



Joshua - Chapter Six

Summary of Chapter Six

As was often the case in ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts, key early conflicts are recounted in detail, while subsequent conflicts are noted more briefly. As the first city to be taken in Canaan, Jericho was to be wholly dedicated to the Lord, as a kind of symbolic first fruits. The people of Israel were to take no plunder and were to leave no survivors.

The chapter may be divided into three sections: the Lord's instructions to Joshua (vv.1-5); the execution of the Lord's instructions (vv.6-21); and the aftermath of victory (vv.22-27).

Joshua was near Jericho in the last episode of Chapter 5, and this has raised the question as to whether the early verses of Chapter 6 should be regarded as the continuation of Joshua's encounter with the 'commander of the army of the Lord.' If this is the case, the Lord's words in vv.2-5 were given to Joshua during this encounter. This is a possibility, but the evidence in the text does not clearly show whether this suggestion is correct or not.

II Joshua 6:1-12:24 - Taking the Land

Now that the Israelites are in the land, they must conquer it. Again, the Lord takes the initiative, his first words underscoring the fact that the land is his gift: <<*I have handed Jericho over to you*>> (Joshua 6:2). Nevertheless, this does not annul the importance of God's people acting on his commands.

In this major section, Joshua and Israel on occasion fail in their faithfulness to the Lord. The Lord nevertheless graciously restores them and fights for them: <<*Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel*>> (Joshua 10:42), and continues to do so until the land is taken.

II.a Joshua 6:1-27 - Jericho Taken and Destroyed

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Now Jericho was shut up inside and out because of the Israelites; no one came out and no one went in. ² The Lord said to Joshua, ‘See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers.’

Joshua 6:1-2

Now Jericho was shut up inside and out. Jericho itself was on full alert; from a human perspective, this would be a hard, if not impossible, battle. Yet from God’s perspective, the battle was already over, because he can say to Joshua in the past tense: I have handed Jericho over to you. Up to this point everything had been more or less preliminary and preparatory. Now the real task before them must be faced and tackled. The Canaanites must be dispossessed if Israel is to occupy what God has promised them. Jericho was not an exceptionally large city; but it was an important, formidable fortress city. If Israel could defeat Jericho, they could defeat anything else that would face them in Canaan. Again the wisdom of God can be seen as opposed to human wisdom, in that Israel faces their most difficult opponent first.

Jericho is one of the oldest known fortified cities in the ancient Near East, as well as one of the geographically lowest, at about 750 feet or 229 m below sea level. Well supplied with spring water, Jericho was an oasis and was sometimes referred to as the ‘city of palms’ as in Judges 1:16. Throughout its long history of occupation, the actual settled area of Jericho occasionally shifted. OT Jericho is identified with Tell es-Sultan, a mound of about 10 acres. The name Jericho, Hebrew *yerikho*, sounds like the Hebrew word ‘moon’, Hebrew *yareakh*, leading many to the reasonable assumption that Canaanite Jericho may have been a centre of moon worship. If so, then the Lord’s destruction of Jericho would have suggested victory over the false gods of Canaan. This is similar to his humiliation of the gods of Egypt at the time of the exodus: <<*For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord*>> (Exodus 12:12), and: <<*The Lord executed judgements even against their gods*>> (Numbers 33:4b).

See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers. Although this initial instruction would have brought great hope and confidence to Joshua and the people, the method that the Lord goes on to describe would require faith and trust in him.

³ You shall march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once. Thus you shall do for six days, ⁴ with seven priests bearing seven

trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets.

Joshua 6:3-4

You shall march around the city for six days. The remarkable instructions given to Joshua suggest a ritual aspect in the taking of Jericho, which underscores the divine agency while also recalling the divine creation in seven days. The method of warfare was one that made absolutely no sense according to military intelligence. It required total dependence on God. It required great faith from Joshua, because he had to explain and lead the nation in this plan. It required great faith from the elders and the nation, because they had to follow Joshua in this plan.

Seven priests bearing seven trumpets; the seventh day; around the city seven times. The number seven is significant as it represented completion or perfection in Hebrew understanding. The number seven appears frequently throughout Scripture and almost always has significant theological interpretation.

The blowing of trumpets was something that is familiar in calling the people to gather before God: <<*When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel*>> (Ezra 3:10), and: <<*Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly*>> (Joel 2:15); a call to arms: <<*Rally to us wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet. Our God will fight for us*>> (Nehemiah 4:20), and: <<*Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; look behind you, Benjamin!*>> (Hosea 5:8); and it will be the announcement of Christ's Second Coming: <<*That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements*>> (Zephaniah 1:15-16), and: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The ark. The visible symbol of the Lord's presence was at the centre of the priestly and military personnel as they walked around the city of Jericho. It emphasises that the conquest of the land of Canaan was first and foremost the Lord's doing. In v.8, the ark is called the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord.

⁵ When they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and all the people

shall charge straight ahead.’⁶ So Joshua son of Nun summoned the priests and said to them, ‘Take up the ark of the covenant, and have seven priests carry seven trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark of the Lord.’⁷ To the people he said, ‘Go forward and march around the city; have the armed men pass on before the ark of the Lord.’

Joshua 6:5-7

Then all the people shall shout with a great shout. Such a shout would not only strike fear into the heart of the enemy, it would also signify the people’s recognition of triumph: <<*When the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded*>> (1 Samuel 4:5), <<*So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet*>> (2 Samuel 6:15), <<*Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation*>> (Psalm 95:1 NIV), and: <<*The Lord goes forth like a soldier, like a warrior he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes*>> (Isaiah 42:13).

And the wall of the city will fall down flat. Tell es-Sultan, OT Jericho, has had a long history of archaeological excavation. Many aspects of the site seemed to fit the biblical picture: clear evidence of fallen mud brick walls creating ramparts against the outer reinforcing wall, which could have allowed Israelite soldiers to go up, i.e. all the people shall charge straight ahead; evidence of a rapid defeat in springtime; evidence of a lack of plundering; evidence of burning; etc. However, the date seemed wrong. The question of dating the ruins of Tell es-Sultan, a site that has, in any case, experienced severe erosion, has recently been reopened. Many historians believe that the fall of Jericho occurred in the 13th Century BC, but some analyses of the original excavation reports, including pottery, stratigraphy, scarab data, and carbon 14 testing, have instead concluded that Jericho was destroyed at the end of the Late Bronze period, circa 1400 BC. Although this would fit with the early exodus theory, it would not fit with the preferred later theory some 150 years later.

This was a plan for victory whereby it would clearly be the work of the Lord. Yet God gave them something to do, so that Israel could work in partnership with God. Obviously, it was something that God could have done without Israel’s help at all, but he wanted them to be a part of his work, as he wants Christians to be a part of his work today.

Take up the ark of the covenant. The ark would be prominent in this victory, just as it was in the crossing of the Jordan River. Israel had to keep their hearts and minds on the Lord who was present with them, instead of putting their hearts and minds on the difficulty of the task in front of them.

To the people he said. Joshua had to tell the people, because what they were asked to do was unusual. This was no customary way to conquer a walled, fortified city.

⁸ As Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the Lord following them.

⁹ And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets; the rearguard came after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually.

¹⁰ To the people Joshua gave this command: 'You shall not shout or let your voice be heard, nor shall you utter a word, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout.' ¹¹ So the ark of the Lord went around the city, circling it once; and they came into the camp, and spent the night in the camp.

Joshua 6:8-11

As Joshua had commanded the people. Joshua does not hesitate to do what the Lord has told him to do. Often, delays to obey God show that his people really do not believe him, or do not trust him, at least.

The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord went forward. Joshua had to tell the priests, because what they were asked to do was unusual. Normally, priests and the Ark of the Covenant did not go with Israel into battle. Yet this was to be as much a spiritual battle as it was a conventional one.

The armed men went before the priests; the rearguard came after the ark. This was the normal practice of the Israelites to protect the ark: <<*The total enrolment of the camp of Judah, by companies, is one hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred. They shall set out first on the march*>> (Numbers 2:9), <<*The tent of meeting, with the camp of the Levites, shall set out in the centre of the camps; they shall set out just as they camp, each in position, by their regiments*>> (Numbers 2:17), and: <<*The total enrolment of the camp of Dan is one hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred. They shall set out last, by companies*>> (Numbers 2:31).

So the ark of the Lord went around the city, circling it once. Jericho was not a large city; they could easily march around it in a day's time. As the people of Jericho saw the Israelites marching around their city, they probably had a sense of both awe and horror. However, it should be noted that:

- It took courage for Israel to do this; Israel was wide open to attack during this time, and it would have been easy for the people of Jericho to attack them from the high position of the walls.
- It took endurance for Israel to do this; the march was for six days, and they had to persist in something that did not seem to make much sense.
- In this, the helplessness of Israel was revealed; through six days of silent marching, they had a good look at the walls that seemed to be impenetrable, they knew that this was a battle bigger than they were.

¹² Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. ¹³ The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord passed on, blowing the trumpets continually. The armed men went before them, and the rearguard came after the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets blew continually. ¹⁴ On the second day they marched around the city once and then returned to the camp. They did this for six days. ¹⁵ On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶ And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, 'Shout! For the Lord has given you the city. ¹⁷ The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers we sent.

Joshua 6:12-17

On the seventh day. This march took place over a period of seven days, meaning that Israel had to have marched on a Sabbath; but this would be a work of God's sovereign grace and power, not of human works.

It shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Devotion to destruction, Hebrew *kherem*, was not an exclusively biblical practice. The Moabite Stone, where in the earliest instance of the name of Israel's God in an inscription, in which King Mesha speaks of devoting to destruction the city of Nebo, killing 7,000 men and women and dragging the vessels of Yahweh before Chemosh. Although such total destruction may be offensive to modern sensibilities, the Bible insists that the total destruction of Jericho was commanded by the Lord himself: <<***But as for the towns of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – just as the Lord your God has commanded***>>

(Deuteronomy 20:16-17), and it gives evidence of God's judgement on the terrible sin of the Canaanites. This order to destroy every living thing was not a license to kill indiscriminately in other warfare, because cities outside the Promised Land were to be treated differently; refer to Deuteronomy 20:10-15. Rather, it was intended to punish the Canaanites, whose iniquity had become complete: <<***And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete***>> (Genesis 15:16), and to protect the Israelites from falling into idolatry and apostasy; refer to Deuteronomy 7:1-6. The extermination of the Canaanites was a special case of divine judgement intruding into a period otherwise characterised by common grace; as such, it provides no pattern for general warfare, either ancient or modern, but anticipates the final judgement that will befall all who persist in rebellion against God's gracious overtures.

The command was given for the people to shout. After the days of silence, this comes as recognition that God would now give them what he had promised. The Lord has given you the city!

Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live. Joshua is careful to take care of Rahab. Her faith in the living God would find support with God's people, as would the promise made to her by the spies in Joshua 2:14.

¹⁸ As for you, keep away from the things devoted to destruction, so as not to covet and take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel an object for destruction, bringing trouble upon it.

Joshua 6:18

As for you, keep away from the things devoted to destruction. Joshua had to command the people of Israel to stay away from the accursed things. By this he means the idols and things associated with the demonic and depraved worship of the people of Canaan. The severe judgement that is brought against Jericho, and all of Canaan did not come because they were in the way of God's people. It came about because this was a people who were in total rebellion against God and in league with the occult, as the artefacts recovered from this period demonstrate.

Should Israel prove unfaithful in carrying out the order for total destruction, the camp of Israel itself would become an object for destruction. Thus, the order is not an instance of ethnic cleansing but of religious purification. Canaanites such as Rahab (Chapter 2) and the Gibeonites (Chapter 9), who devote themselves to the Lord, are spared, while Israelites who defy the Lord, such as Achan (Chapter 7), themselves become *kherem*, i.e. devoted to destruction. Nor was sin a private affair; individual actions could jeopardise the entire camp: <<***But the Israelites broke faith in regard to the devoted things: Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi***>>

son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the Lord burned against the Israelites>> (Joshua 7:1).

¹⁹ But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are sacred to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord.'

Joshua 6:19

Items that could not be destroyed, such as precious metals, were to go into the treasury of the Lord, and in that way be kept separate from common use. This designation of the valuables to the Lord is representative of a first fruits offering as they would have been desirable for the people to keep and thus giving them freely unto the Lord is an act of worship. This is, in many ways, reflected by the words of Paul: <<*If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy*>> (Romans 11:16), <<*But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth*>> (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

²⁰ So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat; so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it.

Joshua 6:20

So the people shouted and: <<*By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days*>> (Hebrews 11:30) commends the people's faith, for they believed the promise of in vv.2-5, showing their faith by their obedience to the instructions.

The wall fell down flat. It is not revealed whether the Israelites knew beforehand that this would be the result of their obedient marching and final shouting. They may have been as surprised as the people of Jericho were at the way God decided to deliver Jericho into the hands of the Israelites.

The people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it. They took after God had given (v.2). It was clear that God gave, but that Israel had to take by obedient, persistent faith. So it is with all victory in the Christian life - God gives life through Jesus Christ; but people must take it from him by obedient, persistent faith: <<*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ – in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*>> (Galatians 3:13-14).

²¹ Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys.

Joshua 6:21

Then they devoted to destruction. As discussed at v.17 the people were required to destroy every living thing in the city - all the people and their animals.

Why was Israel commanded to practice such complete destruction? Because the greatest sins of the Canaanites were spiritual: <<When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practises divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God. Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so>> (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). God knew that the people would be drawn into such practices if they integrated with those who practised such arts, and so it came to pass!

Such judgement may seem harsh because it is harsh, and it must be recognised, that at unique times, God has commanded that such judgement should come to pass. It may happen either through an army that he has used, as is the case here, or through judgement that he directly brings, such as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24-25.

²² Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, ‘Go into the prostitute’s house, and bring the woman out of it and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.’ ²³ So the young men who had been spies went in and brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who belonged to her – they brought all her kindred out – and set them outside the camp of Israel. ²⁴ They burned down the city, and everything in it; only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. ²⁵ But Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared. Her family has lived in Israel ever since. For she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Joshua 6:22-25

Go into the prostitute's house, and bring the woman out of it. Rahab the prostitute and all who belonged to her are spared, in keeping with the promise. Rahab and her household were saved. They coupled their faith in the God of Israel with a willingness to follow through on what God's messengers told them to do: stay at the house with the scarlet cord hanging from the window; refer to Joshua 2:17-19. Their placement outside the camp of Israel is apparently temporary (v.25) and likely necessitated by ritual uncleanness in accordance with the law, such as: <<*He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp*>> (Leviticus 13:46).

They burned down the city, and everything in it; but Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared. In this, a contrast can be seen between judgement and salvation. All of Jericho heard about the God of Israel, as acknowledged in Joshua 2:8-11, but only Rahab responded positively in faith towards God with that knowledge.

Her family has lived in Israel ever since. In fact, this family become part of one of the most important dynasties in Israeli history since King David comes from the line of Rahab: <<*and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David*>> (Matthew 1:5-6a).

²⁶ Joshua then pronounced this oath, saying,

‘Cursed before the Lord be anyone who tries

to build this city – this Jericho!

At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation,

and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates!’

²⁷ So the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land.

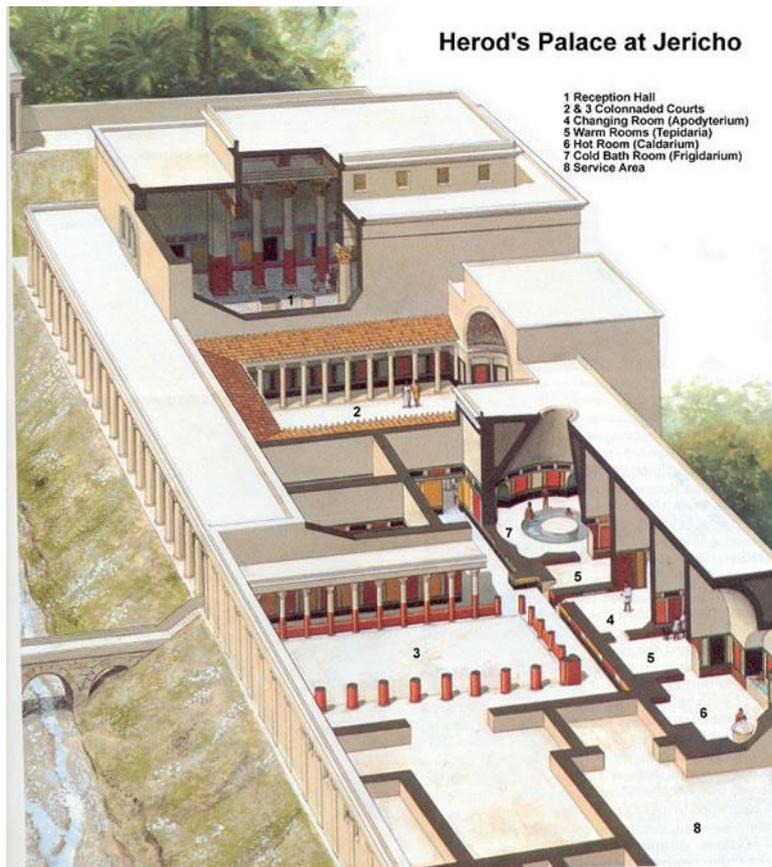
Joshua 6:26-27

Joshua's oath or curse against anyone who should rebuild the city of Jericho underlines the symbolic significance of the first Canaanite city to fall. Jericho represents God's judgement on Canaan, and the continuing presence of its ruins is to serve as a warning to Israel. Any attempt to rebuild and refortify the city, therefore, will suggest defiance of the Lord's rule. The fulfilment of Joshua's curse is subsequently recorded: <<*In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua son of Nun*>> (1 Kings 16:34).

This completes the story of Israel's victory at Jericho. Lessons can be learned from the things that marked their victory:

- Faith: Joshua and Israel believed the battle plan.
- Obedience: Joshua and Israel followed the battle plan exactly.
- Courage: Israel followed the battle plan despite danger.
- Endurance: Israel followed the battle plan over a period of time, even when it seemed that nothing was happening.
- Israel did not rely on carnal scheming and worldly methods; their trust was in the Lord, not in human ingenuity.

The Jericho visited by Jesus was quite different from the OT city and located about one mile or 1.6 km to the south of it. The new city was built around a huge palace complex, first built by the Hasmonæans in the 2nd Century BC, which Herod the Great expanded after he obtained Jericho from Cæsar Augustus. He proceeded to build aqueducts, a fortress, a monumental winter palace and a hippodrome in the vicinity of the more ancient town. Excavations have revealed much of the Herodian palace structures; they were built in stages by expanding on the previous



Hasmonæan palace. One striking feature of the palace site is its huge pools, in one of which Herod the Great probably had his own son drowned. Jericho boasted a tropical climate and excellent access to water for agriculture.