

4. Not by might, but by God

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How often we hear a phrase that says, "God works in mysterious ways." The methods our God use don't make sense to us often.

But time to time, He allows us to have a glimpse of His infinite wisdom to see the reasons why He does. Whenever He does, we are in totally awe and couldn't believe His patience, faithfulness and love for us.

The only possible explanation that I can come up with is that when He does the thing that blows our logic would make everyone to see His power and wisdom and no one can take glory other than Himself.

Many of us heard a story of the wall of Jericho came tumbling down from Sunday School. It is all too familiar story that we tend to forget what it is truly required to happen that way. To understand the conquest of Jericho, we must start our study from more humanly-not-making-sense area.

A. THE CIRCUMCISION OF ISRAEL AT GILGAL

Joshua 5:1-9 So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel. 2 At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." 3 So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. 4 And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. 5 For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised. 6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord--to whom the Lord swore that He would not show them the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey." 7 Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. 8 So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. 9 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.

We would expect Joshua to mobilize his soldiers immediately and attack Jericho. After all, the people of Israel were united in following the Lord. And now the people of the land were paralyzed by fear. From the human point of view, it was the perfect time for Joshua to act.

But God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours. Joshua was getting his orders from the Lord, not from the military experts.

Isaiah 55:8-9 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

God's people must be prepared before they can be trusted with victory. The triumphant conquest of the land was to be the victory of God, not the victory of Israel or of Joshua. It was neither the expertise of the Jewish army nor the emotions of the enemy that would give Israel the victory, but the presence and blessing of the Lord.

Obviously, this was suicidal from a military standpoint. All the men of fighting age were made completely vulnerable and unable to fight for a period of several days, till they were healed.

Then why would they do it right in front of their enemy Jericho? Because they trusted the Lord to protect them and keep them safe. Unlike their fathers' generation which didn't trust the Lord and made Him to keep them away from the Promised Land for forty years until the last man died, this new second generation saw the power of God when they crossed the Jordan River and believed in His Word.

Circumcision, the mark of the covenant reminded them that their bodies belonged to the Lord and were not to be used for sinful purposes. Israel was surrounded by nations that worshiped idols and included in their worship rituals that were sensual and degrading. The mark of the covenant reminded the Jews that they were a special people, a separated people, a holy nation, and that they were to maintain purity in their marriages, their society, and their worship of God.

The Jews had not practiced circumcision during their years of wandering in the wilderness. The new generation was now in their inheritance, however, and it was important that they renew their covenant relationships with the Lord. They would be surrounded by pagan people with immoral religious practices, and they would be tempted to compromise with their enemies. Later, this is exactly what future generations did, because they forgot the true meaning of circumcision.

Since the second generation trusted the Lord, He removed the reproach of Egypt. What reproach? What dishonor? Their shame from Egypt, the shame of their degrading slavery.

By faith, the Israelites could see themselves as an obedient, trusting people, and to stop seeing themselves as they were in their slavery and bondage. Of course, this is the same work God wants to do in us, taking away the dishonor and shame of our previous sins and rebellion, and seeing ourselves as who we are in Jesus.

Before the Israelites rushed into the battle, they had to be holy in the sight of God. Just like them we also must be holy, as we get involved in the works of God by renewing our mind through the Word of God.

B. NO MORE MANNA

Joshua 5:10-12 Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. 11 And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. 12 Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the

land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

On the day after Passover, the manna ceased. It ended a forty-year miracle. God always provides, but He is perfectly free to change the source of His provision from time to time. We need to trust in Him, not in His manner of provision, or we will stumble when that changes.

C. THE COMMANDER OF THE ARMY OF THE LORD

Joshua 5:13-15 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" 14 So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" 15 Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

Joshua's logical question didn't get the answer he was looking for. Rather, he just realized that he was standing in the very presence of the Lord Almighty.

This is one of the many "theophanies" in the OT. A theophany is a physical manifestation of Jesus in the OT.

He points out to Joshua that He is not on Joshua's side. Rather, Joshua is on His side. Like that we should realize that the Lord is not taking any side. Rather we need to be on His side.

How wonderfully comforting it is that the Commander of the army of the Lord is with Joshua at this point!

D. A REALLY WEIRD BATTLE PLAN

Joshua 6:1-5 Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. 2 And the Lord said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. 3 You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. 4 And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him."

Jericho itself was on full alert – from a human perspective, this would be a hard, if not impossible, battle. Yet from God's perspective, the battle was already over, because He promised to give it to Joshua and his people.

The method of the conquest was beyond anyone's imagination. It was a battle without a sword and an arrow, without a gate ramming beam or a siege mount. But it required total dependence on God. It required great faith from Joshua, because he had to explain and lead the nation in this plan. It required great faith from the elders and the nation, because they had to follow Joshua in this plan.

It was a plan for victory whereby it would clearly be the work of the Lord. Yet God gave them something to do, so that Israel could work in partnership with God as He wants us to be a part of His work today.

Christians stand in a position of guaranteed victory because Jesus Christ has already defeated every spiritual enemy.

E. HERE IS THE PLAN TO CONQUER

Joshua 6:6-10 Then 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 rams' horns before the ark of the Lord." 7 And he said to the people, "Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the Lord." 8 So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them. 9 The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. 10 Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout."

As we studied it before, the ark represent the presence of God. Being on God's side makes all the difference in the world whether it is the crossing of the Jordan River or dealing with individual life situations.

F. THE WALL OF JERICHO CAME TUMBLING DOWN

Joshua 6:11-20 So he had the ark of the Lord circle the city, going around it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp. 12 And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. 13 Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the Lord, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. 14 And the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. So they did six days. 15 But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times. 16 And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: "Shout, for the Lord has given you the city! 17 Now the city shall be doomed by the Lord to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. 18 And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. 19 But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord." 20 So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

Can you imagine the soldiers inside of the Jericho wall, following the Israelites as they circled around the wall from the outside on the first day? Without any fight, they

went back to their camp. I am sure that they couldn't figure it out what these Israelites were up to. The suspense was building up for six more days. It got worse when the Israelites circled them for seven times on the seventh day. I am sure that some of the people in Jericho jeered them until they started to shout and the earth underneath of them started to give out.

G. TAKING THE CITY OF JERICHO

Joshua 6:21-27 And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword. 22 But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, "Go into the harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her." 23 And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel. 24 But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. 25 And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. 26 Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying, "Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates." 27 So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country.

Killing every living thing seems harsh to us, because it is harsh. But we must recognize, that at unique times, God has commanded that such judgment come to pass.

The civilization in Canaan was unspeakably wicked. God didn't want His holy people contaminated by their neighbors. Satan could pollute the Jewish nation with intermarriage with the pagan nations around the Israelites and prevent the birth of the Messiah. They had over 400 years to repent, but they didn't.

H. APPLICATIONS

- 1) We must be holy, as we get involved in the works of God by renewing our mind through the Word of God.
- 2) The Christian soldier stands in a position of guaranteed victory because Jesus Christ has already defeated every spiritual enemy.
- 3) The only way to grow in faith in the Lord is to accept new challenges and trust God to give you victory.
- 4) Don't pray for easy lives, rather pray to be better godly men and women. Don't pray for tasks equal to our powers, rather pray for power equal to our tasks.