

# Sword of the Spirit ~ Sword of Man - Part I

## Captain of the Lord's Army

For some time now I have felt drawn by the Lord to look into and contrast the Sword of the Spirit; God's weapon of choice, over and against the sword of man. Today is the first in a series of messages dealing with this subject.

To lay a foundation of sorts, we are going to take a look at the first encounter we have of God with a sword and discuss the implications. The encounter takes place in the Old Testament Book of Joshua.

You may recall that Moses, after he brought the Israelites out of Egypt, took them to the land of Canaan. When they arrived, he sent 12 spies over to check out the land; 10 of the spies came back fearful of what they saw and a rebellion broke out amongst the people of Israel, causing them to wander in the desert for the next 40 years!

There were two men, however, who saw things very differently, Joshua and Caleb. They saw the land flowing with milk and honey, a good land, and they thought for sure God would give them the land.

After wandering in the desert for 40 years, the nation Israel made its way back to Canaan. Moses, who had led them all these years, died and the command was left to Joshua. We can read about this briefly in Joshua chapter 1.

### Joshua 1:1-6

**After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. 5 No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.**

So now the mantle has been past to Joshua and he is given the task of leading the people into the land promised to Abraham.

So preparations are made, getting ready to take the land. In chapter two Joshua sends 2 spies to go and check out the land; they went to Jericho, where Rahab the prostitute protected the spies from being caught. Her act of bravery would later prevent her and her family from being destroyed when Israel invaded the land.

In chapter 3 we read of the amazing crossing of the Jordan River, which took place during flood stage. The priests took the Ark of the Covenant and stepped into the river and the water stopped; the rest of Israel was able to cross over.

The Israelites are now firmly placed in the Promised Land, setting up camp at Gilgal. It is here in verse 10 that I want to read . . .

### **Joshua 5:10-15**

**On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. 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 the produce of Canaan.**

**Note:** For 40 years the Israelites had been hand fed by God with the miracle of manna. I have often wondered how often the people complained at this great miracle. I wonder how many even despised the blessing that would be echoed for all eternity. I wonder how many blessings we enjoy that are nothing short of a miracle from God, yet we grumble!

There comes a time when, just like the Israelites, we need to eat from the fruit of our labors. There comes a time when we need to operate as the mature, godly men and women we have been created to be and be sustained by the land that God has sent us to capture.

**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?"**

**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?"**

**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.**

This is the Scripture that I wanted to draw our attention to today. This is what we call a Christophany; it is one of the few times that Christ Himself appears to man; here He calls Himself the "Commander of the Lord's Army."

We know this is Christ because of what He says; **"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy."** An angel of God does not allow man to worship them, but this encounter is different, it is the Lord!

I find this to be a very fascinating encounter. I mean Joshua is ready for a fight, his mind is engaged and he knows that there is going to be lots of bloodshed as they take this amazing land called Canaan. He sees a Man standing with a sword drawn; he no doubt wonders if this might be the first encounter.

As he approaches the Man, you can be sure Joshua has his hand on his own sword, ready to do battle. Joshua's question is revealing; **"Are you for us or for our enemies?"** The question assumes only two options; if you are for us, then join us and let's do battle! If you are for them, then I will have to slay you! Joshua has it in his mind that since he is about doing the Lord's work, there can only be two options; you are either with me or against me; my way or the highway!

God's response to the question is also revealing; He said; **"Neither; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy."**

First he said **"neither."** Now the Hebrew word that is often translated to mean neither is a very small word, with big implications.

**Lo**                    lo; primitive particle; which means **not**

Christ was the first to coin that little phrase . . . **NOT!** Christ was trying to tell Joshua that whatever he was thinking about Him was **NOT**.

We could learn a great deal here:

Is God for democrats or for republicans . . . **NOT**

Is God pro-choice or pro-life . . . **NOT**

Is God for a republic or for communism . . . **NOT**

We could compile a very long list, but God does not go there!

Remember a passage of Scripture we shared last week?

**Isaiah 55:8-9**

**"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

God has plans that are so much higher and greater than we could even imagine; yet He seems to beckon us to understand them; so we press on!

After Christ tells Joshua; **"NOT"** he then identifies Himself to Joshua, then issues a command!

**” . . . but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.”**

He is the commander or “Captain” of the Lord’s Army. Joshua is about to enter into fierce battles and His commander in Chief is standing before Him; and we see Joshua falling to his face as the reality of this encounter begins to sink in! Christ’s next words emphasize the reality of this encounter; **“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.”**

God demands holiness, because He is holy! I often wonder if we grasp this concept.

Holiness in its truest form means to be “set apart for God’s use and **ONLY** God’s use.” Anything that is consecrated to God is to be used only for Him. When you and I accept the work that Jesus has done on the Cross, and by faith believe that God raised him from the dead, the promise of the HOLY SPIRIT is given to us; He indwells the believer! We have become HOLY because HE is HOLY!

To many times we only wear our holiness when we come to church; to be seen by men, but when we are alone, or in the company of sinners, we act very, very different, how can this be!

In this encounter, Joshua is looking **at** Christ; we have the Spirit of Christ on the inside! How holy should we be? How SET APART are you?

We could spend weeks exploring this encounter, but I hope you are beginning to understand how powerful this was. It was a defining moment in the life of Joshua, and Oh by the way, Joshua took his shoes off!

In the next chapter, the Captain of the Lord’s Army then gives Joshua some instructions as to how to take down the walled city of Jericho. It was a rather ridiculous idea; march around the city everyday for 6 days then on the seventh day march around it 7 times and then when you hear the trumpet blast, everyone shout; crazy idea! It worked!

Remember God’s words from Isaiah . . . “my ways are not your ways . . .” God did this His way because it maximizes the glory given to Him. If Joshua built a siege ramp and devised some brilliant military plan, he would have gotten all the glory; but in this way, God gets it all!

After the trumpet blast and the shout, the walls fell down and the soldiers were given instructions to kill everything; men, women, children, livestock . . .everything!

We often think of how cruel this seemed; I mean why would a loving God allow such butchery?

Moses warned the Israelites about the sins they would encounter as they entered the Promised Land:

## **Deuteronomy 18:9-13**

**When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. 10 Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, 11 or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. 12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. 13 You must be blameless before the LORD your God.**

Anyone who does the things mentioned in the preceding Scripture is detestable to the Lord and will be judged! Yes, it is sad that good people, even children were killed, but they engaged in practices that were simply disgusting to God and He used Israel to rid the land of those people. Only Rahab the prostitute and her family were spared!

Did you ever wonder how long God will keep America from the same fate? Have you ever taken a good hard look at the kind of society we are producing here? God will bring judgment and it will be swift and complete!

As the soldiers went through the city of Jericho they were told not to take anything, but rather ALL plunder was to be taken and placed in the treasury of the Lord; it seems everyone obeyed that directive, except one, his name was Achan. He took some silver and other goodies and buried them under his tent.

In chapter 6, following this amazing victory in Jericho, the soldiers went up to a little town called Ai, which only required a few thousand soldiers to take. They thought this would be an easy day, but the men of Ai over took the Israelites and killed 36 of them!

Joshua was devastated:

### **Joshua 6:6-12**

**“Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. 7 And Joshua said, “Alas, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! 8 Pardon your servant, Lord. What can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? 9 The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?”**

**10 The LORD said to Joshua, “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? 11 Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their**

**own possessions. 12 That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.**

The soldiers lost the battle because of one man's greed! God told Joshua what to do about this and the man was found out. Achan and his entire family, wife, children and all he owned, were taken outside the camp and were stoned to death, then burned. Achan ended up receiving exactly the same kind of judgment that Jericho had received!

One person can prevent God from moving in powerful ways inside the church!

There are thousands of churches across the country that would love to be advancing the Gospel. They try and try to move it forward, but feel as though they are straining. I was told recently by a trusted member of this church; "Rock, I have never seen anyone work so hard to accomplish so little."

We struggle so hard here to pay bills, our mortgage is always overdue, your pastor is on welfare and will soon be going to work a second job. We struggle doing renovation projects because of a constant lack of funds.

The Bible is very, very clear about tithing and those who are committed to membership in this church have made a covenant to engage in Scriptural tithing; the reason we are unable to move forward is that some of you have been hoarding God's cash and have it buried under your tent! Some of you have stolen thousands and thousands of dollars over the years and then have the audacity to complain about the fallen condition of our center . . . that's amazing! Is it any wonder that God's work is slowed?

We are specifically commanded in the Bible not to gossip and slander, yet it goes on unabated. I am stunned at the way some of you talk about each other. On many occasions I have had to throttle some; but it is like it goes in one ear and out the other!

I cannot repeat some of the things I have heard said.

Is it any wonder that we struggle reaching the hurting and wounded in our community. I have even prayed to God; please do not send us any new people because this has become a very unsafe place for them! How sad!

We need to learn a lesson here, because so much hangs in the balance. We have a job to do and it cannot be done so long as there are those who will stand in the way. It is time for all of us to do some heart examination and choose.

At least Achan had the courage to give glory to God before he and his family were killed.

**Joshua 7:19-21**

Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

**20** Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: **21** When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

There are too many today who when found to be stashing God’s stuff under their tent, never give glory to God by confessing their sin, but rather sheepishly whisper “I’m sorry” and continue to go about their way.

The fact of the matter is that these are the people who are standing in the way of God moving the church forward and Christ is commanding those in leadership:

**“Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? 11 Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. 12 That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.**

So, as we begin this series of messages, we are called to take a serious look at the fallen condition of the church. This series is not for the immature, not for those who are squeamish; but rather they are for those who are willing walk forward into an amazing encounter with God.

Joshua said much later in life the following:

**Joshua 24:14-15**

**“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”**