

The People Prepare for the Conquest – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Israel prepares for the Conquest through circumcision and the Passover
2. aim – to cause us to give glory to God for the power he has exerted through us to glorify himself
3. passage – Joshua 5:1-15

b. outline

1. The New Generation Circumcised (Joshua 5:1-9)
2. The People Celebrate the Passover (Joshua 5:10-12)
3. The Commander of the Lord’s Army Appears (Joshua 5:13-15)

c. opening

1. the **structure** of this chapter
 - a. this is a chapter that contains not one (1), but three (3) separate pericopes:
 1. **vv. 1-9** (circumcision); **vv. 10-12** (Passover); **vv. 13-15** (the commander of the Lord’s army)
 2. **i.e.** each of these are able to stand “on their own” having a single subject and intention
 - b. however, we are *combining* them because there is a **common thread** between them **in context**
2. the **content** of this chapter
 - a. this chapter is a **preparation narrative** – another *anticipation* of what is to come – **i.e.** prepare for what God is about to do, *just as you prepared to see what God would do in the river crossing*
 - b. the first act of preparation was to reinstate the circumcision sign in the people *now in the land*
 1. it had been *stopped* for 40 years because the previous generation had been *withdrawn* from the land promise, which circumcision symbolizes – **i.e.** no parent had the *right* to do this
 - c. the second act of preparation was to celebrate the Passover as a people *now in the land*
 1. the people celebrate surviving a *new* judgment of God’s wrath (in the wilderness), and begin to eat of the produce of the land (which they own) – **i.e.** the manna stops as judgment stops
 - d. **LOW:** although the *logical* preparation of the people would be to make plans for the upcoming battles, instead, the people turn their attention *to the God who got them there* – their preparation is simply to reflect upon the *power* and *promise* of God, **and wait for what he will do next**
 1. and this is the thread that continues into the final pericope in the chapter ...

III. The Commander of the Lord’s Army Appears (Joshua 5:13-15)

Content

a. the commander comes to Joshua (vv. 13-15)

1. the **location** of the man (where does this event occur, and *to whom?*)
 - a. “*when Joshua was by Jericho*” = a **private** encounter with Joshua on the road to Jericho as he is *ahead* of the people coming up behind him
 - b. **IMO:** this encounter was a private meeting of the leaders of *two forces* (**see below**), but fully intended to be revealed to the rest of Israel as **a part of their preparation** to come against Jericho
2. the **appearance** of the man (what is this standing before Joshua?)
 - a. what Joshua sees *is a man* (with physical appearance, who speaks, as *present* and *real*)
 - b. what Joshua sees *is a soldier*
 1. **i.e.** given that the man is wielding a sword, it is **most likely** that the man is dressed as a soldier
 2. **i.e.** Joshua’s question implies a *fighting man*, and the title “commander” also implies a soldier
 - c. what Joshua sees *is a soldier wielding a sword*
 1. not a *sheathed sword*, but a “*drawn*” one, standing in a *militaristic* posture (a sheathed sword would indicate a *passive response* to Joshua; a drawn sword indicates an *active stance*)
 2. **LOW:** the soldier is standing *in the way* of Joshua; he is “confronting” Joshua directly
3. the **question** to the man (what does Joshua *logically* ask of the man?)
 - a. the *natural* question (given the soldier’s *active posture*) is to ask: are you for *us* or for *our enemies*?
 1. **remember:** a sword can act as an *offensive weapon* or a *defensive* one (**thrust or parry**)
 2. Joshua *assumes* that this soldier has come to either *support Israel* (offensively) in her cause against Jericho, or has come to *defend Jericho* against the Israelites (defensively)
 3. **i.e.** if you’re blocking *my path*, as a soldier, then *what purpose do you have in being here?*

4. the **response** of the man (what does this man say to Joshua?)
 - a. his response is **ambiguous**: the man answers “neither” (literally, “no”)
 1. **e.g.** the kind of response you might get from a five-year-old over the choice of dinner options
 2. **i.e.** I am not for you or for your adversaries – which leads to the obvious question:
 - b. **IOW**: why are you confronting me if you are not for either side? ... **what other possibility is there?** ... the answer to that question forces us to ask *who is this man?*
5. the **nature** of the man (who is this man before Joshua?)
 - a. **note**: based on our ability to look back through redemptive history, and the number of times that appearances *in this fashion* in the OT are actually **theophanies**, we can assume the same here
 1. theophany (*theos-* & *-phany*) = an appearance of Yahweh in the physical world, often in *direct* appearance as a man, although not limited to such (**e.g.** epiphany = the first appearance of the Christ before the Gentiles in the arrival of the Magi to visit Jesus)
 2. such appearances are often referred to as “*the angel of the Lord*” = a euphemism (due to a lack of revelation) to describe *in human language* the appearance of Yahweh in the world
 3. **e.g.** the Burning Bush (**Exodus 3**); the man (and angels) visiting Abraham before Sodom (**Genesis 18**); the man Jacob wrestled (**Genesis 32**); the pillar of cloud/fire; the “angel” before Hagar (**Genesis 16**); and (**IMO**) the appearance of God to form Adam in **Genesis 2**
 - b. there are a number of hints in this text that the man before Joshua is actually *Yahweh himself*
 1. Joshua clearly sees more than just a *native* – the text *screams* that this is beyond the “human”
 - a. but, the phrase “*commander of the Lord’s army*” might conjure up the idea of **an angel**
 - b. **i.e.** our *natural inclination* would be to assume this “commander” to be a *supernatural being* leading the *angelic host* in battle (angels do serve like this; **e.g.** Elisha, **2 Kings 6:17**)
 1. hosts = the angelic force; supernatural beings designed by God to carry out aspects of his will upon the earth (as messengers or warriors), or to simply observe his works
 - c. but ... who can truly *command* the army of the Lord? (**see below**)
 2. Joshua recognizes him as worthy of worship (homage), and seeks his command (**v. 14**)
 - a. the word (*hwh*) can mean to simply *bow down* (as in homage or prostrate oneself), but it is also used frequently to mean *worship* (**i.e.** the context usually sets the meaning)
 - b. so, since the man does not *rebuke* him for his homage *and does give him a command* (along with the rest of the context; **see below**), the ESV translates it as “*worship*”
 3. Joshua is instructed to remove his sandals, because the ground *around the man* is holy (**v. 15**)
 - a. **i.e.** just as Moses was instructed to do the same *in the presence of God* (**Exodus 3:5**)
 4. the man calls himself “*the commander of the army of the Lord [of Yahweh]*” (**v. 14**)
 - a. who can truly *command* the army of the Lord? – **answer**: only the **Lord of Hosts**
 - b. **i.e.** Yahweh Sabāoth, Lord Sabāoth – the commander of the hosts of heaven, the one who orders all beings *to do his bidding in the world* (**e.g.** *A Mighty Fortress*; stanza 2)
“Did we in our strength confide, our striving would be losing, were not the right man on our side, the man of God’s own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is he— Lord Sabāoth his name, from age to age the same, and he must win the battle”
 - c. **principle**: while angels are often portrayed as “fighting men” (**e.g.** Michael with Satan; **Jude 9**), the Bible portrays the *true leader* of the hosts of heaven *to be Yahweh himself*; angels serve in the host, but **it is God himself who leads them to his ends** (**e.g.** **Isaiah 1:24**)
“Therefore the Lord declares, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: ‘Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes.’”
 - d. Yahweh does not *delegate* judgment to others, but leads the forces of judgment *himself*
 - c. but (**again**): **be Trinitarian** – since this is *a person*, which *Person* is making the appearance?
 1. since (according to Jesus; **John 6:46**) no one has seen the Father, then the various *theophanies* are probably of the other two Persons (**i.e.** non-corporeal [**e.g.** the Burning Bush, Pentecost; dove, Jesus’ baptism; **John 3**]: the Third Person; *as a man*: the Second Person)
 - a. **IMO**: the *theophany* of **Genesis 2** is the Son of God forming the *first Adam* and relating to him *in anticipation* of his own coming *in the flesh* as the *final Adam*
 2. **IOW**: the Son of God (the Second Person) appears before Joshua as the Lord of Hosts
6. the **purpose** of the man (back to Joshua’s question: **why are you here?**)
 - a. **note**: the story *abruptly* ends, with no *seeming* purpose for why the man is standing there ...
 1. **i.e.** the only “command” given to Joshua is to remove his sandals, *which he does*, but no other detail *beyond that* is listed – how does the encounter end, *or does it ... ?*
 - b. so, the *reason* must be embedded in the man’s own statement: his purpose is not “*for*” Israel or “*for*” the adversaries of Israel – it must be from his statement “*now I have come*”
 1. **principle**: **everything that happens in the world is ordained primarily for the glory of God**
 2. **i.e.** the **decree of God** is for many things to happen, but its *ultimate intention* is to complete the purposes of a holy God and glorify *him* above all else
 - a. **e.g.** the hosts of heaven are the *audience* to God’s greatness (**Ephesians 3:10f**)

4. **IOW:** the Son of God comes before the Israelites for the purpose of glorifying God – he has come down **to do what the Lord God has purposed to do in this Conquest**
- c. **meaning:** what God is about to do, in unleashing the hosts of heaven, is not *ultimately* for the glory of the people, **but for God's eternal purpose to bring glory to himself in all things**
 1. the Conquest (ultimately) is God's work – the Israelites will be the "means" that he will use to accomplish (some of) the task, but (ultimately) the judgment and destruction of the people of the land *will be the work of God himself*
 - a. **i.e.** the coming of the Son of God, **in his role as judge**, to bring his word against all those who have rebelled against the law of God and are deserving of destruction
 - b. **e.g.** similar to the picture of Christ in **Revelation 1:6; 19:15**: a "sharp two-edged sword" coming from his mouth – **i.e.** his *word of judgment* upon the nations
 - c. **e.g.** the walls of Jericho fall not because the Israelites "push it over," but because God does
 - d. **IOW:** God has come – Joshua (Israel) is simply to remove his sandals (metaphorically) and watch as the Lord of Hosts vanquishes his enemies
 1. the **final act of preparation** is for the people *to commit themselves to following the Lord* – to abandon any pretense that *they* are strong enough to overcome the Canaanites
 2. **note: chaps. 6 and 7** will make this point *clearly* – one success and one failure
 2. **principle: what truly separates a man-centered view of God's revelation and a God-centered view is this: for whom is the power of God exerted: you or him?**
 - a. **e.g.** my own "epiphany" of this truth came in Boice's preaching of "to him" in **Romans 11:36**
 - b. God will not overthrow Canaan primarily for the benefit of the Israelites, and the Spirit does not bring anyone to salvation primarily for themselves (**i.e.** going to heaven), but he does so to accomplish his eternal purposes
 3. **our entire purpose in life should be to glorify God in all things – how we speak and act must reflect our utter belief that God is above all else, and that he is the One who will overcome our enemies, particularly the enemy within**