

The Battle of Jericho



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Today we look at the most famous story in the book called Joshua, which Cecil B. DeMille could have turned into a multimillion dollar hit movie. But this is so much more; it reminds us that God is not shaped by our ideas or desires. God is connected to history, and God chooses to involve himself in our limited reality.

It is necessary to begin with an understanding that “Joshua” is not a picture of the way life should be, but a glimpse of human limitations and how those limitations shape our reality. Life, at the time of this story was violent. Gods were selfish and unpredictable, religion took the form of pay-for-blessings and good or bad luck. The exhausted children of Israel knew disaster, confusion, and a lack of direction, except under the leadership of Moses and now Joshua. We who believe in and serve God today do not want to go back to that time.

The Bible is an unfolding book, with stories that preserve the worst and best, gradually moving to God’s grace and ultimate gift of his Son. Read it all before you decide who God is and experience how deeply he loves you. When you reach the four gospels you understand that, in Christ, the walls of injustice, prejudice, violence, and hopelessness have been torn down. Our theology and hope are shaped by God’s Son, Jesus the Christ, who shows us the most complete image of the God who offers us grace instead of uncertainty or fear. The Jews who marched around Jericho were just beginning to know what it means to be God’s people.

“Joshua fit de battle of Jericho and de walls came tumblin’ down.” How do you explain a miracle? You don’t – that’s why it’s called a miracle. Among the explanations for this event is that an earthquake happened at just the right time. Or, the walls were old

and had not been maintained so the repeated vibrations of the marching Jews for seven days finally caused the structural flaws to come apart, which produced a collapse. Rather than bog down in speculation, could we consider the simple fact that Jericho was a considerable obstacle to Israel because it was in their direct path after they crossed the Jordan River? If they could overthrow that walled city the region’s people would realize this was no ordinary threat. God, not a regional deity in the form of a stone or wooden statue, was on the move and territorial boundaries meant nothing.

While we are confronting this fantastic story of walls crashing down, what about Jesus, the human shape of “miracles”? The New Testament recounts many stories of Jesus healing a blind man, a leper, a crippled man, a woman with a hemorrhage, among others. But what is the ultimate miracle? Jesus died a violent death on a cross, was buried in a borrowed tomb, and came back to life on the third day! God’s greatest miracle pushes all the others to the bottom of the list. All the miracles of the Bible lead us to Jesus, the ultimate gift of God’s love and grace. Jericho is one story, significant and preparatory, to what God had been planning since Adam and Eve left Eden.

There is yet another anomaly in this dramatic story. Jericho’s walls crumbling is considerable, but what about the pagan prostitute named Rahab? Her home was built into the wall of Jericho; she gave shelter to the Israeli spies who gathered information for Joshua. When the city fell, Joshua commanded that Rahab and her whole family were to be rescued and granted immunity.

The city and its inhabitants were destroyed and a “wicked” woman is spared! What happened to morality or idolatry? Grace does appear in the Old Testament, not just in the New Testament. In fact grace is woven throughout the laws of God. Grace is the reason God never abandoned

Israel even in their worst days. But the strangest and most wonderful note appears in the genealogy of Jesus as Matthew records it: “and to Salmon was born Boaz by Rahab” (Matthew 1:5). Rahab, the pagan prostitute who helped Israel defeat Jericho, is an ancestor of Jesus our Savior!

All of this leads us to some challenging conclusions. Do not think that you can reduce the heart or mind of God to any human theories. Grace defies logic. You may legitimately struggle with theology and science, but there will always be the mystery of our origin and existence. This Jericho story reminds us that life must also involve faith in God and obedience to spiritual laws. The finite mind can never explain the infinite God. The love and grace of God cannot be blocked by the walls of any “Jericho” you will confront. We may build horrific weapons, orchestrate military campaigns, and pray for God’s blessings on our troops, but without God’s guidance and blessings we cannot win the final victory. We follow the Christ who conquered death and sin through his own sacrifice.

When those inexperienced wanderers from the wilderness faced the imposing walls of Jericho it must have seemed a fool’s errand to move forward. Life’s battles today, your battles, may also seem insurmountable, but I remind you that you are not being led and blessed by any Joshua. Christ has gone before you.

I was taught that when life challenges, you do the right thing. I taught my children the same lesson. The results may not be what you want, but they may be even better. Obedience to God is Joshua’s secret to overcoming and winning. Obedience is our secret as well. When you love and serve God, walls of injustice and evil can come down. When you love and serve God, someone’s life will be changed for eternity. There will always be walls for us to walk around as we faithfully love and serve God.