

# **“Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho”: Really?**

**JOSHUA 5:13-6:27; REVELATION 11:15-19**

Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • July 9, 2017 • Big Springs Community Church

**C**ongregation of Christ: A guest pastor asked the congregation, “Do you know how I got my car?” So he proceeded to tell his story of how he went to a car dealership because he really wanted to have a car. When he found his “dream car,” he walked around it, praying for it, and “laying his hands” on it. The next Sunday, in his sermon, he preached how it is God’s will that his anointed ones –which included himself – must live comfortably, including having a car. And that the congregation will be blessed if they would provide for the pastor’s car. And that was how he got his car!

This is just one example of the abuse of the pulpit by health and wealth false teachers. What he did walking around the car and praying for it is what’s popularly called a “prayer walk.” This practice became popular starting in the late 80s among Pentecostals. A person will walk around a neighborhood, a school, or a building while praying that the area will be rid of evil spirits. This practice is also popularly known as a “Jericho Walk.” In recent years, socially active, liberal churches sponsor Jericho Walks in response to immigration, abortion, racial discrimination, same-sex marriage, climate change, and many other causes.

Obviously, the name “Jericho Walk” stems from our text today. After crossing the Jordan River on dry ground, the Israelites were commanded by God to build a stone memorial of the event. They encamped at Gilgal, a few miles east of Jericho, where God reinstituted two of the most important ceremonies in Israel’s history: circumcision and Passover. After four days’ rest, the men of Israel were ready to conquer Jericho.

While waiting for God’s command to proceed to Jericho, Joshua encounters a mysterious man who called himself “Commander of the Army of the Lord.” After this, the Lord gave Joshua instructions on how to proceed with the battle against Jericho. The plan? Not very strategic: Walk around Jericho’s walls for seven days, blow your trumpets and shout. If you obey these instructions, the Lord will surely give the city into your hands. Right.

## **The Mysterious Commander**

When a man suddenly appeared before him with a drawn sword, Joshua might have thought that he was an enemy warrior. So he asked to make sure, “*Are you for us or for our enemies?*” But why did this mystery man answer “No”? It is the right answer for he is “the commander of the army of the Lord.” He is not a mere human commander, but of divine origin sent by God himself. Two things confirm this.

First, Joshua fell on his face and worshiped him. After the man identified himself as the commander of the Lord’s army, Joshua knew the man was really God in human form. If the man was only an angel, he would have told Joshua not to worship him. Worshiping any other creature is a heinous crime against God. For example, after an angel showed the apostle John everything in heaven and what was about to happen on earth, he fell down at the feet of the

angel to worship him, but the angel rebuked him, *"You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets ... Worship God"* (Rev 22:8-9).

Second, the man told him, *"Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy."* It's remarkable that these are the same words that the Lord spoke to Moses at the burning bush, where the Lord said to Moses, *"Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground"* (Exo 3:5). These same words confirm Joshua's appointment by God as Israel's leader after Moses died.

In Exodus 23:20-23, God promised Moses that an "angel" will lead them into the Promised Land. The Lord promised, *"Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared."* If they were obedient, God promised, *"then I will be an enemy to your enemies"* and he will *"blot them out."* The Lord fulfilled this promise to Moses when he appeared to Joshua before he gave Jericho into the hands of Israel.

But who is this *"commander of the Lord's army"* with a drawn sword? There are two other places in the Bible where he appears. The first one is when the angel of the Lord with a drawn sword blocked Balaam on his way to meet with Balak the king of Moab, the enemy of Israel. Balaam was a sorcerer from the East who was hired by Balak to put a curse on Israel so the Moabites could defeat Israel. At first, Balaam did not see the angel, but *"the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face"* (Num 22:31).

The second incident was when proud King David conducted a nationwide census to prove how strong his army was by the number of able-bodied men in his kingdom. Because of this sin, the Lord sent a pestilence in which 70,000 Israelites died. David repented and appealed to God to stop the plague. And the angel of the Lord appeared to David, *"and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces"* (1 Chr 21:16).

The term *"commander of the Lord's army"* therefore was a divine being sent by God to lead God's heavenly angels in battle on behalf of his people. When the Syrian army surrounded northern Israel, Elisha saw God's angelic host, visible only to him, on the mountain, *"the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha ... Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, 'Please strike this people with blindness.' So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha"* (2 Kgs 6:17-18). It is the Lord's angelic host who fought for his people. So we read the psalmist praising God because of his countless angelic host, *"Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word ... Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will!"* (Psa 103:20-21)

Who then is this *"commander of the Lord's army"*? It is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who made his appearance in the Old Testament – before he was incarnate – as the *"Angel of the Lord."* Moses, the false prophet Balaam, Joshua, and David and the elders of Israel, all fell down on the ground and worshiped him. Jesus confirms this in John 8:56-59 when he said to the shock of the Jewish leaders, *"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad ... before Abraham was, I AM."* He claimed to be the eternal God.

This is a reminder that we are to worship only God, not any other being or thing. Some people adore created beings such as angels and spirits, created things such as mountains and trees, or creatures such as popular celebrities, material things such as money, or desires such as fame and power. But this is idolatry, and God is a jealous God, wrathful against idolaters.

## **The Marching Orders**

In Chapter 6, the scene shifts to the situation inside Jericho. Having heard of God's mighty acts in saving Israel from Egypt, drying up the Red Sea and the Jordan River, and defeating their mighty enemies during their 40 years in the wilderness, the hearts of the king and people of Jericho melted. So they shut all the gates of the city so that no one can move in or out. They must have thought that Israel, having no weapons to break down the fortifications, will not be able to conquer the city. But they had a false confidence in their strong wall.

The Lord gave instructions to Joshua as to his military strategy. And what kind of strategy is this? March around the city for seven days, shout as loud as you can, and the walls will crumble to the ground. Joshua did not question this military maneuver, but what would have the rest of Israel thought? But the Lord promised in verse 2, *"See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor."* How will marching and shouting conquer this formidable fortress and mighty men?

The Lord gave specific marching orders. Seven priests continuously blowing seven trumpets of rams' horns would lead the march, followed by the ark of the covenant. Some of the armed men would guard the front, while others would bring the rear guard. They would march around the city once for the first six days, and on the seventh day, march around seven times. How many times then did they march around the city? Not 14, not 7, but 13 times! After completing the seventh circle on the seventh day, the seven priests would blow their seven trumpets with a long blast. When the people hear the long blast, they will together shout with all their might, and the wall of the city would fall down flat.

Notice that the number 7 is used fourteen times in this chapter, four times in verse 4 alone. Number 7 represents God's perfection and completion. When they had marched around the city 7 times on the 7th day, God's plan is completed. Jericho would fall on the 7th day. After the people perfectly and completely obeyed the Lord's instructions, and the city wall fell to the ground, just as he promised.

This 7-day march around Jericho reminds us of the 7th-day Sabbath of creation: six days of work and rest on the seventh. Israel worked for the first six days, and the conquest of the city was accomplished on the seventh, giving them rest from their battle. Even more so, the 7-day march around Jericho happened after they celebrated the Feast of the Passover. What feast came after the Passover? It was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was celebrated for seven days. The first and seventh days were days of rest and holy assemblies. On all seven days, there were burnt offerings, food offerings and sin offerings (Lev 23:4-8). In other words, the 7-day march around Jericho paralleled the worship services during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. Therefore, Israel conquered Jericho after they obeyed and worshiped the Lord!

Once again, the ark of the covenant, representing God's presence with Israel, was the center of the whole event. He fought for his people then, and he fights for us today. When we trust in his power, his wisdom, his mercy, and not in ours, he fulfills his promises in his Word. We are able to obey his commands to fulfill his purpose through the Holy Spirit who indwells us. So we read in Zechariah 4:6, *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."*

## **The One-Sided Battle**

Because the major portion of the conquest of Jericho was God's destruction of its wall, the battle itself was anticlimactic. Joshua did not "fight the battle of Jericho." God did because he is the Divine Warrior, *"The LORD is a man of war"* (Exo 15:3), and *"The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves"* (Zec 3:17).

After the wall crumbled, Jericho's terrified warriors were no match for the 40,000 confident Israeli warriors. *"Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword ... And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD"* (verses 21 and 24). Passages like these are the source of outrage and unbelief for many. How can God order this "ethnic cleansing" of innocent men, women, children and animals? For example, an Old Testament professor says, "I think at that these stories were written in a tribalistic context, and thus reflect that context—this is how stories of gods and nations were told. Further, the writers exaggerated and/or freely shaped the past for theological and/or propagandistic purposes."<sup>1</sup> For him, these Bible events are not history, but mere exaggerations, propaganda, or folklore.

But the reason why God ordered the complete destruction of Jericho is this: God has determined that his patience toward its inhabitants has run out. Their wickedness has reached heaven itself. In Genesis 15:16, God told Abraham that his descendants would return to Canaan from Egypt after 400 years, because *"the sin of the Amorites is not yet complete."* They will suffer judgment because their sin for the next 400 years will be intolerable to God. When Israel reached Canaan, there was only six days left to repent. Every unrepentant sinner would be destroyed, but the prostitute Rahab believed and repented of her sin. The two spies who went into the city promised Rahab that they would be spared because she helped them escape. She believed in God's promise that the city would fall. And they kept their promise.

At this point, it would be helpful to mention archaeological evidence on Jericho. Ancient Jericho was located next an abundant spring on the western Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea. It was settled as early as 8000 B.C., and was strategically located because it was the gateway to the rest of Canaan from the east. That is why God directed Joshua to conquer it first. In the early 1900s, several archaeologists started excavating and examining the site. Some rejected the Biblical Jericho event, but others support it. Those who affirm the story cite the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Enns, "people are just dying all over the place"—reading the Old Testament historical books," <https://www.peteenns.com/people-are-just-dying-all-over-the-place-reading-the-old-testament-historical-books/>.

following evidence: (1) strong fortifications; (2) destruction just after spring harvest; (3) the people had no opportunity to flee; (4) the siege was short; (5) the walls were leveled, possibly by an earthquake; (6) the city was not plundered; and (7) the city was burned.<sup>2</sup>

**D**ear friends, the total destruction of the idolatrous people of Jericho serves as a graphic warning to the world. At the sound of the final trumpet announcing the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, God will destroy all the unrepentant people of the cities of the world. Three passages describe this event: *“And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”* (Matt 24:31). *“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed* (1 Cor 15:52). *“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God”* (1 Thes 4:16).

Lastly, in Revelation 11:15-19, John describes this final judgment:

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” ... Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.*

On the last day, there will be a loud trumpet sound from the seventh angel, and loud voices in heaven. Notice the parallel between the Israelites’ blowing the trumpets on the seventh day and the great shout by the people.

Then in Revelation 19:11-16, we read about the Divine Warrior on the White Horse:

*Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*

The “Commander of the Lord’s Army” has now become the conquering “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” Just as Joshua worshiped the Commander, let us worship our Conquering King. Let us look forward to the loud Seventh Trumpet, and then shout for joy with all our might, *“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory”* (Rev 19:6-7). Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Bryant G. Wood, “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence,” May 1, 2008, <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/Did-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx#Article>. Accessed July 3, 2017.