

“The Sound of the Trumpet”

The seventy-seventh in a series: “I Will be Your God and You Will Be My People.”

Texts: Joshua 6:8-26; Revelation 11:15-19

On a number of occasions, the people of Israel witnessed YHWH’s miraculous power first hand. Now they will witness the massive walls of the city of Jericho collapse before their very eyes. The city of Jericho, which is the main obstacle preventing Israel from taking of all Canaan, will be no more. Israel’s stunning victory over Jericho will be yet another sign to God’s people that he keeps his promises, while at the same time the fall of Jericho is also a sign to all of the inhabitants of Canaan that YHWH is about to give Israel that land he had promised to give them centuries before. When the seven trumpets sound seven times and the people of Israel offer up a great shout, YHWH will not only bring down the walls of Jericho, he is putting the nations of the earth on notice. YHWH is Lord of all the nations of the earth, whether they acknowledge him or not.

The fall of Jericho is certainly one of the best known events in all the Old Testament. While many only remember this story from their Sunday school days, few people see the fall of Jericho as an important biblical event designed to point God’s people ahead to the day of final judgment. But when placed within the context of the overall story of redemption, the fall of Jericho is both the sign that Israel will possess the whole of the land of promise, and at the same time serves as a warning that a day of final judgment is yet to come upon all those nations who reject YHWH. What happens to Jericho when the trumpets sound and the people shout is a graphic picture of what will happen on the last day in human history when the angel sounds the seventh trumpet and there is a loud shout in heaven.

But this same event is also used by enemies of Christianity to show, supposedly, the cruelty and bloodthirsty character of the God of the Old Testament. When seen through the eyes of faith, the fall of Jericho is one of those events in which we clearly see the holiness of God as he severely punishes those who reject him and who are without excuse. But the fall of Jericho is also an event to which those who reject God will point as a sign of how unfair God is and how he has no right to be so cruel to innocent men, women and children. This is why this why the enemies of Christ so glibly dismiss this account as mythological. This is also why we must see the fall of Jericho in its redemptive historical context—it is not just a Sunday School story—and why we must remind those who mock God and his Christ that the fall of Jericho is a graphic warning to them of what will happen at the end of the age. Mock God all you wish, but remember what happened at Jericho will happen to all the nations of the earth on the last day.

As we saw in Joshua 5, it was during the time when Israel was camped at Gilgal and the men of Israel were recovering from circumcision, that Joshua left the camp to scout the route from Gilgal to Jericho. Joshua reports how he encountered a mysterious stranger with drawn sword who identified himself as the commander of the LORD’s army. While Joshua was concerned to know this man’s intentions—did he side with Israel or not?—the language Joshua uses indicates that this mysterious stranger is none other than the pre-Incarnate Jesus Christ. This is why he commanded Joshua to take off his sandals, because that place was holy. Although the man never answered Joshua’s question about his loyalties, Joshua knew that the commander of the LORD’s army was there to lead the hosts of heaven into battle on behalf of Israel. This is what ensures Israel’s victory over Jericho and all of Canaan, provided that the people of Israel trust in YHWH, rather than their own strength to give them the land which God has promised.

As chapter 6 of Joshua opens, the LORD gives Joshua very specific instructions about how Israel was to

proceed in engaging the city of Jericho in battle. The walled portion of Jericho was not large (about seven acres) but the city was well fortified. Although Israel had an army of about 40,000 men, they did not have the equipment used by armies of that period to engage in a protracted siege. In fact, throughout this section of Joshua we read nothing of military preparations on the part of the army. Instead, we read of the nation's amazing devotion to YHWH and to the leadership of Joshua.

The instructions given by the LORD in Joshua 6:2-6 to Joshua bear this out. *“And the LORD said to Joshua, ‘See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.’”* Since the city of Jericho and its spoils will be a gift from YHWH to Israel, Jericho will not fall because of Joshua's military brilliance nor Israel's great military power. Jericho will fall when Israel fulfills the instructions given them by YHWH. It will not be a brilliant military operation which will bring down the city—rather, it will be a seven-day worship service which leads to Jericho's destruction.

The repeated reference to the number seven throughout chapter 6 reminds us of the perfection of God's plan. The use of this number also points to the fact that the fall of Jericho is God's gift to his people and is in some way tied to Israel's seven-day celebration of the Feast of Unleaven Bread which follows the Passover—just celebrated by Israel. The symbolism here is important. The people of Israel have marched into Canaan behind the ark of the covenant, they have consecrated themselves to YHWH, they have crossed through the river on dry ground, they have built a monument as commanded by YHWH, the men have received circumcision in a mass covenant renewal ceremony, the people have celebrated their first Passover in the promised land, and now Jericho will fall after Israel devotes seven days to marching around the city as a sign to Israel that God keeps his promises and as a sign to Jericho (and those in Canaan watching), that YHWH is the Lord and that he is Israel's shield and defender.

None of this is coincidental, as this clearly demonstrates that at this point in Israel's history, the people fully trusted in YHWH to do as he promised. All those in Jericho who knew that they were living on land YHWH had promised to Israel, still refused to repent of worshipping false gods and still willingly relied upon the strength of their walled city to deliver them from Israel. While Jericho's thick walls could protect them from Israel's army, the walls could never protect them from the power of YHWH. When YHWH and the heavenly hosts fight for Israel, led by the commander of the LORD's army, complete and total victory is secured.

And so as we turn to our text (Joshua 6:8-27), we read the amazing account of the fall of Jericho and of God's holy verdict upon all of Jericho's inhabitants.

As we go through this passage, notice the stress which falls upon God's sovereign action and Israel's obedience to those plans revealed by the Lord to Joshua. The people have been given their marching orders (literally), and now the time has come for them to act. In verses 8-9, we learn that plans revealed in Joshua 6:2-6 are meticulously carried out under the direction of Joshua. *“And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them. The armed men were walking before the priests who were blowing the trumpets, and the rear guard was walking after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually.”*

Imagine what the people in Jericho must have been thinking as an Israelite battle array advanced from Gilgal toward Jericho. The people fully expected an Israeli attack and holed up inside the walled portion of the city, where they thought they would be safe. But instead of attacking the city's fortifications, the procession marched completely around the city, with the only sound being that of a ram's horn. As we read in verse 10, "*But Joshua commanded the people, 'You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout.'*"

The people of Israel, who were watching from a distance, along with those marching around the city, were specifically instructed not to say anything and remain silent. As the soldiers, priests and those Levites carrying the ark made their way around the city, the silence was broken only by the sound of a ram's horn. It would have been an eerie scene. One thing which characterized ancient battles was noise—not only the sound of men and animals in battle, but opposing armies would often try to intimidate one another by the bravado of their battle yells and chants. Not so here. There was to be only silence except for the sound of the rams horns. As we read in verse 11, "*so [Joshua] caused the ark of the LORD to circle the city, going about it once. And they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp.*" The people of Jericho must have watched all this with a mixture of fear and curiosity.

With that, day one of the campaign was over, but there were still six more days to go. Verses 12-14 describe the action which took place on the second day. "*Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD walked on, and they blew the trumpets continually. And the armed men were walking before them, and the rear guard was walking after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually. And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.*" Again, while the Israelites do exactly as they are commanded and march around Jericho in silence except for the blowing of rams horns, we can but wonder at the reaction of those in Jericho shut up inside the city, watching this for six consecutive days.

In verses 15-16, Joshua comes to the climax of the narrative—the events of the seventh day. We read that "*on the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, 'Shout, for the LORD has given you the city.'*" When the Israelites began the same process for the seventh consecutive day, this time when the procession marched completely around the city and did not return toward Gilgal. They kept going. Seven times the procession made its way around the city. There must have been a growing fear inside Jericho that something terrible was about to take place.

Meanwhile, in verse 17, Joshua gave the Israelites very specific instructions. "*And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent.*" Since no one in Jericho had repented, no one in Jericho would be spared. Everyone in the city—except Rahab and her family—are to be killed. As we saw in Joshua 2, Rahab and her family is to be spared because she believed that the land was YHWH's, that YHWH was with Israel, and she and her family openly acknowledged that YHWH was the God of heaven and earth. Because she believed this, she hid the two Israelite spies and lied to her own king. So, Joshua will make good on the promise made to Rahab by the spies and she and her family will be spared when the final assault upon Jericho is made.

It is important to notice the language Joshua uses here: *the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction*. That wrath which was about to come upon Jericho is not just the wrath of a

victorious nation (Israel) upon the loser (Jericho). This is not a case of “to the victor go the spoils.” Instead, Joshua is indicating that the nation of Israel was YHWH’s agent for the visitation of his wrath upon Jericho for its sins against him—the worship of false gods and the occupation of that land which he had given to Israel. We get these sense here that the impending destruction of Jericho and the death of all of its inhabitants is an offering of sorts to YHWH.¹ Remember that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had lived long in this land and that the people of Canaan knew full-well of YHWH’s greatness and power. The very fact that the inhabitants of Jericho had time to repent and did not, even though they knew of what YHWH had done to Egypt, Amalek, Og and Sihon, makes their lack of repentance all the more remarkable. God graciously gave them six days, but then the city had been devoted to YHWH for destruction. This is not to say that the people of Jericho could not repent, but that they did not repent when given every chance to do so. Their complete destruction will be swift and certain.

But these are not the only instructions YHWH gave to Joshua. In verses 18-19, Joshua reveals another commandment to Israel. *“But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.”* Certain items are devoted to destruction and certain things are to be devoted to the LORD.² The principle here is that since Jericho’s inhabitants and their property were to be devoted to total destruction, the people of Israel must not take possession of any of them. This list of things banned includes all personal property and animals—things which typically constitute the “spoils of war.” The people of Israel are forbidden from taking anything from the remains of the city, nor are they to enslave any the people of Jericho. Only the precious metals are to be spared.

The reason for this prohibition is stated in Deuteronomy 20:16-18: *“But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God.”* There must be no possibility whatsoever that the people of Israel be led astray by the survivors of these cities, or through their religious relics and practices.³ Should the people of Israel fail to subject these places to complete destruction, or collect any personal property from them, they themselves will come under God’s judgment. The warning is crystal clear.

This complete and total destruction of the pagan Canaanites is to serve as a graphic object lesson of that final judgment yet to come at the end of the age when everything perishes by fire (as described in 2 Peter 3), when God will purge this present heavens and earth of every hint, trace and stain of sin. On the other hand, the soldiers are commanded to collect all precious metals (gold, silver, bronze, etc.) for eventual use in the temple, once it is built in Jerusalem. These things have already been dedicated to the worship of YHWH, and are now to be collected and stored for eventual use in the temple.

It is not until verses 20-21 that Joshua describes the battle itself. Perhaps more than anything else, the

¹ Howard, *Joshua*, 172-173.

² Howard, *Joshua*, 173.

³ Hess, *Joshua*, 133.

very brief nature of Joshua's account of the battle reminds us of the fact that the fall of Jericho has much more theological than historical significance. *"So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city. 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."* At the sound of the final trumpet and the victory shout of all the people of Israel, the walls of Jericho collapsed.

Immediately, Israel's army advanced upon the city and killed every living thing in Jericho by the sword, including men, women, children and animals. Yes, this is a stern and harsh punishment. But the people of Jericho knew full-well the power of God. They knew full-well this land did not belong to them, it belong to YHWH. These people had every chance to repent—Rahab the prostitute's family did—but they loved their "gods" and their paganism more than they feared YHWH. And then suddenly, it is too late. God's appointed time has come and gone. The trumpets sound and the people shout. Everyone in Jericho is dead, and the city is completely destroyed, having been devoted to YHWH for this purpose. Now, Israel's way into Canaan is open. The nations of the earth have witnessed YHWH's power.

With the walls down and the army carrying out God's judgment upon Jericho, Joshua now ensures that those few who did repent are spared.

In verses 22-25, Joshua recounts the fate of Rahab and her family and that of the city and all its inhabitants. *"But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, 'Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.' So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel. 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. But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho."*

Rahab and all those who stayed in her home were spared. Amazingly, we read fact that Rahab became a citizen of Israel and she will be mentioned later on in Matthew's gospel (Matthew 1:5) as an ancestor of Jesus. God chose this woman (a prostitute) to be an ancestor of the very one who commanded the hosts of Israel when Jericho was destroyed and she and her family were saved. The deliverance of Rahab from God's judgment upon Jericho was a wonderful sign of God's grace and mercy and a hint that the covenant of grace extends beyond the narrow confines of ethnic Jews to include any and all who embrace YHWH through faith. But this merciful deliverance was not to be the case for the other inhabitants of Jericho. Once the city's walls were down and its defenses were overrun, every living thing was killed before the entire city was put to the torch. Only those articles made of precious metals to be placed in Israel's treasuries were not destroyed. Everything else associated with Jericho was wiped out just as the Lord commanded—except for a few articles taken by a man named Achan, whose sin will be soon apparent to Joshua and the people of Israel when Israel is defeated by the men of Ai. Lord willing, this will be our subject when we turn to chapters 7-8.

Once Jericho had been destroyed, the instructions given by Moses in Deuteronomy 13:12-16 are now carried out when Joshua placed a curse upon Jericho. In that passage, Moses had declared, *"If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to dwell there, that certain worthless fellows have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go*

and serve other gods,' which you have not known, then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently. And behold, if it be true and certain that such an abomination has been done among you, you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction, all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword. You shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its open square and burn the city and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again."

And so in verses 26-27, we read that "*Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, 'Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates.'*" Sadly, this curse will come fruition in the days of the monarchy, several hundred years later. As a sign of Israel's increasing apostasy, we read in 1 Kings 16:34 of a certain Hiel and the loss of his sons. "*In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.*" There are blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, even in the days of Israel's kings.

As we conclude the account of the fall of Jericho, it is important to notice that not only does this event fulfill God's promise to grant Israel entrance into the land of promise, so that Israel might occupy all of Canaan, but the fall of Jericho is a picture of God's coming judgment upon the whole earth. There is indeed coming a day when the great city of man will collapse, and all those trusting in its wealth, glamor and power will suffer the same fate as all the inhabitants of Jericho. Everything on the earth will be burned so that there is no longer any hint or trace of human sin.

In Revelation 11:15-19, our New Testament lesson, this final judgment is depicted by John. "*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.'*" Notice the sounding of the seventh trumpet by the angel and the loud shout (voices) in heaven which clearly echo the Jericho account in Joshua 6. When the city of man falls when Christ returns, only then is the kingdom of God realized upon the whole earth—so much for postmillennialism

Indeed, John goes on to state that "*And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.'* 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." Just as Jericho was crushed by the power of God, so too the nations of the earth will face the wrath of God and they will suffer the exact same fate.

When the seventh trumpet sounds and the hosts of heaven shout, God's wrath will come upon the earth and there will be no survivors, save those believers like Rahab who trust in Jesus Christ's death and righteousness to save them from their sins and who are dramatically rescued from the wrath to come. On that great and terrible day, all those who know not Christ—who reject his shed blood and perfect righteousness as their only hope of heaven—will suffer the same fate as those in Jericho. Rich and poor, great and small, young and old, will face God's fury when the commander of the Lord's army who destroyed the Jericho's walls and led the armies of Israel to kill every inhabitant, will bring complete and final destruction upon the city of man. But for those who are Christ's, no longer does the city of man

prevent us from receiving our promised inheritance. Just as all of Canaan was now open to Israel after the complete and total destruction of Jericho, so too when Christ comes back and judges the nations in his wrath, a new heaven and earth, the home of righteousness, will rise in its place and we will enter and then receive all that God has promised to us. Amen.