



AND the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho. 11 And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day. 12 And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year. 13 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? 14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? 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. And Joshua did so. (Josh 5:10-15)

I give it as my considered opinion that this appearance of the “Captain of the Lord’s Host” was none other than the pre-Incarnate Christ! I have heard men preach that this mysterious figure was an angel sent by God – perhaps even the Archangel Michael; however, let it be known no angel of the Lord would accept worship of man.

Consider the time of His appearance. Israel had just crossed over the Jordan Waters on dry ground. They were encamped at Gilgal beside Jericho which was occupied by the Amorites, and they had just had all their men of war circumcised. This was necessary because all the men of war who had made the Red Sea crossing had died in the Wilderness owing to their faithlessness. Those younger men born in the Wilderness were not yet circumcised; so, they were now circumcised into Israel prior to the major battle of Jericho which was impending.

Jericho was a heavily fortified city protected by massive stone walls. For an army to attack against a fortified enemy is almost always catastrophic; but not when the Field Commander is the Lord!

You can imagine the thoughts of Joshua as he surveyed the open ground separating Israel from those stone walls. He had faith in God. He believed that God, who had provided every need in the Wilderness desert, would give the Children of Israel the victory; but, still, human eyes must have viewed the enemy walls of Jericho as quite formidable.

As Joshua (which, by the way, is the Hebrew name for Jesus) walked about the perimeter of the prospective battlefield, he must have been trying to materialize his battle plan of attack against that fortress. But when God sends His people into a Holy Battle, He will provide, not only the plan, but the means, of victory.

Joshua hesitated at some point on the perimeter of Jericho, and his attention was attracted by a lone figure standing nearby with drawn sword, *“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.”* I need not describe the surprise and shock of finding a stranger nearby with drawn sword to any combat veteran reading this devotion – especially when near a presumed battlefield. The text tells us that Joshua went unto him. I do not believe that was a casual walking up to the stranger, but a cautious approach by Joshua. He may even have been a bit bowed-up in his approach. *“Friend or Foe?”* is the transmitted message to a suspected enemy in the arena of modern war, but Joshua framed his inquiry slightly different, *“Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?”* If one is positioned on a sensitive spot on a battlefield, it seems humanly logical to inquire if that subject is for us, or for our enemies.

But with God, it is never a condition in His Providence to be on one man, or another's, side. God has One side, and that is all. Our object should always be directed to being on the Lord's side instead of trying to vainly convince the Lord to be on OUR side. How did the Captain of the Host of the Lord respond?

“And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.” In other words, this Captain of the Host of the Lord responded with a negative – *“Nay; but as Captain of the Host of the Lord am I now come.”* I hope you detect the subtlety in this response. God is not on Joshua's side, or the Amorites; but God is always on the RIGHT side (which is His own side) regardless the mix of humanity on the Line of Battle.

How did Joshua respond to this declaration by the Stranger on the Field? How would you have responded?

He worshipped this Being as Divine. *“And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship,”* Men of God do not worship angels, but God only. In fact, whenever an angel has appeared to men who tried to worship them in Scripture, the angels have always forbade it. You may recall when an angel appeared unto John the Revelator and John fell down to worship him? *“These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.”* (Rev 22:6-9)

So this Stranger with sword drawn could not have been God the Father, for the Stranger made reference to His position as Captain of the Host of the Lord, meaning acting on behalf of the Lord of Host. You will note that Joshua only asked two questions

– the first of inquiry of identity; the second, once he recognized this to be the Lord, “What are your Counsels for me?” or “*What saith my lord unto his servant?*”

Then comes the next line of the text to seal the divinity of the Stranger! “*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.*” You will observe that Joshua had no doubt of the Holy Ground upon which he stood. Like Moses before the Burning Bush, Joshua removed his shoes.

What might we learn from this engagement of Joshua with the Captain of the Host of the Lord?

1. We learn that there is no invincible enemy before the Captain of the Host of the Lord. God is Almighty and All-Powerful!
2. We do not presume to have God take our side in battle.
3. When we are on the Lord’s side, He is the Captain and God of War whose victory is certain.
4. Do not presume to think that you stand alone before an enemy when that enemy is also an enemy of God and His people.
5. When in the presence of God (such as Holy Worship Services) we are to reverence the Lord. We are on Holy Ground.
6. We do not worship angels which are also creatures made by God, but God only. Our God is a God of Battles – He is not some wimpy, anything-goes kind of God. He means business, and all that He commands must be taken seriously by His people. Though the Lord is slow to anger, and may delay His intercessions in the affairs of men, there comes a time when His mighty acts are forthcoming to the dismay of the wicked: “***The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.***” Isaiah 42:13-16 (KJV) Though a Lord of Battles, He is also of great compassion to His own.

Yes, the Lord of Host is the God of all Battles. The word ‘Host’ is a military term for armies. Though God is a God of Battles, those battles are not all relegated to the battlefield. Many battles take place in the heart, in the mind, in politics, in society, and, chiefly, in the Church; for if the foundation be destroyed (which is the salt and light of God to the world) what can the righteous do? We are all soldiers of God’s Army – in physical battle, in spiritual battle, in intellectual battle, in social battle, and, yes, in political battles. It is the character of the citizens of a nation that dictates the character of the nation expressed in its outward political ideologies.

Where do you stand in the ranks of that Army – there can be no conscientious objectors.

Postscript: In case you missed it in the news, those stone walls of Jericho came tumbling and response still in the very ground on which they tumbled.