calling to Christian service or leadership?
3. How should recognition that God's presence sanctifies places and activities shape your approach to ordinary work and life?
4. In what ways do you need to metaphorically 'remove shoes'—laying aside self-sufficiency and personal agendas—before serving God?
5. How does this Christophany before Joshua's first battle encourage you to seek divine presence and commissioning before significant spiritual endeavors?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	שָׁר	צָבָא	יְהוָה	אֵל	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	שֶׁל
said	And the captain	host	of the LORD'S	H413	And Joshua	Loose
H559	H8269	H6635	H3068		H3091	H5394
נָעֻלָּךְ	מֵעַל	בְּגָלְךָ	כִּי	הַמָּקוֹם	אֲשֶׁר	אֵת
thy shoe	H5921	from off thy foot	H3588	for the place	H834	H859
H5275		H7272		H4725		
עֲלֵי ד		קֹדֶשׁ	וְהָ	וַיַּעַשׂ	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	כֵּן
whereon thou standest	H5921	is holy	H1931	did	And Joshua	H3651
H5975		H6944		H6213	H3091	

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 3:5 (Holy): And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.