



Life Group Study Series

Joshua: Week Five

13th November 2016

Bible

Joshua 5:13 - 6:27 (NIV)

The Fall of Jericho

13 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?"

14 "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?"

15 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.

6 1 Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

2 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.

3 March around the city once with all the

armed men. Do this for six days. **4** Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.

5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in."

6 So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." **7** And he ordered the army, "Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord."

8 When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the Lord's covenant followed them. **9** The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets

were sounding. **10** But Joshua had commanded the army, “Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!” **11** So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there.

12 Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. **13** The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the Lord and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets kept sounding. **14** So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

15 On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. **16** The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! **17** The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. **18** But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. **19** All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.”

20 When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city. **21** 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.

22 Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the prostitute’s house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her.” **23** So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother, her brothers and sisters and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.

24 Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the Lord’s house.

25 But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day.

26 At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho:

“At the cost of his firstborn son
he will lay its foundations;
at the cost of his youngest
he will set up its gates.”

27 So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.

Sermon Summary

The fall of Jericho presents us with some unique challenges. Apart from the miraculous collapse of the wall (which is often our focus) we have the troubling command of Joshua – from the Lord – to completely destroy the city; men, women, children and animals. The city, he says, is “devoted” to the Lord (v. 17). In my Bible, there is a textual note stating that “The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the Lord, often by totally destroying them.” The same term is used in vv. 18 and 21. This description horrifies us and raises the spectre of genocide and holy war. So how are we to understand this passage?

There are two ways to address a text like this. The first is to know a bit about the original context and the second is to place it in the context of the wider narrative of Scripture. Regarding the first there are a few things that are helpful to note. First, the language of totally destroying a place for the gods was well known in the ancient near east. Scholars have found several examples of this sort of language in the nations surrounding Israel. Second, as one commentator points out, this type of warfare was limited by geography (it was only to be practiced against nations in Canaan; Deut. 20:10-18), time (it was practiced during the conquest and only rarely outside of it; see 1 Sam. 15:1-3), and intent. The destruction of the Canaanites was a judgment of God on their wickedness (see Gen. 15:13-16; Lev. 18:24-28) and was motivated by a desire for religious loyalty (see Deut. 7:1-6). This context is helpful by removing the language of ethnic purity or racial superiority, but still doesn’t really help us escape the destruction of Jericho.

The second way to address this is in the context of the big story of the Bible. This grand narrative begins in Eden and ends in Jesus. The destruction of Jericho begins to make a bit more sense in this context. It reminds us that God’s plan from the beginning was the restoration of all things after the entry of sin and death into the world. The promises to Abraham and his descendants was that they would be a blessing to all nations and that they would be living, breathing example of what it looked like to live in relationship with the one true God. The violence of the conquest was aimed at the establishment of a kingdom of peace. In this regard, the battle of Jericho is a partial, incomplete and temporary step to this final destination. We should read the text and be dissatisfied. It doesn’t sound like a blessing, it doesn’t sound like peace! However, this dissatisfaction should point us to **the violence that Christ endured so that we might have peace**. This is the complete and eternal solution of God and replaces the violence of conquest with a peace that endures.

This wider perspective, perhaps, makes some sense of the emphasis on the salvation of Rahab in Joshua 6. The report of the destruction of the city alternates with reports of Rahab’s salvation. The two reports are almost identical in length!

Like Rahab, we have dedicated ourselves to the Lord and are therefore not dedicated to destruction and wrath. We have been saved and brought into a kingdom where violence has been taken upon Christ and we, the redeemed, have peace. This story, for all its difficulties, points us to the cross and should inspire gratitude for our salvation!

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a LifeGroup discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: What does being dedicated to something look like for you? Take some time to share with the group what you think this dedication or commitment looks like. (This may be a cause, a job or a task etc...)
2. Take a some time to read Joshua 5:13-6:27. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
3. Marc spent some time setting this passage in the wider context of the Bible, how does understanding the original context change how you view this text?
4. The big story of the Bible is summarised in four terms: creation, fall, redemption and perfection. The story of Joshua falls between fall and redemption. How does this big story inform or change your understanding of this passage?
5. The narrator has an obvious interest in Rahab's salvation, why do you think this might be?
6. The concept of dedicating something or someone to the Lord is a bit troubling in the context of war, but how do we meaningfully express our dedication to the Lord today?

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. How might God be encouraging your dedication to Him? Invite the Holy Spirit to empower each other's dedication to God.

Extras

To help inform this series, Marc also asks:

1. Next week we will be looking at Joshua 7 and 8. Have a read and please feel free to email Marc with any questions you have about the text.
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