

Lecture 22 "Conquering the Land"

Joshua 6:1-10:43

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When you started this week's lesson did you say to yourself, "Well now, this is what I've been waiting for; more miracles and some exciting military battles!"? The falling of a city's gigantic walls vividly demonstrates the power of God and there is something amazing about a story where the only weapon is people shouting!

This week we read of God's promises and plans for victory over nations who opposed Him. We learned about Israel's obedience, disobedience, failures and conquests. The book of Joshua records two of the most astounding miracles in the Bible involving two pagan cities, so let's start with Jericho.

After wandering around for 40 years, eating manna and the occasional quail, it was time for the Israelites to claim the land flowing with milk and honey. Jericho was the first Canaanite stronghold Israel was to conquer on their way to claiming the Promised Land. It was the oldest, most prominent and fortified city in that region. Jericho was fortified by double walls, each 6 feet thick and 20 feet high. It was virtually impregnable. Enemies trying to overthrow such a city usually had to starve its inhabitants to surrender.

God had already prepared Joshua to take Jericho. Last week we learned Rahab told the spies she had hidden that the city was terrified of them. Actually, they weren't so much afraid of Israel as they were afraid of Israel's powerful God. Before Joshua and Israel even arrived at Jericho, God told him, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands." As the saying goes, it was a done deal.

The battle plan against Jericho was unique because it was the Lord's. He told Joshua to have Israel march around Jericho once a day for seven days. Guards would lead the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, followed by more guards and the rest of the people. The Ark of the Covenant contained the Law of God. Its presence was a visible reminder that God was with them.

Joshua did not unfold the entire plan to the people all at once, that is, how many times they were to circle the city or what would happen when the marching

was done. The people received instructions one day at a time, and they obeyed one day at a time.

While they marched, the priests were to blow trumpets but everyone else was to remain completely silent. Can you imagine how difficult that would have been, especially for a nation notorious for grumbling and complaining? Tens of thousands of people marched around the city without saying a word, not even a whisper! If women and children were also marching, total silence may have been an even bigger miracle than the walls falling down!

I wondered what the inhabitants of Jericho thought as they watched the silent procession of their enemies, day after day, marching around their city, then leaving without attacking. In spite of the taunts that were probably hurled down at them from the walls, Israel was obedient, and they marched in silence. I'm sure the plan tested their patience, but the command of silence tested their self-control.

On the seventh day, Joshua gave very specific orders. "March seven times around the city. Priests, on the seventh time around, blow your trumpets, and then everyone is to shout because the Lord has given you the city! All that is in the city is to be destroyed because it is devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab and those in her house are to be spared. If you take any of the devoted things, you will be destroyed and you will bring destruction upon Israel."

The Israelites understood that "devoted things" were those things dedicated to God, which was *all* of Jericho, its contents and all living things. Silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron were sacred to the Lord and they were to go into the tabernacle treasury.

On the seventh day, at the end of the seventh time around Jericho, the priests blew their trumpets; however, in Joshua 6:20, it says at "the sound of the trumpet" the people were to shout. It's believed this trumpet was the "horn of jubilee" - one long, alarming sound made from a shofar, a ram's horn. The piercing sound would grab the attention of all who heard it. Some compare the horn blown at Jericho with the trumpet that will be sounded when Jesus calls His people to Him in the sky. In both cases, people will ascend. Israelites up into Jericho. Christians up to Jesus!

At that trumpet blast, all the Israelites shouted, and as the song goes, “the walls came a-tumbling down.” The Hebrew Bible said the walls fell flat. That doesn’t sound like God sent a gentle rolling earthquake causing the enormous city walls to sway gently and then tumble. If God used an earthquake, I imagine it was of violent jolts and continued for some time to level the enormous walls. Flat is flat.

The Israelites rushed in, collected the gold, silver, bronze, and iron for the tabernacle, and then, what offends our 21st century thinking, is that they burned everything to the ground - every living and non-living thing.

We need to remember it was a Canaanite city where false gods were worshiped, and all sorts of evil was practiced - sexual sins with virtually everyone and any thing (mother, sister, aunt, daughter, daughter-in-law, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, bestiality) and there was child sacrifice. The city needed to be destroyed to protect Israel from Canaanite idolatry and unbelievable degenerate wickedness! What would our opinion of a “holy God” be if He’d just said, “Capture the city and do your best to rehabilitate the inhabitants.”? God was building a people for Himself – a people that must be different than their neighbors; a people that would worship and honor God above all.

Such judgment seems harsh to us because it *is* harsh. At unique times, God has commanded such judgment. And there is a contrast between judgment and salvation. All of Jericho heard about the God of Israel but only Rahab responded positively to Him.

We read in Hebrews 11:30, “by faith the walls of Jericho fell down”. Did Joshua’s orders make sense to the Israelites? Probably not – but they obeyed anyway and their faith and obedience caused the walls to collapse.

Joshua's obedience to God is a crucial lesson in this story. Obedience is the evidence of faith, even if God’s commands don’t make sense to us. In faith, Joshua and Israel followed God’s battle plans exactly and they were saved by faith. The same applies to us today, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” (Ephesians 2:8)

We all have our own Jerichos that confront us. It may be sin hampering our relationship with God, challenging relationships with others, or seemingly impossible situations. God's plan taught Israel, and us, that victory is determined and accomplished by God's power and faithfulness.

With the miraculous victory at Jericho, Israel moved on to the city of Ai, presuming it would be easy to conquer. It isn't recorded that Joshua prayed before they attacked. They were defeated. Three dozen Israelite soldiers were killed, leaving Israel humiliated and frightened.

Joshua mourned the defeat and *then* he prayed. He asked God why He parted the Jordan and led them into Canaan if they were going to be conquered. He implied that *God* had not kept His promise to give them victory. But God would not be saddled with that responsibility. He rebuked Joshua for insinuating *He* had broken the covenant to protect Israel. God said, "Stand up Joshua! *Israel* was the covenant breaker." God didn't need to change *His* heart towards Israel. *Israel's* heart had to change toward God.

God revealed the defeat was due to one man's sin, but the entire nation would feel the consequences. The nation was one body and God required holiness from *all* His people. If I were to shoplift, my whole body would go to jail not just my hand. If one football player jumps offside, the whole team is penalized. Israel had been told time and again, the covenant promised blessing if they were obedient, and curses if they were disobedient. "Israel sinned", God told Joshua, "*They* violated the covenant. *They* stole and lied." The entire nation was guilty.

Furthermore, God said, "I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction." All the spoils from the victory at Jericho belonged to God. Everything from the defeated city belonged to Him because it was *His* victory. Israel was told *before* the battle that taking the spoils would "make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it." Only the silver, gold, bronze, and iron were to be put into the tabernacle treasury.

Because everything from the battle was God's, if it wasn't given to the Lord or destroyed, the nation of Israel *itself* would become a "devoted thing" and would be destroyed. Except for what God specified was for the tabernacle, everything else

was to be burned with fire. By taking a devoted thing, Israel had violated the covenant and the thief and everything he had *also* became a devoted thing and must be destroyed. That was the only way to remove contamination from Israel.

God told Joshua how to identify the man who stole from Him through a process of selection. Beginning with the tribe of Judah and ending with the household of the man Achan, he was identified as the thief. The sin Achan thought he had hidden in the camp was revealed. Achan said he saw, he coveted, he took, and he hid a beautiful robe, gold and silver from Jericho. Because the precious metals belonged to God, Achan stole from God Himself. He buried it all in his tent, which defiled the entire camp of Israel making Israel subject to destruction. God was not with Israel in the battle against Ai because the covenant was broken, and God refused to fight for Israel until discipline was concluded.

By bringing the things that belonged to God into his tent, Achan also brought his family into his sin and his entire household was also destroyed. Commentators believe his children knew what Achan had done and even helped him bury the stolen items. Additionally, neither Achan nor his family willingly came forward to confess. The contrast between Rahab and Achan is interesting. Each of their actions affected their family. Rahab's actions saved her whole household. Achan's actions destroyed his.

Achan's sin defied the Lord's commands, caused Israel to lose face before the nations, caused the deaths of thirty-six soldiers, and broke the covenant with God. You may recall in the first chapter of Joshua, Israel dedicated themselves to obedience, even under pain of death. They said to Joshua, "Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey it, whatever you may command them, will be put to death." (Joshua 1:18)

There are several lessons for us regarding Israel's defeat.

- God will not tolerate disobedience.
- Private sins can affect others.
- Sin must be exposed before it can be removed.

Israel learned there is no such thing as private sin, especially in the household of God. The only way to deal with the sin of those who do not know Jesus as their Savior, is to blot it out with death's blood. Praise God our confessed sin is paid for

by the shed blood of Jesus Christ! "In him we have redemption through His blood." (Ephesians 1:7)

After Achan's punishment, the sin was purged from the camp. God's curse was removed from Israel, the covenant restored and the next encounter with Ai was one of victory. God's war strategy wasn't the same as for Jericho, but the victory was just as thorough. God encouraged Joshua, "Don't be afraid; don't be discouraged. I will deliver the city of Ai and its king. You will destroy Ai as you did Jericho, except you may take all the spoils for yourselves."

For the second battle at Ai, God gave Joshua detailed instructions for an elaborate ambush. The city and all that was in it was destroyed and its king was taken to Joshua, although the king didn't survive long. His death by hanging was a warning to Canaanites to leave the land and was a reminder to Israel they would be victorious if they were obedient to the Lord. God's promise to protect and provide victory was unfolding before them.

Defeat doesn't *have* to happen. Ephesians 6:13-18 tells us God has given us the armor and tactical strategy needed to be victorious in spiritual warfare.

Joshua knew the next order of business was to build an altar and have a time of sacrificing to the Lord. Half the people were positioned on the slopes of Mount Gerizim and the other half were on the slopes of Mount Ebal. The two mountains are about 1½ miles apart at the top and 500 feet at the bottom and provided outstanding acoustical properties. The huge natural amphitheater made it possible for the people to hear every word and affirm the Law of the Lord. Even today people say they can hear words spoken from one mountain to the other.

Joshua read the Law of Moses to the people. As the curses of the Law were read one by one, the tribes on Mount Ebal responded, "Amen!" and as the blessings were read, the tribes on Mount Gerizim responded "Amen!" (Deut. 27) The ritual of sacrifices and the reading of the Law reminded Israel of the promises and obligations in their covenant with the Lord God.

Have you ever been the victim of a scam? I heard someone wrote a letter to a business which said, "Dear seller. I bought your book, "How to Scam People on the Internet", but I still haven't received my copy."

In chapter nine we learn about a huge scam that affected Israel for generations. After the Israelites defeated the cities of Jericho and Ai, the nearby Gibeonite nation knew they were *next* on Joshua's hit list, so instead of trying to *defeat* Israel, they decide to *deceive* Israel.

The Gibeonites somehow knew Israel's God wanted all pagan nations destroyed and that He prohibited Israel from making treaties with nearby Canaanites. Gibeon was one of them, so they sent a dishonest delegation to Joshua hoping to trick Israel into a peace treaty.

The Gibeonites went to great lengths to deceive Israel into thinking they had been traveling a long time from a faraway land. The delegation wore old clothes, tattered sandals, carried moldy bread, wineskins used to hold the liquid for their trip were dried out and their pack animals were loaded with worn-out satchels.

They told Joshua they'd heard about Israel's God, how He had delivered them from Egypt and how He helped them destroy two powerful kings. That was old news. Missing from their story was any mention of Israel's recent victories over Jericho and Ai. If they had included those defeats in their tale of deceit, it would have shown they were actually from a nearby nation.

Again, Joshua and the Israelites did not seek God's counsel. Oh, they *did* question the Gibeonites, but decided they were sincere, agreed to the peace treaty and ratified it with an oath. Three days later Joshua and his leaders realized they had actually made a pact with the enemy – Canaanites! When asked why they deceived them, the Gibeonites told Joshua they heard his God had commanded Israel to wipe out all Canaanites. They would rather live as slaves instead of die by the sword.

The angry Israelite army wanted to wipe out Gibeon, but Joshua told them, "We have given them an oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. No, from now on, through Israel, God will be the protector of these foreigners." God's reputation was at stake and Joshua couldn't break the covenant,

so his solution was to make the Gibeonites slaves for generations to come, serving as woodcutters and water carriers, tending to the needs of the altar of the Lord. In that service, they were not in a position to influence others and yet at the same time they would be exposed to the revelation of God. This proved to be a blessing for the Gibeonites in the years to follow.

It's marvelous how our God uses our mistakes to achieve glory for Himself. The Gibeonites were under the protection of Israel and in the coming centuries, God used them to bless Israel. You can read about that in 2 Samuel, Ezra and Nehemiah. As slaves, their job was to carry water and deliver wood for the temple, which gradually led to a place of religious honor for them in Israel. In Ezra it says they were committed to the Lord and His house. Nehemiah wrote that Gibeonites were involved in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. God blessed the Gibeonites with life in Israel, and Israel was blessed by their contribution.

Don't misunderstand. Our sin will not be blessed, but God's grace trumps our sin. Our bad choices will have consequences to deal with just as they did for Joshua. Yet, in God's great grace and love, He can take our mistakes and work them together into His plans for our good. God can use repentant spiritual failures to fulfill His plans and brings Him glory. The redemptive love of God is awesome as He makes us more and more like Jesus Christ. "For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son." (Romans 8:29)

So, Israel was stuck with the Gibeonites whose fear of the Lord God caused them to deceive them into being their forever defenders. And that infuriated five Canaanite kings.

The king of Jerusalem knew that with Gibeon's military strength, Israel would be coming for all Canaanite nations, so he called four Amorite kings to join him in attacking Gibeon. When Gibeon learned of their impending doom, they sought Joshua's help, which he was required to give because of the covenant with them.

God encouraged Joshua by telling him not to be afraid of the kings because He had *already* given Joshua the victory. And God certainly contributed to their victory. He threw all the Amorite armies into confusion and when they fled, God sent a hailstorm. Although the hailstorm didn't harm the Israelites, it killed more enemy soldiers than did Joshua's army. Yay, God!

Have you ever been so busy you wished you had another hour in the day? One of the great miracles in the Bible is often referred to as “Joshua’s long day,” or “the day the sun stood still.” Joshua prayed to God for the sun and moon to do just that – stand still.

Why did Joshua pray what he did and what could the miracle have been? There are numerous opinions, but the most accepted is that Joshua asked God to give him more daylight. In his battle with the Amorites, it was getting dark and Joshua wanted more sunlight to defeat them before they fled to safety. Joshua was likely asking God to stop the sun, meaning, that it would not set, and from Joshua’s perspective standing on the earth, it looked like the sun and moon stood still, that is, that they didn’t move across the sky.

Just how might God have prolonged daylight? Most Bible scholars believe God actually slowed the movement of the earth so there were extra hours in that day. They believe Joshua 10:13 supports that theory: “The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.” The same God who miraculously created the entire universe out of nothing may have literally stopped the sun! He is the omnipotent Creator, who “upholds the universe by His powerful word.”

We’re not told *how* God performed the miracle any more than we’re told how He miraculously fed thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish, or how Jonah survived for three days in the belly of a fish. The recognition of God’s unlimited power is a sufficient explanation for me, and until heaven, I’ll be content until I hear God himself tell me what He did!

Joshua not only successfully defended Gibeon but defeated the armies of five pagan kings in one battle! He and the Israelites didn’t do it on their own because God intervened, confused the Amorites and made them vulnerable. He rained down huge hailstones on them, cornered the five kings in a cave, and prolonged an entire day at Joshua’s request. God promised to fight on behalf of His people, and He came through in remarkable ways.

God may not respond to the prayers of believer’s today by stopping the sun or by punishing enemies with hailstones, but the Lord helps us fight our battles. Romans 8:31 says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” And God works through His Holy Spirit, who gives us strength to resist sin and obey God. The

Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesians that God would strengthen them, "with power through his Spirit in your inner being."

When Jesus died on the cross, He conquered sin and death, and just as He did in the battle between the Amorites and Israelites, God takes an active role in the battle for our souls. He came to earth and took the punishment we deserved and like the Israelites, we don't have to be afraid because, "Everyone born of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith." (1 John 5:4)

Although God's methods may not be ours, He told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

I thoroughly enjoyed this lesson. The stories of Jericho, Joshua's mighty army led by God, and awesome miracles of tumbling walls and hours added to a day were ones I remember from long ago, but this study led me to appreciate the greatness of God even more.

By the way, a great shaking is coming for our world too. Our Joshua, Yeshua Jesus, will give the signal and the trumpet will blast. Until He does, keep marching and anticipating the victory He's promised.

Praise God that those who know Jesus know that victory is *in* Jesus. "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Let's pray. Father, victory at Jericho – defeat at Ai; the sin of Achan – the pretense of the Gibeonites; every portion of Scripture we've studied this week has application to our lives. How awesome is your Living Word. We praise You for your love and care and protection as we travel through this time and this place that you've put us. How blessed we are to have a personal relationship with You.