

Group Study Outline

LAUNCH QUESTION

Have you ever found yourself in an impossible situation? What happened?
Today's story has something even impossible-er! Can God keep His promises?

READ Joshua 5:13-6:5

Can somebody give us a quick recap of who Joshua is and why these people are camped outside a city called Jericho?

Who does Joshua meet? Seriously, who *is* he?! (cf. Ex 3:1-6 perhaps)

What does Joshua ask him?

What is significant about how he answers Joshua's question in 5:15?

How would *you* go about attacking a walled fortress?

How does the LORD tell Joshua to do it?

Why do you think that this is the plan? If it works, what will it show?

READ Joshua 6:6-14

How would you have reacted to Joshua's orders?

How do the people react?

Why was it so important that they obeyed?

Do you ever find God's commands peculiar and hard to understand?

What might this story say to us in those times?

Do you ever find God's ways of doing things strangely unimpressive?

What might God be teaching us about how He works?

READ Joshua 6:15-27

What are Joshua's final instructions to the people?

Read v21 again. How do you feel about that?

How do you personally deal with Bible passages like this?

Have someone read Genesis 15:13-16

Why is there a delay before the people can enter the land?

Have someone read Deuteronomy 9:1-5

Why isn't the destruction of Jericho happening? Why is it?

How might those two passages help us understand what's going on in Jericho?

Where in the Joshua passage do we see this is the case? (e.g. 18-19)

Is absolutely *everyone* destroyed?

In light of everything else at Jericho, why is Rahab's rescue so great?

What does this story teach us about God?

If Joshua is like Jesus leading the people, and Jericho is like final judgment, how should we as God's people respond to this story?

How does it give us confidence as we look forward to *our* Promised Land?

PRAY

Joshua 5:13-6:27



'Joshua' at a glance

Ever since Adam and Eve were evicted from Eden, God's people had been homeless. He promised Abraham a land for his descendants where they could live securely, telling him in Genesis 15:13-16 that they would be slaves for 400 years before finally receiving the land. Abraham's family grew and moved to Egypt. After their slavery, God brought the people out through Moses and got them to the border of this Promised Land. Moses then died and it was down to Joshua to take them into the land God was giving them.

The book of Joshua follows the adventures of Israel as they enter the land, judge the people living there, and settle into their allotted inheritances. It's a remarkably upbeat book, with only the occasional hint that all is not well with God's people. The punchline of the story comes in Joshua 21:45, "Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed: all came to pass."

Where this passage fits in...

At this stage in the story, Israel have just entered the Promised Land and are about to face their biggest fear – the land's current occupants. Can God keep His promise to drive out the nations before them and give them the land, starting with the fortress city of Jericho...?

Theme Sentence

God defeats Jericho as Israel obey his word through Joshua.

Application

- Have confidence that God will win the ultimate victory for us
- Trust in God's chosen servant Jesus and obey him
- Remember both God's kindness *and* his judgement

Commentary

5:13-15 Before the main action takes place, Joshua has a rather peculiar encounter. He sees an armed soldier standing before him and asks the natural question, "Friend or foe?" The answer is surprising; "No."

This warrior is not in Joshua's army nor is he in Jericho's defensive force. He is the commander of the LORD's army. This distinction is important. Joshua has not co-opted God into his own personal plan for invading another country. It is the LORD who designs the strategy from beginning to end and it will be the LORD who fights the war. He is not on Joshua's side; Joshua is on His side.

The identity of the commander of the LORD is disputed. Some argue that he is the pre-incarnate Christ. That may well be the case. 5:15 says that the place they are standing is holy ground and that Joshua should take off his sandals. This mirrors Moses' encounter with God Himself at the burning bush in Exodus 3. Also, 6:2 says that it is "the LORD" speaking when it appears to be the commander of the LORD replying to Joshua's question from 5:14. Whoever he is, his presence shows that God is with Joshua and the people of Israel.

16:1-5 Still at this point, Joshua doesn't know how they will conquer Jericho. The LORD explains the battle plan. And quite a strange battle plan it is too! It's more like a military parade than an attack. The Israelite army are to march around the city every day for six days, with priests carrying the ark of the covenant and holding trumpets made from ram horns. What a bizarre strategy!

On day seven, the army should march around the city *seven* times rather than just once, and this time the priests should blow the horns. At the end of the march, they should blow one long blast of the horn, signaling to the rest of the men to shout. Then the wall will fall down.

How will they get past the formidable walls of Jericho? Marching around for a week, then blowing trumpets and shouting. It is quite incredible. But its oddness points to the power of God. This can only work if God truly is with the people and fighting the battle for them. Shouting alone cannot smash a wall. God can.

The presence of the ark is very significant. It represents God's presence with His people. Numbers 10:9 tells the Israelites, "when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies." Everything in the plan points to God fighting the battle for His people, not the people fighting in their own strength.

16:6-14 Joshua relays the LORD's plan to the people and the people obey him. Joshua is God's chosen servant. God has exalted him in the sight of His people that they might obey him, as promised in 3:7 and as began in 4:14. The people obey his commands even though they seem strange because they are dependent on God to win the battle for them.

16:15-21 On day seven, Joshua issues his final commands. Once the walls fall, the people are to enter Jericho and destroy everything. To be "devoted to the LORD for destruction" is to use the language of sacrifice. It is an offering to God, destroying it on His behalf. It is not to be purely for their own benefit, hence the restrictions on taking any plunder in 6:18. Every other army would plunder their enemies. Often that was the main reason to attack! But the only things to take are gold, silver, bronze and iron, and those things are for the temple, not the people.

The people obey, destroying everything and everyone as instructed (6:21). The ruins are to stand as a permanent monument to God's power and judgment, hence the curse for anyone that rebuilds the city.

Many modern readers find this account distasteful. It seems barbaric and unjust. However, the Bible is clear that God is just and that this is no exception. In Genesis 15, when God promises Abram the land, He tells him that they will be slaves for 400 years before entering it. The reason for the delay is given in v16; "for the sins of the Amorites is not yet complete." If they'd destroyed Jericho 400 years earlier, that would have been unfair. But God has patiently waited and now the people in Canaan deserve what is coming. It is His judgment on their sins.

In Deuteronomy 9:4, God warns Israel not to be proud about it. "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you." This is *divine* judgment, albeit carried out by the Israelites. Years later, when reflecting on it, the LORD tells Joshua, "I destroyed them before you." (Joshua 24:8)

This is why the church must not imitate Israel in physically fighting our human enemies. Events like Jericho were sanctioned by God as precursors to final judgment. We are not to take matters into our own hands. Plus as Ephesians 6:12 says, our battle is not against flesh and blood but against Satan trying to stop us following and serving Jesus. As Jesus put it in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting..."

16:22-27 Archeologists in Jericho have discovered the fallen walls, complete with earthquake and fire damage. Amazingly there is a section of the north wall which didn't fall, with buildings attached to it. How could this be? Amidst all the destruction, there is mercy as Rahab is rescued, just as she was promised in chapter 2. Almost as much space is given to her rescue as to the city's destruction! We must remember God's grace even while considering His wrath.

As Christians, we await a day when a trumpet shall sound, the Lord himself will give a cry of command, and judgment shall fall on the entire world (cf 1 Thes 4:16). The Jericho story is a solemn warning of coming judgment. But for God's people (including those rescued *into* that people), after judgment comes enjoyment of the promised land.