

Joshua 5:1-12

Some time between the **5th-3rd Centuries B.C.**, Sun Tzu, one of China's leading generals and military strategists wrote his famous book the "The Art of War." Though written about a thousand years before Sun Tzu, the book of Joshua is also about warfare. In chapter 5, Joshua stands on the brink of the first battle in Canaan. Encamped on the plains of Jericho, they could easily see the impressive, fortified city they were soon to engage. According to Sun Tzu, giving away your position is poor strategy and attacking a walled city is the worst policy a General can follow. Hence Joshua's military strategy for conquering Jericho was seemingly somewhat questionable. God's ways are not man's ways (**Isa. 55:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:25**).

Summary

In Joshua 5:1-12, we see how Israel, though situated within easy striking distance of Jericho, stopped their forward march, camped, circumcised the soldiers, and celebrated the Passover, showing us that in order to serve God, we must first honor Him.

1. The Setting of Worship vv. 1

A general sense of dread fell upon all the people when they heard that the Lord had dried up the Jordan so that Israel could pass over on dry ground (**Josh 5:1**).

The Lord's miraculous rescue from the waters of the Jordan provided Israel with an opportunity to pause, rest, reflect, and honor their God.

Salvation led to worship, as it always should.

2. The Content of Worship vv. 2-12

What kind of worship did Israel conduct?

The first ritual they observed was circumcision (**Josh 5:2-7; Gen. 12:1-3; 17:1-14**).

Why did Joshua have to circumcise these men? Though the men who came out of Egypt had been circumcised, they had neglected to do the same for their sons (**5:5**).

The men who came out of Egypt had the sign of the covenant, but having the sign was no guarantee of their spiritual faithfulness. Religion that consists merely of external ceremonies, rites, and rules lacks the power to change the heart.

It is a shame to any generation when the children display more faithfulness than their parents, but it happened in Israel and it happens in the church.

After Joshua finished circumcising the men, they stayed in camp and did not proceed further in the campaign until they healed (**Josh 5:8**). Circumcision had prepared them to enter battle ceremonially clean and served to roll the reproach of Egypt (**Josh 5:9**).

Not being circumcised meant not being marked as set apart to God which is a shameful reproach. It is also likely that the 'reproach of Egypt' is a broad expression that includes everything involved in the shame and disgrace of having been slaves in that land.

Shame and reproach are powerful tools. The world wields them and so does Satan.

The gospel rolls away guilt and shame.

Following the circumcision of the new generation of soldiers, the people of God celebrated their first Passover in Canaan (**Josh 5:10-12**). The celebration took place on the date God prescribed (**Exod. 12:6; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:5**). The Lord brought his people across the Jordan to Gilgal at just the right time.

Israel kept the Passover on the plains of Jericho, camped within plain sight of the enemy. They took their stand for what was most important in the life of the nation, and they did so without shame.

Israel's celebration of the Passover was also an expression of faith and a means of assurance. By sitting on the plains of Jericho, having just crossed the Jordan on dry ground, the Passover reminded the people that the same God who brought them out of Egypt would certainly bring them into the full possession of Canaan.

The Lord's Supper does the same way for Christians. As we partake of bread and wine to remind us of Jesus's life and death, we should cling to the promise that he who died and rose again for our salvation will bring us safely to heaven.

The day after Passover the Israelites ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain (**Josh 5:11**). The next day the manna ceased (**Josh 5:12**).

The manna, just like the Passover, was a picture of Christ (**John 6:30-35**).

Just as food gives us physical energy and strength so too Christ gives us the spiritual energy we need to go on day after day, the strength to believe and pursue holiness as we wander as 'pilgrims through this barren land' on the way to glory.

With the wilderness phase of Israel's instruction over, God would now provide for them another source of sustenance-the produce of the land of Canaan.

3. The Delay of Worship

Before Israel could fight against their enemies they must first worship their God.

We do not learn to fight spiritual battles by studying Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War.'

We learn to engage in the conflicts of the soul through the worship of the Almighty.

Israel worshipped on the plains of Jericho in full sight of the enemy and within easy striking distance. How contrary all this is to the Western approach to Christianity but it is only after resting to worship that the Christian is truly ready to fight.

The Lord stresses this principle of worship first, in the very way He has designed our week in the New Covenant. By placing His day as the First of the week, following the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God calls us to worship him and rest our bodies to prepare us for what lies ahead in the following six days.

A thorough search of Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War' reveals no mention of worship or rest or God. For Christians, however, what we find modeled for us in Joshua 5 is the right approach to the art of spiritual warfare.

In quietness and rest in the worship of God, we find our strength.

In the worship of our God, we find our souls fortified for the battles that lie ahead.