

Joshua Chapters 5 and 6

“Joshua fit’ de battle of Jericho, and the walls came a-tumblin’ down...” So goes the famous spiritual song – but who *really* fought the battle of Jericho?

Who is “the commander of the Lord’s army”? See Joshua 5 v 15...

Circumcision and Passover at Gilgal (Joshua 5 v 1 to 12)

We can already sense victory in verse 1: “their hearts melted in fear”. When our spiritual enemies see that we are trusting in God, and are willing to step out in faith and obedience, they instantly lose confidence in their battle against us – if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8 v 31)?

- It would seem that now was the right time for the Israelites to ‘strike while iron was hot’, but instead God told Joshua to circumcise the men who had been born in the wilderness, which would make them especially vulnerable from a military viewpoint – why was this action so important?
- What was the “reproach of Egypt” (v 9) which God “rolled away” on that day?
- What was the significance of the Israelites’ celebrating the Passover (v 10)?
- What happened to the manna and why?

Apparently, all during the forty years of waiting in the wilderness, none of the sons born during that time had been circumcised. Now God commanded this to be done. Joshua makes clear the reason why there was a new generation born in the wilderness: because the old generation did not obey the voice of the Lord, or take the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey by faith. God’s work would go on, but the people of God who had unbelief would not share in it.

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and his people (see Genesis 17 v 9 to 14). Abraham received circumcision as a personal seal of the righteousness that he had by faith (Romans 4 v 11). We too are “circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands” in Christ (Colossians 2 v 11, 12).

The fall of Jericho (Joshua 5 v 13 to 6 v 27)

- Why did Joshua ask the man with the drawn sword whether he was with the Israelites or with their enemies? Why didn’t the man answer Joshua directly? How did he reply?
- What was the significance of the fact that Joshua fell down and worshipped the man, and was then told to take off his shoes? See Exodus 3 v 5, 6.

In a sense, the man refused to answer Joshua’s question because it was not the right question – the proper question was whether Joshua was on *the Lord’s* side. The man announces that he is the commander of the Lord’s army – this is Jesus pulling rank on Joshua, who himself was a great military leader, but not “the commander of *the Lord’s* army”.

- What was strikingly unusual about the ‘battle plan’ for the conquest of Jericho (v 1 to 7)?

Answer: several things!

- (i) The method of warfare (marching around the city, blowing trumpets, shouting) made no sense from a military perspective – the Israelites were wide open to attack during the days they encircled the city, as it would be easy for the enemy to attack them from the high position of the walls;
- (ii) Normally, priests and the ark of the covenant were not supposed to accompany Israel in battle (see Numbers 1 v 47, 1 Samuel 4 v 10, 11); and
- (iii) Most of the ‘work’ was to take place on the Sabbath, which was supposed to be a rest day, without work (Exodus 20 v 8 to 11).

[MORE OVER...]

Joshua had to command the people of Israel to stay away from the “devoted things” (v 18). By this he meant the idols and things devoted to the demonic and depraved worship of the people of Canaan. “The wall collapsed” (v 20): We are not told that Israel knew this would be the result of their obedient marching and shouting. They may have been as surprised as the people of Jericho at the way God decided to deliver the city of Jericho into their hands.

“They... destroyed with the sword every living thing in it” (v 21): Why was Israel commanded to execute such complete destruction? Because the greatest sins of the Canaanites were spiritual (Deuteronomy 18 v 9 to 13).

“But Rahab the prostitute and her father’s household... Joshua saved alive” (v 25): here we see a contrast between judgment and salvation. All of Jericho had heard about the God of Israel (Joshua 2 v 8 to 11), but only Rahab and her family responded positively in faith towards God with that knowledge.

“Cursed... is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city” (v 26) – this was fulfilled in 1 Kings 16 v 34, when Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho, at the cost of his two sons.

This completes the story of Israel’s victory at Jericho. We can learn a great deal from the elements that contributed to their victory –

- (i) *Faith*: Joshua and the Israelites believed the battle plan;
- (ii) *Obedience*: they followed the battle plan to the last detail;
- (iii) *Courage*: they followed the plan despite their danger;
- (iv) *Endurance*: they followed the battle plan over an extended period of time, even when it seemed that nothing was happening; and
- (v) *Spiritual perspective*: they did not rely on human thinking or worldly methods – their trust was in the Lord God (the man with the drawn sword, and symbolized by the ark of the Lord), rather than in human ingenuity, power or might – see Zechariah 4 v 6.