

Message #10**Joshua 6:1-5**

As we come to Joshua 6, we come to one of the most amazing and dramatic stories in all of the Bible. Songs have been written about this chapter. Joshua and the battle of Jericho is one of those stories like that of David and Goliath. It is a story that transcends time and religion. It is such a remarkable story that it ends up being a heroic faith story that shows up in Hebrews 11.

Now let's remind ourselves of the context. God has led Joshua and the children of Israel into the Promised Land. Their mission was to take the Land. They have prepared themselves for this work through circumcision, through the Passover and through partaking of the fruit of the land. God has appeared in a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ to let Joshua know He is fighting for Israel. As we come to this chapter, the conquest of the land begins and it begins with Jericho.

Now the military geographical strategy for taking the land that Joshua presents is this:

- 1) Take the central part of the land—Joshua 6-9.
- 2) Take the southern part of the land—Joshua 10.
- 3) Take the northern part of the land—Joshua 11.

There were two critical cities that needed to be conquered if Israel were to take the central part of the land. The two cities were Jericho and Ai. Jericho was located about five miles west of the Jordan and seven miles north of the Dead Sea. From Gilgal, looking west, the Israelites would see steep mountains that were key to taking the central part of the land.

Jericho was the first major city en route to those mountains and Ai sat right at the base of them. Once Israel had taken these two cities, they could ascend the mountains and would begin to control the central portion and could move either south or north from their powerful perch.

Now God could have taken these cities with just one word. He could say, "All enemies drop dead" and they would have dropped dead and then Israel could just walk into the city and bury the dead and take the land. But that is not how God was going to work. God wanted His people involved in this work and in this chapter we learn a very significant lesson:

WHEN GOD IS LEADING HIS PEOPLE TO VICTORY, HIS PEOPLE WILL FACE SEEMINGLY INCONQUERABLE OBSTACLES AND IF HIS PEOPLE REMAIN FAITHFUL TO OBEY GOD'S WORD, THEY WILL SEE GOD REMOVE THOSE OBSTACLES AND GIVE GREAT VICTORY.

God will not typically snap His fingers and make obstacles disappear. He takes His time and proves the faithfulness of His people and if His people faithfully obey the Word of God, they will see God do some amazing things. He will remove obstacles and they will experience great victory.

Obstacles are part of war, but obstacles are also a key part of victory. Obstacles are nothing to God. They may be something to us, but they are nothing to God. What is something to God is not our obstacles, but our obedience. Consistent obedience to God's Word is necessary for the removal of those obstacles. When we obey, we will see victory. This is true in every area of life.

Now there are two historical facts brought out in these verses:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – The description of Jericho. **6:1**

We know from reading the account of the first group of spies who went into the Promised Land back in the days of Moses that the cities were very large and very fortified (Numbers 13:28). In fact, the appearance of these cities seemed to the spies to look like the walls went up to heaven. That is what they said in their report—"the cities are large and fortified to heaven" (Deuteronomy 1:28).

Jericho was one such city. It was shut up tighter than a drum because Israel was in the land. No one was going in or out. All of the military force of Jericho was locked inside the city and ready for war. Word spread that Israel was in the vicinity and Jericho was on high alert.

Dr. Leon Wood described the city: "The walls were of a type which made direct assault practically impossible. An approaching enemy first encountered a stone abutment, eleven feet high, back and up from which sloped a thirty-five degree plastered scarp (*steep slope*) reaching to the main wall some thirty-five vertical feet above. The steep smooth slope prohibited battering the wall by any effective device or building fires to break it. An army trying to storm the wall found difficulty in climbing the slope, and ladders to scale it could find no satisfactory footing" (*A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 174).

It seems to me **verse 1** is designed to do a couple of things:

- 1) Give us an accurate description of Jericho.
- 2) Show us that Israel was hopeless, in and of itself, to take this city.

This city of Jericho was built with the idea of stopping the greatest military powers in the world. The Israelites were not a trained military. They had been slaves who had wandered around a wilderness. This city was a major physical obstacle and barrier to Israel taking the land.

Now let's see this through Israel's eyes. You have crossed the Jordan and are in the Promised Land and you are to take this land and the first thing you see is a major obstacle, the city of Jericho. But this obstacle sets the stage for one of the great moments in the history of the nation.

There will be times when we will be doing the will of God and walking in the ways of God and some major obstacle will seem to be in the way. It may appear to be insurmountable and unconquerable. You may be exactly where God wants you to be so that He may show you His great power and give you His great victory.

Dr. Ken O. Gangel said, “The real battle with Jericho was not with the Canaanites but with the Israelites, not with the wall of a city but with human hearts.” (*Joshua*, p. 101).

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – The communication of God to Joshua. **6:2-5**

Now there are two specific messages that God gives to Joshua:

Message #1 - God reveals to Joshua that He has given him Jericho. **6:2**

God says to Joshua, “I have given Jericho into your hand with its king and valiant warriors.” The pronoun “your” is singular, so God is specifically addressing this to Joshua. This nation would not have this victory without him. He was God’s choice man for this time and for these people.

The verb “I have given” is a prophetic perfect, which means it is a future event that is already accomplished. William Gesenius said this verb tense is used when the speaker “intends by an express assurance to represent *the future action* as finished” (*Hebrew Grammar*, p. 312). This is a done deal. God has given Jericho to Israel.

Now keep in mind what Joshua is looking at. He is looking at a military fortress that looks impossible to conquer; a 35-foot wall at a 35 degree angle.

As Joshua looked at this city and listened to God, he would realize we are not going to take this city by our physical abilities, we will have to depend on God. In other words, Joshua was going to have to place his faith and confidence in God, because there was no way they could do this on their own.

This is the way it is with our salvation. There is a mountain of sin that we all have and there is no way we can defeat that mountain by our physical works. We must totally depend on God for victory.

When we come up against what appears to be an overwhelming obstacle, we need to be strong and courageous in our trust in the Lord and in His Word.

Message #2 - God reveals how He will give him Jericho. **6:3-5**

Victory would be theirs, but they must obey God and do certain specific things. None of the things God demands they do are the typical military things one would expect. There is no secret espionage here. There is no camouflage here. God does not tell them to get swords, bows and arrows and spears. God does not tell them to exercise and do calisthenics to loosen up for battle. God does not tell them to make some ladders to climb the walls or get some logs to batter the walls. What God asks Israel to do would seem strange to any military man, especially when your objective is to take control of a fortress city like Jericho.

Sometimes obedience to the Word of God when facing obstacles won't make much sense to those who do not understand the Word or will of God. Now there are five requirements God gave to Joshua for taking the city:

(Requirement #1) - The people are to march around the city once a day for six straight days. **6:3a**

There is a debate among Bible teachers whether or not the one's marching refer to all of the people or just to Joshua and the men of war. Most think it refers to Joshua and just to the men of war. Most believe that the women, children and livestock stayed in Gilgal, and only the armed men marched.

Archeologists have determined that the distance around the city was eight or nine acres. At a steady pace, one would be able to walk around the city in about 15 to 20 minutes, which is the average time it takes the average person to walk about a mile.

(Requirement #2) - All the military men of war are to march around the city once a day for six straight days. **6:3b**

The military men are specified. No military man was to miss this march. They were all to go. We know from Joshua 4:13 that about 40,000 men would have marched from Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. We also know that in one census of Israel, there were over 601,730 men who were counted who could go to war (Numbers 26:2, 51).

Now this is not how a military typically operates. They typically do not march out in front of the enemy; they usually use more covert tactics in sneaking in on them.

We have some people in the church who are skilled in math things. I asked two of them, Jerry Speedy and Michael Trumm, to do some math cyphering on this. If we assume that you can circle Jericho in 20 minutes, it would take 600,000 soldiers lined up in rows of 50, 2.61 hours to circle the city. If they were in rows of 100, it would take 1.47 hours to circle the city. So once a day the people of Jericho would watch the men circle the city a couple hours a day.

(Requirement #3) - Seven priests carrying seven trumpets are to march around the city once a day for six straight days. **6:4a**

Richard Hess, in his commentary, said there is no place in history anywhere that compares to this "pre-battle ritual" (*Joshua*, p. 129).

The number seven is a critical number of this chapter. It is used 14 times. There are seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days and seven trips around the city on the seventh day. **The number seven clearly relates here to judgment and to completion.**

Seven trumpets are literal and prophetically illustrative. It will be seven trumpet judgments that will actually lead to Israel getting her land at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 8-9).

(Requirement #4) - On the seventh day all are to march around the city seven times and the priests are to blow the trumpets. **6:4b**

The logistics of circling the city seven times would take the average person around 2 hours. If one were able to go around the city in 15 minutes, it would take 1 hour 45 minutes. If one were able to circle the city in 20 minutes, it would take 2 hours and 20 minutes.

Now according to exit safety standards, a person is supposed to be able to exit a stadium in 3.5 minutes. Now again if you take 600,000 people and have them circle the city seven times, you are probably looking at about 10 to 14 total hours. If you started the parade at 6am, it would be over at about three or four in the afternoon.

(Requirement #5) - When the people hear the priests blast a long note on the trumpet, all are to shout and the wall surrounding Jericho will fall down flat and each person is to go straight up into the city and take it. **6:5**

This is the most bizarre military strategy in existence. You are supposed to take this city of Jericho and your primary weapons are priests and trumpets and the Word of God. Dr. Alan Redpath said this would have been one “strange spectacle” to the people who lived in Jericho (*Joshua*, p. 103).

God’s purpose for this march was for Israel. Although it would demonstrate a period of grace before the final judgment, the instruction was to Joshua and it was for Israel.

This parade would accomplish at least nine things for Israel:

Accomplishment #1 - It would teach Israel unquestioning obedience.

Israel had no clue what this was about except that God told them to do it. They were to circle the city 13 times simply because that is what God told them to do. The real issue for Israel is whether or not she will obey God.

Accomplishment #2 - It would give Israel a tight-knit unity.

When this group did this together, it could not help but build a unity among the entire nation.

Accomplishment #3 - It would teach Israel the importance of God’s Word.

Notice every march had a focus on the ark, which contained the written Word of God. In fact, the ark is mentioned ten times in the first 13 verses (**6:4**, 6(2x), 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13(2x)).

Obviously God's Word is a central feature of conquering this city. Without God's precious Word, we cannot accomplish anything that is important to God.

Accomplishment #4 - It would teach Israel the necessity of undefiled purity.

They would learn that to wage a victorious warfare, they must keep from being contaminated by worldly focus. This was not done by the ways of the world, but the ways of God.

Accomplishment #5 - It would teach Israel about total dependency on God for victory.

Dr. Alan Redpath said the greatest difficulty in the Christian life is to get to the point where we are prepared to admit the whole war is too big for us and God must bring victory about. Before God will give great victory, He brings His people to the point where they realize total dependency on Him for victory. So long as we depend on ourselves we are destined for failure, but when we finally learn to totally depend on Him we will have victory (*Joshua*, pp. 61-63).

Accomplishment #6 - It would teach Israel about the character and power of God.

This one parade would teach Israel lessons about God's Omnipresence, His Sovereignty, His Omnipotence, His Protection, His Holiness and His Wrath. When this march was over, Israel would know a great deal about God.

Accomplishment #7 - It would teach Israel about the importance of faithful consistency.

Day after day they would march around Jericho and nothing dramatic happened. Not every day for a believer is a dramatic and spectacular day. All of these days except one ended with nothing spectacular happening. Israel was learning to be faithful over time.

Accomplishment #8 - It would teach Israel about quiet faithfulness.

God does not want His people loud and obnoxious. Israel was to go quietly about her business obeying God (6:10). Sometimes God's people need to quiet down and go about their business.

Accomplishment #9 - It would teach Israel about faith.

God wants His people to obey Him and believe Him. This is a great faith lesson. In fact, Hebrews 11:30 says that very thing—"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days."

We will all face some obstacles in life and when we do our focus should not be on the obstacle, but on God.