

JOSHUA 5:10–15

THE PASSOVER AT GILGAL AND JOSHUA'S VISION

The last thing the children of Israel did before they commenced the conquest of Canaan was observe the Passover (Joshua 5:10–12). This festival is first mentioned in Exodus 12 in connection with the tenth plague (the death of the firstborns) and Israel's flight from Egypt. In a sort of narrative inverse, the Passover held at Gilgal is also connected with death (this time of the Canaanites) and Israel's entry into the land of promise. Joshua's presiding over the Passover once again signifies his status as a Moses-like figure. That manna stopped being given to the Israelites on that day was anticipated at Exodus 16:35.

Joshua's vision at or near Gilgal (presumably, since the location is not specified except that it was near Jericho) is extraordinary (Joshua 5:13–15). As earlier with the vision of Balaam (Numbers 22:23, 31) and, later, of David (1 Chronicles 21:16), in his vision Joshua saw a man with a drawn sword, whom he at first did not recognize. Joshua's question ("Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?") makes sense since the man's posture would naturally have been considered threatening. Only when the man identified himself as the "captain of the host of the LORD" did Joshua realize with whom he was speaking. He accordingly "fell on his face to the earth, and did worship," since he now recognized that he was in the presence of deity (Joshua 5:14). The response the man gave Joshua parallels Jehovah's response to Moses on Sinai at the beginning of his own theophany (see Exodus 3:5). Joshua now stood in sacred space.¹ That the Lord was speaking to Joshua in this vision is confirmed by Joshua 6:2–5, which contains the details of the speech after the brief parenthetical aside at 6:1.

¹ See the discussion in John Gee, "Put Off Thy Shoes from Off Thy Feet': Sandals and Sacred Space," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021): 205–216.

The stage was set for the conquest to commence. Israel was prepared for war, and Joshua had his divine commission as Moses's successor. The first battle will commence at Jericho in the next chapter.

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