

Joshua – Part 2

Battles and Blessings – Joshua 6-10

After God dried up the waters of the Jordan and the Israelites safely crossed the river on dry land, the kings of the Amorites (highland peoples) and the kings of the Canaanites (coastal and flatland people) were paralyzed with fear. God was surely with this nation. God had dried the waters from the sea for exactly this reason: “That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty; that ye might fear the LORD your God forever” (Josh. 4:24). The return of Jordan’s water separated them from their wilderness life forever.

I. *What Lies Within*

God had done His part; it was time to do theirs. As the Israelites contemplated taking possession of the land, they saw the fortress city of Jericho with its massive walls. While Jericho is the first visible obstacle in Israel’s path, it is not the first obstacle. The exterior obstacles, while important, are sometimes not the hardest to overcome; it is the internal. God never begins with the outward problem, but He always begins with what lies within us.

While the people of the Promised Land were cowering in fear, God told Israel that all the males must be circumcised. Before they could destroy the outward enemy, they had to be circumcised. This sacred rite had been neglected for many years, so none of the men were circumcised. It meant that they had surrendered their heart to the Lord and were willing to exchange their life for life with God. (Rom. 2:29). Every day, the man would look at this part of his body and be reminded of that exchange. Why circumcision? It was a reminder that life did not come from his flesh but from his relationship with God.

This act would mark their readiness to enter the Promised Land and their commitment to God’s commands as they prepared for battle. It renewed the physical sign that was used to signify their commitment to the covenant that was made between God and Abraham. (Gen. 17:10-14). They must separate themselves unto the Lord, establishing their identity as children of God. This was an act of sanctification, a setting apart of themselves from the old ways and sinful nature, to align themselves with God.

Israel then celebrated the Passover at Gilgal in the evening of the fourteenth day of the month. It was the first such celebration since their emergence from the wilderness. The Passover reminded them that they had been delivered from death and were now celebrating their new identity. Because of their new identity, they would now begin to live differently, freed from the bondage of sin, living in faith, not fear. Their Passover was celebrated with the old corn of the land, unleavened cakes, and parched corn. This change would make a significant difference in what would satisfy their desires. The next day, manna ceased; they would now eat of the fruit of Canaan.

I. *The Captain of the Host*

The final thing that Joshua had to do before they began to conquer the land was to plan a strategy. To do that, he must see for himself what *he* was up against. When he drew near and saw Jericho, this huge walled city with all its fortifications, he wondered how he could conquer it with his ragtag “army” of people? But “He lifted up

his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.” Was the sword drawn as a threat or to offer assistance?

Joshua went to him, and asked, “Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?” He replied, “Nay [Neither], but as Captain of the host of the LORD am I now come” (Josh. 5:13-15). He hadn’t come to take sides, but to take over. This is a key theme not only in the book of Joshua but also throughout the books of the Prophets. Humans must choose where their loyalties lie. It wasn’t Joshua’s job to plan the battle strategy, but God’s.

This was no mortal soldier, but God’s own messenger, a *theophany*. A theophany is “a visible manifestation to humankind of God,” like we saw when God confronted Moses at the burning bush. (Ex. 3:1-10). The same instructions given to Moses, “loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy,” are now given to Joshua. If this person had been an angel, he would have refused to allow Joshua to bow down to him. (Rev. 19:10). Instead, it was Jesus who stood opposite him, not in opposition, but as the Captain of the Lord’s host.

The finest leader is the man who is led. God chose Joshua as a leader to rule over the people because Joshua was ruled over by the Lord. This is the proper chain of command and true picture of leadership. God gives His commands to Joshua to produce the desired effect—victory over the inhabitants of Canaan!

II. Plan of Attack

Since Jericho must be eliminated to get to the rest of Canaan, it must be the first city to be conquered. As Israel moves from there and through the land of Canaan, people will react in different ways to Israel’s God. Some will choose to side with God, and they will integrate into Israel; those who oppose Israel will be defeated, and most will be destroyed.

Joshua 6-9 will focus on three cities in the central area of Canaan: Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon. It has been suggested that they picture the three enemies of the believer: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Although this is not specifically stated in Scripture, we will see how these victories suggest such a comparison.

The defeat of the Canaanites wasn’t just about getting rid of the people so that Israel could inherit the land; it was also about judgment against the sin of idolatry and the evil of the world. God has commanded, “I am the LORD thy God...Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (Ex. 20:1-5), but the Canaanite nations had multiple gods they bowed to. God used Israel as Canaan’s judgment.

God used His power to fulfill His promises to His people, despite insurmountable-looking obstacles. It is a testament to God’s faithfulness and the importance of obeying His command and His divine judgment against sin. His unusual battle plan required complete trust in God’s wisdom and power. Jericho’s destruction can also be seen as a foreshadowing of the ultimate victory of God’s kingdom over the forces of evil.

God had a plan to destroy Jericho; a plan unlike any that man could have dreamed up! The priests were to bear the Ark, and they, along with all the men of war, were to march around Jericho once a day for six days. Armed men of war would lead the procession, followed by seven priests with trumpets that would continually blow their horns. In the middle would be the Ark, God's presence, followed by the rearguard, or rear guard. No one was to shout, make any noise, or speak with their mouth.

On the seventh day, the procession would be the same except they would go around the city seven times. When they completed the seventh round, the priests were to make a long blast with the horn. When the people heard it, Joshua said, "Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city." The people were to shout, and the wall of the city would fall flat. Horns and shouting??? Like that's going to knock down walls!

The walls of Jericho were the first of three types of obstacles that must be overcome to win the land. The inner walls were 12'-thick and the outer walls 6'-thick, both roughly 20' high. They would have appeared insurmountable. The walls picture problems and habits we must confront as we walk with God, but can't seem to overcome.

If we follow the strategy that Joshua and the Israelites did here, when we walk obediently around the problem in the presence of God and shout the shout of triumph, the walls will fall down. When we completely change our attitude toward the "insurmountable" problem, giving the problem to God instead of thinking the solution rests on our shoulders, we'll see the problem dissolve into dust. The visible obstacle is not the problem; our attitude toward it is.

Do you suppose walking around Jericho for seven days was how long it took the people to change their attitude? As they walked around each day, they had time to think about God in their midst, the power that He had already displayed, and what He could do again. The more they thought about God, the more they realized and clung to His promises. Gradually, their attitude changed. Finally, they gave their problem over to Him, shouted in triumph, and the walls fell flat! Nothing to it when they obeyed!

God said that when the walls fell, the people were to go into the city and burn everything, but the prostitute Rahab and all in her house must be saved. They were not to take anything from the city because it was accursed, devoted to destruction. By disobeying and taking anything accursed, they would make themselves and Israel suffer the same fate. Silver, gold, and vessels of brass and iron would be consecrated to the Lord and come into His treasury. Jericho was the firstfruits of victory over Canaan. Because Jericho was the firstfruits, the spoil was God's.

It was completely God's victory. Except for the trumpets, Israel's army didn't do much militarily. Joshua uttered a curse on anyone who would rebuild the city of Jericho: their oldest would die as they laid the foundation; the youngest would die as they set the gates. When Hiel chose to rebuild Jericho, the curse was fulfilled. (I Kings 16:34).

II. *Sin Gets in the Way*

Some sins don't take as long as Hiel's for the consequences to become evident. Achan shows us the second obstacle in our walk with God: secret sin caused by the lusts of the flesh. (Josh. 7). The story begins with Achan taking what God said were "the accursed things" that were devoted to destruction. He coveted what God told him to

leave alone—beautiful clothing, silver, and gold. Of course, he thought he was the only one who knew what he had done.

Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai to see what they would encounter at this city. They returned with confidence, “Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai...for they are but few.” They were confident, but their confidence was misplaced. Israel didn’t realize it at the time, but when a great victory has been achieved, we are the most blind to Satan. We are overconfident and believe we can handle anything that comes our way. Ai should have been an easy takeover after Jericho because it was a comparatively weak and unfortified city...

When you see God at work, beware! Satan is on his way! One victory does not automatically guarantee success, but sometimes, we feel an all-out effort isn’t necessary. Israel was utterly defeated when they tried to take Ai; thirty-six Israelites were killed. They made mistakes in their battle plans. They didn’t ask for God’s instructions *before* the battle. God could have revealed the problem and had it taken care of before people died. The Ark of the Covenant, God’s presence, was left behind, and they relied only on their own strength. Without God, we’ll fail every time.

After being defeated in battle, Israel felt lost. Thankfully, Joshua and the elders of Israel turned to the Lord. They came with a broken heart, but there was also a hint of anger and accusation against God. (Josh. 7:6-9).

Joshua had probably asked the men if all God’s instructions had been followed, and everyone had said they had. By having a man among them who had fallen into sin, they had been removed from God’s protection. Now, knowing that this sin had been committed in direct disobedience to God, if the deed had gone unpunished, they would have been just as guilty. They would be liable to the same destruction as Canaan.

After his deed was revealed, Joshua spoke to Achan. Instead of anger, though, he spoke with love, “My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and confess it to Him...” (Josh. 7:19). While God hates sin, He still loves the sinner, and so should we. Achan finally confessed to *doing* the sin, although he didn’t repent *of* it. Like so many, he only confessed his sins because he got caught in them! (Prov. 28:13). When Achan admits to the sin, he relates the progression “I saw,” “I coveted,” “I took,” of almost every sin. But then, he buried his treasures and couldn’t use them because everyone would have known exactly what he had done if they saw them.

Achan and his family (because they knew where he had gotten the things buried in their tent and said nothing), and all his goods were taken into the valley of Achor. There, “all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger” (Josh. 7:25-26). How different Achan’s life turned out from that of Rahab! Achan and his family lost all inheritance in the land, while the foreigner Rahab and her family gained an inheritance.

But God was not finished with Ai. He told Joshua, “Fear not, neither be thou dismayed ... I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land. And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shalt ye take for a prey unto yourselves.” This time, the spoil will be Israel’s to keep. (Josh. 8). Notice the polysyndeton “and”?

God told him to lay an ambush behind the city, but this time Joshua took 30,000 mighty men instead of 3,000. (Josh. 7:4). God had given him a shrewd military tactic to defeat and destroy Ai. Like the first time, a small contingent of men would approach the city, and when Ai came out to fight, they would flee. But when Ai's people chased after them, those who lay in wait behind the city would rise up, ambush them, and seize the city. "For the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand." (Josh. 8:1-7)

Also, instead of just sending his men, Joshua went with them to Ai to lead the troops. He sent 5,000 men to lie in ambush on the west side of Ai while the rest of them went to the north. A valley was between the northern army and Ai. That night, Joshua took some of his men into the valley to draw the king and his men out. Ai thought it would be another easy victory, but this time, God took charge of the battle because sin had been removed from the camp.

God gave the command, and Joshua raised his spear. The men waiting in ambush hastily went to the city and set it on fire. When the smoke was seen, the men from Ai had nowhere to go; Israel had surrounded them. It wasn't long before Israel had destroyed all 12,000 of the men and women of Ai, as God had told them to. "For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves." The decisive victories of Jericho, through God's miraculous working, and Ai, through human involvement, are told in detail to help us understand the rest of the stories that are not as detailed.

Joshua then went to Mt. Ebal to institute a new government in their new land. God's Law would be constantly before them, reminding them of God's expectations. They were promising to order their lives after God's Word. This second generation would formally confirm their agreement with God's covenant.

An altar was built of whole, uncut stones from the Jordan River. These stones set it apart from Canaan's altars, which were usually made from fashioned stones, as God said. Joshua plastered them and wrote a copy of the Law on them, the blessings and cursings, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings unto the Lord. (Deut. 27:4-8). "There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the children, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them" (Josh. 8:35).

III. Deception!

The two battles of Gibeon and Beth-horon signify the third aspect: the wiles of the devil as he attacks the believer through deception. (Josh. 8). This time, it was Joshua himself who "did not inquire of the Lord" (v. 14) concerning the Gibeonites. Gibeonites were Hivites that God had specifically marked to be "utterly destroyed, not make a covenant with them, nor to show mercy to them." (Dt. 7:1-2; Josh. 8:1-7).

All the Canaanites on the east side of the Jordan banded together to defeat Israel. But the Gibeonites, after hearing of the defeat of Jericho and Ai, decided to use their own tactic. They dressed in old clothes, took moldy bread, and tattered wineskins, and rode emaciated donkeys to meet Joshua. They claimed they had "come from a far country, had heard the fame of God and all that He did in Egypt," and wanted to make a league with them. Israel was skeptical, but their clever satanic ruse convinced Joshua, and he signed a pact with them.

When Israel walked over the hill, the first thing they saw was Gibeon, but Joshua honored the treaty and spared the Gibeonites. As a result, Gibeon became a thorn in Israel's side for centuries to come. Joshua made them that day to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord.

Conclusion:

Throughout our human life, there will be many battles to face. Because we are all sinners (though saved by grace) and living in this world where the enemy Satan roams around looking to tempt us, inflict us, and cause us pain, it is an inescapable fact of life. But God is much bigger than anything Satan can throw at us! He is the creator of the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1). Through God's Word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit, we can give our battles to God so that He can direct our battle plan.

Ephesians 6:12 tells us that our battles aren't against flesh and blood humans, but against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of the world—spiritual battles that require God's spiritual power to enable us to fight and win the battle. No wonder we can't succeed without God! And if we fail because we forget Him, we need to evaluate the reason for the defeat, take steps to correct the problem, and move forward.

God commands us to put on the whole armor of God, not just a piece here or there. The whole thing so every part of us is protected against those fiery darts that Satan likes to toss. Above all, we must stand firm, fully putting our trust in Him. Through the Holy Spirit, we can face these battles with God and fight the way God intended us to—through His strength.

Do you feel like you are in the middle of a battle? Do you have your whole armor on or did you leave a few pieces behind? Satan knows exactly where you are most vulnerable, so get those pieces polished and firmly in place. Get into God's Word and find out the battle plan so you can implement it properly. And don't forget to get the Holy Spirit's help.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10).

Victorious! (Joshua Part 3)

1) Read Joshua 11-14. What is the primary purpose of these chapters?

2) Why did the five Amorite kings join forces?

3) What 3 miracles did the Lord perform to ensure the Israelites' defeat of the Amorites?

a.

b.

c.

4) Why did Joshua ask the Lord to make the sun and moon stand still? What does this reveal about his character?

5) What does God's answer to Joshua's request teach us about faith? What does it teach us about His response to Joshua?

6) What can you do that will help you increase your faith?

Conclusion:

What does it mean to strengthen your faith, and how can we do it? Strengthening your faith means to deepen your trust and confidence in God and His promises. This is essential for living a life that pleases God, especially during trials and times of uncertainty. Scripture teaches us that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). This means our spiritual growth depends on nurturing and increasing our faith on a regular basis.

Faith isn't just a one-and-done time of decision, but a daily commitment to trust, obey, and walk with God. We grow our faith by spending consistent time in God's Word. (Rom. 10:17). We should meditate on what we have read and studied. (Josh. 1:8). Our prayers should be bold, expectant, and confident in God's ability. James 1:6 encourages us to ask in faith, never doubting. Finally, we must obey what God shows us to do. These things will vary from person to person depending on their development as a believer and the circumstances that they find themselves in.

Increasing our faith will bring boldness to our actions and a rise in willingness to step out of our comfort zone and perform things we might have considered doing for God before. This relationship with God is essential for goals that God desires us to pursue.

What goals do you have? What has the Holy Spirit been prompting you to do, but were too afraid to try?

When the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't perform some of the miracles they expected to do, He replied, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:20). What kind of mountains do you need to remove?