

COLLAPSE OF JERICHO'S WALLS

Summary and Historical Background

Israel had to make one last preparation before the conquest of Canaan could begin. The circumcision of all the males needed to be reinstated. Circumcision had not been performed for the past forty years. This rite was important as the sign of the covenant relationship that Israel enjoyed with the Lord. However, before Israel could inherit the covenant promises, the sign of that covenant relationship had to be renewed. All the men under forty years had to be circumcised.

Such an act involved faith in God for His protection, because circumcision temporarily incapacitates a man so that he is unable to defend himself. God's command to circumcise the men after they crossed the Jordan was against all military strategy. Such an act made Israel vulnerable to the enemy, but it demanded that they trust God and God alone. Joshua and Israel regarded God's "foolishness" to be wiser than the wisdom of men and they made their faith in God to be their chief priority.

The second section of the book of Joshua begins with chapter six. Here God records the actual conquest of Canaan. There were three campaigns in the conquest. First, Israel conquered the central area of Palestine, cutting off communications between the north and south (Josh 6-8). Next, Israel smashed the strongholds of southern Palestine (Josh 9-10). Finally, Joshua had a decisive victory over the kings of the north by the waters of Merom, north of the Sea of Galilee (Josh 11).

The conquest of Jericho was crucial in the total battle plan because it was the gateway to central Palestine. It controlled the important roads that went westward through the wilderness highlands and so it was the first city to conquer.

The conquest of Jericho is the subject of chapter six. However, before the battle began, the divine Commander-in-Chief appeared to Joshua in 5:13-15. This was the pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave to Joshua His strategy for the conquest of Jericho (6:1-7), a strategy which was most unusual. Nevertheless, Joshua responded in faith and obeyed His orders in detail. As a result God granted him complete victory (Josh 6:8-27).

I. The Covenant of Israel — 5:1-12

5:1 — An important result of Israel's crossing of the Jordan was the effect it produced on the Canaanites. They may have assumed they were protected from Israel for a time by the flood waters of the Jordan. However, when God opened a way through the Jordan for Israel, they saw how God was working on behalf of this nation and they were in immediate danger. This miracle produced great consternation, despair and discouragement. "Their heart melted, neither was their spirit in them anymore." The word "melt" is used of wax melting before fire (Ps 68:2) and this is a figure of a person's heart that is "faint" with fear (Deut 20:8).

5:2-3 — After Israel crossed the Jordan, God commanded Joshua to circumcise Israel. This was the second time God had given this command. The first was to Moses in Egypt. Another view holds that there was a circumcision after this in the wilderness (it was the first one after Israel left Egypt), which was performed when they celebrated the Passover (Num 9:5). However, no specific reference is made of circumcision at that event, so it is speculative. A carnal general would have quarreled with God about circumcising his men, because circumcision would incapacitate his army for about a week. Furthermore, the Jordan River was no-longer between them and the Canaanites to protect them while they recovered from the operation, but instead it prevented them from any possible escape. Normally, a general would not want to subject his army to something that would weaken their physical condition, but Joshua obeyed God by faith and allowed his army to be circumcised. Here is a practical example of Matt 6:33. The "sharp knives" were knives of flint, commonly used up to the Middle Bronze Age, and still seem to be preferred for the rite of

circumcision in deference to this ancient custom. Some believe flint knives have less possibility to cause infection.

5:4-7 — The reason for the need of circumcision is given. Circumcision had not been practiced during the forty-year wandering in the wilderness. The reason for this neglect was Israel's disobedience through unbelief (5:6, 7).

Circumcision was the necessary mark of the covenant (Gen 17:9-14). It symbolized a heart which had worldliness cut away. It expressed the effect of regeneration. Since the wilderness generation rebelled against God and rejected His covenant through unbelief, they failed to circumcise their children. Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with Israel.

The new generation had sanctified themselves and were purged from the old elements, but before they could receive God's covenant promises (the land of Canaan), they had to show their covenant relationship with Him. Therefore, all the uncircumcised males had to be circumcised before they attacked Jericho.

5:8 — One of the effects of circumcision on a man was his inability to move about without pain for about seven days. Gen 34:25 recorded that Hamor and his men were still sore the third day after circumcision and were easy victims of Simeon and Levi. Joshua's faith in God was strong, because he was willing to incapacitate most of his army in enemy territory. Joshua willingly and immediately obeyed his orders from God.

5:9 — God told Joshua He had rolled the reproach of Egypt from Israel. This reproach may have been: (1) the Egyptian bondage; (2) the taunts of the Egyptians that Israel would be destroyed in the wilderness; or (3) their worldliness at Kadesh-barnea when they rebelled against God and wanted to go back to Egypt instead of conquering the Promised Land. Though Israel had been redeemed out of Egypt, there still was too much of Egypt in those Israelites. Circumcision, however, proved that this new generation was committed to the Lord in faith.

5:10-11 — Because Israel was circumcised, they once again were permitted to partake of the Passover, which symbolized God's redemption of Israel from Egypt. They also kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread, showing their dedication to God. The old corn and the parched corn referred to the previous year's grain and to the newly harvested, roasted grain respectively.

5:12 — The manna ceased once they ate the grain of the land. Israel now had recourse to normal means, and had no need for God's miraculous provision.

II. The Conquest of Jericho — 5:13-6:27

A. The Commander-in-Chief — 5:13-15

5:13-15 — Before the battle began, Joshua met the divine Captain of the army of Israel. He encountered a man by the city of Jericho with a drawn sword. This man was actually the Lord, appearing as a theophany. He called Himself the "captain of the host of the Lord" (a title very similar to the Lord of hosts). Literally "host" should be translated "hosts." The hosts (armies) He commanded are those of Israel, of the angels (Ps 148:2), and of the forces of nature (Mk 4:41). Joshua worshipped Him, calling him "lord" (in Hebrew, *adonai*). The Captain commanded Joshua to take off his sandals (like Moses was told to do at the burning bush) because the ground was holy in the Captain's presence. The Captain's orders for the battle against Jericho are given in 6:2-5, where He is identified as the Lord.

Joshua learned by this experience that he was a subordinate (a "servant" to the Lord) in his role as a leader of Israel. He received from God the strategy for conquest. This was God's war against Satan's armies. The Lord had been the Deliverer of Israel from Egypt (Ex 3:8), and the Angel Who

led the nation through the wilderness (Ex 23:20-23), and now He was seen as the Captain of Israel's armies. This war was not an immoral conflict between the Hebrews and the Canaanites. It was a holy war. It was God's war, and He meant to lead it as the Captain of Israel's armies.

B. The Commands for Conquest — 6:1-7

6:1 — Jericho (the name probably comes from the name of the moon god, Yerach) was a city of about nine acres across. Fortifications were made of mud brick, which was characteristic of every city built at the Jericho site until the settlements were made by the Hebrews long after this destruction. Archaeologically, Joshua's Jericho is very uncertain. Most argue that the entire city conquered by Joshua has eroded away, without much trace remaining. Some argue that its remains are those found in the Middle Bronze Age city. Whatever answer is correct, the city was standing and was well-fortified in Joshua's day. Jericho was located on the road which led westward to the highlands in central Palestine.

6:2-5 — Joshua received his orders for conquering Jericho from the Lord, Who was the Captain of 5:13-15. His orders included none of the normal military procedures (encirclement, siege, blockade, ramps, scaling ladders). Instead, the host of Israel was to march around Jericho in complete silence (except for the trumpets blowing) once each day for six days. The march would be organized as follows: armed men would be first, followed by seven priests blowing ram's horns, the Ark of the Lord, more armed men, and other people in Israel (6:3- 4, 6- 8, 9, and 13).

PEOPLE >>> ARMED MEN >>> ARK >>> PRIESTS WITH TRUMPETS >>> ARMED MEN

Such a march was not difficult to do, since it only took about a half hour to go around Jericho. On the seventh day, Israel was to circle Jericho seven times. This may have been bizarre to the people in Jericho, but troubling since they had already heard about the power of God. It also was a test of the faith and obedience of the Israelites. Upon completing the seventh trip around Jericho, a long blast on the ram's horn would sound and the people were to shout. Then God would cause the walls to collapse (literally, fall in their place) so Israel could conquer Jericho.

6:6-7 — Joshua obeyed these strange orders even though they might have seemed ridiculous to the people of Jericho. He did not waver in his faith. He passed on the orders as he had always done. He did not allow any question or doubt to obstruct God's plan.

C. The Capture of Jericho — 6:8-27

6:8-15 — Joshua and Israel obeyed God's orders completely.

6:17-19 — Joshua gave explicit instructions concerning the treatment of the city. The city was accursed (lit., under the ban, or wholly devoted). The Arabic word, "harem" (special quarters for wives), is derived from this word. Two types of things could be wholly devoted: (1) things which were given to God's service (as in Lev 27:28); (2) things which were opposed to God's work. Jericho came under this second class of things. If Jericho continued to exist, it would oppose Israel militarily and would wean Israel away from its devotion to God. Jericho in its sinful condition offended God and obstructed His work. Therefore, it had to be totally destroyed.

Rahab was to be an exception to the ban. (1) The oath, which had been sworn by the spies, protected her and her family from death. (2) The faith she demonstrated showed that she was on God's side, not against Him.

The "accursed" applied to everything: persons, animals, materials, and metals. Everything burnable was to be burned. All the metals were to go to the treasury of the Lord. "Brass" most likely refers to

bronze. "Iron" was in use at Jericho by this time (1400 B.C.); trade documents as early as 1900 B.C. refer to iron. If any accursed thing (thing under the ban) was taken by an Israelite, he would cause all Israel to be accursed by God until the sin was rooted out.

6:20 — God honored the promise He made. When the people obeyed His word, He opened the way to victory. He miraculously caused the walls of Jericho to collapse, enabling Israel to enter and sack the city.

6:21 — The slaughter of the Canaanites is often used by unbelievers to impugn the love of God. However, unbelievers overlook the reason for the utter destruction of Jericho. The Bible reveals (and archaeology confirms) the immorality of the Canaanites. Fertility cults were prominent, involving sacred prostitution by both males and females, by heterosexual and homosexual priests and priestesses. Also, infant sacrifices were practiced by these wicked people. This immorality has been confirmed by archaeology at Canaanite sites (especially in Northern Syria, at Ugarit). The iniquity of the Canaanites had reached such a point that God had to judge them (cf Gen 6:5-7). Their immorality was not yet full in the days of Abraham (Gen 15:16), but over 500 years later in Joshua's time it was full. God had suffered long with them before having them destroyed. God knew if the Canaanites were allowed to live in the land with Israel, they would teach Israel to practice the same wicked abominations that they practiced (Deut 20:18). God used Israel to destroy the Canaanites to punish their iniquity and to prevent its spread.

6:22-25 — Joshua ordered the two spies to bring out Rahab and her family in fulfillment of the oath they swore to her. They were to put them outside the camp for purification ceremonies so that they could enter the congregation of Israel later as proselytes. Rahab later married a Judean prince, Salmon, and she became one of the ancestors of David and also of Christ (Mt 1:5). Several truths are suggested by Rahab. (1) No matter how wicked a person is, God's grace can turn him/her into a great saint. (2) Real faith always produces good works. (3) Whatever is done for God or His people will be richly recompensed.

6:26 — Joshua now ordered the people not to rebuild, that is, to refortify Jericho, or they would be cursed. The Biblical record reveals that there existed an unwalled settlement at Jericho ("city of palm trees") soon afterward (Judges 3:13). Later David spoke of a settlement at Jericho (2 Sam 10:5). However, this is not what Joshua referred to by this curse. Joshua referred to the rebuilding of Jericho as a fortified city. The reason that Joshua cursed the rebuilding of Jericho was to keep it a ruined, insignificant city as a testimony of God's judgment on the sin of the Canaanites. Anyone who would remove this testimony to God's judgment would lose his firstborn at the beginning of the refortification of the city and would lose his last son at its completion. This verse was fulfilled in 1 Kings 16:34 by Hiel the Bethelite in the days of King Ahab, 500 years later.