

September 14, 2025 (Lesson 2)

## VICTORY AND DEFEAT

1. **God Gives Instructions** (Joshua 5:13—6:10)
2. **Obedience Brings Victory** (Joshua 6:11-17, 20-27)
3. **Disobedience Brings Judgment** (Joshua 6:18-19; 7:1-26)

**Central Truth:** Obedience to God brings victory; disobedience brings defeat.

**Focus:** Recognize that obedience brings victory while disobedience brings judgment, and purpose to obey God.

**Evangelism Emphasis:** A Christian's victorious life testifies to faith in God.

**Golden Text:** "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

After being named Moses' successor, Joshua continued to serve him until his death on Mount Pisgah (Deut. 34:5-9), then took over as Israel's leader. Joshua must have felt intimidated by the responsibility laid on him, but God assured Joshua the Lord was with him just as He had been with Moses (Josh. 1:5). For this reason, he was to be bold and courageous in his leadership (v. 9).

Joshua was a clear model of a godly leader, exemplifying great faith and unswerving obedience. In many ways, Joshua foreshadowed the Lord Jesus. Joshua was a dynamic leader, spiritual warrior, and prophetic voice (see Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34). He led the people of God to victory over their enemies, bringing them into the Promised Land, acting as a "savior" to Israel. Indeed, *Joshua* is an English variant of *Jesus* (*Yeshua* in Hebrew).

In this lesson, we see Israel poised to enter into a series of military campaigns to conquer Canaan. As a nation, they had already consecrated themselves to the Lord and renewed their covenant with God (Josh. 3:5; 5:2-9). They were now camped before one of the most imposing and highly fortified Canaanite cities—Jericho. As daunting as this seemed in the natural, God assured them He would give them victory.

### 1. GOD GIVES INSTRUCTIONS

#### A. The Holy Commander (Joshua 5:13-15)

<sup>13</sup> 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? <sup>14</sup> 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? <sup>15</sup> 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.

Before Israel crossed the Jordan, Joshua had sent two spies to Jericho to assess the conditions of the city and discern the mood of the people (ch. 2). The spies learned the people of Jericho had heard about this mighty host approaching their city, and their hearts were fearful (v. 24). Yet, due to the imposing fortifications of Jericho, Joshua knew divine intervention was needed.

To assure Israel of the Lord's presence with them, God sent an angelic being to meet with Joshua. He called himself "[the] Commander of the army of the Lord" (5:14 NKJV). The phrase "army of the Lord" calls to mind other Scriptural references to an angelic army ready to do battle for God and His people (2 Kings 6:15-17; Matt. 26:53). But who is the Commander of this heavenly army? Some Bible scholars believe it was a high-ranking angelic military commander, comparable to the angel mentioned in Daniel 10:5-6. Others think this may have been the Archangel Michael, who is seen as a warrior-prince among the angelic legions (v. 13). Either of these is possible. However, this was probably a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus himself, appearing in angelic form. Let's explore this possibility.

First, who but the Lord himself is commander of the army of the Lord? In His sovereignty, God is often portrayed as commanding Heaven's armies (1 Kings 22:19; Pss. 46:6-7; 103:20-21). One of the divine names is *Jehovah-Sabaoth*, or "Lord of hosts"; that is, Lord of the (heavenly) armies (2 Sam. 6:2; Ps. 24:10). As the Lord of hosts, God is also the commander of Israel's armies (1 Sam. 17:45).

Second, Joshua referred to Him as “Lord” (5:14). In Hebrew this is *Adonai*, which means “lord” or “master.” This term can be used for human leaders. That is why some translations indicate that in this passage, “lord” could be rendered as “sir.” However, *Adonai* often refers to *God Almighty* (see Pss. 8:1; 135:5; Isa. 6:1). This understanding is reinforced by Joshua 6:2, where we see Jehovah speaking directly to Joshua. We must remember the chapter divisions were not in the original Hebrew Bible. There is no break in the flow of the story or the experience of Joshua from the end of chapter 5 through the beginning of chapter 6.

There is one final indication that God himself was speaking to Joshua. The angel told Joshua to take his sandals off, for he was standing on “holy” ground (5:15). This scene is reminiscent of Moses before the burning bush (Ex. 3:4-6). Indeed, no ordinary angel would act in this manner; in other instances where men prostrated to show honor to an angel or human, they were rebuked (see Acts 10:25-26; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). Only God deserves such worship. Thus, it seems evident the Lord himself, the One who reveals the Father (John 1:18), came to encourage Joshua and prepare him for the coming battle.

§      *What does Exodus 15:3 declare about the Lord? How have you experienced this reality in your life?*

#### **B. Clear Commands** (Joshua 6:1-10)

<sup>1</sup> Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. <sup>3</sup> And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout.

Jericho was one of the oldest inhabited sites in the world. It was actually a *city-state*; that is, “a city that was its own individual kingdom.” Probably the chief god of the people was a lunar deity, for *Jericho* means “moon city.” Located about six miles west of the Jordan River, it was the first and most imposing city-kingdom Joshua faced. Within the famous wall of Jericho was about ten acres of land housing around two thousand people. In preparation for attacking Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. This lets us know the invasion of the land occurred in the spring, probably about 1400 BC.

God gave clear instruction to Joshua about the method of attack. The Israelites were not to assault the city directly on their own. They were to follow the Lord’s instructions for seven days, and He would give them victory using divine methods.

Note the repetition of the number *seven* in these instructions. The Israelites were to march for seven days. On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times. There were seven priests carrying seven trumpets. As is evident throughout Scripture, *seven* is a sacred number. This abundance of sevens indicates the conquering of Jericho would be a divine event. It is also noteworthy that no mention is made of the Sabbath in this account. The seventh day of marching may have occurred on the Sabbath. This would have been fitting, again indicating the holy character of all that happened.

The focus of the seven days of marching was the ark of the covenant, the visible symbol of God’s power and glory. A contingent of soldiers were to march ahead of the ark, and another followed it. Accompanying the ark were priests dedicated to worshiping God. They were to blow “trumpets” made of rams’ horns. Known as *shofars*, their purpose was not musical, but rather for

signaling. The shofar called people to worship and soldiers to battle. Here they did both. The blowing of the shofars, along with the ark's presence, the Lord was with the Israelites.

All of these things—the ark, the shofar trumpets, the priests, the repetition of sevens—indicate what was going to happen at Jericho was not a human endeavor. It was the work of God, carried out by His people following His instructions.

### **Our Challenge**

Our challenge is not to understand God but to obey God. He gives promises, not explanations.—T. F. Tenney

## **2. OBEDIENCE BRINGS VICTORY**

### **A. Seven Days of Marching** (Joshua 6:11-17)

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

Can you imagine what it must have been like for the citizens of Jericho? On the first day of the siege, they likely expected Israel to attack immediately. When they saw them lining up on one side of the city, they must have thought that was the direction of the attack. But the residents watched in bewilderment as the Israelites formed a line marching around the city. It is likely the people inside the walls moved from place to place, wondering if Israel's new position would be the line of attack.

In addition, the Israelites remained silent (v. 10). Often, an attacking army would make a great deal of noise in an effort to intimidate the besieged people. Yet, Israel was hushed. The only noise was the sound of the shofars and the tramping of multiplied thousands of feet. (Remember, Israel was a vast host of people.) This silent siege was probably more intimidating than the roar of an army. The people of Jericho were befuddled. Yet, again we see Israel acting in obedience to God's instruction. They were doing things His way, and not acting according to usual military procedures.

Then on the seventh day, Joshua commanded the people to shout. What a shocking noise they must have made! After six days of quiet, suddenly there were trumpet blasts, then the yells and screams of hundreds of thousands of voices. The people of Jericho must have been terrified.

§      *According to Psalms 47:1-2 and 95:1-3, why should we shout to the Lord?*

## **B. The Defeat of Jericho (Joshua 6:20-27)**

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

<sup>26</sup> And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it. <sup>27</sup> So the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country.

Jericho was noted for its formidable wall. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of the ancient city from this period. The wall of Jericho was an elaborate structure. There was an outer wall in two vertical sections. The bottom section was 12 to 15 feet high and about 6 feet thick. Built directly on top of this was another section of wall, raising the total height to 30 feet or more. Within this outer wall was a dirt embankment built on a steep incline. Then there was a second wall of imposing height. God supernaturally caused these walls to fall down flat. Not only did they fall, but the archaeological evidence shows they fell outward—effectively creating a ramp for the Israelite soldiers to climb up. Thus, the Israelites had easy access, enabling them to rush inside the city.

In accordance with the promise of the two spies (Josh. 2:14; 6:17), the household of Rahab was spared (v. 23). The salvation of Rahab and her family was of great significance. Through this sinful, pagan woman the line of David would come, and eventually the Messiah (Matt. 1:5). How marvelous is the grace and providence of God!

The Israelites spared Rahab's household but no one else. They destroyed every living thing within the city—men, women, children, and livestock (Josh. 6:21). This seems extreme and cruel. Yet, if we consider the religious and moral culture of the Canaanite people, it becomes evident why God ordered the annihilation of Jericho. Like other Canaanites, the people of Jericho worshiped many false gods. These gods were placated with human sacrifice, often of children (see Deut. 12:31). Mass graves have been discovered with large numbers of skeletons of infants and young children sacrificed to Baal and other idols. In addition, the gods were worshiped with sexual immorality. Temple prostitutes, both female and male, were common. Besides bringing judgment on a cruel and wicked people, God wanted to prevent Israel from being seduced and corrupted by such practices (12:28-31; 18:9-14).

After the burning and destruction of the city, one final act remained—Joshua uttered a curse on Jericho (Josh. 6:26). This was a sign of God's judgment, and that this site was completely devoted to God. In this curse, Joshua prophetically declared the city would be rebuilt only at the cost of the children of the man who restored the city. This prophecy was fulfilled over five hundred years later during the reign of the evil King Ahab (1 Kings 16:34).

### **Victory Through Obedience**

Total obedience to God means we are to accept the risk of being obedient even when we cannot see victory, but realize the victory comes when we are obedient.—Bobby Stults (*SermonCentral.com*)

## **3. DISOBEDIENCE BRINGS JUDGMENT**

### **A. Divine Warning (Joshua 6:18-19)**

<sup>18</sup> And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. <sup>19</sup> But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord.

A standard rule of war in ancient times was when an army overthrew an enemy, they were allowed spoils from the conquered people. Indeed, God usually permitted this for Israel in their conquering of the Promised Land (see Deut. 2:35; 3:7; Josh. 8:27). However, the Lord had a different plan for Jericho.

In conquering Jericho, no spoils were allowed. Rather, there was to be destruction: “And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord” (Josh. 6:17). The Hebrew word for *accursed* is *herem*, and means “something banned for ordinary use and completely devoted to God.” It is not the usual word for something consecrated to God. Such a devoted thing is so utterly sacred that using it for any human service was forbidden. Such things were often destroyed to remove any possibility of their being used for another purpose. They were wholly the Lord’s.

We see the use of *herem* in the story of King Saul. God told Saul to utterly destroy Amalek—all the people, animals, everything. But Saul kept part of the livestock and King Agag alive. This was in violation of the devoted status of Amalek (1 Sam. 15:21). For this reason, Saul was rejected as king. Later, King Ahab was also guilty of this same sin (1 Kings 20:42).

There were only two exceptions to the destruction of Jericho. First was Rahab and her family. She was spared because of her faith in God and her kindness to the two spies. The second exception was metals, which could become part of the sacred treasury. The gold, silver, and bronze could be fashioned into objects of worship honoring God.

Why would God demand that Jericho be treated in this manner? It is likely the Lord considered this first conquered city to be the first fruit of the Promised Land. Thus, it was to be wholly given to God as a sign that all the land was truly His (see Pss. 24:1; 50:10). Israel was allowed use of the rest of the land, but it was all God’s property. There is a powerful lesson here. The principle of firstfruits



is basic to understanding our responsibility regarding God's blessings in our lives (see Prov. 3:9; Deut. 26:1-4).

God told the Israelites if they took any of the devoted things, they would be accursed themselves (Josh. 6:18). In other words, if they took what was devoted (*berem*), then they would become *berem*. Thus, they would be destroyed, just as the devoted object should have been destroyed. This is what happened to Ahab in the example cited above (1 Kings 20:42).

§      *How does the Lord warn us in Psalm 119:9-11, and what is the benefit of heeding His warning?*

### **B. Achan's Sin** (Joshua 7:1-26)

<sup>1</sup> But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel.

<sup>18</sup> And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. <sup>19</sup> And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. <sup>20</sup> And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: <sup>21</sup> When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

<sup>25</sup> And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

Sadly, despite God's warning, there was one Israelite who took devoted things for himself. His name was *Achan*, a name probably derived from the Hebrew for "troublesome." He would indeed prove troublesome to God's people (see Josh. 6:18; 7:25). Notice that Joshua 7:1 says "the children of Israel" sinned against the Lord. The transgression of this one man affected the entire nation. No one sins alone; when anyone sins, it affects all those around him.

Joshua and Israel's other leaders were unaware of Achan's sin. The next place they came to was Ai, a smaller, less fortified town. Joshua sent spies to investigate the city. They reported back that Ai could easily be conquered and only three thousand men were needed for victory (vv. 2-3). However, the people of Ai overwhelmed the Israelite troops, killing thirty-six men (vv. 4-5).

Joshua was distraught over this loss. Not knowing of Achan's transgression, he cried out to God. He tore his clothes and threw himself on the ground (v. 6)—a sign of mourning and sorrow. He complained to God for permitting this defeat (v. 7). Joshua also said this loss would be seen by the nations as a dishonor to God's reputation (vv. 8-9). The Lord's answer was straightforward—there was sin in the camp (v. 11).

At the Lord's direction, the Israelites cast lots to determine who had sinned. Casting lots was a common means of seeking God's will in ancient Israel, being mentioned over seventy times. In Acts 1:26, Jesus' disciples used lots to find a replacement for Judas among the Twelve. Here Israel's leaders cast lots, progressively narrowing down the potential offenders. Finally, the lot fell on Achan, and he confessed his sin (Josh. 7:20). He had seen a fine Babylonian garment, some gold and silver, and he "coveted them" (v. 21). This incident shows what possible harm can come from coveting. No wonder God prohibited it in the Ten Commandments. Overwhelmed by his carnal desires, Achan took for himself what belonged to God. This language is paralleled in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-10. They kept for themselves part of what they said they were giving to God. Like Achan, this couple faced the same fatal consequences.

God had said that anyone who kept any of the accursed things would become accursed (Josh. 6:18). This is what happened to Achan. He and his family, livestock, and all his possessions were destroyed. His family and animals were first stoned, and then everything was burned. We may wonder why Achan's family had to be punished. First, Achan hid the devoted things inside his tent.

His family probably knew this and did nothing about it. Therefore, they were complicit in his disobedience and deceitful cover-up. Second, sin has a contagious effect, and Achan's sin could easily spread. To destroy everyone connected to Achan was a preventative measure. Third, this fulfilled Joshua's word concerning any violation of God's covenant (7:15).

### **God Sees**

“God will evaluate every deed, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl. 12:14 NET).

## **TRUST AND OBEY**

The circumstances of God's people can change quickly. A dramatic victory at Jericho was followed by a stunning defeat at Ai. The determining factor was the disobedience of one man. In His grace, the Lord gives us blessings we do not deserve. Yet, His blessings are usually conditional—based on continued obedience. We would do well to learn this lesson from the stories of Jericho and Ai. As the old hymn says, “Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

### **Daily Devotions**

- M. Victory Through Obedience (2 Samuel 5:22-25)
- T. Confess Disobedience to God (Ezra 10:1-4)
- W. God Is With His People (Zechariah 8:20-23)
- T. Overcome Evil With Good (Romans 12:14-21)
- F. Victorious in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14-17)
- S. God Remembers Your Obedience (Hebrews 6:9-12)