

# The Lord Your God Goes Before You

## God's Work in the Book of Joshua

### *Picking Sides*

5:13-6:27

#### **Focus Attention:**

Ephesians 6:10-13

You know the struggle.

When you were baptized into Christ, you knew well the new life God had given you. You knew the excitement of the Lord's presence, and you knew that He would be with you wherever you were. You spent time with Him in prayer and read His word with eagerness to know Him and His ways better. The promises of God were sweeter than anything you had ever experienced.

Then the battle began. Experiencing the promises of God and the joys of the Christian life were not without challenges. Satan began to entice with old temptations, passions and desires. He placed new obstacles in the way with family, friends or co-workers. He even had a way of introducing doubt into your walk with Christ.

Especially troublesome were the really *big* battles – the ones that just seemed too large to handle, that required strength and determination that you just did not have, things that hit at the heart of your deepest struggles in life.

As you matured as a Christian, some of the faces and situations may have changed but the struggle has not. Paul describes it in Romans 7:15-24. Sometimes the battles still seem too great. Your strength seems too small. The barriers between the way you are the way you want to be in Christ seem too big. Is there an answer to this dilemma?

Our struggle is not unlike what Israel faced in the land of promise.

The people had experienced amazing things by God. He had taken them safely over into a new life and a new land by stopping the waters of Jordan. He had renewed His covenant with them, reminding them of His devotion and presence with them. They celebrated their relationship with Him through their first Passover. And they had experienced the first taste of these promises as they ate the fruit of the land, and it was sweeter than anything they had ever experienced.

But now a battle looms ahead. Jericho now stood between the people and the rest of their promise from God. It sat in the way of the passage of the hill country and into the heart of Canaan. It was a huge barrier, perhaps the most formidable of the fortified cities Joshua and Israel would meet. A double wall surrounded the city, the outer wall 12 feet high and at least 6 feet deep. Beyond the wall, a ditch encircled the city 27 feet wide and nine feet deep. A city of this size and fortification could only be taken by siege, and the people of Jericho were well prepared. The city had been built around an oasis spring that supplied plenty of water for the inhabitants' needs. Any siege of this city would be a long, arduous, and militarily expensive undertaking.

Did Joshua and Israel have the strength to overcome this obstacle? Would their determination be enough to win the day? The barrier between where they were and where they knew God wanted them to be may have just seemed too big.

God had an answer to their dilemma – and ours.

## **Focus on the Word:**

### **A. Whose side are you on? 5:13-15**

1. Joshua had not received instruction from God as to how Jericho would be taken. So Joshua goes on a reconnaissance mission to consider his first enemy.
2. “A man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand.” The appearance of this sudden warrior apparently took Joshua by surprise. Nevertheless, Joshua courageously approaches the man and asks his allegiance in the coming conflict. For Joshua, you were either for the Lord and His people or against them.
3. “Neither, but ... I have come.”
  - a. “Commander of the army of the Lord”
    - i. Possibly an angel of the Lord sent as a messenger to Joshua. Angels were sometimes sent on missions of this kind, some identified in similar ways (cf. Dan 10:5, 20; 12:1).
    - ii. Some believe this to be a preincarnation appearance of Jesus (similar to Gen 18 and Dan 3). Angels refused the worship Joshua gives to this messenger (cf. Rev 19:10). What’s more, Joshua is given the same instruction as God gave to Moses when He appeared to Moses through the burning bush: “Take off your sandals...” There is a divine presence with Joshua.
    - iii. “What kind of a military force did this divine Commander lead? The ‘army of the Lord’ was surely not limited to the army of Israel though it may have been included. More specifically, it referred to the angelic hosts, the same ‘army’ of heaven that later surrounded Dothan when Elisha and his servant appeared to be greatly outnumbered by the Aramean army (2 Kings 6:8-17). In the Garden of Gethsemane at the time of His arrest, Jesus referred to this heavenly army when He said that 12 legions of angels were ready to defend Him (Matt 26:53). In Hebrews 1:14 they are described as ‘ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.’ Though invisible, they serve and care for God’s children in times of great need.” <The Bible Knowledge Commentary>
  - b. The response Joshua receives from God’s messenger is not that God is neutral. Nor is it that He is disinterested in the battle at hand. Instead, the message is one of encouragement and instruction. <Clarke>
    - i. First, Joshua is assured that God is present. This is the first time God makes a physical appearance of His presence with Joshua. How important that must have been for Joshua as he prepares for this first battle of conquest. Israel will not have to face this enemy alone. God will be with them.

- ii. As important (if not more so), Joshua needed to understand that he is second in command over the army of Israel. This war was first and foremost God's against the evil practices and idolatry of Canaan. God was not interested in *helping* Joshua and the people take possession. God intended to *lead* in the conquest. Joshua did not need God to be on Israel's side. Joshua and Israel were given the opportunity to be on *God's* side of this conflict.
- ☞ "Every father and mother ... and Christian leader is second in command to the Lord Jesus Christ; and when we forget this fact, we start to move toward defeat and failure. The Lord came to Joshua that day, not just to help but *to lead*. 'Without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). Joshua was an experienced soldier, whom Moses had trained for leadership. Yet that was no guarantee of success. He needed the presence of the Lord God." <Weirsbe, p 66> He needed to choose God's leadership in his mission, not ask God to help him fulfill his agenda as he somehow led the way. As we face our own formidable obstacles, God is not interested in being our servant. He insists that He be our commander. We must place ourselves fully under His command in every situation.
4. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy."
    - a. The first instruction in this battle is identical to the one God gave to Moses when commission to confront Pharaoh. It is a call to obedience, humility and full submission.
    - b. It is also a reminder of the significance of God's presence. "Joshua was standing in 'heathen territory'; yet because God was with him, *he was standing on holy ground*. If we are obeying the will of God, no matter where He leads us, we are on holy ground; *and we had better behave accordingly*. There's no such thing as 'secular' and 'sacred,' 'common' and 'consecrated,' when you are in the Lord's service. 'Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all the glory of God' (1 Cor 10:31)." <Weirsbe, p 66>

## B. Whose battle plan will you use? 6:1-5

1. "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands."
    - a. Before God gives Joshua his marching orders, he tells him the certain outcome.
    - b. "The tense of the Hebrew verb is prophetic perfect (*I have delivered*), describing a future action as if it were already accomplished. Since God had declared it, the victory was assured." <The Bible Knowledge Commentary>
    - c. Perhaps the evidence of this sure victory is explained in verse 1.
    - d. Because God has already declared the victory, it is important for Joshua ...
      - i. That he fight this battle *out of* victory already won, not in order to win the victory.
      - ii. That he follow God's instructions in order to experience the victory.
- ☞ "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom 8:37). The conquest for our inheritance in Christ has been assured. The last enemy is death, and Paul says its days are numbered (1 Cor 15:24-26, 54-57). Paul then concludes, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58). What hope do you receive from these truths?

*Remember that you fight FROM victory, not just for victory.*

<Wiersbe, p 70>

2. “March around the city ...”

- a. “From a military standpoint, the orders this captain gave were ridiculous. Joshua was to march the people of Israel around the city of Jericho once a day for six days. On these circuits no one was to make a sound. On the seventh day, seven circuits were to be made. Then, at a signal, all the people were to shout. And, so the promise, when the people shouted, the walls of the city would fall down. Israel could then attack and was to utterly destroy the city, saving only those in Rahab's house. Nothing was to be salvaged. No booty was to be taken. All was to be destroyed.

“Joshua may have felt foolish giving such orders. And Israel may have felt foolish too. Certainly, after a day or so of fearful observation, the people of Jericho would have become bolder and in relief have shouted out taunts and ridicule.”

<The Teacher's Commentary>

- b. In spite of the unusual aspects of God’s battle strategy for Jericho, the elements of it are quite significant.

i. The number seven = In Scripture, the number seven often symbolizes completeness or perfection. There was a fullness of divine wisdom and activity in the plan God lined out for Joshua, and it was demonstrated in seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days of marching, seven circuits of the wall on the seventh day.

ii. The ark of God = The box which carried the covenant tablets and other symbols of God’s covenant with the people appears prominently in this chapter, just as it did as the people crossed the Jordan. It was the constant reminder of God’s presence with His people. Yet unlike at the Jordan, where the ark went *before* the people, this time the ark circles the city *in the midst* of the people. God’s presence is found among the people He claims as His own.

iii. The constant blowing of trumpets = “These instruments are ‘jubilee trumpets’ (lit. Heb.) used in connection with Israel’s solemn feasts to proclaim the presence of God (Num 10:10).” <The Bible Knowledge Commentary> These trumpets were made of rams’ horns and were not made for making instrumental music but for signaling. Their significance was found in military use (the sounding of alarm) and in religious contexts (the announcing of the presence of God).

“The rams’ horns were used primarily for celebrations. The common Hebrew word for ‘trumpet’ is *shofar*; for ‘ram’s horn,’ it is *jobel*, which is the root of the word *jubilee* [used in this context]. The ‘Year of Jubilee’ was the fiftieth year after seven Sabbaticals, and was a special time of celebration in Israel (Lev 25; 27:17-14). The priests blew the rams’ horns to ‘proclaim liberty throughout all the land’ (25:10).” <Weirsbe, p 74>

- iv. The loud shout = Together with the trumpet blast, the shout signaled the onset of attack. It was on the one hand psychological warfare creating panic and confusion among the enemy – to melt the hearts of the opponents. It was also a symbol of the people joining with God in the attack.

- ☞ The heading to Psalm 18 reads, “Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.” Read verses 30-32ff of the psalm. Consider then Isaiah 55:8 and Proverb 14:12. When have you found yourself developing your own battle plan without consulting God’s will first? The truth is, however, God does not just want to be consulted. God wants to be followed. God’s battle instructions to Joshua were not suggestions or advice. These were orders to be followed with utmost care. What do you think would have happened had Joshua taken God’s instructions and then developed his own plan, perhaps even adapting his own from God’s? We would expect Joshua and the people to fail in their battle against Jericho. What makes us think we will have any different results in our own spiritual battles when we do just that?
- ☞ Often times, our reaction to God’s battle plan for our lives are what Israel’s initial tendency may have been: “This plan makes no sense!” Remember ...

*Faith is not believing in spite of evidence,  
but obeying in spite of consequence.*

### **C. Whose strength will you rely on? 6:6-27**

1. “No battle strategy appeared more unreasonable than this one. What was to prevent the army of Jericho from raining arrows and spears down on the defenseless Israelites pursuing their silent march? Or who could stop the enemy from rushing out of the city gates to break up Israel’s line, separating and then slaughtering them? Joshua was an experienced military leader. Certainly these and similar objections to the divine strategy flashed into his mind. But unlike Moses at the burning bush who argued with lengthy eloquence against the Lord’s plan (cf. Ex 3:11-4:17) Joshua responded with an unquestioning obedience. He lost no time in calling together the priests and soldiers, passing on to them the directions he had received from his Commander-in-chief.” <The Bible Knowledge Commentary>
2. “By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days” (Heb 11:30).
3. Notice the added elements in this battle as the people obey God’s marching orders.
  - a. The people’s silence = “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.” (Hab 2:20). For six days, and most of the seventh, there was to be silence (waiting) and trumpets (listening to God).
  - b. The people’s perseverance = The repetition of 6:1-14 indicates the deliberateness and determination Joshua and the people had in following God’s instructions. Day after day, for six days straight, the people did just as God said with no visible result. If anything, the result was probably the opposite of certain victory. Taunts and mockery no doubt flew down from the top of the wall of Jericho as the people

inside the city watched this unusual battle strategy, and looked out at an army ill equipped for a proper siege of a city.

- ☞ Are you very good at exhibiting these two aspects of following God’s battle plan for your spiritual battles? How well do you practice “stillness” in your relationship with God? Do you expect “instant fixes,” or do you persevere through God’s instructions? Scripture clearly demonstrates that God is rarely in a hurry. Learning to live by God’s pace is an important part of placing yourself second-in-command to His leadership. Is it possible that the people of Israel may have been tempted to leave God’s plan sometime during the week and seek a better one of their own – one that made more sense? Apparently not. The people followed God throughout the battle without wavering, trusting God for the final outcome.
4. “And the walls came tumbling down.” When the people had fully obeyed God’s instructions, God was true to His word. The victory was final. The promise was kept. “Every man charged straight in” (6:20). There was not a breach in the wall or a crack here and there that the fighting men of Israel had to file through. The devastation of the wall was so complete that Israel came in from all sides. The only part left untouched was the one containing the house of Rahab and her family – another promise of victory kept.
  5. The only matter that remained was that of the “devoted things.”
    - a. This signified that the things of Jericho were to be set apart for the Lord. As such, they no longer belonged to the former owners, and they were not a part of a sacrificial offering to the Lord. Whereas a sacrifice or offering was a voluntary gift that could be recalled at any time prior to the ceremony, the devoted things were the complete ownership of God.
    - b. The devoted things included everything in the city of Jericho: people, livestock, silver, gold, possessions of every kind. They were to be completely destroyed or placed in the treasury of God. (The issue of genocide in the Book of Joshua will be dealt with in a later lesson.)
    - c. In future battles, God would allow the people to participate in the spoils of victory. Not this time. Jericho was the “firstfruits” of the conquest. As with other firstfruits in Israel, these were to be devoted completely to God.
    - d. The city itself was burned, and Joshua intended that it should never be inhabited again. So serious was he about this that he calls down a curse on anyone who would dare rebuild it (a curse that found fulfillment during the godless days of King Ahab, 1 Kings 16:34). Apparently, Joshua wanted another monument. A circle of stones had been set up at Gilgal to remind the people of God’s gracious fulfillment of His promises. Now, Jericho was to serve as a reminder of God’s great victory over an “unbeatable enemy” in Israel’s first battle for the inheritance.
- ☞ When have you experienced a victory over one of the formidable spiritual battles in your life, only to take some of the spoils with you? We are sometimes tempted to carry some of the remnants with us as a trophy, perhaps even thinking we in our newfound strength have mastered it, rather than leave everything that was set against us behind. Worse yet, we keep the spoils as a token of *our* victory in the struggle and

fail to give God the glory for what was actually *His* victory that resulted in our blessing. In what ways do you need to leave behind the remnants of a spiritual battle in your life and give God greater honor for the great things He has done?

### ***Focus on Tomorrow***

When you played a “pick-up” game or a team sport, were you among the first or the last to be chosen? Why is that? Who did you most want on your side? Why is that?

Are any of your toughest spiritual battles being made worse because you have the wrong focus? Are you focused more on *your* strength, *your* strategy, and *your* desires for the outcome ... or do you truly have *God's* will, *God's* battle plan, and *God's* power out in front? If you are unsatisfied with any of your answers to that question, what will you do this week to change it?