

04

SESSION FOUR

The Fall of Jericho

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will read the story of the fall of Jericho. The Israelites were commanded to obey God and follow His unusual instructions in the face of unfavorable odds. We will get to see how God used apparent foolishness to confound the wisdom of the world. We will see the power of an unseen God over visible might. And in the story of Rahab, we will see God extending mercy and grace to anyone who will trust in Him. As believers in Christ, we trust God to fulfill His promises and extend mercy, and for this reason we obey—even when the circumstances appear unusual.

SCRIPTURE

Joshua 6:1-5,15-25

THE POINT

God fights on behalf of His people when they respond in obedience.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Wimbledon 2001 was the scene of one of the greatest dramatic events ever in tennis—at least for Goran Ivanisevic. The former 1992 Australian Open champion had fallen so far from his glory days that he needed the gift of a wild card to enter the Wimbledon tournament. He and the other players probably thought his presence would not be much more than an uninteresting rerun. He had made it to three previous Wimbledon finals and was the lucky loser all three times. This year was different, even though the final included a formidable opponent, double faults, superstition, and doubt. Against all odds, the 125th seeded wild card triumphantly held up the Wimbledon trophy. To say the least, it was an unusual victory.

Joshua 6 contains one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Scripture. There is the protagonist—Israel; the antagonist—the city of Jericho; the rising action—the marching around the walls of Jericho once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day; and there is the climax—the walls of Jericho come tumbling down! Like Ivanisevic’s win many years later, Israel’s dramatic victory was against all odds.

- **What obstacles are you currently facing that seem insurmountable?**
- **When have you been surprised by the way God worked something out in your life? How does remembering how God has worked in the past help you to trust Him with the future?**

Option 2

Begin a discussion about students’ relationships with their parents. You might consider sharing a personal experience or memory from your own childhood about a time you chose to obey your parents and are glad you did, even though you didn’t understand at the time the reason behind what they were asking. Don’t get too involved or deep with this discussion, but ask questions such as: Would you consider yourself an obedient child? Why or why not? Would your parents consider you to be an obedient child? Why or why not? Think about the last instruction you received from your parents. Did you question it? Explain. When you question your parents’ instructions, how do they typically respond?

Discuss students’ relationships with God, then ask:

- **Would you say you are an obedient child of God? Why or why not?**
- **Is it more difficult to obey God than it is your parents? Explain.**
- **What’s your motivation for obeying God?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God fights on behalf of His people when they respond in obedience.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joshua:** chosen by God as Moses' successor to lead the Israelites to the promised land
- **Rahab:** spared from the destruction of Jericho for hiding the two Israelite spies Joshua sent to determine the strength of the city

PLOT

In the previous session, we saw God prove Himself faithful once again by parting the waters of the Jordan River for Israel to cross. Whether or not the Israelites thought themselves worthy, God delivered on His promise. Now, the Israelites find themselves in need of supernatural intervention yet again. Though they have seen God open the Jordan River on their behalf, they wonder how He will help them overcome the formidable walls of Jericho.

TIMELINE

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Rahab helps the Israelites in their conquest of Jericho.

CONQUEST OF AI

How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.

THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.

GOD PROMISES VICTORY

At the start of Joshua 6, we know that God has promised Israel victory in the promised land. But the plan He is about to reveal doesn't seem to make much sense. It offers no assurance of a military conquest. It has nothing to do with military might, and it does not include common weapons of warfare. Take a look:

Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. 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." (Josh. 6:1-5)

Picture this. The city of Jericho is on lock-down. Its gates are up because the inhabitants are fearful of Joshua and the Israelites. No citizen of Jericho is allowed to exit the city, and the king of Jericho and his army are trying vigilantly to prevent the Israelites from entering.

And to top it off, the Israelites are given somewhat of a strange battle plan! How could marching around the wall of Jericho one time for six days and seven times on the seventh day ever bring down massive walls that were wide enough, according to the ancient historian Josephus, to accommodate driving two chariots side by side? Can you imagine the priests as they listened to Joshua repeat God's instructions? They probably wondered if Joshua was hearing God as well as Moses had heard Him. Surely Joshua had missed a portion of God's instructions, right? Wrong.

God used a seemingly foolish battle plan to accomplish His purpose. As Paul says in the New Testament, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). Throughout this action plan, we see that the Israelites must be involved. God will execute what the Israelites implement. God's people must participate in the battle of Jericho by marching around the city, and as a result God will give them victory by bringing down the walls. By acting in faith, these massive walls will implode upon themselves without a bulldozer or a wrecking ball because God Himself will bring them down.

- **What questions do you think you might have had after hearing Joshua's instructions?** (For example: How is all this marching going to bring down a wall? What's the point of blowing trumpets? Shouldn't we plan a sneak attack and scale the walls instead?) (p. 28, PSG)
- **Have you ever questioned something you sensed God leading you to do? If so, how did you respond?** (p. 28, PSG)

THE PEOPLE RESPOND IN OBEDIENCE

Joshua delivered God's marching orders, and the people prepared for victory by obeying. So they marched around the city once a day for six days.

Can you imagine the self-talk going on in the minds of the Israelites? God forbade them to speak (6:10), but it is difficult to stop that little inside voice from murmuring. It might have sounded like this: *Of course Joshua has the faith to follow these instructions. He was close to Moses, and the in-crowd always has inside knowledge. Or, I just don't understand how walking will bring down this wall.*

Regardless of any inward doubt, the Israelites obeyed God. They marched in silence around Jericho's massive wall once a day for six days. Were their feet tired? Were they exhausted? Were they yearning to whisper a small complaint to a neighbor or friend? Maybe the mighty men of war felt embarrassed as they marched in silence. Or did they feel a sense of renewed strength because they were doing the will of God in God's way?

Finally, the moment of truth arrived. The seventh day. The final instructions. And here's where we pick up the story:

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. 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. 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." 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. (Josh. 6:15-21)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

When it comes to the driving out of these people groups from the promised land, it is important to remember that God was willing to wait about 430 years because “is not yet complete” (Gen. 15:16). In other words, Israel’s conquering of this land was a form of judgment by God in light of the people’s sins. And to demonstrate the long-suffering patience of God, He waited more than four hundred before finally judging them for their unrepentant sins.

What kind of wickedness did the Canaanites keep pursuing? All kinds of sexual sin, even as far as incest and bestiality, in addition to child sacrifice (Lev. 18:20-30), among others. According to one biblical scholar, “The evidence for profound moral corruption was abundant. God considered them ripe for divine judgment, which would be carried out in keeping with God’s saving purposes in history.”

Not only that, but in regard to the seemingly harsh language of destroying everyone, “the average person isn’t going to pick up on the fact that this stereotypical ancient Near Eastern language actually describes attacks on military forts or garrisons, not general populations that included women and children. There is no archaeological evidence of civilian populations at Jericho or Ai. ... The use of ‘women’ and ‘young and old’ was merely stock ancient Near Eastern language that could be used even if women and young and old weren’t living there. The language of ‘all’ (‘men and women’) at Jericho and Ai is a ‘stereotypical expression for the destruction of all human life in the fort, presumably composed entirely of combatants.’”¹

TIMELINE

THE JUDGES CYCLE

Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.

DEBORAH

God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

The World Opposed to God

There are times in Scripture where the term “world” refers to more than the physical planet Earth or the collective human population. In many instances, the term refers to an active and evil spiritual force that is in direct conflict with God and His kingdom. This evil world force operates under Satan’s control (Eph. 2:2; John 14:30), displaying the same self-centeredness and deceit that is found in his character. Christians are called to overcome this world of spiritual evil (1 John 5:4-5) through faith in the Son of God.

At the end of the seventh trip around the wall, on the seventh day, Joshua gave the command. The people shouted before the wall fell—not after. They shouted in faith, believing God had given them the city. God moved at the sound of the shout and brought the wall down in such a convincing way that the text says the wall fell down flat! The word means just that—flat. Not one stone was on top of another.

GOD SPARES SOME OF HIS ENEMIES AND BRINGS THEM INTO THE FAMILY OF FAITH

This story is a spectacular example of God's power exercised on behalf of His people as well as God's judgment over His enemies. But it also contains a thread of mercy. As the conquest of Jericho began, Joshua remembered the oath that the two spies had made with Rahab, who had given them shelter. He sent the spies to rescue her and the family members gathered in her house.

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. (Josh. 6:22-25)

Make no mistake. Just as God kept His promise to the Israelites in the conquest of Jericho, God will keep His promise in preserving a remnant. For this reason, we trust God and obey Him by loving the enemies of God and praying for them to become disciples of Christ. We reach out and teach through prayer, through the Word of God, and through our testimony.

CHRIST CONNECTION

When Rahab is mentioned in Scripture, she often receives an infamous designation. She is called Rahab "the prostitute." In Joshua 2:1, the two spies entered Jericho and gathered at the house of "a prostitute whose name was Rahab." In 6:17, her name is mentioned again, with that same designation. In verses 22-25, the two spies were told by Joshua to go into the house of the prostitute whose name is Rahab. In Hebrews 11:31, the writer says that by faith "Rahab the prostitute" welcomed the spies and did not perish with those (king and people of Jericho) who were disobedient. James 2:25 refers to "Rahab the prostitute" as someone whose faith was demonstrated in works.

Interestingly enough, it is not until Rahab is associated with Jesus in His genealogy in Matthew 1:5 that this dubious designation is dropped. There, the text says that Rahab married Salmon (not Rahab the prostitute married Salmon). Rahab and Salmon had a son whose name was Boaz. Boaz married Ruth, and they had a son whose name was Obed. Obed had a son whose name was Jesse. Jesse had a son whose name was David, and Jesus is from the line of David, which makes Rahab a great grandmother of the Messiah.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What is the difference between faith in God's plan for our lives and our understanding of His plan? Do you, personally, have to understand God's plan in order to have faith? Explain.** *Genuine faith is one that seeks understanding while also realizing that we may not always understand the way God works on this side of eternity. However, even during those times of not fully comprehending God's plan, Christians can trust in God's character and have faith that He is working all things for good.*
- **How do you determine what you believe God is calling you to do? How do others play a role in that?** *When discerning God's calling in our lives, it is important that we first turn to Scripture and see how what we believe we are called to do aligns with God's Word. In addition to that, however, we need to hear from others and be willing to listen to wisdom from godly people in our lives. People like parents, pastors, and youth leaders can help provide wisdom when sifting through decisions in life.*
- **Why do you think God desires to work through our obedience rather than apart from it? What does this teach us about the importance God places on our relationship with Him?** *One thing it teaches is that God doesn't just want passive observers in His story of redemption, but active participants. It also teaches us that faith is more than just personal belief; it results in obedient actions, and God often uses those obedient actions as a means to accomplish His will.*
- **What are some ways Christians can remind one another to focus on and obey God's plans instead of focusing on themselves and/or what others think?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

God's instructions to the Israelites reveal the importance of words and actions. The people could not utter a word until Joshua gave the order to shout at the sound of the long trumpet blast. Perhaps God wanted the Israelites to display their faith in action before speaking with others about the importance of "faith in action."

- **What are some ways we display our faith "in action"?** *Answers will vary, but may include things like prayer and Bible study, serving others, and being involved in church.*
- **How does faith "in action" give added credibility to expressing our faith "in words"?** *We have heard it said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. There is truth to that, recognizing that the words of our mouth should be commensurate with our actions; otherwise people might tune us out.*



HEART

The story of the battle of Jericho teaches us a lot about believing in God and taking Him at His Word. Joshua and the people were given specific instructions that, from a worldly perspective, don't seem to amount to much in the way of a military strategy. Yet unlike the generation before them, they chose to believe and trust that with God all things are possible. Because of that, this younger generation demonstrated the true heart of faith in God—believing Him and trusting in His Word.

- **What should true and genuine faith be rooted in?** *The object of our faith is Jesus, and our faith in Jesus is rooted in what God's Word has to say about Him.*
- **How has this session encouraged your own faith when it comes to trusting in the promises of God in Scripture?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

Like Rahab, believers are called to share the good news with unbelievers. We are to call people "into the house," letting them know they can be spared from the judgment of God through the blood of Jesus if they trust in Him. God spared Rahab and her family among the Israelites. They were preserved for a divine purpose.

- **How is God's grace on display in this story?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **It is easy for Christians to adopt an "us vs. them" mentality with the world. How should God's promise to save people—even among His enemies—change our mind-set?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #7, which contains a map of Israel's conquest of Jericho.

SOURCES

1. Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?* (Baker Books, 2011), pp. 175-176.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject