

Not Alone

Joshua 5:13-15

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A. Aligned (vs. 13):

1. Now it came about – After the new generation crossed the Jordan on dry ground (intimidating the surrounding nations; 5:1), were then circumcised (the ‘reproach of Egypt’ was no longer on them), celebrated the Passover, Joshua remained camped at Gilgal near Jericho. The purification of the people of Israel was now complete. They were finally in the Lord’s Promise Land by His mighty hand preparing for battle.
 - a) The response of the Canaanites (5:1) to Israel’s crossing of the Jordan River was linked to 4:24: “so that all the nations of the earth might know.” The circumcision of the male Israelites was their last link to “the shame of [their] slavery in Egypt,” that is, their ties to the journey out of Egypt to Canaan (5:9). The rite of circumcision, the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:9–14), was not observed during the forty years of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. Joshua renewed the rite, which was symbolic of the obedience promised by the second generation (Josh. 1:17). The Israelites’ observance of the Passover in the land and their eating of food in the Promised Land broke their last tie with the Exodus from Egypt. The manna ceased (5:12). As the Lord had appeared to Moses (Exod. 3), so he appeared to Joshua. Where the army of God was, in this case in front of Jericho, that place was holy (Josh. 5:13–15).¹
2. Now it came about – Despite the tremendous odds facing the nation of Israel, what was most important was for them to align themselves spiritually with the Lord God, ensuring that they submit themselves to His standards.
 - a) All of the chapter’s episodes reflect the same outlook noted in connection with 1:7–8, that spiritual concerns—not military preparations—were to be of first importance to the Israelites in their tasks ahead. This principle, of course, is one that still stands today: God wants our undivided loyalties and our holiness. Indeed, Lev 19:2 (“Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy”) is quoted by the apostle Peter (1 Pet 1:16) as still valid for Christians.²
3. He lifted up his eyes – While Israel remained encamped, Joshua, acting on his own initiative and with a clear conscience, looked intently and continuously at the man standing nearby, fully focused and undistracted.
 - a) *Joshua was near Jericho* – The leader of God’s army went to scout the nearest Canaanite stronghold, but another warrior was already on the scene.

¹ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 87). Tyndale House Publishers.

² Howard, D. M., Jr. (1998). *Joshua* (Vol. 5, p. 155). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

4. He lifted up his eyes and looked – Joshua carefully and intently inspected the person standing near him. So intensely engaged was he that he came to a complete intellectual understanding that this person was unique and powerful.
 - a) The spies reported at Kadesh Barnea that the cities of Canaan were “large, with walls up to the sky” (Deut. 1:28). Despite Joshua’s long military experience he had never led an attack on a fortified city that was prepared for a long siege. In fact, of all the walled cities in Palestine, Jericho was probably the most invincible. There was also the question of armaments. Israel’s army had no siege engines, no battering rams, no catapults, and no moving towers. Their only weapons were slings, arrows, and spears—which were like straws against the walls of Jericho. Joshua knew the battle of Jericho must be won because, now that they had crossed the Jordan, Israel’s troops had no place to which they could retreat. Further, they could not bypass the city because that would leave their women, children, goods, and cattle at Gilgal exposed to certain destruction.³
5. And behold, a man was standing opposite him – Joshua was intensely occupied preparing for war after ceremonially preparing the people to be in right standing with the Lord. Yet, after careful inspection, and in contrast to all the Israelites he had seen before, including his knowledge of the giants in the land, this man who appeared near him immediately captured Joshua’s full attention. Especially with all that is before the nation, Joshua nevertheless engaged the man at once and entered into conversation with him.
 - a) As Jehovah had spoken to Joshua to prepare him for the first great event—the passage of Jordan, so now He appeared to him to reassure and instruct him for the second great enterprise—the subjugation of Canaan. Recognizing the strategic necessity of the capture of Jericho to the Israelites (any retreat across Jordan was cut off), Joshua had gone to reconnoiter the bastion himself, perplexed because of its seeming impregnability (6:1).⁴
6. And behold, a man was standing opposite him – The man was not mounted on a horse but stood directly in front of Joshua with his sword drawn. This had to be a tense situation, particularly for one who had already been encouraged not to be intimidated as he stepped into leadership after Moses (Josh. 1:5-9).
 - a) *A man standing* – This experience is taken by many to be an encounter with God in human form (a theophany), or with Christ (a Christophany). However, Scripture also records angels being sent on similar missions of this kind (Jdg. 6:11; 13:3), and some are specifically identified as captains over the heavenly armies (Dan. 10:5, 20; 12:1).
7. Sword drawn in his Hand – The man having the sword in his hand signified that, with the people now prepared for battle, he was ready to assume full authority and exercise his might on behalf of God’s people. This man was not intimidated by the fact that Joshua commanded forty thousand fighting men who had just crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

³ Campbell, D. K. (1985). Joshua. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 339). Victor Books.

⁴ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament (Jos 5:13). Moody Press.

a) This was a threatening sight, and Joshua's question about the man's loyalties should not surprise us. The exact language here—"with a drawn sword in his hand"—is found again only twice in the Old Testament, referring to the angel of the Lord: (1) in Num 22:23, 31, where the angel of the Lord stood before Balaam, barring his way, and (2) in 1 Chr 21:16, where the angel of the Lord stood before David, threatening Israel because of David's sin.⁵

8. Joshua went – Even though Joshua had a vivid understanding of the nature of this man, he demonstrated courage and a firm commitment to stand for God's people. Remaining focused on carrying out God's directive, Joshua approached the man.

9. Said to him – Joshua continued speaking to the man with unwavering intention, determined to discern his purpose. Joshua was obviously trusting the Lord as God had instructed him to in chapter one verse five through nine. His courage stemmed from faith in God, just as it had forty-five years earlier when he first entered the land as a spy (Numbers 14:6-10).

10. Are you for us or an adversary – No matter how intimidating the man appeared, Joshua sought answers, for he was already preparing the people for battle. Joshua needed to know whether this man had come to bring harm or distress to the Lord's people. A true leader stands at the forefront of the Lord's people, because a sincere commitment to the Lord's Word ensures steadfast engagement in the Lord's will, regardless of the cost.

a) Joshua and Israel must recognize their proper position: it is not merely that God is on their side; rather, they are called to fight the battles that God Himself directs (John 15:1-10).

B. Alert (vs. 14):

1. He said – Joshua spoke to the man, and even with his sword drawn, the man responded to him.
2. I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord – The phrase 'come now' indicates that the man was intensely seeking to have a favorable conversation with Joshua, aiming to provide him guidance and counsel.
 - a) The "army of the Lord" was surely not limited to the army of Israel though it may have been included. More specifically, it referred to the angelic host, the same "army" of heaven that later surrounded Dothan when Elisha and his servant appeared to be greatly outnumbered by the Aramean army (2 Kings 6:8–17). In the Garden of Gethsemane at the time of His arrest, Jesus referred to this heavenly army when He said that 12 legions of angels were ready to defend Him (Matt. 26:53). In Hebrews 1:14 they are described as "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation." Though invisible, they serve and care for God's children in times of great need.⁶
3. I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord – When the man spoke directly to Joshua, identifying himself as the "captain of the host of the Lord" he was revealing that he commanded a far

⁵ Howard, D. M., Jr. (1998). *Joshua* (Vol. 5, pp. 155–156). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Joshua*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 339). Victor Books.

greater army than the forty thousand men under Joshua – an innumerable host. These were the Lord's mighty warriors, possessing all authority and power. It was reminiscent of 2 Kings 6:15-17, where Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant so he could see the heavenly host ready to fight on Israel's behalf against the Aramean army.

- a) But the address and the adoration of Joshua, the holiness communicated to the spot by the presence of this Personage, and the application to him of the name Jehovah (ch. 6:2), identify Him with the Angel of the Lord, the Second Person of the Trinity. His attitude of equipment betokened his approval of, and interest in, the war of invasion. Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship. The adoption by Joshua of this absolute form of prostration demonstrates the sentiments of profound reverence with which the language and majestic bearing of the stranger inspired him. The real character of this personage was disclosed by His accepting the homage of worship (cf. Acts 10:25, 26; Rev. 19:10; 22:8, 9), and still further in the command, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot." Jamieson, R. (n.d.). A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Joshua–Esther: Vol. II (p. 13). William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited.

4. I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord – After Joshua faithfully obeyed the Lord – crossing the Jordan as commanded and ceremonially cleansing the people before God – the Lord of hosts came to his aid. It is not that the Lord was not present, it just takes faith to meet Him on holy ground. It is faith that brings us to the place of encounter, and it is faith that enables us to surrender fully to the Lord's authority.

- a) It must have been a great encouragement to Joshua to realize that he was not alone. There is a loneliness to leadership that can be disturbing and even depressing as you realize how much your decisions affect the lives of others. "To be President of the United States is to be lonely," said Harry Truman, "very lonely at times of great decisions." Joshua must have been feeling some of that loneliness. Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). Be Strong (p. 65). Victor Books.

C. Worshipful (vs. 14b-15):

- 1. Joshua fell on his face to the earth and bowed down – When faith exposes us to the presence of God, our hearts are moved to collapse in worship. This does not mean that all our troubles disappear; rather, it means that our surrender to God is so sincere that when He takes center stage, He becomes all we need to address all the challenges we encounter.
 - a) Joshua first bowed the knee (Eph. 3:14); then submitted to a holy walk (Josh. 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15); and finally went out to battle the enemy in the power of the Lord (6:10ff). Like Joshua, we have already been given our inheritance (described in Eph. 1–2) and we must overcome the enemy in order to claim and enjoy it. I love the humility that Joshua displayed. Though anointed by God (Josh. 1:5-9), the leader of God's people, a true warrior, promised to be provided land and see many days in the Promise Land, he remained humble and fully dependent on the Lord.
- 2. He say to his servant – Even though Joshua was the Commander-in-Chief of Israel, the host of the Lord was far greater. Recognizing this, Joshua continued speaking to the captain with unwavering intention, requesting to be a person who would faithfully and humbly carry out whatever commands he received.

- a) Joshua had read in the Book of the Law what Moses had said to the Lord after Israel had made the golden calf: *“If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here”* (Ex. 33:15, NKJV). The Lord had promised to be with Joshua just as He had been with Moses (Josh. 1:5), and now He reaffirmed that promise in a personal way. Like his predecessor, Joshua refused to move until he was sure the Lord’s presence was with him.⁷
- b) Joshua must take orders from him (Josh. 6:2-5), and he can also know that the armies of heaven are committed to this war-as later events confirm.

3. Captain of the Lord’s host – Establishing the people in the Lord was to be directed by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Passover Lamb recently celebrated, the One who delivered Israel from Egypt, and the One who blesses them to experience all that God promised through Moses (Genesis 15). Similarly, the Lord provides salvation for us through His blood, shed on Calvary, and through His resurrection three days later. He delivers us into heaven into the presence of God. He is our Mediator (Hebrews 8:1-2), who will never leave nor forsake us (John 10:29-30), because His salvation permanently indwells us through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). He remains our Captain, Lord of hosts. Therefore, we must consecrate ourselves by walking in the Spirit rather than in the flesh.

- a) “The prince of the host of Yahweh” appears only here and Dan 8:11, where the reference is to God himself. Our passage is more closely akin to the figure of the messenger of Yahweh who appears fifty-eight times in the OT, with eleven further occurrences of “messenger of God.” Such a messenger commissions Gideon (Judg 6:11) and even appears briefly in the narrative of Moses’ commissioning (Exod 3:2). Another brief appearance comes in the deliverance at the sea (Exod 14:19; cf. Num 20:16). Seeing the messenger can be equated with seeing God (Judg 13:22). As a military figure, the messenger destroys God’s enemies (Num 22:23; 2 Sam 24:16-17; 2 Kgs 19:35).⁸

4. Remove your sandals – Dusty, dirty sandals cannot stand on holy ground. Any place the Lord stands becomes holy, even if it is among sinful and unrighteous people.

5. The place where you are standing is holy – The specific location where Joshua met with the “captain of the Lord’s host” had now been consecrated for worship and service to God. Every conversation and every decision regarding war was going to be decided in that place. All of Joshua’s attention would be directed to and from that place.

- a) Joshua never saw this captain again, yet he went on to win every battle.
- b) Ex 3:5. This spot in defiled Canaan was sanctified by the presence of the holy God.⁹

6. And Joshua did so - Without hesitation, Joshua committed himself to faithfully devote all his energy to serving the Lord God.

- a) Joshua was reminded that *he was second in command*. Every father and mother, pastor, and Christian leader is second in command to the Lord Jesus Christ; and when we forget this fact, we start to move toward defeat and failure. The Lord came to Joshua that day, not just to help but to *lead*. “Without

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong* (pp. 64-65). Victor Books.

⁸ Butler, T. C. (1984). *Joshua* (Vol. 7, p. 61). Word, Incorporated.

⁹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Jos 5:14). Moody Press.

Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NKJV). Joshua was an experienced soldier, whom Moses had trained for leadership. Yet that was no guarantee of success. He needed the presence of the Lord God.¹⁰

7. And Joshua did so - The presence of the captain of the Lord's host was so inspiring, even though Joshua was already steadfast in obedience, he became even more energized to apply all his skills and knowledge to the task before him.
 - a) Joshua was commissioned to undertake the Lord's battles for Canaan, just as Moses had been commissioned to confront Pharaoh.
 - a) God had already promised Joshua that he would be with him just as he was with Moses (1:5), so Joshua needed not worry. The lessons Joshua needed here were to be able to recognize when he was in God's presence and when to trust in him. The man's instructions to Joshua about removing his sandals because he was standing on holy ground obviously recalled God's words to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:5). In yet another way, Joshua was now being affirmed as Moses' successor and God's presence was being promised to him.¹¹
8. And Joshua did so - When Christ is the center of our lives, nothing should intimidate us, and nothing should distract us from being completely surrendering to the work He has gifted and called us to do. The obstacles we face may be incredibly overwhelming, the emotional distress excruciating, and the challenges perplexing - but like Paul, when our lives are completely surrendered, there is only one thing to do: press toward the mark (Phil. 3:1-17). As the writer of Hebrews urges, "run the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12:1-3). For, as Paul declares, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:21, NASU)

¹⁰ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong* (p. 66). Victor Books.

¹¹ Howard, D. M., Jr. (1998). *Joshua* (Vol. 5, pp. 158–159). Broadman & Holman Publishers.