

“Whose side are you on?” Moses had foretold that a prophet would arise from among us after he was gone. He said we needed to **“listen carefully”** to everything this prophet said, for he would be speaking the Creator’s own words to us. And now Moses was gone—he had wandered off into the wilderness to die alone. Moses had left Joshua of Nun to be in charge. So we **assumed** that this Joshua was the prophet who would speak the Creator’s truth to us. The Creator said it was time to cross the Jordan River and that we needed to be brave and courageous, for he would be **“with us.”** But Joshua began his role as leader by being **cautious**. Instead of directly leading us all across the Jordan River, trusting in the Creator’s protection, Joshua instead sent two spies into Jericho to assess its strength. The spies reported that the people were afraid of us.

Then Joshua armed 40,000 of our men and readied them for battle. This is what Moses had commanded us to do. But something about it seemed **wrong**. We had escaped Egypt through no strength of our own—we had no **weapons**, no **soldiers**, and no **army** at that time. The Creator had fought for us and we had done nothing but follow. Why were we arming ourselves for war **now**? Was the Creator not going to fight for us? Why did we need **swords**? Then Joshua led us to the Jordan River. When the feet of the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant stepped into the river, the river retreated, making a path through the waters so we could all cross on dry ground. We had entered the wilderness crossing through the waters of the **Red Sea** and now 40 years later we were leaving the wilderness crossing through the waters of the **Jordan River**. Then we learned what the swords were for. They were to be used on **us**. The Creator told us to use our swords and circumcise ourselves. This incapacitated us and we had to trust in the Creator’s protection while we healed. So we stopped to celebrate the Passover. The Passover was the night the angel of death had passed over us and we were liberated from slavery in Egypt. The Creator had fought for us and we had followed and been saved.

But then on the next day, after remembering the Passover, we began eating the grain of this new land. And it was then that **“the manna stopped.”** For forty years the Creator had given us bread from heaven. This manna had showed up every morning to feed us. And now that manna was gone. The Creator’s daily provision had disappeared. And frankly, we were thrilled about this. We had never liked the manna. We had always missed the rich foods and grains of Egypt. We had complained for years saying, **“We are disgusted by this manna!”** We were so glad to be done with the manna. But deep down, something again seemed **wrong** about it. We were no longer relying on the Lord, one day at a time. After we came to the outskirts of Jericho, a man with a sword approached Joshua. Joshua asked the man, **“Whose side are you on? Are you on our side or on the side of our enemies?”** The man said, **“I am on neither side. I am the captain of the Creator’s forces.”** Then Joshua fell down before him and said, **“What is your message for us?”** The man said, **“Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.”** This was exactly what the Creator had told Moses at the burning bush before Moses had come and led us out of Egypt. We were on holy ground. The Creator was in this place, working in this very place to accomplish his good work. That was comforting, but we were also deeply concerned. What did it mean that the Creator was **not** on **our** side? And that he was **not** on our **enemies’** side either?

Then the Creator told Joshua that he had given Jericho into our hands. So we followed the Creator’s Word and marched around the city of Jericho once a day for six days, taking with us the Ark of the Covenant which contained the Ten Words of the Lord’s **will**, the manna of his **provision**, and the budded staff of his **protection**. Then on the seventh day we marched around Jericho seven times. And after the seventh time we all shouted and the priests blew their trumpets. And through the Creator’s power, not through our own, the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. Then Joshua told us, **“The city is forbidden to you, all that is in it belongs to the Lord!”** So after the walls collapsed we charged into the city and listened to what Moses had told us, **“Do not leave anything alive that breathes.”** So we killed every man, woman, child, and elderly person, as well as every animal in the city. It was a bloodbath. We willingly killed all the living creatures, but when it came to destroying the wealth, it was much harder for us. Some of us took the wealth of the city for ourselves and even Joshua also took some wealth, claiming it was for the Creator.

Feeling high off of this victory, Joshua then prepared us to go and fight the people of Ai. But when we faced the people of Ai, we were defeated and had to flee. Joshua was deeply confused and angry and wanted to know why the Creator would let this happen. The Creator said, **“You have sinned and broken the covenant and my commandments.”** We had **“acted unfaithfully”** by taking the wealth of Jericho. So we repented and destroyed the wealth that we had taken. After this we went back to fight Ai and we won. Joshua was fired up. He had been humiliated when the king of Ai had first defeated us and he wanted **revenge**. So Joshua took the king of Ai and **crucified** him for all to see.

“Whose side are you on?” We had all heard the Creator’s true law at Mount Sinai, **“Do not kill.”** But the law that Moses had ended up giving us had been veiled and obscured because of the **“hardness of our hearts.”** Therefore Moses had commanded us to destroy everything in the cities we faced. He knew we had **idolatrous** hearts. He knew that if we mingled with the people, we would become like them. He knew that if we took their wealth and their city, we would become like them. It **all** had to be destroyed because we were **hardhearted**. Yet we had not even listened to this veiled law of Moses. We had willingly and eagerly slaughtered every living thing, but we wanted the wealth for ourselves. It turned out that we were no different than these nations we were fighting against. We were the same. We were not **“holy.”** We were just like everyone else. Joshua had asked the Creator, **“Whose side are you on?”** And the Creator had said, **“I am on neither side.”** The Creator is always working for the good of **all** his creation. He does not take sides in **our** battles, fights, and wars. The Creator had wanted us to be his **“holy”** people, not because he was on **our** side and **against** our enemies, but because he wanted a **“holy”** people who could bring blessing to all of creation.

“Whose side are you on?” The name “Joshua” or “Yeshua” comes from Hebrew, but in Greek you say the name Joshua as “Ἰησοῦς” or in English as “Jesus.” The first Joshua to come after Moses—Joshua of Nun—**killed his enemies** and every living creature in Jericho and took the city’s wealth. But when the next Joshua—Joshua of Nazareth—came to Jericho, he **loved his enemies** by healing a blind beggar and helping a rich tax collector give away all his wealth to the poor. The first Joshua came into the land and **crucified** its kings to lift himself up. The second Joshua came into the land and allowed himself to **be crucified** to lift others up. The first Joshua **took sides** in the battles and fights of our world. The second Joshua **rejected both sides** of the fights in our world and loved everyone on both sides. **“Whose side are you on?”** Moses said that the Creator would raise up a prophet after him that would speak the Creator’s truth. The world looks for prophets to take the form of the first Joshua—sword-wielding conquerors who **crucify their enemies** and **build up wealth**. But the true prophet of the Creator is the second Joshua—Jesus of Nazareth—who **lays down all violence and wealth** and is **himself crucified** out of love for his enemies. **“Whose side are you on?”** Are you on the side of the first Joshua, participating in the fights of this world? Or are you on the side of the second Joshua, taking up your cross and laying down all violence and wealth in love for your enemies? **“Whose side are you on?”** The Creator does not choose sides in the fights of our world. And if we are to be faithful to him, then we too must **not** choose sides in the fights of this world. Instead the Creator calls us to join his true prophet, Joshua of Nazareth in a life of love for all sides, for all peoples, and for all creation. **“Whose side are you on?” Amen.**