



THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Joshua 5:13–6:27

The first obstacle the Israelites had to overcome as they entered the promised land was the mighty fortress of Jericho. The divine plan for conquering this city was unique and serves as a continuing reminder to us that God alone deserves the glory for all our victories.

The people of Israel are now in the land of Canaan. And Joshua has done his homework in surveying the land. This is a land of city-states. Each city is an independent kingdom, with its own king. Conquering one city will not topple all the others like dominoes; the Israelites have to conquer them all.

And the first city they must conquer—the front door into Canaan—is the city of Jericho. Archeological digs reveal that Jericho was surrounded by a set of double walls. One wall was built around the city proper, and then there were several acres of land running down a slope to another, outer wall. Poor people built homes on that outer slope of ground between the walls and against the outer wall. This is where Rahab's home was built—against the outer wall—according to chapter 2.

Archaeologists also have discovered the remains of bricks that have tumbled down into heaps at the base of these ancient city walls, and we're about to be told how it happened.

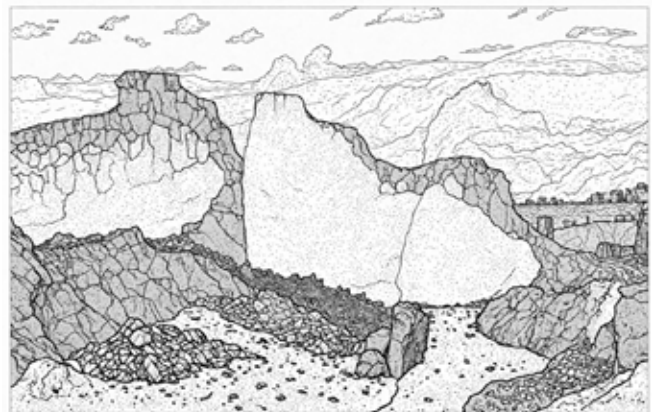
Here in Joshua chapter 5, we read at verse 13:

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing be-

fore him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?”

The man responds in verse 14:

“No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?”



Remains of the earlier Middle Bronze walls



Now this man is not an angel because an angel would not have allowed himself to be worshiped. This is what we call a *Christophany*, a preincarnate appearance of God the Son. He appears in the form of a warrior, and He reveals some interesting truths to Joshua.

Here's the first truth: *This isn't Joshua's battle; it's God's battle.* When the Lord says here, "I am the commander of the army of the LORD," He's not referring to the army of Israel with their little swords and sling-shots; He's referring to the host of heavenly angels.

The second truth the Lord reveals is this: *He isn't on Joshua's side, but Joshua needs to be on His side.* Again, in verse 13, Joshua asks this Warrior, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No," which can be translated, "Neither."

God isn't so much on *anybody's* side; the point is, you'd better be on *His* side. God isn't hoping somebody will let Him be on their team; you better be on *His* team.

In verse 15 the Lord says to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." Here's the third truth the Lord reveals: *The place where you battle is holy ground.*

We tend to think of the church as holy ground; people want to be buried in the church graveyard because that is supposedly sacred ground. God says here, "No, that place where you do battle for My glory happens to be sacred ground." That office where you work and live for Christ is holy ground; that classroom is holy ground; that kitchen is sacred ground. Wherever you face the daily battles of life—where God can be honored and obeyed—that is holy ground.

Now we are given some details here in chapter 6 and verse 1: "Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in." In other words, humanly, there is no way Israel can defeat Jericho. Those thirty-foot-high gates with iron frames and iron hinges are bolted shut. I've seen remnants of ancient city gates like these that have been excavated—the Israelites aren't just going to push them open.

In verse 2 we read: "And the LORD said to Joshua, 'See, I have given Jericho into your hand.'" If I had been Joshua, I would have said, "Well, I don't see *anything*."

And then the Lord gives Joshua a strange battle plan:

"You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat." (verses 3-5)

That's the plan? Can you imagine Joshua repeating this battle plan to his people? Circle the city once a day and then on the seventh day, march around it seven times with seven priests blowing on seven trumpets—that number seven represents completeness—and that will do it.

Let me tell you, this battle plan is a lesson in humility. They are not going to do anything of any military significance. They won't be able to take any credit for the coming victory, and that's the point. God is their strength and victory.

This battle plan requires humility but also obedience. We know from archeological discoveries that this city would have taken less than an hour to march around. Every day, the children of Israel are going to march around this city for an hour and then return to their camp while the city's walls remain standing.

What kind of plan is this? They are to obey, even though they do not understand. Perhaps this is where you are at today—obeying God and walking with God, even though you don't always fully understand His plan.



Another interesting aspect of God’s plan is that they are to remain silent as they march around the city. Notice Joshua’s command in verse 10: “You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth.”

It’s one thing to obey the will of God and yet complain about it; it’s another thing to obey and remain silent. God is saying, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Trust Him.

The only noise is going to be the sound of the rams’ horns. By the way, the ram’s horn was sounded on special occasions to mark the presence of God. Clearly, this is God’s battle.

By the end of the seventh day, the Israelites have walked around this city thirteen times; they have spent at least thirteen hours studying these massive walls. Maybe God knew it would take that long for them to realize they could not overcome the fortress city of Jericho.

The principle is true to this very day: victory in the Christian life is not difficult; it’s impossible. Without the Spirit of God and the power of God, the battle is too great.

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Now look at verse 20:

As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city.

Rahab’s house, built against a portion of the outer wall, stays intact, allowing her and her family to escape, as they had been promised.

So, here is Israel at the doorway into the promised land, given an unforgettable lesson. Jeremiah 32:27 puts it this way: “I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?”

Let’s walk with the Lord—in humility, with silent surrender, giving Him all the glory—one day at a time.

If you asked your yet to be saved friends if they think you’re on God’s team, what would they say? Why do we as believers sometimes choose to serve on a “team” other than God’s? How does valuing holiness impact your choice of whose team you’ll be on?

What does God understand about the human heart that drives Him to emphasize humility in believers? When we resist God’s teaching us humility, how does that affect God’s reputation and our usefulness in serving His interests?

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