

The battle of Jericho



Colour me!



Joshua 5:13-6:10

One day, Joshua was near Jericho when he saw a man standing some distance in front of him. The man was holding a sword, so Joshua walked up to him and asked, “Are you on our side or on our enemies’ side?” “Neither,” he answered. “I am here because I am the commander of the Lord’s army.” Joshua fell to his knees and bowed down to the ground. “I am your servant,” he said. “Tell me what to do.” “Take off your sandals,” the commander answered. “This is a holy place.” So Joshua took off his sandals.

Meanwhile, the people of Jericho had been locking the gates in their town wall because they were afraid of the Israelites. No one could go out or come in. The Lord said to Joshua: “With my help, you and your army will defeat the king of Jericho and his army, and you will capture the town. Here is how to do it: march slowly around Jericho once a day for six days. Take along the sacred chest and make seven priests walk in front of it, carrying trumpets. But on the seventh day, march slowly around the town seven times while the priests blow their trumpets. Then the priests will blast on their trumpets, and everyone else will shout. The wall will fall down, and your soldiers can go straight in from every side.”

Joshua called the priests together and said, “Take the chest and make seven priests carry trumpets and march ahead of it.” Next, he gave the army their orders: “March slowly around Jericho. A few of you will go ahead of the chest to guard it, but most of you will follow it. Don’t shout the battle cry or yell or even talk until the day I tell you to. Then let out a shout!”

Commentary

God had promised to be with Joshua and to help him. On the eve of the battle of Jericho, Joshua needed to be reassured, and this happened when he met the heavenly soldier. He realized he was in the presence of God and, like Moses at the burning bush, took off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground.

This encounter must have been a great encouragement as Joshua put God's battle plan into action. He knew from the spies how frightened the inhabitants of Jericho already were, and when they saw the daily silent march around the walls, it must have weakened their morale even further. But it also took great faith on Joshua's part and his army's to carry out God's strange instructions. They didn't know what would happen when they finally shouted the battle cry on the seventh day. That shout was the moment when the walls miraculously collapsed and Jericho could be taken, and Joshua's soldiers must have been as amazed by what happened as the people in the city. God chose to give the victory in such a way that no one could say it was achieved by their own cunning or courage. Faith in God had won the day.

Questions

- ▶ What do you think the heavenly soldier meant when he said he was on neither side?
- ▶ Can you imagine what some of the experienced soldiers on Joshua's side must have said when they heard the battle plan?
- ▶ Why was it so important to put the special chest and the priests at the front of the procession?
- ▶ What do you think everyone expected to happen on the seventh day?



Visual aid

The trumpets in the story were rams' horns that were also used to call people to prayer at special festival times. Make some of your own out of cardboard tubes or use a real wind instrument.



Activity idea

Build some walls from toy wooden blocks or, if you have the space, some cardboard boxes. Walk around these walls silently 13 times in total (once a day for six days and seven on the seventh) and then, with a great shout and the sound of trumpets, shake the foundations so that the walls you have made come tumbling down. Obviously, they won't literally fall down, so give them a little kick to help them fall!



Prayer idea

This battle began with silent prayer, not the traditional sounds of hand-to-hand fighting. It was also persistent, regular prayer (each day for seven days). As a family, compose a special prayer about something important to you all, and write it around the edge of a circular piece of paper. Pin it up and pray it once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. Look out for God's answer, which will almost certainly take you by surprise.

Key verse

"I am your servant," [Joshua] said. "Tell me what to do" (Joshua 5:14).

New Testament story link

Acts 12:1-17: The church prays regularly for Peter in prison, and the answer takes them all by surprise.



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