

## Silence, Please

Second in Command: Life of Joshua – Part IV

Joshua 5-6

### Introduction

In our last discussion, we followed the Israelites triumphantly through the Jordan River. We see them now, two million strong, standing on the eastern side, just prior to reaching Jericho. I imagine their heads are swimming with excitement, their chests are heaving, and their hearts are swelling with great joy that they have just experienced faith in God and have just seen Him work in a miraculous way.

You would think that it would be at this moment that they would attack Jericho, but God does something rather unusual; rather strange, militarily. An all out offensive would be perfect in its timing, but instead, God says, in effect, “I want you to stop right here and wait. There are several experiences that I want to lead you through to prepare you.”

The reason for this, as we will learn, is that God is far more interested in doing a work in His people than in doing a work through them.

Please turn to Joshua chapter 5.

### God’s Preparation of Israel For Battle

Let us take a brief look at the three experiences that God has for His people in order to prepare them as they head toward the conquest of Jericho.

1. The first experience is the right of circumcision.

Joshua 5:1-9 gives us the details. Evidently, in rebellion, the parents who had wandered in the

wilderness for forty years, had said, in effect, “God, if You have abandoned us, in that You will not allow us to go into the promised land, then we will abandon You and will not follow the token of the covenant relationship; that is, circumcision.”

So, evidently, these parents did not circumcise all the boys born while they wandered in the wilderness, which was another act of disobedience.

Joshua 5:8 tells us,

***Now when they had finished circumcising all the nation, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.***

It is important to understand the way God turns everything upside-down. The Israelites are poised, the Jericho-ites are paralyzed, and God says, “I want you to circumcise every man in the nation and then, wait until healing takes place.”

In so doing, God militarily incapacitates the entire Israelite nation. It was not a very wise military move, but God is more interested in His covenant relationship with the warrior than He is in winning a war.

2. The next experience is the observance of Passover.

Look at the last part of Joshua 5:10.

***. . . they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho.***

Now this is really something! This, obviously, is going back and remembering their exodus from Egypt.

They would kill the lamb and eat, as well as perform several other observances related to Passover.

Can you imagine the enemy sending out spies from Jericho to find out what is happening? I am sure they are terrified. They are expecting an attack. The spies, however, come back with the report, “Well, they’re all eating. They’re celebrating some feast. It looks like it’s one huge dinner on the grounds. They must be Baptists, those Israelites! They don’t look like they’re ready to attack. It seems strange.”

It was strange! But God wanted them to remember His power in Egypt before they utilized His power at Jericho.

3. The third experience is the cessation of manna.

We are told of this in Joshua 5:11-12. The manna had fallen from heaven for over forty years. Now look at verse 12.

*The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.*

In other words, they were not to expect a miracle from heaven when there was food on earth available. There is a tension between what God will do and what men are to do, and men are expected to feed themselves in the land of Canaan.

## God’s Strategy for Israel’s Victory

Now Joshua 5:13, and following, tells us that Joshua goes to survey the scene. He goes to look at the city of Jericho and takes a good, long, hard look.

For our own benefit, let us step back in time and take a look at what Joshua must have seen, as he swept his gaze over Canaan. This was a land, we know historically, of city-states. I used to wonder why, when one city was attacked and conquered, it did not cause others to topple, until I learned in my study, that they were city-states. City-states each had their own king and were, in effect, their own independent kingdom. So the Israelites would have to conquer every single city.

Now the power in the land; the nominal overlord, was none other than, Egypt. As best we can determine from archaeology and history, the ruler during the time of Joshua was Amenhotep III. That is kind of a long name, so if you will allow, we will call

him “Junior”. We know from the Tell el-Amarna letters that Junior did not really care what happened way over in his foreign holdings – one of which is Canaan. We also know, from these fragments, that the people pled with this man to give relief from an invading army; that is, the Israelites. However, he did not care, so he never really helped, which lets us know that the Israelites had Canaan at their feet. They could conquer without any threat, whether it mattered or not, of a world power – that world power being Egypt. That is the good news.

The bad news is that Joshua is standing there secretly observing Jericho, which was a city, from what archaeological digs would tell, with walls that were perhaps, as high as forty feet, that were manned by highly trained, skilled warriors. And who are the Israelites? They are a ragtag multitude of ex-slaves who had just come out of wilderness wanderings. They did not have catapults. They did not have moving towers. They did not have battering rams. They had some swords, some spears, and some slings – we could count them. These would be like pea shooters before this impregnable city called Jericho, which was the doorway to the land of Canaan. It is no doubt that Joshua, standing there looking at this wall, probably had one main question on his mind, “Lord, how? How?”

### Lessons from a heavenly visitor

It is at this time that Joshua tells us, in Joshua 5:13, that he was visited by a unique, to say the least, military leader. Look at that verse.

*Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?”*

Good question! The answer, of a sort, is given in Joshua 5:14.

*He said, “No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, “What has my lord to say to his servant?”*

Now, had this been a mere angel, Joshua’s worship would have been rebuked. Just as any man or angel from time immemorial, he would not have

allowed worship. Theologians would call this a “theophany”; that is, an expression of God in some tangible, visible sight. Or perhaps, this is a “Christophany,” which I think is more correct. It is an image of Jesus Christ taking the form of this warrior with a sword in his hand. Prior to His coming, a Christophany would be a form that Jesus took. So this is perhaps, Christ Himself – the pre-incarnate Christ – visiting Joshua and saying, “I am the captain of the host of the Lord.”

Now, his instructions to Joshua are basically, three-fold.

1. Number one, this is not Joshua’s war, it is God’s.

The captain of the host of heaven did not refer to the people camped at Gilgal who were waiting with their little swords and slings. He referred to the host of heavenly angels that surround the throne of God, from time immemorial, and await His bidding to act. He snaps His fingers or He whispers a command and they move.

The Old Testament gives us a number of illustrations. The servant of Elisha saw the host of the Lord when he was trapped by the Syrian armies. (II Kings 6:17) We know that Jesus Christ, in fact, referred to more than twelve legions of angels, meaning there are at least seventy-two thousand angels that could come to His rescue, if He but whispered the command. (Matthew 26:53)

God is telling Joshua, “It won’t be your pea shooters, it will be the power of the host of heaven that will overcome Jericho.”

Now there are times when we have read or heard stories of the host of heaven coming to the benefit of man. Such stories are very rare, but one that I have read and enjoyed is of John Paton and his wife, who, more than a century ago, went to the New Hebrides islands as missionaries. The islands, at that time, were inhabited by cannibals; headhunters, but John and his wife felt compelled by God to go to that particular region of the world.

The Patons disembarked from the ship on which they had sailed to the islands, rowed their boat to shore, and camped on the seashore their first night. They prayed that God would protect them that night and then, bedded down. Nothing happened during the night and the next morning, they began their missionary work.

After several months, they learned the language and met some of the natives. After a year or two and much hard work, they began winning some of the natives to Jesus Christ. Eventually, the chief came to know Him, as well. It was in the course of their conversations that John finally asked, “We were expecting an attack. Why didn’t one come?”

The chief chuckled and said, according to the biographical accounts, “We did come. I, and some of my warriors, slipped down to the edge of the beach. We were going to attack your camp, kill you, and eat you. But, when we reached the sands and started toward your tent, flaming soldiers appeared and surrounded your tent. Each had a sword drawn in his hand, so we retreated.”

Joshua, if you are going to attack this massive city, the inhabitants of which could easily kill you, it is going to take some of that host to be able to win the victory. This is the first lesson.

2. The second lesson is that God was not on Joshua’s side, Joshua was to be on God’s side.

Look at Joshua 5:13b-14a again. Joshua asked this warrior, “Are you on our side or on theirs?”

*He said, “No . . .”*

That could be rendered, “Neither.”

What a tremendous truth this is that really needs to be marshaled today. We have the tendency to take God and put Him on our side. We plan our programs and then, we step back and say, “God, we now call upon Your holy lightning. You ignite this to life. Are You on our side?”

Have you ever noticed this, especially in sporting events? This occurs even, for example, in church softball. There are two teams and one of them prays, “Lord, we want You to just help us to have a good game.”

This could be translated, “We want to win.”

The other team prays, “Lord, help us. We want to have a good game too, for Your glory.”

This means, “Boy, it’d be great if You’d let us win. Join our team.”

These are innocent prayers, but in life, they are not so innocent. God is not interested in getting on our team, He wants us on His. He is not partisan, He is sovereign.

3. There is a third lesson and that is, the land of battle is, in God's perspective, holy ground.

Look at Joshua 5:15.

*The captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." . . .*

I love this, because we tend to think of places such as the church or our prayer closet as holy ground. God says, "Joshua, at the very place where you do battle, *that* is holy ground."

Translate this into this century's life of spiritual warfare; spiritual battle, and that corporate office room is holy ground; that shop is holy ground; that kitchen or any place where you face the ordinary daily battles of life, God says, in His perspective, "*That* is holy ground."

### Lessons from God's strategy for victory

Now, Joshua 6:1 tells us, in a few words, how hopeless the situation is from man's perspective. Look at that verse.

*Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in.*

I love the very next phrase, in Joshua 6:2.

*The Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand . . ."*

Had I been Joshua, I would have said, "I don't think I see. I need some more information."

So, God gives it to him, in Joshua 6:3-5, when He basically says, "Here is the plan attack, Joshua."

*You shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days.*

*Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.*

*It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn [at the end of the seventh circle], and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead.*

What is the plan of attack? Circle the city once for six days. On the seventh day, circle it seven times, while seven priests, all the time, are blowing on seven trumpets. Seven, by the way, is the number, in the Old Testament, of completion or wholeness.

There are several lessons in this. Let me give them to you.

1. First, there is a lesson in humility.

Joshua is preparing for his first military campaign. He has just met with the commander and he comes back to tell his host, "Here's how we're going to do the fight."

"How is it, Joshua?"

"Well, we're going to walk around the city."

"Okay, then what?"

"Well, we're going to walk around it again. And then, on the seventh day, uh, seven times."

For the Israelites, this is very humiliating. Can you imagine being part of the crew that walked around the city wall?

Just imagination, although this did not happen, that you are having a conversation with an Amorite, who is up on the wall. He might say, "What are you doing down there?"

"We're overthrowing your city."

"How's that?"

"Well, we're walking around it once today."

"You're frightening me."

And so the conversation would go.

If there was ever a time when God set the contributions of men aside so He would get all the glory, it was here and now.

So the land where the Israelites would battle was holy ground and the first lesson that they would learn on that holy ground was in humility.

2. The second lesson is in obedience.

It seems from the text, that the Israelites were given just one command at a time. In other words, they were told on day one, to get up and walk around the city. We know, from the digs, that this walk would take about thirty minutes. Then, they were to go back to camp. That is all they were told. Only Joshua knew the outcome.

Day number two comes along and they get up and ask, "Okay, what's next?"

“Walk around the city again.”

Afterwards, they go back to camp. They were given just enough information for that next day.

However, it is made worse by the fact that at the end of the day, they would return to camp, and the walls were still standing – the walls had not fallen. Perhaps, by this time, the Amorites are lining the walls, chiding and jeering at them.

What a lesson this is for the Israelite in persevering; in patient obedience. They might think, “I don’t understand this. It doesn’t sound like much of a battle attack to me, but I’ll walk around this wall.”

“You want me to do it again? Okay, I’ll do it again.”

“Again? And on the seventh day, do it seven times? Seven times? Okay, seven times.”

Add another dimension to this, if you think it is bad enough. Note the way Joshua commanded the people to walk around the city, in Joshua 6:10.

***But Joshua commanded the people, saying, “You shall not shout nor let your voice be heard nor let a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I tell you, ‘Shout!’ Then you shall shout!”***

It is one thing to obey the will of God when you understand it and remain silent, it is another thing entirely to have no idea why you are doing something and yet, be silent. The only noise would be the sound of the ram’s horn. That is the only eerie sound circling the city.

Let me explain something that could have an obscure significance in this plan, and that is in the ram’s horn. The only time they pulled these out of the cases was in the Year of Jubilee – in fact, that could be translated “Jubilee horn” – or on the Sabbatical year. Every seven years, the priests would pull out these horns and would blare through them to signify, the very presence of God.

Now you have the full picture. The people are walking around in silence and as they walk, the priests are blowing on the horns. The eerie sound is signifying, to every Israelite heart, that God is present. This is God’s battle. It is His power.

I think God is pressing on the Israelite heart the power of silent trust. In that simple truth, which is so profound and difficult to live, God says to them, and to us,

***Be still, and know that I am God . . . (Psalm 46:10 KJV)***

3. There is a third lesson that we will call a lesson of spiritual warfare.

We have implied this already. The Israelites had thirteen long looks at this impregnable city of Jericho; thirteen hard looks at the forty foot high wall. They may have counted the stones by this time. Perhaps it took thirteen times for them to recognize that they could not win the battle by themselves. We do not know.

I would suggest that the greatest difficulty, in your life and mine, is getting to the place where we recognize or are prepared to admit, that the whole thing is too big for us; that spiritual victory is an impossibility without the power of God. We cannot do it on our own!

We do not come to the place where that little catchy phrase says, “You come to the end of your rope and tie a knot and hang on.”

No. You come to the end of your rope and you let go . . . and then, watch God.

Perhaps today, you are standing in front of your Jericho; in front of the walls that never seem to crumble and you are talking as loudly as you can and are perhaps, kicking at the wall and arguing with the wall. It may be the wall of pride. It may be the wall of materialism. It may be the Jericho of sensuality. There you stand, debating and kicking and maybe, cowering before it. You are doing everything but admitting, “Lord, I am absolutely helpless before this wall,” and then, just getting quiet.

It is hard to be silent. Try it for thirty seconds right now.

It seemed like a long time, did it not?

Perhaps we have been complaining that God is not speaking, but in truth, we have not been listening. Perhaps one of our biggest problems is that we have been making so much noise that God’s still, small voice is drowned out.

Let me ask a question of this church. If for some reason, God’s Spirit, power, presence left this church, how long would it be before we realized it? How long would it take the volunteer army to recognize that their duty had turned into lifeless, meaningless acts? How long would it take the musicians to recognize that, even though every note was hit perfectly, it was spiritually flat? How long would it take the teachers

to recognize that their teaching is without clarity and without passion? Let me rephrase the question, if God's power left this church, what would cease operating and what would continue on?

What about your own personal walk in daily routine affairs – if God's presence and power left, how long in your day would it take for you to recognize that He had gone?

Some of the saddest words in all of the Old Testament, relate to Samson, the mighty man who was once filled with the Spirit of God. The scriptures say, in Judges 16:20b,

*. . . But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.*

Perhaps one of the reasons we do not recognize that God is not there in power is because we are so busy kicking at it, and complaining about it, and fighting it, and hitting it, and banging on it. If we would only give Him time to speak, we would learn that He has a totally different battle plan.

## Application

Let us conclude our study today, in Joshua's little book, with two applications.

1. Number one, when your voice is silent and God works in you, there is no question who receives the benefit.

When we work and we speak and we move and the walls do not fall down, we say, "Maybe I'll walk a little faster around this wall," or, "Maybe I'll talk a little louder."

It is our nature, and we must abandon it, to try to help God. Our help, if anything, is submission to His plan.

When we are silent and God works, it is all the benefit to know Him in silence and then, to shout to make Him known. That has always been the pattern of spiritual warfare and victory.

2. Number two, when your strength is broken and God works through you, there is no question who receives the credit.

Who fought the battle of Jericho? Whose power was on display at Jericho? Who made the walls come crumbling down at Jericho? Was it Joshua? Was it the Israelites? No. It was God. There was absolutely

no question and it was undeniable in the life of every Israelite, that it was the work and the hand of God.

We have this terrible tendency to obscure God's glory. We have this terrible habit of stealing His praise. Sometimes He just has to wipe away all of our contributions, so we can learn, like Paul, who made it clear that our power does not come from men, but from God.

Look at Joshua 6:16.

*At the seventh time, when the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city."*

Note that last phrase,

*. . . the Lord has given you the city.*

Skip to Joshua 6:20.

*So the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city.*

The Israelites learned what God spoke to the prophet Jeremiah,

*Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me? (Jeremiah 32:27)*

God did a work in His people first, through silence. Then, God did a work through them, with a shout.

Perhaps the reason our walls are not falling is that He still wants to do a work in us in silence.

Let us sing the following chorus. Allow the words and their meaning to float over your soul, as you get the message of this wonderful little chorus.

*To bless Your heart, Lord God, is my desire*

*To let You touch my life and set my heart afire*

*To see Your hand of love in all that comes my way*

*To learn to hear Your voice each moment of the day.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/3/1991 by Stephen Davey.

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