

Joshua 6: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Joshua chapter 6 So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, Take up the Ark of the Covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of ram's horns before the Ark of the Lord.

And he said to the people, Go forward, march around the city, and let the armed men pass on before the Ark of the Lord. And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of ram's 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. 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. So he 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. 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 ram's 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.

[2 : 0 0] And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days. 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.

[3 : 1 0] 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. 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 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. 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. So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.

[4 : 21] In Joshua chapter 6, we actually begin the conquest of the promised land. The book of Joshua has 24 chapters. Of these, the first five are devoted to preparation and entry into the land.

Only chapters 6 to 12 really directly concern the work of the conquest itself. Perhaps surprisingly to many readers, the significant majority of the book focuses elsewhere. The defeat of Jericho is a story of immense importance.

It's recounted in a way that makes this clear. A lot of attention is devoted to the Lord's instructions, and then to the Israelites' faithful fulfilment of these. This is the first city of the land to be defeated, and as such it represents the whole land.

It's the first fruits of the land. We are presented with the great obstacle that Israel faces. In the first verse, Jericho is shut up behind thick walls. The crossing of the Jordan occurred on the seventh day, and the destruction of Jericho occurs on the seventh day too.

There is a sabbatical character to Israel's entry into the land. The Lord is giving rest to his people. However, the Sabbath day is also the day of the Lord. It's the great day of judgment, and it will be that for the city of Jericho.

[5 : 32] Israel walks around Jericho once a day for six days, with the Ark of the Covenant and seven priests before the Ark blowing ram's horn trumpets. On the seventh day, they go round the city seven times, and at the long blast of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout, and the walls fell down.

The Lord had announced that all of this would happen in advance, giving them the instructions what they ought to do. And it all happened as the Lord declared. The instructions and the fulfilment showcased both Joshua and Israel's faithfulness at this point, and the Lord's power.

We might ask ourselves why the defeat of Jericho is so liturgical in character. Israel is essentially given a liturgical procession to perform on seven successive days. This all seems a bit superfluous to requirements.

Surely God could just bring the city walls down, and they could just go in without any of this rigmarole of walking around the city for six successive days, and then seven times on the seventh day, with the trumpets blowing.

Looking more closely at this, I think there is a reason for all of these details, and it can help us to understand the meaning of the event more generally. Rabbi David Foreman first alerted me to some of these connections, particularly from Leviticus chapter 25, where we have the instructions of the year of Jubilee.

[6 : 48] In verses 8 to 13, You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month.

On the Day of Atonement, you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land, and you shall consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property, and each of you shall return to his clan.

That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you. In it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself, nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you.

You may eat the produce of the field. In the year of jubilee, each of you shall return to his property. The very name of jubilee is connected with the ram's horn, with this trumpet blast.

And the beginning of the year of jubilee is proclaimed with a trumpet blast at the time of the Day of Atonement. The year of jubilee is connected with something else, and that's with the Feast of Weeks, which is mentioned in chapter 23 of Leviticus, verses 15 and 16.

[7 : 55] You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the Lord.

Both in the case of the year of jubilee and the Feast of Weeks, there is a counting of seven sevens. And then there is this feast that celebrates Israel's possession within the land.

Israel returns to its property in the year of jubilee. The time before this where the trumpet appears is at Sinai. On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire.

The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder, The Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain.

[9 : 01] And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. There's Exodus chapter 19, verses 16 to 20. So let's try and fit some of these pieces together.

We've noticed a close similarity between the Feast of Weeks and the Year of Jubilee. There is a loud and long trumpet blast at Sinai, much as there is such a blast of the trumpet at the destruction of Jericho.

At the destruction of Jericho, there's an emphasis upon the number seven. Seven days, seven trumpets, seven circuits of the city on the final day. A further connection is seen in the fact that Sinai is connected with the Feast of Weeks.

The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, is a feast that is associated with the giving of the law. Things are slowly starting to come together. The description of the Feast of Weeks, seven weeks that have to be counted out, and then the Year of Jubilee, seven weeks of years that have to be counted out, suggest that Pentecost might be thought of as a mini-Jubilee, and the Year of Jubilee as a mega-Pentecost.

So if Sinai is connected with Pentecost, can we see Jericho connected with the Year of Jubilee? I think we can. There is the same blast of the trumpet, there are the repeated sevens, and then, most importantly, the land is being given into the hands of its true possessors.

[10 : 22] Sinai is the event that formally declares Israel's release from slavery. However, being released from slavery might not mean so much if you aren't given land. The slave released without land is vulnerable and dependent in unhealthy ways.

Jubilee ensured that Israelites weren't reduced to such long-term dependence and landlessness. And Jericho's emphasis upon sevens and the blowing of the trumpet should tip us off to the fact that it is a Jubilee-style event that is taking place here.

The land is being given to its proper owners and the gift of the land is completing the liberation from slavery that the Exodus and Sinai began. With this symbolic pronouncement of Jubilee, they are finally entering into the freedom for which God set them free.

They have not just been released from the clutches of Pharaoh, they've now been planted within the new land and they'll start a new life here as free people. Israel is strictly charged not to take any spoil but to devote it all to destruction.

Save for the silver and the gold and the iron and the bronze vessels. These would be devoted to the treasury of the Lord. Such instructions can be found in Deuteronomy chapter 7 verses 23 to 26.

[11 : 33] But the Lord your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. And he will give their kings into your hand and you shall make their name perish from under heaven.

No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them. The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves lest you be ensnared by it for it is an abomination to the Lord your God and you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it.

You shall utterly detest and abhor it for it is devoted to destruction. The city of Jericho is completely devoted to the Lord. Its contents either being given to the Lord's treasury or being utterly destroyed.

Rahab and her household however were saved. This is a Passover event for them. The reference to Rahab living in Israel to this day may not refer to Rahab personally but might be a reference to her offspring.

The chapter ends with a curse declared upon the person who would try and rebuild Jericho. Now while people lived in the area of the destroyed city there was not a true attempt to rebuild this city from the ground up until later on in 1 Kings.

[12 : 45] In 1 Kings 16 verse 34 we read In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of Abiram his firstborn and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segab according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.

A question to consider where in the New Testament do we find the defeat of a city in a way reminiscent of the defeat of Jericho by Joshua? What further parallels could be found between the two cities?