

Joshua 5:13-15 | Sunday September 6, 2026

Israel's time so far in the promised land has been used intentionally. God had the men be circumcised as a reminder of His covenant promises to Israel. Then, the nation celebrated the Passover. Many shared firsthand accounts of how the blood of the lamb saved their lives. As they started eating on the produce of the land, the manna stopped. The people are maturing and growing in their walk with God and how to trust Him. Yet, a glaring challenge loomed on the horizon, Jericho. **The promised land could not be inherited until Jericho was conquered.** Bypassing it would leave their families exposed to attack, so it had to be dealt with. It served as the entrance to the mountainous region of the Promised Land and was conveniently located in the middle of the land. If conquered, Jericho could help provide a strategic advantage in taking the entire land. Due to this favorable position and its strong defenses, Jericho is one of the **oldest cities in the world**. Joshua knew how strong and important this city was. He also knew there was a reason the city existed for as long as it had. Jericho was easily defended and hard to conquer. Israel's weapons would do little damage against Jericho's strong walls, and with its resources, the city could endure a long siege. As Joshua was by Jericho, all of this must have been on his mind as he was startled by the sight of a commanding soldier.

Joshua 5:13-6:5 ESV

(13) **When Joshua was by Jericho**, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"

(14) And he said, "No; but **I am the commander of the army of the LORD**. Now I have come." And **Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped** and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

(15) And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, **"Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy."** And Joshua did so.

(1) Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.

(2) And **the LORD** said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor.

(3) You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days.

(4) Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.

(5) And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."

The commander of the Lord's army is not an angel but is Jesus before He was born in Bethlehem. The first way we know this is when Joshua falls down to worship, the commander does not stop him. An angel would have.

Revelation 22:8-9 ESV

(8) I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. **And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me,**

(9) but he said to me, **"You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and**

your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. **Worship God.**"

When John becomes overwhelmed, he starts to worship the angel who has been showing him these things. The angel quickly stops John and corrects him. An angel is just a messenger and is not be worshipped, only God is to be worshipped. This makes Joshua's encounter so interesting because **the commander of the Lord's army accepts Joshua's worship**. The second way we know this is Jesus is the instruction to **"Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy."** This command echoes what God asked Moses to do when He was in God's presence at the burning bush.

Exodus 3:4-6 ESV

(4) When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

(5) Then He said, "Do not come near; **take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.**"

(6) And He said, **"I am the God of your father**, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, **for he was afraid to look at God.**

The place became holy because the holy God was present. The same is true for Joshua. **The commander must be holy** because the place He stood was now holy. The commander of the army of the LORD is Jesus. This is a title we might not think of to describe Jesus but is one of His roles we see in Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:11-14 ESV

(11) Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and **in righteousness He judges and makes war.**

(12) His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems, and He has a name written that no one knows but Himself.

(13) He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is **The Word of God.**

(14) **And the armies of heaven**, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, **were following Him on white horses.**

Jesus is the righteous one who will judge and make war. **He leads the armies of heaven out into battle.** Here He is standing in front of Joshua with sword outstretched. This raises a very important question for Joshua.

Joshua 5:13 ESV

(13) When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him **with his drawn sword in his hand**. And **Joshua went to him** and said to him, **"Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"**

Joshua shows real character by drawing near to the commander. He wants to know if this warrior is for Israel or for their enemies in the promised land. Basically Joshua wants to know if the commander is a friend or a foe?

Joshua 5:14 ESV

(14) And he said, **"No;** but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does

| my lord say to his servant?"

Jesus answers no, which can also mean neither. This answer is truly startling when we really think about it. It makes perfect sense for Jesus to say He is not for Israel's adversaries. God gave this land to be conquered, so of course God's commander and His army would not be on their side. **Yet, notice Jesus does not say He is on Israel's side.** This is startling, as we know Israel is God's chosen people walking in His promises.

Zechariah 2:8-9 NAS95

(8) For thus says the LORD of hosts, "After glory He has sent me against the nations which plunder you, **for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye.**

(9) "For behold, I will wave My hand over them so that they will be plunder for their slaves. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me.

God values Israel, specifically Jerusalem, to the point that they are called the apple of His eye, and all the nations will be judged and plundered by how they treat Israel. So this raises the question, **why would Jesus say He is not for Israel?** To understand this, we have to understand God's purposes behind His actions. He does not love Israel or work on their behalf because they warrant it or deserve it. **God fulfills His promises to Israel for His own glory.** God is for God's glory.

Ezekiel 36:22; 24; 32 ESV

(22) "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: **It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name,** which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

(24) I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

(32) **It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you.** Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

Psalms 106:7-8 ESV

(7) Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider Your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of Your steadfast love, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.

(8) **Yet He saved them for His name's sake,** that He might make known His mighty power.

Isaiah 48:9-13 ESV

(9) **"For My name's sake I defer My anger; for the sake of My praise I restrain it for you,** that I may not cut you off.

(10) Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.

(11) **For My own sake, for My own sake, I do it, for how should My name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.**

(12) "Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! **I am He; I am the first, and I am the last.**

(13) My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together.

God is faithful to His promises for His own name's sake. There is verse after verse declaring this amazing truth. From saving Israel out of Egypt, to bringing them back from the exile, to protecting them from countless enemies throughout the years. **God loves Israel and cares deeply for them, but ultimately is faithful to them for His own name's sake and for His glory.** This helps explain how God works. He does not share His glory with another, so He works in a way that leaves no doubt that only God could have done it. He is the first and last. He is the amazing creator. Israel benefited so much from God's goodness. They benefited when He delivered them. They benefited when He deferred His anger, but ultimately it was about God's honor and God's glory, not theirs.

One application point that should not be missed is if Jesus, as the commander of the Lord's army, says He is not for Israel, **then no other nation can claim God is on their side.** We know throughout history how many have made this claim. The British national anthem calls for God to save the king and scatter his enemies as it makes loose references to Psalm 59:11 and 68:1. It is challenging to think that the British army was singing for God to be on their side as America was praying for God to give them victory in the Revolutionary War. Countless nations have claimed God is on their side, and yet in reality we should humbly come to His word and submit ourselves to His side. Daniel serves as a great example of how to trust in the God who acts for His name's sake.

Daniel 9:17-19 ESV

(17) Now therefore, O our God, **listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon Your sanctuary, which is desolate.**

(18) O my God, incline Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by Your name. **For we do not present our pleas before You because of our righteousness, but because of Your great mercy.**

(19) O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. **Delay not, for Your own sake, O my God,** because Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

Daniel makes heartfelt pleas for God to work but bases his prayer on God's name and His glory. Daniel knows that Israel is not righteous yet. He calls on God to fulfill His promises so that God could receive all the glory. Daniel knew that Israel did not receive God's protecting hand because of who they were but because of who God is and what He has promised. Daniel is focused on God being glorified. **Israel had needs, and yet above all Daniel wanted to see God glorified and God's name praised.** Daniel's prayer is humble, and as he makes his real requests, he is looking to God's glory and not his own or Israel's. **This attitude challenges our self-focus and draws our eyes to the God who deserves all the glory.** It is a sobering thought that God is glorified through His promises that He has made to us.

1 John 2:12 ESV

(12) I am writing to you, little children, **because your sins are forgiven for His name's sake.**

Our sins have been forgiven for His name's sake! We tremendously benefit from this, and it was motivated out of God's love, and yet we were not the ultimate focus. God's own glory is. We are forgiven for His name's sake.

Psalms 23:1-3 ESV

- (1) A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.
- (3) He restores my soul. He **leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.**

This psalm contains so many amazing promises of who God promises to be for us. He makes us rest and promises to lead us. He sees our weaknesses and faults and restores us. All of this is for His name and for His glory. It can be so easy to become self-focused and lose sight of who it is actually about.

Psalms 79:9 ESV

- (9) Help us, O God of our salvation, **for the glory of Your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for Your name's sake!**

Our salvation is so much bigger than us. The God of the universe is glorified as He works in each one of our lives, showing His faithfulness to us. **He is glorified by the care and love that He shows to us.**

Psalms 56:8-11 ESV

- (8) **You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle.** Are they not in your book?
- (9) Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. **This I know, that God is for me.**
- (10) In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise,
- (11) in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. **What can man do to me?**

David knew how intimate and personal God was in his life. God cared so deeply for David that God had collected every tear and counted every sleepless night of distress. David had a confidence that God was for him. This does not contradict Jesus' answer to Joshua. **God was not on the Israelite armies' side, in the sense that He was not accomplishing their will nor seeking their glory.** God was focused on glorifying Himself as He showed them His loving faithfulness. Israel would benefit as God received the glory.

Joshua 6:2 ESV

- (2) And the LORD said to Joshua, **"See, I have given Jericho into your hand,** with its king and mighty men of valor.

After telling Joshua that He was not on their side, Jesus then informed Joshua that He had given Jericho into their hands. God was glorified, and His people had the joy to walk in the blessings that He accomplished. **God is for us as believers as He accomplishes His will in our lives, all for His own honor and glory.** When we realize that it is not ultimately about us, we can praise God all the more and truly marvel at His tremendous self-glorifying love.

Ephesians 3:17-21 ESV

- (17) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, **being rooted and grounded in love,**
- (18) may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is **the breadth and length and height and depth,**
- (19) **and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,** that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
- (20) Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,

according to the power at work within us,

(21) **to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,**
forever and ever. Amen.
