

Lesson 8 - 18 December 2011

Israel's Victory at Jericho

Lesson Scope: Joshua 5:13-6:27

Lesson Focus

The miraculous crossing of the Jordan River marked the end of Israel's wilderness wanderings. The new generation had renewed their covenant relationship with the Lord, and He had "rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off [them]." They had observed the first Passover in the Promised Land and were now enjoying the fruits of that land.

Years earlier, the ten faithless spies had said that the cities of Canaan were "great and walled up to heaven" (Deuteronomy 1:28). Just before them now lay Jericho, one of the strongest of these cities. Strategically located near Canaan's eastern border, Jericho was the key to the central part of the land. By taking this city first, Joshua could divide the country, moving out from there to subjugate other areas, city by city.

But Joshua had none of the armaments needed for attacking a walled city—no battering rams, catapults, or moving towers. His only weapons were slings, arrows, and spears, which were like straws against the walls of Jericho.

But Joshua was on God's side, leading God's earthly army, and so victory was certain.

God fully enables His people to overcome their enemies. Those who follow His direction and apply themselves to the battle will win the victory. The city of Jericho covered approximately eight acres, and a circuit would have taken about thirty minutes. Archaeological excavations suggest that it was surrounded by two walls, an outer wall six feet thick and an inner wall about twelve feet thick, with both walls about thirty feet high. These walls, which were fifteen feet apart, were linked by houses built across the top, as Rahab's house "upon the wall." It appears that the outer wall fell outward and down the hillside, dragging the inner wall and houses with it, the streak of bricks gradually getting thinner farther down the slope. Thus the wall literally "fell down flat."

Lesson Aim: To identify principles for overcoming the enemy.

Theme Verse: 1 John 4:4. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Lesson Text:

Divine Direction

Joshua 5:13-15 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.

Joshua 6:1-3 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.

Joshua 6:10 ¹⁰ And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall *any* word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout.

Complete Victory

Joshua 6:15-20 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. ¹⁷ And the city shall be accursed, *even* it, and all that *are* therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that *are* with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. ¹⁸ And ye, in any wise keep *yourselves* from the accursed thing, lest ye make *yourselves* accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. ¹⁹ But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, *are* consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD. ²⁰ So the people shouted when *the* priests blew with the trum-

pets: 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.

Joshua 6:24 ²⁴ And they burnt the city with fire, and all that *was* therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

Joshua 6:27 ²⁷ So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was *noised* throughout all the country.

Questions for Study

Divine Direction

1. What qualities essential for victory did Joshua display as he met his Captain?
2. Why is proper, regular worship essential to spiritual victory?
3. Explain God's part and man's part in the teamwork required for victory.

Complete Victory

4. Why might God have chosen such an unorthodox battle plan?
5. Since God is all-powerful, why must we struggle for our victories?
6. How can we apply the instruction of 6:18 to our personal lives and churches?
7. Why does the Lord deserve all the credit for our spiritual successes (Joshua 6:27)?

Analyzing the Passage

The "captain of the host of the LORD" (Joshua 5:14) was likely not an angelic being, but a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. He accepted Joshua's worship, and He declared that His very presence made the ground around Him holy. In Joshua 6:2 He is called "the LORD." (The flow of thought goes directly from Joshua 5:15 to 6:2; 6:1 is a parenthetical comment.)

His instructions were a test of faith for Joshua. This command to circle the city may have looked like a dangerous military maneuver. It spread out the army and exposed it to possible attacks and ridicule from the people on the wall. Conceivably, the enemy could rush out of the city gates to break up Israel's line, separating and then slaughtering them. But Joshua and his people chose to trust God and overcome by faith.

Jericho seems to have been a kind of first fruits, consecrated to the Lord.

The Hebrew word translated accursed is also translated devoted and dedicated elsewhere. The forbidden spoils were two categories—things to be burned and valuable metals that obviously would not burn and were to be brought into the treasury of the Lord. In later battles, the people were free to take of the spoil (Joshua 8:27).

Principles and Applications

Divine Direction

1. Discernment is required to overcome the enemy (Joshua 5:13). When Joshua saw the strange soldier, his first question was "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" He needed to discern whether he should fight the stranger or offer his support.

Today our enemy is "a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). He will use any trickery or disguise, ranging from a roaring lion to an angel of light. We must stay close to God's Word and God's people to avoid the two extremes of supporting wolves in sheep's clothing or fighting against God (Acts 5:39).

2. A life of victory requires worship and reverence (Joshua 5:14-15). Proper, regular worship will take our eyes off ourselves and our weaknesses and remind us of the powerful Captain who fights with us. Worship will align our hearts with God and ensure that we fight for His cause. Without worship we may be part of that unhappy group who thought they were doing wonderful works for the Lord but are told to depart from Him (Matthew 7:21-23). "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Without worship, the "care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and [we become] unfruitful." With our vision fixed on earthly things and our own strength, instead of being fixed on God, we are easy prey for deception.

3. To experience victory, we must believe the promises of God (Joshua 6:1-2). Circumstances seemed to belie God's promise, "I have given into thine hand Jericho." But Joshua chose to believe and obey through faith, and once again God showed Himself faithful.

God has promised us, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." "He that overcometh ... shall be my son." And there are many other promises that we can trust absolutely, regardless of what the facts seem to say.

4. To overcome our enemies, we must follow God's directives (Joshua 6:3). What an unorthodox battle plan, this silent circling of Jericho day after day! But God could see the end of His plan and knew what He was doing. The Israelites needed to obey His commands, even though they could not understand them.

We also need to follow God's directives, even though we may not understand them. Our God clearly sees the spiritual forces that we only dimly comprehend through faith. He is directing the flaming hosts of heaven to a guaranteed victory. Someday our eyes will be open and we will see that all God asked of us was perfect in wisdom. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Complete Victory

5. God provides victory for those who put forth effort (Joshua 6:15). When life goes smoothly, we tend to forget God. So if God just did all the work for us and handed us the victory, we would take His work for granted. Therefore He asks us to do all we can to press into the kingdom, and He provides the rest.

We can have as much of God as we want. We are the ones who limit God's grace and power in our lives by our failure to work for it. "Sure I must fight, if I would reign; / Increase my courage, Lord; / I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, / Supported by thy Word. / And when the battle's over, we shall wear a crown."

6. Spiritual victory requires decisive action in the moment of crisis (Joshua 6:20). When the people shouted and the wall collapsed, the people could have stood with their mouths hanging open in astonishment. But they acted decisively and seized the moment to take the city.

Trees do not grow roots during the storm; the storm tests the roots they grew in the calm days. So the moment of crisis is not the time to develop strength but the time to display the strength developed by faithful everyday living. If we faithfully obey the truth we have from day to day, we will do the right thing in the moment of crisis. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

7. To be victorious, we must destroy the items that bring us to defeat (Joshua 6:24). Many times we fail to find victory because we enjoy the temptation. "But . . . make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

So-called Christian music and books may talk about God but mainly feed

the appetites of the flesh. We need to ask ourselves, "Does this thing draw me closer to God or make Him seem farther away?" Praying "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" is useless if we are not willing to "mortify the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13).

8. Victory must be attributed to the power of the Lord (Joshua 6:27). By nature we cry out to the Lord for help but then, when He gives us the victory, we take the credit. Perhaps that is why God chose to destroy Jericho's walls with a shout, so there could be no doubt that He deserved the glory.

Job's experience shows the tremendous power of the devil and how quickly we would be destroyed if God did not limit our temptations and provide a way of escape. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

Important Teachings

1. Discernment is required to overcome the enemy (Joshua 5:13).
2. A life of victory requires worship and reverence (Joshua 5:14-15).
3. To experience victory, we must believe the promises of God (Joshua 6:1-2).
4. To overcome our enemies, we must follow God's directives (Joshua 6:3).
5. God provides victory for those who put forth effort (Joshua 6:15).
6. Spiritual victory requires decisive action in the moment of crisis (Joshua 6:20).
7. To be victorious, we must destroy the items that bring us to defeat (Joshua 6:24).
8. Victory must be attributed to the power of the Lord (Joshua 6:27).
9. Victory is possible when we respect and obey the directives of God's appointed leadership (Joshua 6:10, 16, 20).
10. To be victorious, we must maintain a proper respect for what God calls His own (Joshua 19:24).

Answers to Questions

1. What qualities essential for victory did Joshua display as he met his Captain?

He was alert and courageous, quick to confront the stranger. But the moment he knew the stranger was actually his Captain, he demonstrated humility by worshiping and taking off his shoes. Finally, he obeyed his instructions implicitly.

2. Why is proper, regular worship essential to spiritual victory?

Proper, regular worship will take our eyes off ourselves and our weakness and remind us of the powerful Captain who fights with us. Worship will align our hearts with God and ensure that we fight for His cause. Worship will keep us from being lifted up in pride and falling into the condemnation of the devil.

3. Explain God's part and man's part in the teamwork required for victory.

God graciously provides initial salvation, the indwelling Holy Spirit, His Word, and all the armor for our battles. Then He screens our temptations and limits the devil to what we can bear, while providing a way of escape.

Our part is to choose to trust in Him, and dedicate our lives to obeying His commands, which is our reasonable service. It requires constant, diligent effort to crucify the flesh and overcome temptation.

4. Why might God have chosen such an unorthodox battle plan?

This strange circling tested and therefore strengthened the Israelites' faith. Likely they had to face ridicule from the inhabitants of Jericho, which reminded them that they were separated unto God. When the walls fell, they had no doubt that God alone deserved the glory.

5. Since God is all-powerful, why must we struggle for our victories?

When life goes smoothly, we tend to forget God. So if God just did all the work for us and handed us the victory, we would take His work for granted. So He asks us to do all we can to press into the kingdom, and He provides the rest. Much of human struggle against sin is because of the sinful nature. Since man is a creature of choice, he must choose to crucify the old nature; God will not do that for him.

As Job's experience shows, God receives much glory when people choose Him in spite of suffering. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

6. How can we apply the instruction of 6:18 to our personal lives and churches?

We must be careful to keep ourselves from the things and expressions God forbids, such as lust, pride, anger, covetousness, and the things that feed them. The church decides that some technologies or practices are not safe and should be avoided. If we take the forbidden thing, we destroy ourselves spiritually and trouble our fellow men. We must never take to ourselves what God expects us to render to Him, such as credit for our talents

or accomplishments. Money spent for extravagant living could also come in this category.

7. Why does the Lord deserve all the credit for our spiritual successes (6:27)?

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood" but against spiritual beings that are far more powerful than we are. The Book of Job reveals the devil's frightening power and how quickly he would devour us without God's protection. "For without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Summarizing the Lesson

Encamped along the hills of light,
Ye Christian soldiers, rise,
And press the battle ere the night
Shall veil the glowing skies.
Against the foe in vales below
Let all our strength be hurled;
Faith is the victory, we know,
That overcomes the world.
To him that overcomes the foe,
White raiment shall be given;
Before the angels he shall know
His name confessed in heaven.
Then onward from the hills of light,
Our hearts with love aflame,
We'll vanquish all the hosts of night,
In Jesus' conquering Name.
—John H. Yates

Research Guide

1. Read "The Fall of Jericho" under Chapter 6 of Joshua in Halley's Bible Handbook.
2. Meditate on Job and how by faith he overcame all the affliction the devil could bring upon him.