

Joshua 5-6 – “Jericho Down”

5:1 - *So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.*

After crossing over the Jordan, Joshua could have just continued straight on to Jericho with this exciting momentum. They’ve just miraculously crossed the Jordan, they’ve set up their memorial stones of all that God has done. They know the people in the land are in fear. Might as well strike while the iron is hot, right? Not exactly. You see, God is never in as big of a hurry as we tend to be, and there was still a work that God wanted to do in them first.

- We can be quick to launch out and **do** something for God, but He would rather us **be** something for Him. He wants to be sure Israel is conquered spiritually before they go and conquer Jericho physically.

5:2-3 - *At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.”³ So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.*

You might ask, why would God do this now? Israel is about to embark on one of their biggest challenges upon entering their new land. This seems like a poorly timed strategic initiative.

Here’s why it seems this was important:

- 1) **Because they were a covenant people.** They were chosen and set apart for God and by God. Circumcision was the sign of this covenant. It reminded them that their bodies belonged to the Lord, they were His.
 - It had not been done through their wilderness journeys so now this new generation would be reminded that they were to be a people yielded and surrendered to God. They were to be set apart for Him.
- 2) **To test their faith.** Militarily speaking this was very bad timing. This would render the Israeli fighting brigade inoperable. Their military prowess would be, well, a wee bit hindered. They will need to learn quickly that they need to trust in the Lord for protection and safety. They would come to see through this that victory comes from the Lord and not themselves.

2:4-7 - And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. ⁵ For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised. ⁶ For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord—to whom the Lord swore that He would not show them the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” ⁷ Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

An entire generation had to wander 40 years in the wilderness because they failed to believe what God said He would do. God promised them the land and that He would bring them into the land. But they doubted based on what they saw, rather than having faith in what they heard. And they lost out.

So now that there's a new generation, circumcision was to be renewed.

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant that they were a people set apart from God. This would be a distinct marking of the people of God.

But this was to be more than a physical marking, this was to be symbolic of a spiritual work. As they were to cut away the flesh and no longer be a people governed by the flesh but governed of God, it was to indicate this could only come through a circumcision of the heart.

- **Jeremiah 4:4**, *"Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings."*
- **Deuteronomy 30:6**, *"And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."*
- **Romans 2:28–29**, *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."*

So this whole process was to be more than just some ceremonial, religious act, it was to be significant of a heart that was turned to the Lord in repentance and ready to follow wholeheartedly in obedience.

Again, God is more concerned with where our heart is spiritually than where we are physically. He'll get them to Jericho and through Jericho, but He wants them first to learn to trust Him and move forward in the Lord and not in the flesh.

5:8-9 - *So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. ⁹ Then the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.*

So, they're camped out in Gilgal, letting the guys get healed. Remember Gilgal means to roll or rolling. And it's here that God says the **reproach of Egypt** has been rolled away.

What was the reproach of Egypt?

- It was that they saw this nation delivered out of Egypt but then were left to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. This was cause to mock and scorn Israel. Perhaps they could have said, the Lord brought them out but could not lead them in.
- But now they are in the land, Gilgal is the first place they came to after crossing the Jordan. Egypt would now be unable to scoff at Israel's lack of progress. God has rolled away their reproach.
- God is faithful to finish what He starts. But we must learn to walk faithfully in the process.

5:10-12 - *Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. ¹² Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.*

Passover was first instituted at Israel's deliverance from Egypt. It was to be an annual celebration and memorial of how God redeemed and freed His people from bondage and slavery in Egypt.

- There is no indication that the Jews continued to follow the Passover during their wilderness wandering, same as circumcision. And no uncircumcised person could participate in the Passover (Exodus 12:48).

So, it's important for Israel to remind themselves that they're here because of the Lord. And as the Lord delivered them miraculously from bondage, He will once again do a miraculous work to bring them in to the promised land.

- Just as the Passover was to be an ongoing reminder of what God had done for them, communion is now a reminder for the believer of the redemption we've received in Christ through His sacrifice on the cross. And we must do this regularly to remind ourselves that it is only by the grace of Jesus Christ and His atoning work by which I stand.

It's interesting that once they ate of the produce of the land, the manna stopped. The manna was something people complained over and caused them to long for Egypt (Numbers 11:4-6). As amazing as the manna was, God had something far greater for them. Something they missed out on because of their grumbling and unbelief.

- When we follow God obediently, it doesn't guarantee everything will go smoothly, but everything that happens will be for our good. God has good things in store for all that will simply follow Him in His way.
- And so far we've seen that this encompasses crucifying the flesh; reckoning yourself dead to sin, remembering what Christ has done for us, and walking in the abundant life that He has given us.

“In preparing for victory God's people had to overcome four great obstacles: (1) the death of Moses (ch. 1); (2) the morale of the troops (ch. 2); (3) the raging waters of Jordan (chs. 3–4); and (4) the spiritual condition of the people (ch. 5). The first obstacle was surmounted by words of encouragement and exhortation; the second, by information derived from reconnaissance; the third, by dramatic manifestation of the power of God; and the fourth, by renewal of basic ceremonies which marked Israel as the special people of God.”¹

5:13-15 - *And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”¹⁴ So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”¹⁵ Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, “Take your*

¹ Smith, J. E. (1995). *The Books of History* (p. 63). College Press.

sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.

So as Joshua is out and doing a little reconnaissance mission of Jericho, he lifts his eyes up and suddenly sees a very interesting person with a sword ready to do battle. Joshua wisely asks if he's for Israel or for their enemies.

I love the answer – No! Joshua is probably confused wondering, *No for what?* But this Man quickly identifies Himself as the ***Commander of the army of the Lord***. This is another pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. He's visited the patriarchs at previous times as the Angel of the Lord, but now He comes to do battle on behalf of Joshua and Israel.

It's wonderful how the Lord always comes to us in the way we need Him.

- To Abraham the pilgrim – He came as a traveler to share a meal.
- To Jacob the schemer – He came as a wrestler to break him of his dependency.
- To Hagar in grief – He came as the God who sees and hears.
- To the three Hebrew men – He came as a companion in a fiery trial.
- To Joshua the leader of Israel – He came as the commander of the army, reminding Joshua that he's really just 2nd in command.

We see the reality of this commander being more than just a man. Joshua was ready to yield to Him and give Him the respect due Him, but this commander says to take off your sandals. This is more than just a man of high rank, this is One who deserves worship and who's presence cannot tolerate sin or impurity. Removing the sandals, like Moses was called to do in the presence of God, indicated reverence for the holy presence of God.

The Lord was revealing once again that Joshua is not going to win this battle through military fortitude, but through faith in the Almighty God.

- The more important question was is Joshua on the Lord's side. We can lay out our plans and hopes and ask God to come alongside them and bless them, but what we need to do is come alongside what God is doing. May we always be standing on the Lord's side.

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

We need to remember that the Christian walk is not all about tranquility and ease. There are times where we'll face challenges and conflicts. Some Christians have never experienced victory because they've never waged war against the things holding them back from victory.

God had to conquer Israel before Israel could conquer the land.

Have we allowed the Lord to do that in our lives? Have we surrendered to Him, have we gone to battle against the things impeding our progress and victory.

We see the stages in Joshua that are parallel to our victory:

- Joshua had to learn to have a humble worship (5:14 / Ephesians 3:14); a holy walk (5:15 / Ephesians 4:1, 17); and a heavenly warfare (5:13 / Ephesians 6:10-20).

John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.) said: “You are but a poor soldier of Christ if you think you can overcome without fighting, and suppose you can have the crown without the conflict.”

Jericho stands as that picture for the believer. Something that is standing in the way of our inheritance in the Lord. An obstacle that can only be taken down in the Lord’s strength, but one that we must be willing to fight through in spiritual warfare to overcome.

The city of Jericho was well fortified. It had an outer wall that was six feet thick and about 11 feet high. The inner wall was 12 feet thick and about 35 feet high. Jericho was built on a hill so there was a steep incline just to get to the walls making it very hard for an enemy to scale.

When it says it was securely shut up, it was definitely secure. In the eyes of Israel this seemed impossible to take this city. But God! And again, God is already at work because the people of Jericho are fearful of Israel. They’ve locked themselves in.

6:2 - *And the Lord said to Joshua: “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor.*

God reminds Joshua that He’s already done the work and secured the victory! I’m giving you this city and its inhabitants the Lord says.

- In the same way, the Lord Jesus has already done the work for us! He’s secured our victory over Satan, sin, and death!
- We don’t fight **for** victory, we fight **from** victory. Don’t give in or let up. We still need to claim the ground God has given us. The battle still wages, but the war has been won. Trust the Lord and walk in the victory He’s provided.
- **2 Corinthians 2:14**, *“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.”*

6:3-5 - You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. ⁴ And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him."

So the Lord gives Joshua his marching orders – quite literally. And I think Joshua would have been asking God what the backup plan was?

I mean this sounds quite ridiculous, ludicrous; it could leave Israel the laughing stock of Canaan.

- But God doesn't provide great challenges to set us up for failure. He provides great challenges to strengthen our faith.

And God is going to have them do something extraordinary but it will only show the extraordinary might of God.

- Now keep in mind, God could have done this all by Himself. But He has His people partnering with Him. He wants us to step out in faith and come alongside what He's doing. We get blessed as we get to see all that God does.

Now this would have been a pretty hard sell for Joshua passing this on to the people of Israel. They could have been seeking a second opinion, or wondering if Joshua is really qualified after all. This is going to be a huge exercise of faith. One that is going to take courage and hope.

6:6-14 - Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord." ⁷ And he said to the people, "Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the Lord." ⁸ So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them. ⁹ The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. ¹⁰ Now Joshua had

commanded the people, saying, “You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, ‘Shout!’ Then you shall shout.”¹¹ So he had the ark of the Lord circle the city, going around it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp.¹² And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord.¹³ Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the Lord, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets.¹⁴ And the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. So they did six days.

Normally the priests and the ark of the Lord did not accompany Israel into battle. And it was always the Kohathites that carried the ark.

But God is bringing the ark into sight to again show that this battle will not be won by military might, but by the hand of the Lord. The ark is synonymous with the presence of the Lord here.

Again, this strategy seemed very foolish, but God was doing some good things through this all:

1. He was building faith in Israel. They would need to trust that the Lord's ways were good and right.
2. Teaching obedience. Would they follow the plan exactly? Would they just go around 6 times on the 7th day and say, *‘That should be good enough.’*
3. Building courage. All of Jericho would be able to see Israel marching below. And they would be open and vulnerable to being attacked.
4. Building endurance. They had to keep going day after day even when nothing seemed to be happening.
5. Breaking them of any self-reliance. Walking around this city and getting a close look at the walls and the strength of the city would have caused them to see this was out of their hands. They would need the Lord to act on their behalf.

Often times this is the process the Lord takes us on in our Christian walk. We see walls get put up in our lives that either attempt to keep sin in or people out. We can feel like we're just going in circles with little hope. But in the process God is teaching us to walk by faith and walk in obedience. Be courageous in fighting against the enemy and endure to the end because the walls will eventually come down when we recognize it's not by our effort or strategy but by the Lord alone!

- Faith does not rely on what is seen but on what is unseen. It doesn't rely on the arm of the flesh, it relies on the strength of God (2 Chronicles 32:8).
- **Hebrews 11:30**, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days."*

6:15-20 - *But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶ And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: "Shout, for the Lord has given you the city! ¹⁷ Now the city shall be doomed by the Lord to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. ¹⁸ And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. ¹⁹ But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord."*

As the city would be destroyed, the people were to take the devoted things in Jericho (ie. silver and gold and the vessels of bronze and iron) and they were to be given to the Lord.

This would be their first conquest in their new land, and so they are to give the first fruits of their victory to the Lord. It would also remind them that their victory was completely by the Lord.

- It's interesting that the Lord brings them to their toughest challenge that they will have in Canaan first. He doesn't start them slow and build up to the more stronger cities. He just takes them through Jericho first. This will be a huge builder of faith in Israel to continue on to each of the places they will need to defeat.

6:20 - *So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.*

Not only did they need to walk around the city, but at the completion of that, they all needed to shout. Again, things would get pretty awkward quickly if nothing happened. They really needed to obey and trust the Lord.

But of course, just as God said, He's giving them the city and the victory, they just need to do what God says.

6:21-25 - *And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword. ²² But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, “Go into the harlot’s house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her.” ²³ And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel. ²⁴ But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. ²⁵ And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father’s household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.*

To some it may seem very harsh and unloving to see a city like this so utterly destroyed. But remember, God had given these people over 400 years to repent. Jericho wasn’t destroyed because they stood in Israel’s way, they were destroyed because they continued in sin and rebellion. They brought great abomination upon the land and one another. They were already destroying themselves. So God knew that the only remedy was to remove them. Just like cancer needs to be cut away lest it destroy the rest of the body.

Deuteronomy 18:9–14, *“When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, ¹¹ or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. ¹² For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. ¹³ You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. ¹⁴ For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.”*

Rather than focus on the destruction of Jericho, it’s amazing to see the salvation of one family willing to put their faith in the Lord. As promised, Rahab and her family would be spared. It seems that as the walls all crumbled, Rahab’s home (which was in the wall) stayed intact and she was able to be delivered.

Psalms 61:3, *“For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy.”*

It's amazing that she not only was saved but that Rahab would be a part of the lineage of the Messiah. That's some amazing grace right there.

6:26-27 - *Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying, "Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates." ²⁷ So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country.*

This curse actually came to pass during the reign of Ahab and a man name Hiel. Hiel rebuilt Jericho but lost his 2 sons in the process (1 Kings 16:34).

“This is a powerful story. It offers us a battle plan that is so bizarre that no-one in his or her right mind would follow it—unless, of course, it was an opportunity to obey Yahweh. Then, however, it does make sense, since the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of this world.³⁴ Here, then, is the central issue for us today: are we prepared to go with the foolishness of God, or do we fear that our obedience will make us seem less than we would like? After all, it is easy to hold back from obedience! And so this story is a powerful proclamation of the truth to us: if we want to achieve God's purposes, the only option is to do so in God's way.” ²

³⁴ 1 Cor. 1:25.

² Firth, D. G. (2015). *The Message of Joshua* (A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.; p. 82). Inter-Varsity Press.