

What's the Message – Lesson 40

Today's study deals with one of the best-known stories in the Old Testament . . . the battle of Jericho.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that God would open our hearts and minds to see that there is a pertinent lesson for us to learn in this ancient story . . . that it is not a “fun story” we should merely play with, but is an example of how we should respond to any command of God. Amen.

Last time we saw Joshua and the Children of Israel on the verge of entering into the Promised Land, and the preparations the Lord had them go through to get ready for the task ahead. Today we see them deal with the first major challenge in facing the people they were to displace.

The tone for this lesson is established in chapter 6, verses 1 and 2, where we read: *Now Jericho was shut up from within and from without because of the people of Israel; none went out and none came in. And the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have given into your hand Jericho, with its king and mighty men of valor.”*

Now, do you see the change in attitude from 40 years previously? Instead of the Israelites feeling like they were only grasshoppers facing the giants of the land, the situation was reversed. Now it was the people of Palestine who were afraid of the People of Israel.

Let's carry this idea forward, and imagine what it might have been like to be a guard on the wall of Jericho. Imagine that you have the early morning watch, and you are standing in your position, looking down to the encampment of the Israelites on the shore of the Jordan River in the valley below Jericho.

The sun has not come up yet, but you sense that there is movement in that camp. Your nerves are on edge, and you are tempted to shout an alarm to your fellow guards and commander. You hesitate. Then you say to your closest companion, “Do you see any stirring in the camp?” He says, “I'm not sure, its still to dark to see clearly.”

But then there is a definite movement, and you suddenly shout to your gods, “Oh Baal, oh Ashera! Help us! With that, the rest of the guards and your commander rush to the wall to see for themselves. Yes, the dreaded moment has arrived. The mighty army of Israel, the people who have walked across rivers, the fighters who have conquered the armies of Sihon and Og, are now coming for Jericho.

But what a strange attack formation it is. There are seven men leading the entire procession, blowing ram’s horns as if they were trumpets. Then comes something never seen before: four men carrying a most unusual box, with some strange figures on its top.

This is followed, not just by the army of Israel, but the entire nation with women and children, all marching together . . . but no one says a word. Except for the shrill blasts on the ram’s horns, there is not a sound. Around the entire perimeter of Jericho they march . . . just beyond the reach of your arrows you note, and after one circuit, they head back to their encampment below. Nothing like this has ever been experienced in warfare before. The tongues of Jericho are busy wagging, everyone trying to understand what they had just seen, and what it meant.

That night, the Israelites slept soundly, comfortable in the assurance that they had done exactly what the Lord commanded. That night in Jericho, no one slept at all.

Psychological warfare of the highest order had been initiated. And lest the people of Jericho think that this was all a bad dream, the process was repeated again and again, for 6 days. By this time they were not only exhausted from fear, their minds were numb. But on the seventh day things were different. This time the Israelites did not return to their camp like before; this time they kept going round and round the city, and the cloud of dust kicked up made it hard to distinguish between the end of the group and the beginning of the marchers.

From atop the wall it was hard to distinguish exactly what was going on within the Israelite formation. But without really seeing it clearly, the women and children had moved to the backside of the group. Then suddenly, for the first time, a mighty shout went up from every mouth of the Israelites, and their fighting men came rushing forward.

And the walls in which the people of Jericho had placed their trust fell down before them, and Jericho was destroyed. Well, teacher, perhaps a little more dramatic than the account in the Book of Joshua, but that is what happened at Jericho. But what does it mean to us? What is the message we should take from this?

Thank you for presenting it that way, Dale. Perhaps your presentation will help our listeners better understand the impact this event had on both the people of the land, and the people of Israel. Two things had happened. The Israelites had obeyed the Lord, and the victory was clearly His miraculous work. Everyone, friend and foe alike could see that. It was a lesson for Israel, but it is a lesson we need to learn also. The question is, can we learn it the easy way by studying this example, or will we have to learn it the hard way, as did the people of Jericho. Do we put our trust in what once appeared as strong, sturdy walls . . . do we trust in the false gods we have brought into our lives . . . or do we trust in the Lord to the point that we follow His commands? And will we do it completely, or will we pick and choose the parts we want to obey?

That is where Israel had fallen short; they did not obey God fully and completely. The Lord had commanded, in chapter 6, verse 17: *And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction.*” In this they had failed. Next week we shall see the impact of that behavior and its significance.

This series has been developed and written by our director of teacher training, Mr. D. A. Senter, and is copyrighted by Lamb of God Lutheran Church in Flower Mound, Texas. Your narrator is Dale Gaus.

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