

March 11

Joshua 6 and 7

Joshua 8 and 9 (also referenced March 12)

(Singing) Joshua fit the battle of Jericho... every kid knows that story. But, there are some plausibility challenges here and the historicity of this is very helpful. So, a helpful first question is "Is Jericho a real place?"

Jericho is actually one of the oldest cities in Israel, maybe the world. It is well fortified and strategically placed. It was not very large, but it was the first city that needed to be conquered in order to take over the Promised Land.

After crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land, Joshua and his people had to climb to the top of a steep ridge to be able to gain control of the country. Guarding the bottom of the natural ascent to the central highlands was the city of Jericho.

So God gives Joshua the battle plan. Can you imagine being Joshua and taking this to the generals? March around the city for 7 days. 7 times on the last day and then shout! And the thirty foot walls will fall and we'll just go in and kill people. Ready, Break!

Seriously? That's it?

Have you ever stopped to think about why God gave such a strange battle plan to His people? It emphasizes at least three things of importance.

First, it highlights the importance of faith - the ability, the determination to trust in the Word of God even in the face of external evidence that shouts, 'This is foolish. You are going to fail!' Faith is trusting the promise of God, as opposed to the efforts of your own mind and strength.

The parallel to our Christian experience is immediately obvious. The 'Jericho' in my life and yours is not going to ever be conquered by our human efforts. The walls are just too high and too thick. It will come down, however if we pick up the mighty weapon of faith. Trust the promises of God and He will pull down the mightiest stronghold, like it was nothing at all.

The second thing that God's battle plan clearly emphasizes, is that the glory for all that is about to happen here belongs to God, and to God alone.

The last thing that the strange battle plan of attack at Jericho emphasizes is the importance of complete obedience. Not one brick fell, not one crack appeared in those immense fortifications until after the seventh circuit on the seventh day! Until that very instant nothing happened.

Now, Archeology points to the destruction of the city about the time Joshua was there. It is impossible to tell how the walls were destroyed by archaeological digs, but we know that they were. Some have suggested that the shouts created harmonic resonance. Some have said there was an earthquake at that time. But whether you imagine harmonic resonance, a perfectly timed earthquake or the physical hand of God, the fact that it happened in perfect timing with Joshua's team yelling points to a miracle of God through the faith of his people

The Book of Hebrews says that the Promised Land is a kind of object lesson for us, (a type of the experiences of each and every Christian). Like Israel of old, we have been called to rise up by faith and enter into our promised "rest." Since that type is established for us by the New Testament, it is fair for us to make a spiritual application with regard to the city of Jericho. I believe that there are some obstacles in the form of well-fortified barriers that squarely block the paths to spiritual maturity in every single one of our lives. To reach the highland plateau from which the land of Canaan could be occupied, Israel had to deal with Jericho - and to reach the plateau of spiritual maturity in our lives, those strongly fortified strongholds also have to be pulled down.

What is the 'Jericho' that is blocking your path to Christian maturity? Is it a particular sin that has such a grip on us that we cannot seem to break its power? Is it an inability to forgive someone who hurt us very badly? Is it an experience that badly scarred us, or an influence that we cannot evict from our daily experience? Joshua and his people won a decisive victory at Jericho by fully trusting God. Those 30' high walls came crashing down because Israel exercised faith.

I don't know what the 'Jericho-like' obstacle is in your path. God's battle plan for your life probably will not require silent marches or trumpet blasts. But I'll bet it will have three salient features - it will be a plan that brings victory through faith - not human effort. It will be designed to glorify God, not you - and you won't see many bricks falling until after you have completely obeyed the word of the Lord!

Two comments regarding the significance of chapter 7:

The first is that it would appear that Joshua did not consult with the Lord before sending a contingent of troops to deal with the small settlement at Ai. Whenever we neglect to consult God in making our plans, we are asking for disaster. The Bible says, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" But remember, Jesus also said in John 15, "*Without me you can do nothing!*"

The second thing that is here is a "terrible" principle of Scripture. The sin of just one person can interrupt the flow of God's power and blessing to a whole congregation. As far as we can tell, only Achan - of all the people of Israel - sinned against the ban on taking personal booty out of Jericho. But for the sin of that one person, the whole nation paid a terrible price. It is because there is sin in the camp, and the blessing of God is being withheld until that sin is dealt with. There is one terrible lie that Satan has been telling all of us from the day of Eve right through to today. He

says, 'Go ahead - break God's laws - even if it does become known it will only affect you. No one else will be hurt by it...' That is a fearful lie.

The subject of Gibeon's deception is an interesting one. These wily people really pulled the wool over Joshua's eyes with their clever disguise, and the story of a long, arduous journey from a distant land. What a great reminder to us that things are not always what they seem to be. Did you notice verse 14 of chapter 9? It says, *"The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord."* What a revealing comment. That is twice now in the space of just a few days that Israel has gotten into big trouble by simply relying upon their own judgment to make important decisions. It happened at Ai when, without consulting with the Lord, the spies developed a battle plan that looked good, but quickly turned out to be a disastrous one, because they did not know about the sin of Achan. They couldn't know about that, but God did know, and He could have revealed it to them before the rout, if only they had stopped to check their plan with Him. Now here, with reference to Gibeon, they looked at the old clothes. They tasted the stale provisions, and on the basis of what they could see and smell and taste, they decided - without stopping to ask the Lord. What is going on in your life that you have not asked God about?

It is extremely interesting to me that Israel, when they found out about the deception, did not even think about breaking the oath. Because the Israelites had taken an oath before God, Israel honored the word even when it was given under deception. That's how important your word is. The godly thing is to honor it even when it hurts.

This is Mark Ashton, hoping you are enjoying project 4:4, where we remember that people don't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.