

Joshua: Prophet of Conquest

Bible Background • JOSHUA 5:13-6:27

Printed Text • JOSHUA 5:13-6:5, 15-16, 20 | Devotional Reading • HEBREWS 11:23-31

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLAIN how Joshua acted obediently to the vision from God, REFLECT on our inefficiencies when challenges overwhelm us, and COMMIT to obeying God especially in challenging times.

In Focus

In the seven years Thomas had worked at his company, his sales team had performed consistently in the top three percent. Thomas had given his best on the job, and he had earned the right to a promotion. Besides, God had placed this desire in his heart long ago. However, Thomas had been told by a lot of people, mostly Black, that he would never become a district manager at his company. “They don’t promote Black folk to those positions,” he was repeatedly told.

Whenever he heard this, however, Thomas simply replied, “Well, the final decision is really in God’s hands.” Thomas knew what they said was true, but it was a good company to work for and he had put in the time and talent. Thomas was sad that the people who should have been encouraging were most discouraging.

Nevertheless, Thomas followed the desire God gave him and put in his application for the district manager position when it came up in January. He didn’t hear anything for a long time, but he just kept praying instead of letting himself worry.

In the spring, Thomas was called to his supervisor’s office and told the great news: he got the promotion! One of the vice presidents shared with him that the company wanted to reach the African American community. To do this, they would have to hire Blacks in high-level positions. Thomas said to himself, “Yeah, that might have been the company’s reason for promoting me, but I know that God already had His plan in mind.”

Why is it necessary to be faithful if God works His will anyway?

Keep in Mind

“But the LORD said to Joshua, ‘I have given you Jericho, its king, and all its strong warriors’” (Joshua 6:2, NLT)

Words You Should Know

- A. **Worship** (Joshua 5:14) shachah (Heb.)— To bow down as a show of honor or respect
- B. **Shout** (vv. 6:5, 16) rua’ (Heb.)—To sound an alarm, make a joyful noise

Say It Correctly

Paradigm. PARE-ah-dime.

Adamah. ah-DAH-mah.

KJV

Joshua 5:13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?

14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?

15 And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

6:1 Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.

2 And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.

4 And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.

5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times.

16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

20 So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

NLT

Joshua 5:13 When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to him and demanded, "Are you friend or foe?"

14 "Neither one," he replied. "I am the commander of the LORD's army." At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. "I am at your command," Joshua said. "What do you want your servant to do?"

15 The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did as he was told.

6:1 Now the gates of Jericho were tightly shut because the people were afraid of the Israelites. No one was allowed to go out or in.

2 But the LORD said to Joshua, "I have given you Jericho, its king, and all its strong warriors. 3 You and your fighting men should march around the town once a day for six days.

4 Seven priests will walk ahead of the Ark, each carrying a ram's horn. On the seventh day you are to march around the town seven times, with the priests blowing the horns.

5 When you hear the priests give one long blast on the rams' horns, have all the people shout as loud as they can. Then the walls of the town will collapse, and the people can charge straight into the town."

15 On the seventh day the Israelites got up at dawn and marched around the town as they had done before. But this time they went around the town seven times.

16 The seventh time around, as the priests sounded the long blast on their horns, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the town!"

20 When the people heard the sound of the rams' horns, they shouted as loud as they could. Suddenly, the walls of Jericho collapsed, and the Israelites charged straight into the town and captured it.

The People, Places, and Times

Jericho. Situated in the southern portion of the Jordan Valley, Jericho was near the east-west roadway that connected Transjordan with the hill country of Palestine. Jericho was a popular place because it was an oasis situated in a hot plain, isolated from other major settlements. Over the life of the city, Jericho has served as both a busy urban center and a small campsite. As early as the Stone Age, Jericho was a walled town of about 10 acres. Jericho came to have solid defense ramparts and walls. By Joshua's time, the walls of Jericho, which had been built thousands of years earlier, were still being used for defense of the settlement.

The story of Joshua's conquest of Jericho reports many items of significance for Israel's history and subsequent Jewish and Christian theology. From the narrative of the spies at Rahab's house, one learns that Jericho was a walled city with houses, gates, and windows. Some houses were built into the walls of the city (Joshua 2:1). The account of the stoppage of the Jordan's water at Adamah reports the crossing "right against Jericho" (Joshua 3:16).

Why would Joshua's inevitable defeat of Jericho become such a beloved story?

Background

Joshua, the mighty Israelite military commander, knew His God and believed He would give His nation the Promised Land. Militarily, God instructed Joshua to plunge into Palestine and divide it into north and south. Jericho was the first target to conquer since it lay directly in the path of their destination. Jericho lay in the valley of the Jordan River. In this lush tropical climate, palm, balsam, sycamore, and henna trees grew. Great and wealthy, Jericho would be an ideal first fruit sacrifice to God.

Once the Israelites had safely crossed the Jordan, they commemorated the event by taking twelve stones from the riverbed and placing them at the next night's campsite. One man from each tribe was to select a stone. The stones were to serve as a memorial for instructing future generations about the Lord's intervention at the Jordan River. Other memorials were established as well. Teaching children about the faith through the use of memorials was an established Israelite practice.

After they crossed the Jordan, the manna which had fallen from heaven each day ceased. Since Israel had reached the land of promise, the daily provision of manna was no longer necessary.

Do you have special memorials or customs to pass on cultural knowledge to the next generation?

At-A-Glance

1. Messenger of the Plan (Joshua 5:13-15)
2. The Plan to Conquer Jericho (6:1-5)
3. Joshua Obeys the Plan (vv. 15-16, 20)

In Depth

1. Messenger of the Plan (Joshua 5:13-15) Prior to the siege of Jericho, Joshua had an encounter that was similar to Moses at the burning bush. Joshua saw a man standing in front of him with his sword drawn. Joshua asked the man whether he was an enemy or an ally. "Neither," the man replied (5:14). The man identified himself as the commander of the army of the Lord. Upon hearing this, Joshua fell to the ground face down in reverence. Joshua asked what message the Lord had for him. He was then told to take off his shoes as the place where he was standing was holy.

When has God commanded you to worship in what seemed to be an impossible situation?

2. The Plan to Conquer Jericho (6:1-5) The residents of Jericho had anticipated an attack and barred their gates. The city was closed to all incoming and outgoing traffic. They were afraid of Israel's might (Joshua 2:8-11).

In giving Joshua instructions, the Lord assured him that the victory had already been won. But, it was not going to be an ordinary capture. They would not take it by direct force, espionage, or siege tactics. Joshua was not going to need battering rams and heavy armor to enter the city. Instead, the men were to walk around the city walls, in silence, once a day, for six days. Seven priests led the procession, escorting the Ark which symbolized God's presence. The Ark went before Israel when they went into battle. In essence, therefore, the Lord went before Israel in every battle.

On the seventh day, the priests and men of war were to walk around the city seven times. After completing their seventh lap, the priests were to blow the trumpets. This would be the signal for the people to shout. The dual purpose of the battle cry was to inspire the troops as it intimidated the enemy. The walls of Jericho would fall flat (v. 5). The men would then be able to capture the city with ease because it would be taken by the power of the Lord. Sometimes God gives us instructions that may seem so far-fetched, we just can't believe He is really instructing us. We should remember that God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). He knows what is needed at any given time and He tells us to trust Him. He has never let His people down, as Scripture shows us again and again.

What testimony do you have that confirms God's steadfast deliverance?

3. Joshua Obeys the Plan (vv. 15-16, 20) Joshua's instructions may have seemed strange to the people, but they performed the first six days faithfully. On the seventh day they got up early. This day they were to increase their daily march and walk around the city seven times. When they had finished marching the seventh time, the priests blew their trumpets and Joshua commanded the people to shout the victory. The Lord had given them the city.

God is able to give us the victory over our enemies when we obey His words and follow His instructions. As long as God's people are obedient to Him, they are witnesses to His mighty power exhibited on their behalf. We may not agree with the Lord's directions for our lives, and we may not even want to accept His principles. But, God is never short on His promises. He will come through for us whenever we submit to Him and follow His word every day!

What encouragement can you give to a new Christians about trusting God?

Search the Scriptures

1. What were the people supposed to do when they heard the horn blow? (v. 5)
2. Why were the people to shout? (6:16)
3. What did the people do on the seventh day? (v. 15)

Discuss the Meaning

1. What significance do you see in the repetition of the number seven in the conquest of Jericho?
2. What lessons can you take from this text about victory in your personal battles?

Liberating Lesson

Miraculous events such as the fall of the wall at Jericho are sometimes difficult for modern-day readers to believe. To our fore-bearers, however, the fall of the wall at Jericho indicated a stronghold of faith. The Old Negro spiritual "Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho," tells the story of God's assurance of victory in a battle against the enemies of His people. As a group of oppressed people, Israel found strength in a God of deliverance, a God who could destroy the enemy. It is critical to always remember that God is a God of deliverance and power.

Application for Activation

Look at your own life. Are you taking time to know God now, far in advance of your troubles? Do you take time to praise Him during the day despite what's happening in your life? How is your prayer life? Do you call on God only when you are in need or do you pray just because it is a tradition? These and other questions should be answered this week as you reflect on this lesson and share it with someone else. At the same time decide today that you are going to follow God no matter where He leads and how impossible it may seem to you. As you open your heart to Him, praise Him for answered prayers.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Joshua 5:13-6:5, 15-16, 20 The Israelites have successfully and miraculously crossed the Jordan and are now set to possess the land. The news of this and other acts of God spread all around the regions of Canaan, and their inhabitants are afraid of the Israelites (5:1). The Lord appears to Joshua in the form a man set for battle and instructs him on how to go about possessing the land.

The first battle would be against Jericho, which is the first city to the west of the Jordan.

5:13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? 14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?

Joshua seems to be alone, near Jericho, when confronted with a messenger from God. Because the man has a drawn sword in his hand, Joshua asks if he is friend or foe. Joshua is remembered primarily as the military leader of Israel after Moses' death, and as the military leader, he is vigilant to protect his people from this strange messenger if need be.

Even though Joshua asks an either-or question, the man answers, "Nay." God is not embarrassed to let us know that our entire paradigm, or way of thinking about the world, is wrong. Joshua should not be worried if intruders are for them or against them, but if they are for or against God. Thankfully, this man is for God, as the captain of the Lord's army. Joshua is overwhelmed by the honor of this visitation from such a heavenly being. He falls to the ground and "worships" the man. When angels are mistakenly worshiped, they usually insist that they are not worthy of such worship (Revelation 19:10). Only God is. This is not necessarily what Joshua is doing here, however. The verb translated "worship" (Heb. shachah, shaw-KHAH) means "to bow down"; this can be done in a worshipful manner (Genesis 22:5) or it can merely show respect for authority (2 Samuel 9:6).

15 And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

The captain of the Lord's armies asks Joshua to respect the holiness of this place by removing his dirty shoes. Joshua is sure to have remembered the story of a similar request made to Moses when the Lord called him to rescue His people while speaking out of a bush. When we approach God, He accepts us as we are. It is important, however, to respect the great honor that God gives to us by allowing us such access to the heavenly throne room. To remind us that we should leave behind the worn, dirty, everyday, earthly worries when talking with God, the captain commands Joshua to remove his shoe so as not to disrupt the holiness of the place where he stands. Joshua obediently does so and listens for the Lord's instructions.

6:1 Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.

The first verse of this chapter describes the seemingly hopeless and almost impossible situation that confronts the Israelites as they approach Jericho. This difficulty is much like other obstacles they have overcome along the way, such as crossing the Red Sea and the Jordan River. The difference, in this case, is that the city has prepared for war by fortifying their city walls. The verse starts by telling the state of mind of the inhabitants of Jericho when the people of Israel arrive at their borders. "Now Jericho was straitly shut up." The double usage of the word *sagar* (Heb. saw-GAR) is employed here to describe shutting in of the people of the land. Literally the phrase reads, "Jericho was shutting up shut," which means that the city was sealed so that no one was able to go in or go out of the city. They were shut within the walls because they were fearful of the Israelites' coming attack (2:10-11; 5:1).

2 And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

It is important to note that verse 1 is inserted parenthetically here, then the narrator continues the thought which he began in 5:13. The chapter division in 5:15 is somewhat misleading and creates the impression that the Lord's theophany and speech with Joshua ended there. However, the Lord's conversation with him continues (6:2-5) with detailed war plans against Jericho. Joshua and the Children of Israel are at the wall of Jericho, probably gazing at the wall and contemplating how to overcome such a formidable barrier. According to some archaeological sources, the wall of Jericho is a pear-shaped mound 366 meters (400 yards) in length from the north to the south, 183 meters (200 yards) in width, and about 67 meters (70 yards) high. As Joshua is gazing at this impenetrable wall, the Lord appears in military regalia (5:13-15) and speaks to him. The Lord assures Joshua that He has given him the city of Jericho. "See," the Lord said, "I have given into your hand Jericho" with their king and their army. The language here indicates a completed action. In other words, the Lord seems to say to Joshua, "There is no cause for alarm or worry. I have already won the battle for you. I have already handed the land over to you as I have promised." The Lord's specific mention of the king and his army, not only implies total victory but also indicates and confirms that the inhabitants of Jericho have planned to attack Israel. They are ready to defend their city. The Lord then assures Joshua of victory.

3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. 4 And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. 5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

In verses 3-5, the Lord gives direction for how this battle, which has already been won in the spiritual realm, is to be won physically. The Lord gives Joshua the battle strategy to convey to all the Children of Israel. The instructions are clear:

1. The people, led by the men of war (soldiers), are to march round the city of Jericho once each day for six days. The word “compass” (Heb. sabab, saw-BAB), means “to surround or circle round.” The idea is not to march as in a military parade but go around the walls of the city once a day (v. 3).
2. Seven priests with seven rams’ horn trumpets shall go in front of the Ark of the Covenant and lead the way around the city each day (v. 4).
3. The people are to circle the city seven times on the seventh day (v. 4).
4. At the end of the 7th time, the priests shall blow a long blast of the rams’ horn and the people “shout with a great shout” (v. 5) before marching straight in to take possession of the land (v. 5).

The phrase, “shout with a great shout” are two Hebrew words from the same root. Rua’ (roo-AH) means “to sound an alarm, make a joyful noise,” and teru’ah (teh-roo-AH) is “an acclamation of joy or battle cry.” The cry is for both the intimidation of the enemy and the encouragement of the friendly forces (Numbers 10:9; 23:21). Shouting is frequently associated in many instances with the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4:5; 2 Samuel 6:15; cf. Numbers 29:1; Psalm 33:3).

It is also noticeable that the priests are to lead the people in wars and take an active part in the affairs of Israel. Ministers of the Lord are to be at the forefront in accomplishing the commands of the Lord (cf. v. 4-6; 3:3, 8, 13-17; 4:3). The result of obeying all these instructions is that the walls of Jericho will “fall down flat” i.e., completely. That means total destruction. It will give way and the people of Israel (everyone) will march straight in to take possession of the land.

15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times. 16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city. Verses 6-14 contain Joshua’s instruction to the people and the description of the actual procession (the encircling) of the city from the first day to the sixth day. The narrator now takes us to the events of the seventh day. The Children of Israel have obeyed the Lord and have done everything according to the instruction of Joshua to them. Then early in the morning of the seventh day, which we can refer to here as their “D-Day,” the people start early to circle the city.

Their starting “early about the dawning of the day,” as mentioned here, is important in view of the special instruction regarding the seventh day (from v. 4). Since it would take them longer to march around the city seven times in one day, they need to start early. On this eventful day, the people circle the city just as they have been doing for the past six days, silently with seven priests carrying rams’ horns leading the way, followed by those carrying the Ark of the Covenant and the soldiers, and then the people (vv. 8-14). Each march must be completely around the city. To do that seven times on the last day, and then march in to capture the city afterward would take hard work and faith. To the Israelites as well, this method looks very strange and foolish, but they act in strict obedience to the Lord, who uses the things that seem foolish to the world to put to shame the wise, and the weak things to defeat the mighty (1 Corinthians 1:27–28). Moreover, they have seen enough of God’s mighty deeds along the way especially in the most recent time (Joshua 3–4), that they have to trust and obey Him.

Verse 16 relates the fulfillment of God’s promises and the result of total faith in and obedience to the word of God even when it sounds irrational. The people have completed the procession according to the instructions of the Lord. After the priests have sounded the trumpets, Joshua announces to the people to shout (rua’) for joy because the “Lord has given you the city,” which reminds them of God’s promise to give them the city (v. 2; cf. 8:1, 18; Judges 3:28; 4:7, etc).

20 So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

Here, the narrator gives us the climax of God's victory over the city of Jericho. "So," i.e., recalling the reader's attention to the event in verse 16, Israel obeys Joshua's instruction. When they heard the sound of the trumpet, "the people shouted with a great shout" (vv. 5-6). At the long blast of the rams' horns, coupled with Joshua's signal, the people raise the battle cry of triumph. As they are shouting, probably in excitement and in obedience to the word of God, the walls of Jericho start to crumble. As the wall falls flat, the people of Israel move in, "every man straight before him, and they took the city." Scholars have long sought physical reasons for the fall of Jericho. Some believe the walls lowered into the ground like an elevator, allowing Israel to enter the city by walking across the tops of the wall. Others believe the Lord might have used an earthquake to bring about His purpose. Still, others think the trampling and vibrations might have weakened the walls causing them to tumble. No matter how the incident is interpreted, the fall of Jericho's walls served to demonstrate God's power over nature.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Rahab Rewarded for Her Faithfulness
(Hebrews 11:23-31)

TUESDAY

Jesus Heals Blind Man from Jericho
(Luke 18:35-42)

WEDNESDAY

Enjoying the Manna and Local Produce
(Joshua 5:8-12)

THURSDAY

Marching Around the City of Jericho
(Joshua 6:6-14)

FRIDAY

Rahab and Spies Confirm Rescue Plan
(Joshua 2:15-24)

SATURDAY

Rahab Saved While Jericho Is Destroyed
(Joshua 6:22-25)

SUNDAY

Joshua's Successful Conquest of Jericho
(Joshua 5:13-6:5, 15-16, 20)