

p 37 WEEK 5: A FOOLISH PLAN, A DECISIVE OUTCOME

Joshua 6:1–27

The Place of the Passage

It is difficult to imagine which obstacle would be more intimidating: the flood-swollen Jordan, or Jericho. Having witnessed the wonders of God’s parting the Jordan, Israel should have every reason to trust that the Lord is with Joshua as they approach Jericho (Josh. 3:7). In chapter 6 all eyes are on this fortified city, a city built for a fight and filled with men trained for war. But this city, as the spies found out, was melting in fear (2:11), fully aware of Yahweh’s power. The God of Israel was the God of heaven and earth, and he had a claim on Jericho. The manner in which the Lord took this city was carefully tuned to make a point, both to the surrounding peoples and to Israel.

The Big Picture

The author gives us a play-by-play telling of Jericho’s capture, a story carefully designed to make a point about God’s promises and how he brings them to fulfillment.

p 38 Reflection and Discussion

Read through Joshua 6:1–27, then reflect on this section of Scripture using the questions below. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 401–403; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Joshua Receives the Battle Plan (6:1–5)

Throughout the book of Joshua we hear a cadence of commands—and promises making them possible. In 6:1–5, what does God promise? What does he command?

As this book unfolds, the ark of the covenant is consistently in the middle of the action. How would you explain the role of the ark in Israel’s life? What implication does this have for the moral legitimacy of Israel’s invasion and destruction of these Canaanite cities?

2. Joshua Carries Out the Battle Plan (6:6–27)

This chapter builds suspense, especially when Joshua tells the people to shout (vv. 16–20). Just before they shout, Israel receives a set of commands. What is the significance of the timing of these commands?

p 39 Joshua's victory at Jericho is total. List every indication, in the story, of Joshua's complete victory. Then, read Genesis 15:12–21 and state one reason for the totality and timing of this battle.

The nation has crossed the Jordan and taken Jericho with perfect success. How should the people of Israel and the reader of the story respond to this success?

Joshua 6:21 is difficult for some readers. The destruction of men, women, children, the elderly, and animals should sober us as we read. Thankfully, we may trust God's Word at every point without grasping fully why God says or does what he does. Assuredly God is good (Ps. 119:68) and just (Gen. 18:25), and his Word proves true (Prov. 30:5; Ps. 12:6). What is your best explanation for why God is just in issuing these orders? Several passages may be helpful in working this out, including Genesis 1:1; 15:15–16; Deuteronomy 9:5; 20:10–18; and Leviticus 18:24–25; 20:1–5.

In Hebrews 11:30–31, two feats of faith are mentioned—one carried out by Israel and another by a Gentile. What do these parties have in common?

p 40 First Corinthians 1:18–31 describes salvation through Christ similarly to how we might describe salvation at Jericho. Read that passage and answer these questions: How does God save? Whom does God save? Why does God save in this way?

Read through the following *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these reflections have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

GRACE OF GOD. God alone deserves credit for this victory at Jericho. The marching, trumpets, and shouting by themselves would accomplish nothing. It was the Lord who made Jericho fear, and it was the Lord who made her walls fall. And yet, what Christ accomplished for sinners through his death and resurrection is infinitely more profound and humanly impossible than what we witness here. As we consider our own salvation in Christ, we can take no credit for it. In Ephesians 1 the apostle Paul reflects on the spiritual blessings that come to us through Christ, including predestination, adoption, redemption, forgiveness, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. These blessings come from the Father (Eph. 1:3–6), Son (vv. 7–12), and Spirit (vv. 13–14),

and each blessing is given to magnify the praise of God's glorious grace (vv. 6, 12, 14). From the beginning to the end of our salvation, God does the work, so that our boast is in him alone (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 1:31; Eph. 1:8–9; 2:8–9).

GOD'S FOOLISH PLAN TO SAVE. To any human observer, Joshua's plan for battle was utterly ridiculous—but it was not Joshua's plan. Given to him by Yahweh himself (Josh. 6:2–5), Joshua's battle plan amplified God's wisdom, not man's. The Lord could have flattened the city ahead of Israel's arrival, but he did it like this to confound human wisdom and demonstrate his strength. The apparent folly of God's salvation strategies is even more profound at the [p 41](#) cross. There Jesus Christ died to flatten the fortified city of sin and death and hell. For, in the cross, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ... so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor. 1:27, 31).¹

Whole-Bible Connections

"DEVOTED FOR DESTRUCTION." Suspense builds across the chapter leading to Israel's "shout." After receiving instructions concerning the shout, Joshua gives the instructions to shout and commands the people to do so. But before they can give their shout, Joshua speaks to them about things that are to be "devoted to destruction" (Josh. 6:17–21). This was not an oversight remembered at the last minute. Its placement highlights its importance. The point of total destruction was to signal to Israel that this invasion and this place were not theirs but the Lord's (Deut. 20:10–18). This was not an imperialistic human invasion but a divine judgment. When we come to the New Testament, we see the battle moved to the realm of the unseen. Through his resurrection, Jesus is now exalted over *every* unseen power and enemy of God (Eph. 1:20–22), and he empowers his people for battle against these forces (6:10–20). Likewise, the new creation will be cleansed of all evil (Rev. 21:8).

TOTAL OBEDIENCE FOR A TOTAL VICTORY. When the walls fell down, they "fell down flat" (Josh. 6:20). When Israel took the city, they "devoted all in the city to destruction" (v. 21). And as if that were not enough, after rescuing Rahab, "they burned the city with fire, and everything in it" (v. 24), and Joshua put a curse on anyone "who rises up and builds this city" (v. 26)—a judgment that would actually be fulfilled several hundred years later (see 1 Kings 16:34). An exception to Israel's obedience will play out in the chapter ahead, but the lesson learned here is how God keeps his promise of blessing for obedience. Just as God promised in Joshua 1:8, Joshua's law-keeping brought military success. In this way, Jericho serves as a paradigm for every future battle that Israel would face in the Old Testament. Moreover, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ, a second Joshua, wins the victory by means of keeping God's law perfectly (Heb. 10:5–10)

¹ J. I. Packer and Lane T. Dennis, "[Series Preface](#)," in *Joshua, A 12-Week Study*, ed. J. I. Packer, Dane C. Ortlund, and Lane T. Dennis, Knowing the Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 3–41.

and defeating his enemies with his own counterintuitive military operation—namely, the incarnation and crucifixion (Heb. 2:14–15).

Theological Soundings

JOSHUA'S SWORD AND THE JUSTICE OF GOD. In Joshua's hand there is a sword covered with the blood of women and children. We should be careful not to measure God's justice by our own standards (Deut. 32:4). We are finite [p 42](#) and fallen in our understanding. Yet thoughtful readers will wonder why God would command this slaughter. This is difficult, but let us consider what we know from Scripture. First, God is the creator and therefore the owner of all things. Life is his to make or take (Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6). Second, we were created to glorify God, but every human is born guilty, corrupt, and condemned under sin (see Rom. 5:12–21). This is the reason that everyone eventually dies. Third, as with many aspects of Israel's life under the old covenant, there are many foreshadowings of future realities, including salvation but also judgment. Here, as in Noah's generation, God brings that future sentence into the present. Thus God's conquest of Canaan is not a model for us to imitate but a pattern of God's final judgment in hell. Fourth, the Lord was patient with the Canaanites, having allowed generations for the sin of this people—which included child sacrifice—to come to full flower (Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:24–26; 20:1–5; Deut. 9:5). Rahab's story highlights God's purpose to save anyone who finally turned to faith. Fifth, as a new Eden, the land was a sacred space for a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6; see also Lev. 18:24–25; Rev. 21:8). This explains why God's commands for total destruction were confined to the boundaries of Canaan (Deut. 20:10–18), and why Israel would be likewise judged if she fell to the same sin (Lev. 18:26–28; Deut. 28:25–68). Removing the unrepentant guarded Israel's purity (Deut. 7:3–4; 12:29–31). For all these reasons, this was not a human invasion for ethnic cleansing but a divine invasion for judgment and salvation (Deut. 32:43), a dramatic portrayal of what is required for God to be with man. Today, Christians wield a sword heavier and more severe than anything Joshua's army carried. Jesus' cross is covered in blood as well, and it covers our sins through faith (Rom. 3:25). But apart from faith, the gospel of the cross also warns of eternal judgment for sin (Rom. 1:16–18).

STUBBORNNESS OF SIN. The Lord gave Abraham a timeline for Israel's move into the land: “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Gen. 15:16). The completion finally came, and Joshua 6 is what it looked like. The depravity of the human race is exemplified in the stubbornness of this Canaanite city. Certain of the power of Israel's God, after six whole days they would not bow to him. This is a picture of the condition of every human heart. Knowing our sin, apart from God's grace we still refuse to turn to him.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Joshua 6:1–27 for your life. How does this passage lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises? Write down your reflections under the three headings we have considered and on the passage as a whole.

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Joshua 6:1-27

As You Finish This Unit ...

Humble yourself before God in prayer, recognizing your salvation from a greater enemy than Jericho and by means even more foolish than a shout. Boast in the Lord alone for his grace and the foolishness of his cross.