

# PROPHET OF CONQUEST

DEVOTIONAL READING: Hebrews 11:23-31

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Joshua 5:13-6:27

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Joshua 5:13-15; Joshua 6:1-5, 15-16, 20

## I. Special Message

### Joshua 5:13-15

**13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?**

**14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?**

**15 And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.**

13a. The city of *Jericho* was located about 10 miles northwest of the Dead Sea and 5 miles west of the Jordan River. Cities of antiquity were sited with three concerns in mind: access to water, access to trade routes, and defensibility. Because of nearby springs of water, the city was an oasis in the dry Jordan landscape. Jericho was a strategic place to begin conquest of Canaan because of its proximity to trade routes. Jericho depended on its walls for defense.

13b. Based on Joshua's initial reaction to the appearance of this armed *man*, there is no reason to think he looked ex-

traordinary in any way. But putting two facts side by side yields an amazing scene: (1) Joshua's question indicates his uncertainty regarding whose side the man is on, yet (2) Joshua *went unto* this armed man anyway! The scene is one of confidence in the protective presence of the Lord. As to the answer to Joshua's question, he was about to find out that the answer wasn't a simple "us" or "them"!

14a. This individual was likely an angel of the Lord. The word *host* is used as a reference to an armed force (Judges 4:15). The man's identifying himself as *captain* reinforces the military overtones suggested by his unsheathed sword and the armed force at his command.

The man does not give Joshua a straightforward endorsement of allegiance. Whether the man was for or against the Israelites depended upon their faithfulness and obedience to *the Lord*.

14b. The posture of worship Joshua adopted may have been intended only in a sense of indicating great respect.

Joshua's question sought to get to the heart of the man's errand. Joshua's referring to himself as *servant* and to the man as *my lord* are two more indications of Joshua's great respect for this messenger sent by God.

15. *The captain of the Lord's host* did not immediately reveal the nature of his

visit. His directive echoes the scene of the burning bush episode involving Moses at Mount Horeb. This incident provides another link between Moses as God's prophet and Joshua as his legitimate successor.

## II. Sovereign Plan

### Joshua 6:1-5

**1 Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.**

**2 And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.**

**3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.**

**4 And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.**

**5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.**

1. This note interrupts the captain's conversation with Joshua briefly (Joshua 5:15). In so doing, it reveals the "defensibility" aspect of *Jericho*. The fact that *none went out and none went in* speaks not only to the city's ability to control access but also to the reason for the heightened security measures: the threat posed by *the children of Israel*.

Joshua had previously sent two spies into the city to assess the situation there. One or more alert members of the populace had informed authorities not only of the intrusion itself but also where the spies were located. Under protection from

Rahab, the spies had learned that the city was in a state of panic because of reports of what the Lord had done to the kings east of the Jordan River (Joshua 2).

2. *The Lord* himself addressed Joshua. This could indicate either (1) that the captain prepared Joshua for the Lord to arrive on the scene or (2) that the Lord had chosen first to introduce himself as captain of the army before identifying himself more fully. Either would be in keeping with ways that God had interacted with great men in the past.

The description of the forthcoming conquest of *Jericho* in terms of *its king* and *mighty men of valour* reassured Joshua that the victory would be complete; it was to be a decisive win for Israel. Neither king nor soldiers would escape. The Lord did not say "I will give," but *I have given*. The victory is so assured that He spoke of it as already having happened.

The promised land was a gift from God to Israel. They had done nothing to earn or deserve such a gift; it was a demonstration of God's gracious treatment of them as His covenant people. Because of this fact, their life in the land was to be different from that of the nations they dispossessed. That could happen only with a "clean sweep" (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). God's assured victory in Jericho was to be indicative of the sort of military campaigns the people should plan on.

3. God's instructions for taking the land had to be followed. Merely circling a *city* was not an efficient military tactic. It could however heighten the fear the people inside were already feeling. But it could also lose the element of surprise, as Joshua effectively used later. Perhaps the latter was the Lord's intent so that the Israelites would realize that the victory was solely by His might, not theirs.

One estimate of the circumference of Jericho was approximately 2,000 feet. The marching would not take place right next

to the wall, of course, lest the Israelites be in danger of arrows. A safe distance might therefore require a walk of a mile or more.

According to Numbers 26:1-2, 51, there were 601,730 Israelite men able to bear arms. The amount of time the march would take depended on the width of the marching formation and the speed of the pace.

4. Unlike other nations, military success in Israel didn't depend on numbers, technology, or skill. Rather, it depended on the Lord's presence. *The ark* of the covenant would symbolize that presence. But to trust in the symbolism without actually being led by the Lord was a recipe for disaster (1 Samuel 4). Obeying God was the key to victory.

Other verses make clear that the priests marched on the first six days as well (Joshua 6:13-14). The deviation from the pattern of the six days marked the fact that *the seventh day* would bring a different result.

Armies need ways to communicate, and the *trumpets* of curved *rams' horns* served that purpose.

5. After days of hearing only shorter blasts of horns, the *long blast* on the seventh day would probably feel like a grand celebration for Israel. The shouts of *all the people* in combination with that blast would precede the Lord's bringing down *the wall of the city*. No other military action would be necessary for God to raze Jericho's defenses. For *every man* to go *straight before him* would ensure they did not get in each other's way.

Joshua 6:6-14 records the obedience of the people, the priests, and the armed men to Joshua's orders. Within these verses is his command for the army to remain completely silent until the time to shout. Only the priests' horns were to be heard.

### III. Simple Obedience

**(Joshua 6:15-16, 20)**

**15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the**

**city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times.**

**16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.**

**20 So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.**

15-16. *The people* obeyed everything that Joshua told them from the Lord, with no deviations.

This city was being conquered through God's power, not through Israel's might. Though it had not yet happened, it was as good as accomplished.

Joshua 6:17 contains a reminder to spare Rahab and her family. Everything else in the city was dedicated to destruction.

The importance of following directions was to be a central feature of Israelite faith henceforth. It was the key not only to conquering the land but also keeping it. The key to remaining in the land would be found only in continuing to recognize the land as a gift from God and honoring Him. To fail in this regard was a guarantee the Israelites would surely forfeit the gift God had given them.

20. *The people* once again followed every command the Lord had given to Joshua. We may wonder how many soldiers went up into the city after *the wall fell down flat*, but no record was made. We may guess that numbers are not given because they were not the key to victory. God's power was.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## PROPHET OF CONQUEST

### Into the Lesson

Name TV shows that feature a main character who always comes out on top by using unusual, improvised methods and/or devices.

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Why are such shows attractive?

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The book of Joshua offers multiple accounts that are as dramatic as such TV shows, and more so! Let's see what just one of its episodes can teach us in the twenty-first century.

### Into the Word

Read today's lesson text: Joshua 5:13-15; 6:1-5, 15-16, 20. Draw or use words to describe today's true story in a sequence of panels.

### Into Life

What spiritual preparations do you see in today's text and related texts regarding spiritual preparations to the victory at Jericho? Consider Joshua 5:14-15 in your response.

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To see the lesson in its wider context, note how and why victory at Jericho was followed by the defeat described in Joshua 7.

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### CHALLENGE for the week

How will you take personal obedience to the Lord more seriously?

*I will . . .*

### THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Victory follows obedience to the Lord.