

Joshua Chapter 5 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is: "What is a commitment to God and what does it entail?" The idea is to think, "OK, I believe in God, now what do I do about it? What does God want from me?"
2. Let me start by summarizing Chapter 5. Then I'll explain how that title ties to this lesson.
 - a) At this point in the story of Joshua and the Israelites, they have just finished crossing over the Jordan River and are now "in" the land of Israel.
 - b) You would think the next order of business for the Israelites would be to start attacking the inhabitants of the land. Instead, God declares that the next order of business is for all the Israelite males are to circumcise themselves. That had to hurt for a while. ☺
 - c) After that, everyone there was to observe the Jewish holiday "Passover".
 - d) In the final set of verses in this chapter we read of Joshua going out by himself. He encounters someone else that is also out by himself alone. This "someone" has a sword. Joshua asks the important question of "Are you for us or for our enemies"?
 - i) The man's response is interesting. It is in effect, "I am neither for you or for your enemies. Then he says in effect, "I am in charge of the armies of God."
 - ii) In Chapter 6 (next lesson), this "entity" then gives Joshua the instructions as to how to attack Jericho. This plan doesn't involve any weaponry or attack. Then the orders were to "March around the city a bunch of times, and then the city walls will just fall down by themselves". Again, we will get to that in the next lesson.
 - iii) The most important thing the man said here in Chapter 5 was, "The place where you are standing is holy ground, so take off your shoes". What does that mean?
 - a) A clue is that it is that the exact expression was said to Moses when he saw God via "The Burning Bush". The point is Joshua was speaking to God. Many Christians including myself believe this is Jesus prior to His "birth".
 - b) The point is the ground is not holy because the ground itself is special. The point is the ground is holy because Joshua is in the presence of God and therefore, because God is standing there, the ground is holy.
3. With the chapter summarized, let me now get back to the title of my lesson:
 - a) Again, the first thing the Israelites did in effect upon entering the Promised Land is "harm themselves physically" by circumcising all the males.
 - i) Among the other effects of circumcision is that it weakens a man for several days. After this procedure one does not want to do anything else for a while. Think about the last time you were really sick. All you wanted to do is lay in bed. That is what happened to the entire male population for a few days.
 - ii) My point is the Israelites were now completely dependant upon God for survival. Remember that they were now within striking distance of Jericho. The soldiers and guards of Jericho could come out of the city and effectively wipe out the Israelites if those in Jericho were aware of the circumcision ritual.
 - iii) By circumcising themselves, the Israelites have effectively become 100% dependant upon God for their survival and that is the point of this act.
 - b) Let me put this a different way: If the Israelites immediately attacked Jericho with weapons, they could give themselves credit for the victory. Yes they would acknowledge God for getting them across the river, but they (the Israelites) would give themselves the credit for the victory over Jericho if they attacked the city "like a normal army" would.
 - c) For the Israelites to weaken themselves here, is to be completely dependant upon God for their survival. The same with taking the time to celebrate the Passover Holiday. Instead of attacking or even being on the defensive, they were putting themselves at the mercy of God and trust in Him for their own survival.

- d) It would probably be best at this point to define "circumcision" and then define how that relates to Christians. The act is for a man to cut off the foreskin around the tip of the penis. (I promise that is as gross and as literal as I'll get for this lesson. ☺)
 - i) The concept of "circumcision of the flesh" is in effect, about a total commitment of our lives to God. How do I know that?
 - ii) That is because circumcision is about the act of cutting off part of one's flesh. The idea (symbolically) is to walk away from our old life of "serving the flesh". That is living for things of this world other than living for God's desire for our lives.
 - iii) This commitment to circumcision was ordained by God to Abraham and has been part of the Jewish culture ever since.
 - iv) So why does God not require Christian males to circumcise themselves?
 - a) The answer is because the act of circumcision is symbolic of no longer living for the world. One can do that without actually doing this surgery.
 - b) The New Testament makes it clear that Christians are not required to circumcise men. (See Colossians 3:11)
 - c) It is a common practice for a lot of people to circumcise their male babies for health reasons. My parents did circumcise me when I was a baby.
 - e) This leads us back to the issue of commitment. What God wants from Christians is a total commitment to Him. I have learned the hard way that there is nothing like being in pain (e.g., being sick for a few days) to remind us of our complete dependency upon God.
 - i) So, does this mean God wants all men to circumcise themselves to show our commitment to Him? No. Again, the New Testament specifically teaches that Christian men are not required to be circumcised.
 - ii) So, if Christians don't have to cut off any of their flesh, how do we show a total commitment of our lives to God? It is through our actions. It is by the way we live and by the way we choose to spend our time and our earnings.
 - iii) This leads us back to a reminder of how Christians will be judged by God. The good news is Christians will not be condemned for any of our sins when God judges us. At the same time, somehow our eternal rewards are based on how we have acted since we became a Christian.
 - a) My personal view on heaven is that some people will appreciate and enjoy it more than others. For example, if one gets "bored" singing praise songs to God now, one will be bored for eternity. The same with the idea of having a heart to making a difference for God. If we can't stand doing it now, I suspect we "can't stand it" in the next life as well.
 - iv) If you grasp the concept that "circumcision" represents a complete commitment of one's life to serving God, you have now grasped the main point of this lesson.
 - f) Just when you thought my introduction is done, there is more. ☺
4. The next part of the chapter will have the Israelites celebrating the Passover meal and ritual.
- a) That sounds all "fine and dandy" except for the fact they are performing this ritual in the plain sight of the enemy. My point is if the enemy found out they were sitting around eating a meal and telling the story of the first Passover, it would be a chance for their enemies to get them while their guard was down.
 - b) The point here is that the celebration of the Passover was also a sign of faith in God.
5. The final part of the chapter deals with Joshua's encounter with God.
- a) That too is about commitment and deals with Joshua's trust in God's plan for destroying the city of Joshua. This plan did not involve any frontal assault and that took courage to go tell the Israelites that this is the "way" God wants us to attack.
 - b) As to the words of God's speech to Joshua, we will discuss that when we get there.
 - c) There, now we can start Chapter 5. ☺

6. Chapter 5, Verse 1: Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.
- a) The chapter opens with a comment about all the people currently living in what we know as "Israel" prior to the Israelites actually living there. The verse essentially says that everyone living there at that moment is scared. My questions about this verse are 1) How did the Israelites know this information and 2) Why is this verse located here?
 - b) Let me tackle the questions in order. The first is the "how did they know this" question:
 - i) Know that no survey work was done. The Israelites did not send spies to survey everyone's attitude about the Israelites now being west of the Jordan River. ☺
 - ii) I suspect this verse is a "footnote" that was added to the text. Once the Israelites saw how the people living in the land reacted to the upcoming attacks, they were scared for their own lives.
 - iii) Remember that prior to Chapter 5, the Israelites were all camped east of the Jordan River. I'm sure word got around the land of Israel that there were one million to a few million people who were camped across the river. Once they got across, that had to scare everyone living there even more. I believe word got around.
 - iv) Imagine how scared the people living in Jericho were. I suspect that when they saw or heard about the Israelites crossing the river, the king said in effect, "Send messengers throughout the area that we have to unite and attack or we will all get killed". I can't prove that, but I would suspect that would be the logical thing to do, given this situation.
 - c) Let me talk for a moment about this verse another way: I have stated in previous lessons on Joshua that the "Conquering" of the Promised Land represents our conquering over sin in our life. Without the "power of God" in our lives, those demonic beings that control the sins in our lives had no fear of competition. Once we are willing to attack sin using the power of God, those forces now have a reason to fear for their dominance over our lives.
 - i) Let me put this spiritual battle another way. Why would demonic forces care about the fact that the Israelites are coming to conquer this land? The answer is Satan knew from the "Garden of Eden" days that his days on earth are numbered.
 - ii) That is because he (Satan) knew there would be a Jewish Messiah coming who would one day conquer and defeat him. Therefore Satan wants to do everything in his power to keep the Israelites out of the land and prevent the Messiah from being born there. Thus, there was a real demonic fear of the Israelites living in the land. (There is a separate demonic fear of the Israelites being in the land today, but that is another story for another day.)
 - iii) Getting back to the verse, my point is not only did the residents of the land fear the Israelites, but so did "demonic forces" behind those residences.
 - iv) By the way, if you think this verse only applies to "then" and not "now", remember what Jesus said about the forces of evil. "The gates of Hades (i.e., hell) will not prevail against you." (See Matthew 16:18)
 - d) I'd like to move on to Verse 2, but I still have the second "why" question of this verse. ☺
 - i) The question is, "Why is Verse 1" located here? I believe a big part of the reason is due to the fact that God wants the Israelites to trust in Him despite the fact the enemy is now in striking distance. This verse is God's way of saying, "It is ok for the Israelites to stop and circumcise themselves and hold the Passover meal because I (God) am in charge and I (God) know the enemies are scared of you."
 - ii) The great lesson to be learned from the opening verse is that we don't have to worry about the "nearby enemies" of sins of our lives. God has things under control and God will work everything out in His timing. That doesn't mean we ignore sin, it means we now have the power to overcome sin in our life.

7. Verse 2: At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again."³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.
- a) Remember the Israelites are still camped out just west of the Jordan River and God is now speaking to Joshua to give him his next command to lead the Israelites.
 - b) Before I discuss this verse, it might be best to remember where we left off in Chapter 4 and what is happening here. In Chapter 4, was the great "river crossing miracle" where God stopped the Jordan River from flowing so the Israelites could all cross it easily. The last part of the chapter was the Israelites building a monument to remember the event.
 - i) Verse 1 of this chapter is a "footnote" to describe how the current residents of the land of Israel felt about the Israelites now being west of the river and close enough to attack without any natural boundaries to stop them.
 - ii) We now come to Verse 2, which is God telling Joshua what is the next thing to do.
 - c) This verse is God telling Joshua to make a whole bunch of knives out of flint and circumcise all the men who have crossed the river. If one knows the geography of that area, one would know that flint rocks exist in that location of the world.
 - d) Verse 3 then says that Joshua made flint knives (i.e., knives out of flint) and circumcised the Israelites. That does not mean that the male population (my estimate is three quarters of a million men) formed a long single line with Joshua standing in front saying, "OK next, now you, pull down your pants." ☺ It means that all of the males were circumcised and Joshua oversaw the event to make sure everyone got circumcised.
 - e) The only other bit of information we get from this verse is that the name of the location was "Gibeath Haaraloth". A lot of English translations will say this was the "hill of foreskins" which is the English translation of that term. Even the NIV bible mentions this fact as a footnote. The point is they were not camped out at a city performing this ritual. They were out in an open area west of the river and the place where all the men were circumcised was properly renamed "hill of foreskins".
 - i) Yes, if one can imagine say, three quarters of a million men going through this ritual, it would create one big pile of foreskins, and that is the name of this place and yes, the name of this place is a "big pile of foreskins".
 - ii) I promised earlier in the lesson that I would not get "gross" anymore describing circumcision. I never promised I would avoid bad jokes on the topic. ☺
8. Verse 4: Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt--all the men of military age--died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt.⁵ All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not.⁶ The Israelites had moved about in the desert forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the LORD. For the LORD had sworn to them that they would not see the land that he had solemnly promised their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.⁷ So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way.
- a) These verses summarize much of the Israelites forty years of wilderness wanderings. Let me put all of this in a few sentences: "All of the Israelites left Egypt about 40 years ago. The generation that left Egypt did not obey God and He said that the generation that left Egypt could not enter the Promised Land but only their children could enter it. The generation that left Egypt had gone through the circumcision ritual, but not any of their children. Therefore, the men who had crossed the Jordan River had not been circumcised.
 - b) As I prepared for this lesson, one question kept bothering me: Why did the Israelites who wandered in the desert fail to circumcise their children? After all, Moses was the leader of those who wandered in the desert. Moses did receive the law from God and part of that law clearly stated that every male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. So why did Moses ignore this command for the next generation of Israelites?

- i) Even if Moses knew the present generation was not going in the wilderness, he knew the next generation going in was.
- ii) For what it is worth, I consulted lots of commentaries, and I never really got a good answer to this question.
- iii) The truth is that those "wildness" years were true waste of time. If one studies the book of Numbers carefully, this the book that covers the period of time where the Israelites were wandering in the desert for forty years. That book covered "year 1 and part of year 2 carefully and then skipped forward to the end of year 40 when the next generation was about to cross the Jordan River.
- iv) My point is the bible is essentially "silent" about the 38 years (or so) where the Israelites essentially just "wandered" in the desert all that time.
- v) One of the things that didn't happen in those "silent years" (as far as what is recorded in the bible) is the next generation of Israelites were not circumcised.
- vi) The point is those years were "such a waste" that the history of the Israelites during that time was not even recorded for us to study. That generation had turned from God so much, the negative history was "blotted" from the records.
- c) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. How does it affect me? The point is a person can turn from God "so much" to where one's life is essentially a "waste" for so long, it is ignored.
 - i) One can think of a person who never turns to God in the first place. No matter how financially successful they get or no matter how low they go in life, their life is essentially a "waste" because they have no desire to turn to God to make their life fruitful for Him. They may even blame God for their circumstances, but they refuse to turn to Him for help.
 - ii) It can describe a believer as well. One may go through a period of time where one ignores God completely. That time period is essentially a waste as one is not productive for God to make a difference for Him.
 - iii) If one studies the "Book of Numbers", remember that the key to that book is to understand the concept of a "waste of a life" or a waste of time as far as God was concerned. It was about a large group of people who refused to trust God and He (God) can get to a point with anyone and say in effect, "OK, I've had it with you. You refuse to turn to me, so I refuse to help you. I will give you what you want (life without Me) and let's see what happens".
 - iv) See Romans 1:21-32 on the topic of God "giving up" on people. An important point here is that God can "give up" but we never know when that moment is, and we should never give up on anyone.
 - v) Meanwhile, I forgot that we are studying Joshua, and not "Numbers". ☺
- d) The main point of these verses here in Joshua, is that the present generation who had crossed over the Jordan River had not been circumcised. Therefore, God commands all the Israelites to be circumcised as required in the law. God said in effect, "Do this now".
 - i) Think about this act from the standpoint of "attacking the enemy": Here are all the Israelites now across the Jordan River. The City of Jericho is (by best estimates) about two miles away with nothing but open land in between the Israelites and the city of Jericho itself. One would think that now is the time to attack and not the time for all the men to well, cut off part of their body-skin.
 - ii) The point is the very act of performing all these circumcisions is that all of Israel would be weak for a few days. In fact, if the enemy had gotten "wind" of what the Israelite people were doing at this time, they would have attacked and probably defeated the Israelites due to their weakness from performing this ritual.
 - iii) I can hear Joshua ask, "OK Lord, are you sure you want me to do this now?" ☺

- e) The funny thing is the day I was supposed to write about this issue, I ended up writing a day later. I got really sick for part of a day, and I am grateful that my wife was there to take care of me during that time. What I learned from that sickness (among other issues regarding my health) is that God wants us to be fully dependant upon Him. I could have been sicker for a lot longer and I "should have" been working, but instead I was dependant upon God helping me get better. It's amazing how one's priority's shift when one gets sick all of a sudden.
- i) My point is I'm positive God put me through that incident to help me relate more to the fate of the Israelites as I am preparing this lesson.
 - ii) The Israelites, "in the face of their enemies", purposely made themselves weak for a several day period while they recovered from the act of circumcision.
 - iii) In other words, Joshua probably asked God in effect, "OK, Lord, I understand that circumcision is a requirement of the law and all Jewish people, but why do you want us to do it now, when we are about to face off with our enemies?"
 - a) The answer is that God wants us fully dependant upon Him at all times. When we forget that we are called by God to be fully dependant upon Him, He (God) has this way of "humbling us" to remind us of that dependency. In my case, God got me sick for a day just to remember that I am dependant upon Him and not "things" for my life.
 - iv) So John, are you telling me I should tell God how grateful I am for my health and my life before I go back to my normal routine? That would be nice. ☺ The point here isn't gratitude, although showing gratitude for our lives is an important thing to do and helps us to keep our focus on Him. The point here is that no matter what we do in our lives, we need to remember that God is there, He wants to be in charge of our lives and He wants to be in charge of the timing of our lives.
 - a) If God does not want us to do something at a particular time, God has His ways of stopping us. He could make us sick or put some sort of diversion in our life to prevent us from doing what he doesn't want us to do.
 - b) Let me put this another way: The next time a "roadblock" comes to prevent us from doing something we want to do at a certain time, stop and consider the fact that it may be God putting that roadblock in our lives for a reason. In other words, instead of complaining about the fact we could not get "x" accomplished, tell God how grateful we are for putting that roadblock there, in order for God to accomplish His purposes.
 - f) My point of all of this is that even though all of the Israelites may have thought, "Gee, Lord do we have to do that the circumcision ritual now?" They should be grateful that God is teaching them patience and learning working on His timing and not theirs (ours).
9. Verse 8: And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.
- a) Verse 8 is another footnote that says in effect that all the Israelites remained at this campsite until everyone was healed from the act of circumcision. It took a few days for everyone to recover from the pain of it all.
 - b) We know that it was only a few days between this ritual and the time of the river crossing. This is because if you recall from the last chapter, the day the river was crossed was the 10th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. (You may recall my big discussion of how the 10th day is the same day as "Palm Sunday".) Coming up in two verses, the Israelites celebrated the ritual of Passover. That holiday of Passover always takes place on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. Therefore, we know the recovery from this circumcision process was a matter of a few days.

10. Verse 9: Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.
- a) The Israelites have not moved since the last verse. The point here is that God called the place where the Israelites are camping "Gilgal", and that name stuck for a long time.
 - b) The other point that doesn't come through well in the English is the word "Gilgal" actually means, "rolled away".
 - c) The idea is stated in the text is that the "reproach of Egypt" has been rolled away due to the circumcision of all the Israelites. So what does that mean? How did the physical act of circumcision change what happened to the Israelites in terms of leaving Egypt?
 - i) The idea of leaving Egypt wasn't just about walking out of there. It is about changing one's lifestyle from focusing and caring about "things of this world" to caring about and living for God with all of one's life. The reason the previous generation was essentially discarded by God is that they physically left Egypt but they never "mentally" left Egypt. The previous generation still sought the things that the Egyptian people and lifestyle "lived for".
 - ii) Let me put this in modern terms: Imagine a person who only cared about making money. Or imagine someone who lived for fame, or someone who lives primarily for supporting their family and that's it. Let's say they "get saved" and now realize there is more to life than just "stuff of this lifetime". That person now not only realizes that God exists, but wants to live to make a difference for God in this world. That is the idea behind "changing lifestyles".
 - iii) The problem with the first generation of the Israelites is they grasped the first step of acknowledging the existence of the "true God" but never wanted to take the next step of "living for Him and through Him" with their lives. Therefore, that first generation was destined to "waste their lives away" still focusing on and caring about the "things" of this world.
 - iv) John, are you saying we can't have hobbies or make a living? Of course not. I am saying that as a Christian, one is primarily concerned with serving Christ in one's life. One can enjoy other things, but one puts those other things in perspective of what is important. Further, sometimes one can even turn what one enjoys into something to make a difference for Christ. The point is one does not ignore one's necessity to make a living or ignore one's family for the sake of God. One works through God to make a difference in this world and "do all those other things" through the power of God.
 - d) Getting back to Verse 9, the point is the Israelites are beginning to live the new life in the Promised Land and are learning to trust God to get things done in His timing. They were willing to be obedient to God and circumcise their bodies to show their trust in God at a time when they are vulnerable.
 - i) God names the place "Gilgal" meaning to "roll away". What the Israelites were "rolling away" their old way of thinking learning to live for God and "by" God.
11. Verse 10: On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.
- a) The Israelites crossed the river on the 10th day of the month. It is now four days later and the Israelites have recovered from the circumcision. The Israelites now celebrate the Passover holiday on the day as prescribed by the Law. (In Exodus 12:48, God makes a point that one must be circumcised in order to celebrate this holiday.)
 - b) What this text also implies is that the Passover holiday was ignored in the years when the Israelites wandered in the desert. They did do it the first year after they left Egypt (see Numbers Chapter 9). What happened was that the Israelites ignored the holiday for the next 38-39 years while they were wandering in the desert. Again, one has to think of those years as "wasted" from God's perspective.

12. Verse 11: The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. ¹² The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.
- a) It's time to review "manna". When the Israelite nation wandered around in the desert for 40 years, they ate manna. That is a Hebrew word that literally means, "What is it?"
 - i) The description of manna can be found in Exodus Chapter 16.
 - ii) It is described as a white flaky like substance that rained down from the sky six days a week. The Jewish nation ate it every day for the forty year time period.
 - iii) Notice that even though the previous generation couldn't enter the Promised Land, God still fed them those forty years along with their children with manna.
 - iv) I have no idea if manna was tasty or bland. What we do know is the stuff rained down every night and it was enough to provide the food substance for the Israelites during the entire time they wandered in the desert. There is also the possibility their animals ate it as well, but the text is silent on that issue.
 - v) One thing that was special about the manna was that it was only good for one day on every day, except the day before the Sabbath. If one tried to gather more than one day's worth of manna, it would go bad. The day before the Sabbath, it would last for two days before going bad. They couldn't gather it on the Sabbath.
 - b) Here's my point about manna that I want to tie to these verses: Imagine that all of the days of one's life, from the time one could walk, one would bend down on the ground and collect this manna stuff to eat. I would consider it a habit if one had to do this every day of one's life.
 - i) Now, after 40 years, it stopped raining manna. Can you imagine waking up, and every day of one's life going to collect this stuff and now all of a sudden it didn't come? I suspect everyone woke up, looked around and said, "Hey, where's the manna? What are we supposed to eat for food?"
 - c) Now John, you said this lesson is about being totally dependant upon God. Yet here is their miraculous food supply that rained down from the sky stopping after 40 years. How are they supposed to completely trust God without this stuff?
 - i) The answer is go back to the text. It says that in Verse 11, the Israelites ate some of the produce of the land. In other words, the Israelites were fully dependant upon God for their substance, and God "happened" to have food that was growing in the ground ready there to eat.
 - ii) In ancient times, people sought protection within the gates of city walls. Within those walls people would come to trade what they owned for other things. In other words, the city would have an open market where buyers and sellers met. The farmland itself was outside the walls of the city. My point here is the land where the Israelites were camping was probably farmland. The people who normally work the farmland were scared of the Israelites and were now hiding inside the city walls of Jericho. That is how God provided the food for the Israelites to eat now that the manna has stopped.
 - iii) The food the Israelites ate was "unleavened bread" and "roasted grain". The term unleavened bread means one does not give the bread time to rise in an oven. I assume the place the Israelites were camping was a grain field. One can fairly quickly cook these items and that is what they ate the day the manna stopped.
 - d) My point being is we can count on God to provide for us. How He provided for us yesterday may be different than how He provides for us today or tomorrow. If one's income stopped coming in, God usually has something else waiting for us to provide for us today. To find that new source requires dependence upon God.

- e) So are you saying that just because the "manna" stopped and the Israelites ate off the produce of the land is symbolic of us trusting in God for today's or tomorrow's substance? Yes I am. Sometimes that means living off of savings for a while and sometimes that means God wants us to "move on" as He has plans for us elsewhere. How do we know where to turn for tomorrow's substance? We ask God for guidance and move forward with logical steps trusting that God is guiding us.
 - i) What I want us to get out of these verses is if one's income stops, then one has to trust in the fact that God will provide a new source. God doesn't stop the "manna" without providing a new source of food (or income) to those that follow Him.
 - f) What is implied here is that if we care about serving God, He in turn, cares about taking care of us. I happen to be writing this page of the text on my birthday. (Don't e-mail me. It was a while ago.) It reminded me that God has taken care of me all of my years and I trust that He will provide for my future. I may not know how, but I have faith in Him that He will provide just as He provided for the Israelites now that they are in the land.
 - g) Finally, let's make the connection between the Passover celebration and the end of "manna". The purpose of the Passover Holiday is to show gratitude to God for rescuing the Israelites out of the bondage of slavery and into a new life of serving God.
 - i) The observance of this holiday is a requirement for all Jewish people. It is designed to teach one's children how God has rescued the Jewish nation out of slavery and being grateful to God for calling them into a new life of serving Him.
 - ii) The Jewish Passover ritual is "somewhat similar" to the Christian ritual of taking communion. The purpose of Christian communion is to remember how Jesus died for our sins. The purpose of Passover is for Jews to remember how God has called them out of a life of slavery into a life of serving Him.
 - iii) It is not a Christian requirement to observe Passover. Still, I always recommend to Christians that if they ever get a chance, go join a Jewish family to celebrate this holiday ritual. Think about the fact that now that one is born again, one has been rescued from the world and now one is in a new life of living for God and living to make a difference for Him.
13. Verse 13: Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"
- a) The first question I have here is "What was Joshua doing near Jericho?" Was he out alone praying for what to do next, or just scouting out the enemy? The text does not say.
 - i) I believe Joshua was getting accustomed to God speaking directly to him. God told Joshua when and how to cross the river and to start the circumcision process. God told Joshua to observe the Passover. I suspect that now that Passover is over, Joshua was wondering what's next and I believe he was praying for an answer.
 - ii) Whether or not Joshua was praying at this point, what did happen is that Joshua had a visual encounter with God. The point is God sought out Joshua to give him instructions on what to do next.
 - iii) There are many times in my life where I have prayed, "OK God, I'm confused here, what do I do next?" Sometimes God has made it very clear as to what I am to do next and sometimes I simply have to move forward and trust that God is guiding me. I believe that is what we are seeing here with Joshua. The Passover is over and he was wondering what to do next.
 - b) Joshua then saw this "entity" (who looked like a man) standing in front of him, with a sword drawn. Joshua did not know if it was an Israelite or someone who lived in this land. It was natural for Joshua's first question to be, "Are you for us, or for our enemies"?
 - c) The next verse is the response of the person Joshua was now talking to.

14. Verse 14: "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"
- a) Remember that this "being" who was right in front of Joshua had his sword out of its "pocket" and was drawn. The point is this "being" was prepared to fight at this moment.
 - b) In the bible, whenever God wants send a messenger to the face of a person, notice that the messenger often comes in the appearance of a human. If God is perfect, than a perfect God is capable of having a messenger resemble a human.
 - i) If God wanted this messenger to be "obvious" it was sent from Him, why wouldn't this messenger be say, a giant creature with wings or something that looks threatening? The point is that God wanted Joshua to honor this person, but not be so scared that he would run away in fear. Thus this "being" appeared human.
 - c) The first response thing this "being" said is that he is neither for the Israelites nor against them. The first word he said was "neither". Before we go any further, we need to discuss the word "neither". You know from the rest of this verse that this man represents the God of the Universe. So why does he say he represents neither the Israelites nor their enemies?
 - i) God does not care about the life of the Israelite any more or less than He cares about the lives of those currently living in the land of Israel or any more or less than He cares about you or me. God is not "for" any person more than another.
 - ii) Does that mean that God didn't want the Israelites to win this battle? Of course not. Being for or against anyone is a separate issue than who God wants to win a particular battle or war.
 - iii) Over four hundred years earlier, God ordained the destruction of all the people living in the Promised Land due to their wickedness. (See Genesis 15:16). The people currently living there have gotten so corrupt in their wickedness that God was doing a "mercy killing" by wiping them out. The crime against them was that they were taking their children and offering them "live" to their false gods.
 - a) God creates all people with the instinctive knowledge that killing is wrong. To get to a point of killing one's living children (as a sacrifice to a false god) is enough for God to say, "OK, I've had it with this people." The amazing thing is not that God has ordained this punishment, but that He waited as long as he did.
 - d) Now we can discuss the rest of the verse. Joshua realized that this "being" is not human. Joshua bows down in respect of God. Joshua understands God is now communicating with Him directly by a visual appearance.
 - e) God has already spoken directly to Joshua a number of times in this chapter. Joshua now realizes that whatever God has to say "this time", is important enough for God to make a visual appearance in front of Joshua. His "wise reaction" is to take it seriously and bow down. Joshua believed this being was sent from God or "is" God and bows down.
15. Verse 15: The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.
- a) To understand this verse, we have to go back to when Moses first saw the burning bush prior to Moses even leading the Israelites out of Egypt. The exact same phrase that God spoke to Moses is the same phrase God spoke to Joshua here in Verse 15.
 - b) Remember that Joshua had a lot of alone time with Moses as his personal assistant. I am pretty sure that at least once Joshua would ask the question of Moses, "When you first encountered God, what did He say to you and how did you know it was God?"

- i) Moses would respond to Joshua's question by saying that the first time he ever encountered God was through "The Burning Bush". The first thing that God said to Moses though the burning bush was the exact same line (in Hebrew) of "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." I am positive that Joshua would recognize that expression and realized that he was talking to God.
- c) So why did God require Joshua (and Moses a long time earlier) to take off their shoes? Does this mean we have to take off our shoes in church?
 - i) First of all, no it does not mean we have to take off our shoes in church. If God ever orders me directly to take off my shoes in His presence, I too would do so. In the meantime, I don't want anyone in church to smell my feet and I'm not crazy about the idea of having to smell other people's feet at well. ☺
 - ii) So back to the first question: Why did God require Moses and Joshua to take off their sandals in the presence of God? It was a sign of "servant hood". A household servant (yes, a slave) in those days would never wear shoes. It was a sign to a guest of who was in charge and who is the servant. To ask someone to remove their shoes is to show "servant hood" of the one removing the shoes.
 - iii) In other words, it was a sign of respect that Joshua would understand that He must "serve" the God of the Universe and Joshua is in God's presence.
 - iv) Many years ago, I visited a church while they were studying the book of Exodus. The church built a full size model of the tabernacle as described in Exodus. While they did cut a few corners on how much real gold was used, they did an incredible job of building the structure exactly as it was described in Exodus.
 - a) What caught my attention as I walked inside of it was the fact there was no floor. On the ground was just the grass growing that was planted at that location. I went back and studied the bible passage about the tabernacle. While God gave every exact detail of how it was to be built, there was no mention of any floor. What struck me then, is what struck me about God's statement to Moses and Joshua. Because this structure represented being in the presence of God, one should not have on any shoes as one is a servant of God in the presence of God.
 - b) Again, I don't believe that applies today, as our culture does not consider being barefoot to be a sign of "reverence". Unless I get a direct order from God to do otherwise, my shoes are staying on.
- d) Getting back to the verse is that Joshua "did so". Joshua knew that this "messenger" was no ordinary "regular" angel (as if we would know what a regular angel looked like).
 - i) The one statement we had by this "being" about himself is that he is the "Commander of the armies of God". Therefore, if this was just an ordinary angel, it is a pretty important one in that "it" was in charge of all the angels that involved in warfare on behalf of the God of the Universe.
 - ii) That leads to more questions. If "God is God" why does He need a literal army and who do does this army fight against? If God is well "God", I don't think the war has anything to do with attacking God Himself. It has to do with "spiritual warfare" and the idea of angels fighting for God fighting against demonic forces.
 - iii) When Satan rebelled against God, Satan still understood who God was in terms of "being God". What scholars guess is that Satan didn't like God's plan of "redeeming men and women for Himself". Satan wanted to rebel against the idea of spending eternity being a servant of mankind. The reason Satan rebelled along with one third of the angels is that Satan and his forces didn't want to see God's plan go through with the redemption of men and women. (Sources: Luke 10:18 and Revelation 12:4, know that "stars" represents angelic beings in heaven.)

- iv) My point to all of this is that there is one big "spiritual war" that goes on behind the scenes of what we perceive of the world.
 - a) For a cross-reference on this topic, See Daniel Chapter 10:12-14.
 - e) Many Christians (including myself) argue that this "entity" speaking to Joshua is a "preincarnate" appearance of Jesus Himself". One has to remember that Jesus always existed and then took the form of a human, which is the main New Testament story. The argument is based on the fact this "being" said the exact same words that God spoke to Moses at the burning bush and the fact He was the leader of the "armies" of God.
 - i) If my view is wrong on this issue, I won't think twice about it. I've learned as a Christian if I had a choice of being "too conservative" in one's biblical views versus being "too liberal", I would choose "too conservative" and therefore, I will argue that it is Jesus Himself speaking to Joshua.
 - f) With all that said, "the leader of God's angels" took time out of his busy schedule to give Joshua an announcement. ☺
 - i) As to the specific message God had for Joshua, that is a topic for Chapter 6. Since I've managed to write over eleven pages on Chapter 5, we will have to discuss the rest of God's speech to Joshua in the next lesson when we cover Chapter 6.
16. Let me wrap this up by getting back to my title about learning to trust God. The Israelites had to circumcise themselves and perform the Passover rituals all in the presence of their enemies.
- a) If one thinks about it, that fact reminds us of the line from Psalm 23 that says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies". (Psalm 23:5a NIV).
 - b) For these Israelites, it took real trust in God to do His will (the circumcision and the Passover meal rituals) despite the circumstances around them.
 - c) It also took real faith for Joshua to be "out by himself" after all of this in order to have a visual encounter with the God of the Universe.
 - d) My point is no matter what is happening in our life, God is always there, watching out for us and saying to us "Trust Me" no matter what is going on in our life.
 - i) Is it easy to put one's trust in God in difficult situations? No, it was tough for the Israelites then and it is tough for us now. So why doesn't God appear before us when we are about to take on something difficult in life? The answer is God gave us the story of "Joshua" to understand that He is always there and always looking after those who have committed their lives to Him. Often God seems silent to us in difficult situations. That is God's way of saying "trust Me and I'll see you through this situation."
 - ii) Remember that God loved us first (before we responded to His love) and called us. God is always looking for people to respond back to His love. Once we have made that commitment, God is not capable of going back on His word to love us and protect us as we live to make a difference for Him.
17. Let's pray: Father, we don't always understand what You want from us. We don't always know what to do next. Guide us and help us to know that You are there, You care for our lives and You are guiding us down the path that You want for our lives. Help us to make a difference for You not that we are glorified, but that You are glorified in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.