

Lesson 6

The Defeat of Jericho

Joshua 5.13-7.1

Introduction

This lesson examines Israel's miraculous victory over the fortified city of Jericho under Joshua's leadership. At the end of chapter 5, Joshua encounters the commander of the Lord's army, emphasizing God's presence and guidance in the upcoming battle. God then gives Joshua explicit instructions for capturing Jericho in chapter 6 - the Israelites are to march around the city daily for six days and then seven times on the seventh, after which the priests will blow trumpets and the people will shout, causing the walls to collapse.

The Israelites demonstrate great faith by following this unconventional battle plan precisely. On the seventh day, the walls fall, and they destroy the city as commanded, sparing only Rahab and her family, who had protected the spies. Joshua places the city under a curse to never be rebuilt. This first victory shows God's power and fulfillment of his promise to give them the land. However, the account ends on a somber note as one man's sin will lead to Israel's first defeat in the next chapter. This lesson examines the significance of Israel's miraculous victory at Jericho and how it sets the stage for future conquests under God.

5.13-15: A Divine Encounter

Joshua 5.13-15 contains the seventh directive Joshua receives directly from God in this opening section of the book. The occasion is like two other Old Testament stories that come before it: Jacob and the man of God at Peniel, Genesis 32.22-32, and Moses and the burning bush, Exodus 3.1-4.17. All three men, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua are facing a life-and-death conflict and are confronted by a divine messenger. Here, Joshua comes up on a man standing before him *with a drawn sword in his hand*.²³ At first Joshua did not recognize this person for who he was. He asks whether this person is for them or for Israel's enemies.

The man replies, *Neither, I have now come as commander of the Lord's army*. Now, Joshua gets it. Immediately, he falls to the ground in worship, realizing he is in the presence of a superhuman presence. This person seems to be someone sent by God for a divine mission. He is there for a specific goal. Next, Joshua reflects on his position versus the man's by referring to himself as a "servant" and the man as his "lord." The man instructs Joshua to remove his sandals because he is standing on holy ground, 5.15. Chapter 5 ends abruptly with the words, *And Joshua did that*. So, what is the purpose of his meeting with this man? Is it simply to remind Joshua that God will be with him and the fighting men as they take Jericho? That God will be doing the fighting? It certainly seems to be the case.

While there are differing opinions of just who the man referred to here is, there is a case to be made that this is a member of the godhead (probably Jesus, again because it seems this is someone sent by God for

a divine mission) that Joshua is talking to. Note how Joshua worships this person, who in turn, accepts it. The fact that Joshua was told he was standing on holy ground is also an indication of the divine presence, especially in the Old Testament. And finally, taking this in conjunction with the opening verses of chapter 6 and the instructions received, it would seem that the commander of the Army of the Lord is Jesus Himself.²⁴ Although Howard cautions:

The exact nature or personality of this divine self-revelation is not known precisely because the Scriptures are silent on the question. This self-revelation of God certainly anticipated Christ in a typological way, even if it was not Christ himself.²⁵

Preparation for Battle

The account of Israel's first victory in the land is told in great detail. Just as the crossing of the Jordan was treated as an important event to be solemnly undertaken, with proper ritual preparation and commemoration, so also the taking of Jericho was to be done properly and in order. God gave precise instructions for the taking of the city, which involved careful ceremonial circling of the city rather than classic military tactics, 6.2-5). As God's faithful representative, Joshua instructed the people accordingly, 6.6-7). The dramatic buildup and climax of the action are told in 6.8-21. The lengthy detail of chapter 6 emphasizes the importance of Jericho and its destruction. It was the first city captured by the Israelites, and, as such, its capture represented the entire takeover of the land. The Israelites' taking of other cities and their kings is compared several times to what happened to Jericho, 8.1-2; 10.28, 30. At the end of Joshua's life, when he summarized the taking of the land, Jericho was the only city he mentioned by name, even though he mentioned seven nations and several kings who fought against Israel, 24.8-13.

The first verse of chapter 6 sets the stage for the episode at Jericho. The problem is stated: Jericho was *strongly fortified*. Their task of taking the city would be very difficult because of this. Jericho was impenetrable from outside attacks and those within the walls had no means of interacting with the opposing forces. This left Israel with no conventional military options for breaching the defenses of the fortified city. By emphasizing Israel's disadvantage, the reader understands the need for divine intervention if they were to overcome the walled city of Jericho and the significance of God's promise to give them victory through supernatural means.

Verse 1 functions in the same way that 3.15 does, which precedes the other great miracle in the book, showing a great potential obstacle that is then overcome effortlessly by a mighty act of God.

6.2-5: Instructions Received

Beginning in verse 2, the Lord assured Joshua, through the captain of the Army, that *I have handed Jericho, its king, and its best soldiers over to you*. In light of what is said in the previous verse, this must have come to Joshua's great relief. The fall of Jericho would be an act of faith, Hebrews 11.30 as well as an act of God.

The plan to take Jericho was simple. The Israelite army was to march around the walls of Jericho every day for six days. Seven priests carrying ram's horn trumpets were to escort the ark in that procession. On the seventh day, the Israelite troops were to march seven times around the walls. Then the priests were

to blow their trumpets, and the people were to shout with a great shout. At that moment, God promised, the walls would “fall down flat.” At whatever point in the procession an Israelite soldier might find himself, he would be able to move straight ahead into the city. The protective walls of Jericho would virtually melt away, 6.3-5. The number seven is symbolical, recalling God’s works of creation.

The plan to capture Jericho was simple. For six straight days, the troops would march around the city walls. The cities in Palestine during that time were not very large, with one writer estimating the circumference of Jericho to be around 600 meters.²⁶ It would have taken about an hour to march around the city. Seven priests carrying ram's horn trumpets would lead the procession to escort the sacred ark. On the seventh day, the soldiers were instructed to circle the walls seven times. The number seven held symbolic significance, representing God's creation of the world. When the circuit was complete, the priests would blow their trumpets and the people would shout. At that very moment, God promised that the walls would collapse completely to the ground, falling flat, not outward, or inward, but downward. People could climb over the collapsed wall and go straight ahead.

6.6-10: Instructions For the Priests and Troops

Joshua promptly relayed the Lord's instructions to those assembled. He first outlined the role of the priests, who would escort the ark during the procession, 6.6. Next, he informed the people about the planned daily march completely around the city walls, 6.7. Leading the procession would be an armed guard unit.²⁷ Following behind was the priesthood carrying the ark, which symbolized the presence of God marching before them. In addition, a rear guard of soldiers would trail the ark.

In a display of great faith, this very unconventional strategy for conquering Jericho was accepted without question by all parties. Both the people and priests faithfully carried out their assigned parts as prescribed, 6.8-9. A final detail stipulated the procession would circulate in absolute silence until Joshua signaled otherwise, 6.10.

6.11-15: The Plan Executed

It seems the Israelites began their marching around Jericho's walls on the same day the captain of the Lord's army appeared before Joshua. The text implies the initial day's march occurred later in the day. Once the ark had made one full circuit, the soldiers returned to their camp at Gilgal where they spent the night, 6.11.

This process was repeated each of the next five days, with the Israelites marching entirely around the perimeter. On the seventh day, as God had ordained, the procession marched around the city walls

Faith Depends on God

HEBREWS 11.30

The walls of Jericho fell down

By Faith

after they had been **marched** around for seven days

WHAT

HOW

OCCASION

GALATIANS 3.26-27

You are all sons of God

By Faith

for those of you who have been **baptized** into Christ

seven times, 6.12-15. By following the divinely prescribed strategy with the ark at the center, the Israelites demonstrated their obedience and faith that God would fulfill his promise to deliver Jericho into their hands.

6.16-25: A Ban Placed on the City

On the seventh circuit around Jericho on the seventh day, the priests sounded their trumpets and Joshua signaled for the people to shout. Standing before the towering walls, Joshua declared his faith that God would deliver the city to them.

Joshua then reminded the Israelites of God's command regarding placing Jericho under the "ban," meaning everything in the city was devoted to God to be destroyed or used for worship. All metals were holy treasure for God's sanctuary, no captives could be taken, and all living things were to be killed. The only exception was Rahab and her family, to be spared for hiding the spies.

When the shout rang out, the walls collapsed and the Israelites surged in to conquer the city, facing some resistance, 24.11. They destroyed everything as commanded except Rahab and her family. Two spies were tasked with protecting Rahab, who was brought out with her relatives as they were unclean Gentiles. They lived outside the camp initially due to their status but eventually Rahab married an Israelite and lived among God's people. Faith, not race, defined true Israel.

6.26-7.1: The Story Concludes

Joshua commanded the Israelites to never rebuild Jericho, placing it under an oath and curse. Anyone who violated this by trying to refortify the city would lose their sons.²⁸

The victory at Jericho demonstrated God's promised divine assistance, causing Joshua's fame to spread throughout the region.

However, the account has a sour note - Achan from the tribe of Judah disobeyed God's command by taking forbidden objects for himself from among the plunder. Though a single man sinned, the whole people were considered unfaithful. One individual's sin affected all. Achan's act angered God and set the stage for Israel's first setback in the next conquest detailed in chapter 7. Corporate guilt and individual responsibility are interconnected themes. This prepares the reader for Israel's coming defeat due to Achan's sin violating God's holy ban.

What's in this for Us?

God can deliver on his promises in miraculous ways beyond our understanding. We should have faith like the Israelites that he will fulfill what he says, even if the means seem strange.

Complete obedience and faith are required for God to work mightily on our behalf. The Israelites trusted and followed God's detailed instructions precisely.

Individual sin has corporate consequences. Achan's disobedience affected the whole nation, just as our sins can undermine God's work. We must hold each other accountable.

God desires holiness and expects us to dedicate what he gives us fully to him. We shouldn't take what is under God's ban or curse for ourselves.

Rahab's story shows that God saves both Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in him. Our identity is found in Christ, not ethnicity or background.

Victory over the spiritual strongholds we confront comes through supernatural means, not human effort alone. We must depend on God's power to overcome obstacles.

One small act of disobedience can cause great harm to ourselves and innocent people around us. We must guard our hearts daily.

Conclusion

The account of Israel's victory over Jericho through following God's unique battle plan demonstrates His faithfulness, power, and guidance for his people. The Israelites were able to witness a miraculous sign of His presence and ability to overcome any obstacle in their possession of the Promised Land. But we also see a sobering reminder of how easily even great works of God can be undone through individual and corporate sin. One man's disobedience brought consequences for all.

Ultimately, the lessons from Jericho call us to live in complete obedience and faith like Joshua, recognizing that victory only comes through God, not our own efforts. It also warns of the dangers of compromise and taking for ourselves what is devoted to God. May we heed these lessons to depend fully on Christ for the spiritual battles we face, and to encourage one another in holiness as we seek to live wholly for him.

For Class Interaction and Discussion

Lesson Outline:

1. Introduction:
2. Divine Encounters and the Commander of the Lord's Army (Joshua 5:13-15)
3. God's Strategy: Instructions for Conquest (Joshua 6:1-5)
4. Faith in Action: Israel's Obedience (Joshua 6:6-15)
5. Victory and Obedience: The Fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:16-25)
6. Consequences of Disobedience: The Sin of Achan (Joshua 6:26-7:1)

Thought Questions for Discussion:

1. How did Joshua's reaction to the commander of the Lord's army demonstrate his humility and leadership?
2. Why do you think God chose such an unconventional method for the Israelites to conquer Jericho?
3. What does the command to remain silent during the march tell us about discipline and faith?
4. Discuss the importance of unity and collective responsibility as seen in this story.
5. How does the story of Rahab provide insight into God's grace and redemption?
6. What can we learn about God's holiness and judgment from the ban on Jericho?
7. How do the actions of one individual, like Achan, impact the community of faith?
8. Consider the role of worship in preparing for and engaging in spiritual battles.
9. How can we discern when to use traditional methods versus when to wait for God's unique direction?

10. What does this story teach us about the importance of following God's guidance even when it defies human logic?

Group Activities:

- In groups, discuss modern-day "walls" or obstacles in your life and how God might be calling you to address them through faith.
- Join together in prayer, sharing requests that pertain to things that seem like "fortified cities" in your life. Pray for each other, asking for God's intervention and guidance.

Final Encouraging Word:

As we reflect on the story of Jericho's fall, let us be encouraged by the power of God to bring down walls and grant victory to those who follow Him in faith. Though challenges may seem insurmountable, remember that the same God who brought down Jericho's walls is with us today. May we step out in obedience, trusting in His plans, and may we be vigilant against the "Achan's" in our hearts that can hinder His work. Let's move forward in unity, courage, and faith, knowing that our God is the ultimate commander of the army of the Lord.

²³ The exact language here is found in only three occasions in the Old Testament: Joshua 5.13; Numbers 22.23, 31, & 1 Chronicles 21.16.

²⁴ It is interesting to compare this account with that of Moses in Exodus 3.2-5. And also that of the commissioning of Isaiah (Isaiah 6) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1). In all these cases, God's holiness is demonstrated before the charge is given. Hess (p. 140) adds: In the New Testament, the same sequence occurs in the announcement to Mary (Luke 1.26-38) and in the Transfiguration (Matthew 17.1-13; Mark 9.2-13; Luke 9.28-36). For the Christian, Christ's salvation, his saving presence, precedes his call to a life of discipleship (Romans 5-6; Ephesians 2.8-10; 4.1-16).

²⁵ Howard, p. 160.

²⁶ Woudstra, p. 109.

²⁷ This could be the forty thousand warriors from across the Jordan (the troops from half of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Reuben), mentioned in 4.13.

²⁸ Exactly how the builder of the fortifications would lose the lives of his sons is not clear, whether by sacrificial rite on his own part or by divine action. In any case, 1 Kings 16.34 reports the fulfillment of the curse.