

Day 5 – Feb. 2, 2023

Amid the violence, there is a pressing reality here in the book of Joshua that we can easily miss. It is a reality that we often take for granted in Christendom, a reality that the Jews would marvel at could they see the future. This reality was solidified in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, “God With Us”. And it is just that – that God was with His people on this conquest of the Promised Land.

In the day of Joshua’s battles, most nations had their own deities, and those deities were often relegated to their particular geography. Larger name deities held larger areas, but every group had their gods. One of the major gods worshiped that day was Ba’al. He was the god of fertility, storms and floods. So when the Israelites first crossed the Jordan River, which was at flood stage, it was a sign that they were entering Ba’al’s territory. And as the Ark of the Covenant, which was Israel’s symbol of God’s presence, entered the flooded Jordan, the water stopped flowing. God by His very presence subdued and halted Ba’al, the son of the Canaanites primary deity El.

Forward to today’s story, and we see the Ark of the Covenant coming with them into every battle. What was so amazing in this was that Yahweh wasn’t relegated to a certain land or geography. He was the God who was everywhere, and so was always with His people. The Israelites trusted God to be with them, consulted God (or, to their defeat, didn’t) on decisions, and made vows to the present God. While this got them in trouble with the Gibeonites – note that their vow before God was more powerful than the deception of the Gibeonites – it was yet another reality for this people who traveled with their God. And from hailstorms to stopping the movement of the sun (or as we know it today the earth’s rotation), God acted on their behalf.

Today, we take it for granted that God is with us. We can pray wherever we are without having to go to a certain place. We know God is present in our wilderness times as well as our oasis times. We celebrate God’s presence with us in worship each week, as do all Christian churches around the world. But what if we truly took this truth seriously, that God was with us. What if we recognized that this same God who brought a devastating hailstorm on Israel’s enemies and stopped the earth’s very rotation was with us at work or school, at home or in our travels, in our bedrooms and kitchens and living rooms. How might our lives change if we truly recognized that God is with us always, both in power and in judgement? Yes, God has expectations of His people and judges us by our behaviors. Thank God He judges with mercy and grace!