

## THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

### Joshua 6

For those of us who have lived all our lives in peace time it's hard to understand what it must have been like to live through a war. Land was requisitioned. Possessions and property were commandeered. Beautiful flower gardens were dug up to grow vegetables. Food was rationed. Education was interrupted. Cities were bombed. Lights were extinguished. Loved ones were parted. Children were separated from their parents. Lives were lost or permanently scarred. Everything was dedicated to the war effort.

The book of Joshua is a book about war time. It's an exciting book to read when you are a child. The graphic details of the battle of Jericho make an excellent Sunday School story. But when you grow older some of the more gruesome details become less palatable. Verse 21 makes uncomfortable reading. 'They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it —men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.'

We won't cope with the events in this book unless we come to terms with the fact that it's all about war. And if we apply this to our Christian lives it reminds us that coming into the church of Jesus Christ is not only about becoming sons and saints. It's about becoming soldiers.

Paul wrote to Timothy, 'Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 2:3). In the letter to the Ephesians he says, 'Put on the full armour of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground' (Ephesians 6:13). At the end of his life he wrote, 'I have fought the good fight' (2 Timothy 4:7).

If entry into the promised land has lessons to teach us about the Christian life then a primary lesson is that we're in an army and it's war time.

Joshua chapter 5 records four significant events. First of all, the men had to be circumcised. That was a condition of the covenant, a condition that had lapsed during their time in the desert. Now they must put it right.

Circumcision is not part of the new covenant. We are in Christ. Christ was circumcised, and his obedience in that respect counts for us too. Paul said to the Colossians, 'In him you were also circumcised ... in the circumcision of Christ.'

The second event was the celebration of the Passover. Once again, that was part of the covenant which the LORD had made with them. And once again, for us, Christ is the key. Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. We don't repeat that sacrifice with the offering of a lamb. We remember his sacrifice as we share bread and wine.

Thirdly, the supply of manna ceased. The miracle of the manna was for abnormal times. God was leading them into settled, normal existence and so the manna ceased.

The normal Christian life is one in which we commemorate the miracles which God has performed in the past but we do not necessarily experience miracles in the present. The normal Christian life is just that – normal. It is a life lived according to the normal laws of the world which God has created for us, and given to us.

Perhaps the fourth event was the most significant of all. Verses 13 to 15: 'Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" The commander of the

LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.'

There were two armies, the army of Israel and the army of Jericho. Wrong.  
There were two commanders. The commander of Israel and the king of Jericho.  
Wrong.

There was a third army, the army of the LORD, and there was a third commander, the commander of *that* army. Joshua said, 'Are you for us or for our enemies?' The answer was 'Neither.'

That's so important for us to hear today. Whose side is God on, the Americans or the Arabs? The answer from the Bible is 'Neither'. God has his own agenda. The vital question is not whether God is on our side but whether we are on his side. In the book of Joshua God is the warrior king and Joshua had to fall down and submit to his will.

All that brings us to Joshua chapter 6 and the battle of Jericho. What a strange battle it was. I want us to focus on just three things: the commander of the army, the reason for the war, and the nature of the victory.

### THE COMMANDER OF THE ARMY

What is clear is that the commander of the army was the LORD. God had made a promise to Moses that he would bring his people into the land of Canaan. In Exodus chapter 23 verse 23 he gave this assurance: 'My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out.' Notice that: 'I will wipe them out.'

Coming back to Joshua chapter 6 and verse 2, 'Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men."' 'I have delivered Jericho into your hands.'

The LORD gave clear and specific instructions to the people through Joshua and it was imperative that they obeyed them. To echo the famous words of John F Kennedy, ask not what your God can do for you – ask what you can do for your God.

Jesus' army is not based on fear. It is based on love. But Jesus said, 'If you love me you will keep my commandments.'

### THE REASON FOR THE WAR

It's important to recognise that the conduct of this war with its total slaughter was not intended as a norm. In Deuteronomy chapter 20 God gave laws about going to war. Here's what it says in verse 10.

'When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace.' Only if that offer was refused was the battle to be joined, and even then total slaughter was not envisaged.

Verse 16 begins with the word, 'however'. 'However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. • Completely destroy them —the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites —as the LORD your God has commanded you.'

Why were such different rules to be applied by Joshua? The reason is in verse 18. 'Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God.'

Leviticus chapter 18 outlines some of those sins. Verse 6: 'No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations.' There follows a list of sexual partners

forbidden to men. This includes close relatives: mother, step-mother, sister, step-sister, grand-daughter, aunt, daughter-in-law. It includes any woman married to another man. Alongside these commands is this one: 'Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech' (verse 21). 'Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman' (verse 22). 'Do not have sexual relations with an animal' (verse 23).

God goes on: 'Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. ... And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you' (verses 24, 25, 28). Strong language.

Moral and spiritual infection had spread throughout the land and God had to cut it out completely. He had to act in judgment in order to restore righteousness.

In Ephesians chapter 6 (verse 12) Paul reminds us who the enemy is. 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.' Not flesh and blood but spiritual forces, the devil and all his schemes.

This is a great age in our society for tolerance. The only thing that cannot be tolerated is intolerance, but God is intolerant of sin.

#### THE NATURE OF THE VICTORY

This must be one of the strangest strategies in the history of military tactics. An armed guard marched round the city followed by seven priests blowing trumpets made of rams' horns. They were followed by other priests carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD and behind them a further detachment of armed soldiers. There was total silence apart from the eerie sound of the trumpets. For six days they marched round the walls of Jericho once. Then on the seventh day they circled the city seven times. On the seventh time when the priests sounded the trumpets Joshua told the people to shout. 'Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!'

When the trumpets sounded and the people shouted, the walls collapsed. The army rushed into the city and destroyed it.

The significant factor in all this was not the weapons of the soldiers or the leadership of Joshua. It was the presence of God, symbolised in the ark of the covenant. At God's appointed time the walls simply collapsed. Another miracle.

In 2 Corinthians 12 verse 9 Paul quotes God's word to him. 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Paul goes on to say, 'Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.'

How strong do you have to be for God to work through you? How fit do you have to be? How mentally and emotionally balanced do you have to be? How clever do you have to be? How influential? How successful? God says, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore we can say, 'I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.'