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### **THE FALL OF JERICHO**

After Moses led the Israelites out of slavery through the Red Sea, the people’s sins of unbelief and faithlessness (Numbers 13–14) provoked the Lord into condemning an entire generation of His people to wander through the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. Throughout those many years, Moses continued to be Israel’s guide and intercessor, but because of Moses’ own act of unbelief (Numbers 20:1–13), the Lord refused to let Moses actually lead God’s people into the Promised Land. Moses was able to climb Mt. Nebo, which overlooked the Promised Land, but he himself would never enter it. Moses died in Moab, and the joyful task of leading God’s people into the land of milk and honey was left to his successor, Joshua.

After sending two spies across the Jordan into Jericho, Joshua prepared his people for entrance into the land which had been promised since the time of Abraham. Led by the Ark of the Covenant, a new generation of Israelites entered the new land. And as they went, they witnessed a miracle similar to the crossing of the Red Sea. In order to leave the desert and enter the land promised to them, the Israelites confronted a large river, the Jordan. There were no bridges by which they could cross. But the Lord had a plan for leading them once again through seemingly uncrossable waters. When the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant reached the Jordan River, and their feet touched the waters, the river stopped flowing and piled up in a heap upstream. The ground dried up, and once again, God’s people could cross a large body of water without harm (Joshua 3:6–17).

It is no coincidence that the miracle of the Jordan crossing mimics the crossing of the Red Sea. Those who are finally entering the land promised generations ago to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are of a

different generation than those who crossed the Red Sea. It is forty years after that first remarkable miracle. In essence, this is to be a new and different people of God than the bunch that had denied Him in faithlessness and unbelief while escaping from Egypt and wandering in the desert. God was beginning anew, and these new people were to experience the same act of deliverance reserved for God's chosen. They commemorated their miraculous crossing by taking twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, each stone representing a tribe of Israel, and placing them as a memorial. The new generation of Israelites was circumcised in recognition of their special status as God's people, and Joshua was ready to begin the conquest of the land promised to the Israelites. Jericho would be the first Canaanite city to be defeated.

Joshua realized where his conquest would begin as he was standing near the city of Jericho and suddenly noticed a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword. Considering this a peculiar sight (and mildly threatening as well), Joshua went to the man and asked whether he was an ally or an enemy of Israel. The man responded that he was neither, rather, he was the "commander of the army of the Lord." After hearing those words, Joshua fell in awe before God's angelic warrior and asked what message was to be given. The Lord then told the leader of the Israelites that he was on holy ground and should remove his sandals. Once again, the Lord was preparing a miraculous intervention in the history of mankind.

The Lord would give the city into the Israelites' hands. And the conquest of the city would be performed in a miraculous, supernatural manner. Of course, the residents of Jericho had already heard about the invading hordes of Israelites nearing their city, and when the story of Israel's miraculous crossing of the Jordan reached their ears, they panicked. They shut themselves behind the city walls and hoped for the best. It often happens that we think we can secure ourselves by building stronger walls and higher fortresses, but in reality, strong walls and barred gates can be signs of weakness and fear rather than strength. It certainly was so for the citizens of Jericho. God's people were approaching, and they knew of little else to do but close themselves off and hope for the best.

The procedure for this conquest would be a strange one indeed. The people of Israel, including all the warriors, were to gather together and march around the city once a day for six days. The Ark of the Covenant would be an integral part of this procession, and in front of the ark, seven priests would carry trumpets made out of rams' horns. As the people circled the city walls, these seven priests would blow their trumpets. After them would come the rear guard. Presumably behind the rear guard would follow the main body of people. Apart from the blowing of the trumpets, the people proceeded in silence.

The seventh day was to involve a different ritual. Once again, the people of Israel along with the Ark of the Covenant were to circle the city walls of Jericho in silence except for the sounding of the trumpets. On the seventh day, after the trumpets were sounded, the people were to shout at the top of their lungs. They were told to holler and scream, until

the walls of the city came tumbling down.

Now isn't it interesting how often the Lord was going to use the number seven in performing this miracle? Of course, seven is God's sacred number, and so it was also held sacred by the Israelites. Even more interesting is that the number was held sacred by other Eastern tribes. Not only did the seven rams' horns, the seven priests, and the seven days' marching inspire the Israelites, it must certainly have created psychological terror in the hearts and minds of the people of Jericho.

The people of Jericho had already been frightened by the news of Israel's miraculous passage through the Jordan River. And now these potential enemies were engaged in a ritual around their city walls, which used the number seven predominantly. Those inside the city didn't know what to expect. This was sure and certain psychological warfare. Here was an invading force which surrounded their city once a day in a deafening silence broken only once a day by the sound of blowing trumpets. It wouldn't take much time before such behavior began to rattle their already fragile nerves.

It should be noted that the number seven is particularly dominant in the book of Revelation. Throughout this biblical prophecy, John uses the sacred number to communicate his message of repentance and judgment. In Revelation, seven churches are addressed. Seven seals are unloosed to allow seven plagues into the world. In the midst of the seventh seal, seven trumpets and seven bowls underscore the dark forces unleashed against a rebellious and unrepentant world. So you see, it behooves us to understand that even as the God of Israel used the seven days encirclement, and the seven trumpets and priests to bring judgment to Jericho, so,

in Revelation, He uses the sacred number in a variety of ways to warn the world of a swift, surprising judgment against those who have rejected the message of gospel grace.

So often we are tempted to think of the God of the Old Testament as somehow different than the one portrayed in the New Testament. But in so many ways, even in subtle ways (like the use of the sacred number seven), the Bible reveals the similarity of God's actions in both. And that should not surprise us. He is, after all, the same God!

Sooner or later, God acts. We can imagine how futile the march around the city may have seemed for those six days. But, in God's time, intervention and judgment happen. In God's time, there is success. We, too, pray the Lord to help us in our desperate situations. We wish we could witness His intervention in our fallen and distraught lives. And sometimes, nothing seems to happen. Our dreams fade and our hopes disintegrate. We ask the Lord, "How much longer?" and seem to hear only silence. But then, God acts. When the Lord promises, "Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened to you" we can't expect to add our own qualification such as "by 9 o'clock Tuesday, Lord, if you please." The Lord is faithful to His promises, however, and when His time is right and according to His will, He will give us that which we need to know and enjoy, eternal salvation under the forgiving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As God promised the Israelites, on the seventh day of circling Jericho, after the trumpets had blown, and the people had lifted their voices in wild, riotous shouts of victory, the walls of Jericho fell down flat. Isn't that an interesting description provided by Scripture? "The walls fell down flat." They didn't just crumble

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away. They didn't erode over the next few months. One section didn't collapse to allow entrance into the city. All the walls fell to the ground immediately. The walls of Jericho fell by divine act, not by any efforts from the Israelites, and they fell at once. Not with a whimper, but with a bang.

Scholars and scientists are always attempting to find some rational explanation for what happened to the city walls because there is some archeological evidence to support this biblical description of Jericho's fall. The site where Jericho lay is known today as Tell el-Sultan. It's the site of more than two dozen ancient cities. These cities were built and destroyed, one on top of each other. With that many cities built on top of each other, it's difficult to discern for certain the position of Jericho. However, there are some ruins which give evidence of a terrific holocaust, supporting the Bible's description of the people of Israel burning the city and all its remains (6:24). And the abundance of foodstuff in some of these ruins supports the possibility that the harvest had just been gathered as suggested by Joshua 5:10–12. Of course, for those of us who see God's miracles all around us and believe in His periodic interventions, archeological proof isn't of the essence. We trust that the Bible presents an accurate description of God's control over the power of nature.

Why would the Lord exact such a devastating price on the city of Jericho? After all, what had they done that was so wrong as to merit complete annihilation? The city wasn't merely conquered. Everything that was in it was destroyed. As a matter of fact, the city was "devoted to the Lord for destruction" (6:17). "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword" (6:21). All of Jericho's inhabitants were put under the curse of death, and all of the city's treasures which could not be destroyed were consigned to the Lord's house. This is a spiritual conquest more than a political one. Jericho represented God's judgment on all the Canaanites and their pagan religions. In a way, Jericho became the "firstfruits" of the Promised Land, the "firstfruits" of the destruction of God's enemies. A holy and just God cannot compromise with evil. A holy and just God cannot even abide with evil unless God is also present in grace.

That's why it's so warming to see the Lord reveal His grace in the midst of the holocaust. As you remember, not all the inhabitants of Jericho were destroyed. One woman and her household were spared. Before Israel had crossed the Jordan, Joshua sent two spies to scout out Jericho's strength. These two spies entered the city, but the king of Jericho learned of their presence somewhere within the city walls. When the king learned they had been sheltered by a prostitute named Rahab, he demanded she give them up. But Rahab hid the two spies on her roof, and told the authorities that they had left the city under the darkness of night. Rahab protected the spies because she respected the power of Israel's God, and realized He was able to accomplish whatever He willed. In return for protecting the spies, Rahab asked that when Jericho was destroyed she and her household would be spared. The grateful spies agreed. Rahab then helped the spies escape by lowering them on a cord through her window and down the town wall.

Rahab may have engaged in a disreputable profession, but she is recognized for placing the law of God and the love of her family above the dictates of her evil king. For her, God became the first duty of life, and her pledge to the Lord would not be compromised. As a result, her life and the lives of those who remained under her roof during the invasion were saved. As a mark of our Lord's incredible grace, she was chosen as Jesus' ancestor. Through her lineage, the Savior would one day be born (Matthew 1:5).

Were we not familiar with the story of the fall of Jericho, the means by which God performed this miracle of conquest and deliverance would appear ludicrous. It seems ridiculous to march

around the city walls carrying the heavy Ark of the Covenant for six straight days in silence, except for the occasional blowing of the ram's horn. To us it appears ridiculous to think that on the seventh day of circling the city, blowing the trumpets, and shouting, the walls of the city should mysteriously collapse.

One marvels at how the Lord used what was rather absurd to perform the profound. And yet, how typical of our Lord and His miracles! This is the same God who gives us wine and bread and declares them to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ. By taking this bread and wine, we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. These seem foolishly simple substances for the Lord to use. But this is what He chooses to provide for our salvation. By having water poured over our heads, and the name of the Triune God spoken, we are made children of God in baptism, and enter a covenant of grace which lasts into eternity. And the Lord uses simple, ordinary people like you and me to witness our Savior's grace and love. Through you and me the Gospel message of life and salvation is brought to others. Why you and me? We're just too ordinary to be of much use. But through that which is ordinary God conceives miracles.

The fall of Jericho is evidence of Paul's magnificent observation in 1 Corinthians 1:27–29: "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." In a way, the fall of Jericho should seem no surprise at all. That's often all the method by which God works miracles.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION**

*THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL – JOSHUA 10:1-28*

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for this opportunity to study Your Word and contemplate Your intervening hand in the world You gave us. Keep us ever mindful of Your power and presence revealed in the wonders of nature, and help us consider Your handiwork, not only in the sun, moon, and stars, but also in the wind and the rains and the cycles of the seasons. We pray in our Lord Jesus' name. Amen.*

1. When the chapter begins, we are introduced to the king of Jerusalem. What tribal name is given to the people under the five kings? (10:5)

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2. How did the king of Jerusalem feel about the approach of Joshua and the Israelites?

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3. Compare the strategy of the king of Jerusalem in facing the Israelites with the manner in which the Gibeonites hoped to save themselves in 9:3-15.

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What happened to the Gibeonites as a result of their deception? (9:26-27)

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What consequences came from the king of Jerusalem's strategy? (10:26)

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4. State the Lord's promise to the people of Israel concerning the forces which had allied against them. (10:8)

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5. How did the Lord begin to use nature in the defeat of Israel's enemies? (10:11)

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Describe some of the forces of nature which David recognized under the dominion of the Lord. (Psalm 18:7-15)

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How does Jesus confirm His Deity by demonstrating His power over nature? (Mark 4:35-39)

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6. Where else other than Holy Scripture are the words recorded of Joshua calling for the sun to stand still? (10:13)
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On what occasion is this same book mentioned in 2 Samuel 1:17-27?

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List other ancient writings pertaining to the people of Israel that have not yet been found? (Numbers 21:14; 1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29)

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Would it make any difference to our salvation if these manuscripts were someday discovered in an archeological dig? (John 20:30-31) Why?

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7. If God performed this miracle in our day, what different wording might we use in describing it?
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Is the Bible written to be a scientific textbook?

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What is the purpose of Scripture? (John 20:31)

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8. How is Joshua's miracle remembered by the prophet Habakkuk many centuries later? (Habakkuk 3:11-13)
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9. This may not be the only moment when the Lord intervened in time for His good purposes. How does the miracle of Isaiah 38:1-8 suggest something similar to the miracle experienced by Joshua and the people of Israel?
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Why is it within the Lord's power to intervene in time itself to accomplish His will? (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8)

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10. What did this miracle prove to the people of Israel? (10:14)

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How many pagan kings were conquered by Joshua, according to Joshua 12:24?

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11. We may at times feel a degree of horror at the justice of God executed by His people in the Old Testament. We like to think of our Lord as a merciful and compassionate shepherd, and not as a just judge. But, this is to ignore an important aspect of our Lord's attributes. How does the Lord show His justice in the following stories from the New Testament?

Acts 5:1-11

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Matthew 25:41-46

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Since the death and resurrection of Christ, why are we free from the fear of God's eternal justice? (Galatians 3:13, 4:4-5; Romans 3:22-26)

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