



Joshua and the Battle of Jericho

Leader's notes



Background

A New Challenge

The Israelites had crossed the Jordan and camped at Gilgal, three miles away. It had only been a short time since the death of Moses. What might Joshua have been thinking and feeling?

Deuteronomy 34; Joshua 1:1-9

Joshua had some military experience. He had led Israel in the battle against the Amalekites 40 years earlier and they had recently defeated Arad, Og and Sihon (Numbers 21). They had captured a number of Amorite cities from King Sihon. Jericho was different. It is possibly the oldest city in the world. Historians think there has been a city there since at least 7,000BC. It was now about 1405 BC and the inhabitants had learnt much about building strong walls. The Israelites may not have had any equipment for scaling walls and had they attempted a long siege, Jericho's neighbours and allies may well have attacked them.

Jericho was the gateway to the Promised Land. If they were to live in the land, they had to get rid of this enemy stronghold or they would have been vulnerable to constant attack.

A Mystery Visitor

Joshua was met by 'the Commander of the Army of the Lord'. We know that this wasn't an angel because he accepted worship from Joshua, so he had to be a member of the Godhead. Many Bible scholars believe that this was Jesus. They think that he made a number of appearances on earth before he was born as a man. The book of Revelation also depicts Jesus as a Warrior King, (Revelation 19:11-16). Ephesians 6 tells us that our main battle is against 'the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly world'. Perhaps there was going to be a spiritual war as well as a physical one, driving back the spiritual forces that ruled Canaan at the same time as the land army invaded, (rather in the same way as we would send in the air force first today).

On whose side is God?

Why didn't the Lord tell Joshua that He was on the side of the Israelites?

God is on no one's side. He loved the people of Jericho as much as He loved the Israelites, but the time had come for Him to judge the Canaanites. Genesis 15:16. They were extremely corrupt. The Canaanite religion of spiritualism and serpent worship included child sacrifice and the sacred prostitution of both sexes.

Jesus will one day judge everyone. In Jericho, sadly, everyone died except Rahab and her family. Rahab knew very little about God but what she had heard, she believed. The miraculous stories about the God of the Israelites were well known in that part of the world. The Holy Spirit guided the spies to her house so that they were help each other

If the Canaanites were so terrified of the Israelites, why were they attempting to defend the city so strongly rather than surrender and worship the God of the Israelites?

One reason is that the Canaanites believed that each god had only one or two special powers. The Hebrew God was known to be a god of nature (they had crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan) and a god of battles (they had defeated Sihon and Og), but did he have any power against strong fortresses? The had great faith in their own defence system,

When Joshua revealed to the Israelites the plans for the ‘attack’ on Jericho, how do you think the people reacted to that idea?

God had certainly helped them in battle before but they had never been asked to do anything quite so odd. Did He choose something which was deliberately ridiculous in order to test their faithfulness (Joshua 1:16-18) or could there have been a good reason for it?

Each day the army led by the priests with the Ark of the Covenant marched the 3 miles from Gilgal and then around the city. It wasn’t large (try to find a photo) and it would only have taken about 30 minutes to march around it. How might the reactions of the inhabitants have changed as the week wore on? How would the soldiers have felt? The story shows the Israelites at their best because they remained humble, obeyed God to the letter and therefore won the victory.

What made the walls collapse?

See separate activity sheet

There are a few theories concerning why the walls fell down.

1. Shaky foundations
2. Earthquake
3. The sound/shock waves from everyone marching in unison weakened the walls

Excavations show the walls and foundations to have been strong. Houses were built within the walls so they were extremely thick.

An earthquake would have damaged the camp at Gilgal, which was only 3 miles away. The Bible says that every part of the wall fell ‘in its’ place’, with the exception of the part where Rahab lived.

In the ‘attack’ on Jericho, God showed His power in a way that everyone could understand. With the Ark of the Covenant taking such a prominent position, it would have been impossible to show more clearly that it was God who had given Jericho into the hands of the Israelites.

Difficult issue

In the book of Joshua, the Bible appears to condone the killing of huge numbers of people. This is a difficult issue and we cannot look at it fully here. If someone raises the question, it might help to consider this:

- a) God does not lightly destroy a whole city – compare this with the story of Jonah and Nineveh. Jonah 1:1; 3 (especially verse 10); 4:10-11
- b) The people of Jericho had had plenty of time to respond in some way as Nineveh but the only one who did was Rahab.



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