

UNIT 1: JOSHUA AND JUDGES

Lesson 2

Victory and Defeat

Obedience to God brings victory; disobedience brings defeat.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

The keys to conquest and the cost of sin are in focus today. After crossing the Jordan River, Joshua prepared the people by having them recommit themselves to their covenant relationship with God. With Jericho in sight, Joshua encountered the Captain of the Lord's army (5:14) and was given precise instructions from the Lord for defeating the seemingly impenetrable walled city. By obediently following the Lord's directions, Israel was successful. However, without seeking the counsel of the Lord, Joshua led Israel against the small town of Ai. Without God's guidance, Israel was ignorant of the sin in their camp, and they were humiliated by an inferior foe.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Joshua wanted to know whose side the Captain of the Lord's army was on—Israel or the other nations. The Captain said he wasn't on either side. The point is that Israel must choose God's side. When Moses came down from the mountain and found the people worshiping the golden calf, he moved quickly to prevent the wrath of God. *"Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD's side? let him come unto me"* (Exodus 32:26). God's side is always the winning side, and all who desire to live victoriously are invited to be on His side. If Jesus is *"the Captain of [our] salvation"* (Hebrews 2:10), our lives will end in victory.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. GOD GIVES INSTRUCTIONS *Joshua 5:13—6:10*

- A. The Captain Comes to Joshua (5:13-15)
- B. A Winning Strategy for Israel (6:1-10)

2. OBEDIENCE BRINGS VICTORY *Joshua 6:11-17, 20-27*

- A. The Victory March (11-17)
- B. The Walls Fall (20-27)

3. DISOBEDIENCE BRINGS JUDGMENT *Joshua 6:18-19; 7:1-26*

- A. Israel's Defeat at Ai (6:18-19; 7:1-9)
- B. The Reason for Failure Revealed (7:10-26)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. GOD GIVES INSTRUCTIONS *Joshua 5:13—6:10*

A. The Captain Comes to Joshua *Joshua 5:13—15*

Israel had renewed the Israelites' commitment to the Lord through the rite of circumcision (5:2-9) and observance of Passover (vv. 10-11). Upon partaking of the produce of the land, the manna ended (v. 12). The next thing on Joshua's "to-do list" was to conquer Jericho, and even though he had been encouraged by the report of the spies who shared with him the words of Rahab, Jericho was still standing with seemingly impenetrable walls. At this point, Joshua had received no instructions from God concerning how to defeat the city. Yet, Jericho was standing between Israel and their conquest of the land. If left alone, the city would always be a danger to Israel as they endeavored to push further into Canaan.

With Israel camped near Jericho, Joshua looked up to see what appeared to be "*a man ... with his sword drawn*," so Joshua asked him, "*Are You for us or for our adversaries?*" (v. 13 NKJV). The "man" said, "*No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come*" (v. 14 NKJV). In other words, "I'm neither for you nor against you; I answer to God alone." Recognizing this was a heavenly visitor, Joshua fell to the ground and asked, "*What saith my lord unto his servant?*" (v. 14). This was similar to Moses' encounter with the Angel of the Lord at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2). The Lord's captain told Joshua, "*Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy*" (Joshua 5:15 NKJV). Similarly, the Angel of the Lord told Moses, "*Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground*" (Exodus 3:5 NKJV). Like Moses before him, Joshua did as he was instructed. The presence of the Captain of the Lord's host revealed to Joshua that the armies of Heaven were standing by. Through obedience to their covenant with God and His commands, Israel would be on the right side, and God would dispatch His angels on their behalf.

B. A Winning Strategy for Israel *Joshua 6:1—10*

The Captain of the Lord's host may well be the "*Angel [Messenger] of the Lord*" identified in fifty-eight places throughout the Old Testament (including Exodus 3:1-6 and Judges 6:22). Because this unique person was worshiped (Joshua 5:14) and referred to as "*the LORD*" (6:2), many believe He was the pre-incarnate Christ. As such, when verse 2 states the Lord spoke to Joshua, it may have been Jesus (*Yehoshua*) speaking to Joshua (*Yehoshua*). The message to Joshua was that the Lord was putting Jericho into his hands, including the king and his army (v. 2). With God's help, victory was sure.

Jericho was locked down, with the inhabitants behind the walls hoping to remain safe from Israel's attack. But the Lord told Joshua to take seven priests with seven trumpets of ram's horns, led by the ark of the covenant. The priests would blow the trumpets while leading the people in a silent walk (v. 9-10) around the city once a day for six days. On the seventh day, they would walk around the city seven times, and on the seventh time, when the seven priests blew one long blast on the horns, the people would shout. Each procession around the city was led by armed soldiers (v. 7), followed by seven priests with trumpets, the ark, and the rear guard (v. 9).

By military reasoning, this plan made no sense. Some have tried to explain away the miracle by suggesting the marching, combined with the sound of trumpets and shouts, resulted in vibrations that caused the walls to fall. Not only is this physically unlikely, but this is not what the text states. In verse 2, God said He was giving the city to Joshua. This was the power of God at work and not a manipulation of the laws of physics.

2. OBEDIENCE BRINGS VICTORY *Joshua 6:11–17, 20–27*

A. The Victory March *Joshua 6:11–17*

Joshua and Israel diligently followed the Lord's instructions. Doing exactly as commanded, "*the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about it (v. 11)*". Mentioned thirty times, the ark is featured prominently in the Book of Joshua. Of those thirty times, the ark is mentioned twenty-seven times in chapters 3 through 6, including ten times each in chapters 3 and 6. It is called *the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God* (3:3) or the shorter "*ark of the covenant*" (3:6, 8; 6:6, 8). It was a physical reminder that the Lord God was with them. It represented the Lord going before them in power to cross the Jordan River in chapters 3 and 4 and going before them to defeat their enemies, starting with Jericho in chapter 6.

Early in the morning, the priests, soldiers, and people marched as instructed, once around the city, with the trumpets sounding but the people remaining silent (vv. 11-13), and repeated this for the next five days (v. 14). On the seventh day, the soldiers, priests carrying the ark, and priests with trumpets walked around the city seven times. On the seventh time around the city, the priests made a long blast on the trumpets, and Joshua told the people, "*Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city*" (v. 16). He also reminded them that Rahab and all in her house were to be spared because she had helped the spies. They promised to save her and her family if they were in her house (v. 17). Each time around the city, the scarlet cord hanging from the window of her home would have been clearly seen, alerting the soldiers to Rahab's exact location.

B. The Walls Fall *Joshua 6:20–27*

The shout went up, and "*the wall fell down flat*" (v. 20). Israel entered the city over the collapsed wall and began carrying out the Lord's commands. Every living thing in the city, except for Rahab and those in her home, was to be "*destroyed ... with the edge of the sword*" (v. 21). The two spies whom Rahab had helped were instructed to go into the city to protect her and her family as they had vowed to do, but everyone else was to be killed. The only items to be brought out of the city were "*the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and iron*" (v. 24), which were to be put into the tabernacle's treasury.

After executing the plan as God had given it—saving Rahab and her household and collecting the city's silver, gold, bronze, and iron—Joshua pronounced a curse over the city's ruins, prohibiting anyone from rebuilding it (v. 26). However, Israel would not completely destroy every city, town, and village in they came against. After all, God promised to give them cities and houses (Deuteronomy 19:1). Following Jericho's miraculous defeat, Joshua's fame was broadcast throughout Canaan. Jericho feared Israel because of Israel's God, and after this great victory, all the people of Canaan would know that God was empowering Joshua and Israel to take the land.

3. DISOBEDIENCE BRINGS JUDGMENT *Joshua 6:18–19; 7:1–26*

A. Israel's Defeat at Ai *Joshua 6:18–19; 7:1–9*

Israel's success was based on faithfulness to their covenant relationship with God. They were to obey God and keep themselves pure through their complete commitment to Him. This is why they were warned not to contaminate themselves by taking or keeping anything from the ruins of Jericho. The victorious soldiers were warned not to take or keep any spoils of war because doing so would "*make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it*" (6:18). Unknown to Joshua, however, a man named Achan surrendered to temptation and "*took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel*" (7:1).

Joshua and Israel, fresh off their defeat of Jericho, were probably feeling pretty good about their future success. When their march took them to the small town of Ai, Joshua sent some men to assess the town. The men came back very confident, telling Joshua he only needed to send two or three thousand men to take that place (v. 3). Joshua did not seek God's will but listened only to the advice of his men. When the battle was engaged, the men of Ai sent the three thousand soldiers of Israel running, and about thirty-six Israelites were killed, which greatly disheartened Joshua and the Israelites (vv. 4-5). Joshua tore his clothes and *"fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until evening"* (v. 6 NKJV). He questioned God, asking if He had brought them over Jordan only to deliver them into the hands of the Amorites. He told God that when the inhabitants of the land heard about Israel's defeat, they would be emboldened against them, and God's name would be defamed (vv. 7-9).

B. The Reason for Failure Revealed *Joshua 7:10–26*

God responded to Joshua first by telling him to get off the ground. Then He told Joshua why Israel lost the battle; namely, because Israel had sinned by taking *"some of the things under the ban"* (v. 11 Amp.). God knew it was Achan, but Israel as a whole was guilty because of the actions of this one man. Therefore, they would not have God's protective hand on them until they dealt with the sin in the camp (v. 12). God told Joshua if they wanted to return to His favor, they must *"sanctify"* (cleanse, purify) themselves by removing the *"accursed thing"* from the camp (v. 13). God did not specify who had sinned. Instead, Israel as a whole was to present themselves before the Lord. God identified the tribe first, then the family, and finally the man—Achan (vv. 14-18).

This was to be a powerful and unforgettable lesson for Israel. It revealed the severity of sin and its catastrophic results on the nation and the individual who disobeyed. One man's sin brought a curse on all Israel. When exposed, Achan confessed he had taken a Babylonian garment, a wedge of gold, and some silver. He said he coveted them, took them, and then hid them in his tent (v. 21). The punishment for him and his family was what God required. He, his family, and all they owned were taken to the valley of Achor, where they were stoned, burned, and buried beneath *"a great heap of stones"* (v. 26), which remained as a reminder of the consequences of sin.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

We should examine our lives daily and sanctify ourselves by surrendering to God's will and Word. We cannot live victoriously while leading sinful lives.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

In the church, it is good to have accountability partners. This may be a spouse or a close friend who can help us honestly assess our attitudes and actions and pray with us for victory over sin.

WORKSHEET

About The Land of Canaan

The First Mention of the Land of Canaan in Scripture is in Genesis 11:31 and 12:5, as the land to which God commanded Abram (Abraham) to migrate. The name of the land of Canaan is derived from the name of the ancestor of the people who lived there: the Canaanites, who were descendants of Canaan, one of the grandsons of Noah (Genesis 10:6, 15-18).

Where Was the Land of Canaan? Egyptian inscriptions (dating to 1800 BC) identify the land bordering the east end of the Mediterranean Sea, between Egypt and Asia, as the land of Canaan. Clay tablets found in Egypt (dating to 1400 BC), with cuneiform writing on them, identify the habitation of the Phoenicians along the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea as the land of Canaan.

The Land of Canaan Was Not a Large Place. According to Genesis 10:15-20, Canaanite territory extended from Sidon to Gaza [on the Mediterranean Sea coast] west of the Jordan [River] (*Bakers Bible Atlas*). This was an area about 160 miles in length, north to south, and about 30 miles wide on the north end and 60 miles wide on the south end. The *land of Canaan* is mentioned 32 times in Genesis.

Canaan, the Land Promised by God to the Descendants of Abraham: As told in Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:18, God promised to give all the land of Canaan *for an everlasting possession* (17:8) to Abrahams descendants (meaning only those descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob) the Israelites, the Jews. Because of this promise, in Christian songs, sermons, lessons, and conversations the land of Canaan is referred to as the Promised Land.

Centuries After the Time of Abraham, the ancient Israelites, at Gods command, invaded and took possession of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, thus fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham. Two important aspects of modern Israels claim to the land they now inhabitant is based on ancient Israels possession of that land (1400 BC), and on Gods 4,000-year-old promise (repeated numerous times in the Old Testament) to give the land of Canaan to Israel.

Seek God's Guidance

1. What had all *the kings* heard about (Joshua 9:1)? Why was this significant?

2. What mistake did Israel make (9:14)?

When have you made a similar mistake?

What happened?

3. What caused the Israelites to complain and grumble (9:18)? Why could this have been so deadly?

What does James 5:9 say about grumbling?

4. Why did Joshua have no reason to fear (Joshua 10:8)?

5. Why do you suppose God performed such an astonishing miracle (10:12-14)?

6. C. S. Lewis said, "The miracles, in fact, are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see."

How does Psalm 19:1-3 speak to this idea?