

Overcoming Our Jericho

Joshua 5 & 6 - February 16, 2014

by Dr. Craig P. Scott

As I pondered our morning text I could not help but think of the words spoken by King David in his twenty third Psalm . . .

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: . . .”
- Psalm 23:5a

This is literally taking place in Joshua 5 through 6.

The nation of Israel recently crossed the Jordan and is camped 1-½ miles from Jericho. This great city is an ancient fortress blocking their passage into the Promised Land. Israel is so close to the city that her campfires and tents can be seen from the walls of Jericho and yet, the nation prepares for their first recorded Passover meal since the exodus. This is just one of the many pictures described in the 23rd Psalm, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

It is also a reminder to every one of us that the battle is the Lords. It is impossible without the Lord.

Our battles are fought, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.” - Zech 4:6

Just as the crossing of the Jordan was by the power of the Lord, so will the taking of the Land be. It is a reminder that without the Lord, the battle to overtake Jericho is impossible.

Think how deeply rooted Jericho was in the land.

It's existence dates back to 3000 B.C. In that time, it had withstood many earthquakes, fires and attacks. It was the strongest city in Canaan. It controlled the western entrance to the Promised Land and was prosperous. It was a prosperous community dealing in agriculture, bitumen and sulfur. These items were exported throughout Canaan.

Bitumen was used to waterproof items. It was also coveted for use in the manufacturing brick and mortar, adhesives and incense. The sulfur was exported for medicine, pest control, a wine preservative and metallurgy.

Along with these exports, the City controlled the vital water supply for the area.

Jericho was well established and well fortified. It stood as a major obstacle in Israel's way. They could not by-pass it without having them attack their rear. They would lose precious time if they waited to starve them out. They would lose many lives attempting to assault the walls. The longer they waited, the more time it gave the other kings to form an alliance against Israel.

Is this not like the problems that assail us on every side? . . . Overwhelming and unsolvable problems . . . They often come from without - the world, our friends, the temptations. Others are from within - Whether we like to admit it or not - often the obstacles that confront our walk with the Lord are deeply rooted. Much like Jericho.

What is it that causes us to flounder? What causes us to slip back to our old ways? What is it that causes us to stumble over and over again? 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 likens the obstacles that stand in our way of growth as strongholds. They are our Jericho's. They stand in our way.

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: ⁴ (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) ⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; ⁶ And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”

They are our strongholds of anger, strongholds of sinful habits, strongholds of wrong thinking, strongholds of the flesh and much more. They are deeply rooted strongholds.

We are often like the drug user who gets clean for a few days, or a few weeks and then his un-slain nature re-immerses. The roots are still there. Our sinful roots can be like Israel's Jericho. Well fortified. Deeply rooted. They are impossible to overtake apart from God.

This passage is helpful in instructing us how to overcome our Jericho's.

To understand it, we must refresh our minds on Israel's encounter. With God's might, Israel crossed the Jordan. As the feet of the priests stepped into the swollen river, the waters receded. The nation then passed over on dry ground.

As I mentioned before, they camped that night five miles from the river, and a mile and one half from Jericho. They were so close that their campfires and tents could be seen from the walls of Jericho. Yet, astonishingly God had them stop and prepare themselves for the feast of Passover, while they were in sight of their enemies.

Have you ever wondered why the Lord had them do this, instead of preparing for war? They selected their Passover lamb and kept it with them for four days. They then circumcised all males that were not circumcised. That means all the males 38 years and under had to be circumcised. Some estimated that 280,000 to 720,000 males were circumcised that day. Those between 39 and 58 were already circumcised and guarded the camp. They did the rest of the prep work for Passover.

Four days later they killed their Passover lambs and held their home Seders. It was the first recorded Passover meal since they left Egypt. It may even been the first time they held Passover since they left Egypt. It was difference in some ways. There was no blood on the doorpost. They were reclining instead of standing. They were remembering rather than waiting in anticipation.

The next day they celebrated the feast of unleavened bread with unleavened bread and old food from the land. Remember, up to this point, they collected the Manna every day for 40 years. During those years, they set out to collect this Manna some 12,320 times. However, the day after the feast of unleavened bread, the Manna had ceased. Imagine the stunning impression it made. It was then that they began to eat the fruit of the Promised Land.

Why all this in the middle of taking the Land? Why all this in the presence of a fortified Jericho? Might I suggest that we are given some insight in how to handle deeply rooted problems that block our way from God's blessing.

First, we begin by getting right with the Lord, and then we are to feast on the Lord and His word.

The ending of Manna set in motion a whole new set of problems for Joshua. Food for the nation now had to be planted and harvested. Planting season for the barley and wheat was in September or October. That meant they had to take Jericho soon - much sooner than Joshua had originally imagined. It was then that Joshua took a walk to look at Jericho.

How do we defeat a deeply rooted fortress? How do we keep it and its inhabitants from coming back and attacking us from the rear? It was then that a man approached Joshua with a drawn sword.

You have to like Joshua. He did not cow tail it back home. He aggressively went forward to him ready to fight and challenged the man "Are you for us or for our adversaries?"

Amazing the man said, "Neither."

"And he said, Nay" - Joshua 5:14a

In other words . . . *I am not here to take sides, yours or that of anyone else.* Have you ever stopped and wondered what this was all about?

Note, the Captain of the host does not stop here. He goes on to say,

"as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come."

In other words, "I am here, not to take sides, but to take over and take charge as Commander of the Lord's army." This is an important principle. It is foundational for all of life and our warfare against the forces of the world and Satan. There is no question that the Lord was there with the armies of heaven to secure Jericho so His people could possess their God-given inheritance. Yet a certain perspective was vital for true success.

What the Lord was saying to Joshua is . . . It was not Joshua's place or right to ask God to join Israel's army no matter how right and holy it is. Rather it was Joshua and the nation who needed to acknowledge God's claim over them.

We tend to approach our battles and causes backwards; we turn things all around and try to marshal God to support *us* rather than to *submit* and *follow* Him. This was key to any battle. Especially, for the ones that are as deeply entrenched as Jericho.

Joshua, as with all of us, is in the army of the King. We must follow the Lord, submit to His authority, take our orders from Him, and rest in the battle, which are in His hands.

God is not another player in our mystical game of life that we can move around as we see fit. Rather, we are in His army. He is our supreme Leader. God does not follow us. We must follow Him and submit to His authority, and take our orders from Him, and rest in the battle, which is in His hands.

When the Angel of the Lord said,

“You are on holy ground. Take off your shoes.”

Certainly, Joshua understood by this that this was the same One who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush.

Don't miss this point. Many of us do. We want to have God on our side, yet we want to still be in charge. This is a lesson we must learn if we are to be victorious in our battles with the flesh and in this life. Let God be in charge.

Then came the instruction. Compass the city once every day for six days with the army. Have some of the armed men before the Ark and the rest behind the Ark. The Priest's carrying the Ark is in the middle. Also have seven priests with seven ram's horns before the Ark. Everyone is to be silent. No talking. No shouting. Only the trumpets are to sound.

On the seventh day, walk around the city seven times in silence and then have the trumpet blast and all the people shout. And the walls will fall down.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” - Isaiah 55:8

Perhaps we are given a little insight to a future battle occurring in the Book of Revelation. As the seventh seal is opened (rev. 8:1), “There was silence in heaven for one half an hour” and then we find seven angels with seven trumpets (rams horns). At the seventh trumpet it says,

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. - Rev. 11:15

As it was the Lord who went before Joshua, so it is the Lord who brings down our strongholds. The routing of our enemy is of the Lord. We learned this at Jericho. We can also see this with the fall of the future Babylon. Therefore, we must learn that whatever stronghold may form between now and the time the Lord returns, we must face them with the Lord's power and strength.

So, in light of this passage, what should we do . . .

1. Before the battle - We must spiritually prepare ourselves. That is, mortify our flesh and feast on Christ.
2. We must present ourselves to Christ as a living sacrifice. We are part of His army. He is not part of our army.