

Joshua 6, Conquest of Jericho

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Overview

6:1 balances 5:1 and 6:27 in framing the section and separating the preparation from the conquest.

After the preparation comes the battle.

- It is a mistake to think that we can succeed in battle without the threefold preparation of salvation, discipline, and submission.
- It is equally a mistake to expect that faithfulness in these three areas will yield a life free from conflict and opposition. Just the opposite: the purpose of these is to equip us as the Lord's Host to fight his battles under his direction.

6:2-26 is organized in the forwarded command form familiar from the Lord's three speeches in the crossing of the Jordan in ch. 3-4.

- The Lord speaks to Joshua.
- Joshua passes on the command to the people.
- The people obey.

In this case, the Lord speaks once, but gives two commands, and the second two parts are given first for the first command, then for the second.

6:1, Jericho Shut Up

Like 5:1 and 6:27, focuses our attention away from Israel and toward the land that they are invading.

Unlike the other two verses, this one concentrates on Jericho, which is to be the object of the activities over the next chapter.

The security of the city explains why the Israelites are able to go about the circumcision and Passover celebration without hindrance.

2-5, The Lord's Command

2, *Gift of the City*

Refers directly to the circumstance of 6:1. "See!" A command to look at the city, shut up, with no activity around the gates. Suggests that this interview takes place, not at night, but in full daylight. If it were at night, the gates would be shut up anyway, and there would be nothing for Joshua to see.

3-4a, *Days 1-6*

All the men of war to march around the city. NB: not the entire population, but only the fighters.

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Accompanied by priests and the Ark of the Covenant.

The priests are to bear “seven trumpets of rams’ horns.” This phrase invites further attention.

The Problem

The word rendered here (and in vv. 5, 6, 8, 13) “ram” nowhere in the Bible has that sense. There are clear words for “ram” and “ram’s horn,” but this is not one of them. The word is used extensively (and almost exclusively) in Lev. 25, 27, to describe the year of Jubilee. In fact, this word (*yobel*) is the basis for the word “jubile,” which is merely transliterated there. These are really “the jubilee trumpets.” To understand their significance here, we need to know the meaning of the Jubilee itself, as defined in Leviticus, which they had at their disposal.

Significance of the Jubile, Lev. 25

1-7: the sabbatical year, characterized by letting the land lie fallow. (Included the reading of the law, Deut. 31:10-13.)

8-17: Every seven sabbatical years is the year of Jubile. Three provisions summarized, and then amplified in the rest of the chapter:

- 11-12, 18-22, land to lie fallow, as in the sabbatical year.
- 13, 23-38, property to return to its owners. (cf. Deut. 15, suspension of debts in the seventh year)
- 14-16, 39-55, Israelite slaves to be freed. (cf. Exod 21:2, slaves freed every seven years; here we are probably dealing with those who have had their ears bored through.

Associated with the Jubile was a particular trumpet call (also named “jubile” in Lev. 25:9, but really the word elsewhere rendered “alarm”).

Significance of yobel in Josh. 6

Perhaps a figurative echo of the jubile year. Like a poor man forced to sell his land to survive, Jacob and his sons abandoned the land that God had promised them to flee to Egypt in time of famine. Now the rightful owners return to their possession, accompanied by trumpets appropriate to announce that joyful occasion.

4b-5, Day 7

On the seventh day, the priests actually issue the distinctive jubile call with the trumpets. (They will in fact blow every day, but not with the distinctive call.) “When the jubile call draws you,” march into the city.

The next two sections recount how Joshua echoes each aspect of this instruction to the people, and how they obey.

6-14, Days 1-6

6-7, Joshua Commands

8-14, The People Obey

We can reconstruct the order of march from 6:8,9.

1. The "armed men." Though this translation is possible, it seems at variance with v.3, which indicates that only "the men of war" were to march, and thus the "rereward" must also be armed. Another translation is more likely. *Xaluc* can also mean "withdrawn, drawn out," and thus might come to mean "selected," or a military "detachment." This is actually a better rendering, given its contexts. In addition to the 3x in Josh 6 (7, 9, 13), under examination here:
 - The passive ptc appears first in Num 31:5 to describe a smaller force selected from the whole to battle Midian. Cf. the verb in 31:3.
 - Twice in 1 Chr 12 (23,24) to describe the forces that fell away to David during the time of Saul
 - Late, Isa 15:4, to describe forces of Moab; 2 Chr 28:14, an expeditionary force from Israel against Judah.
 - The other 9x, in Numbers (32), Deut, and Josh (4:13), all refer to the forces of RGM/2. We found in 4:13 that they fulfilled their promise to Moses by sending only 40K out of the total of $43,730 + 40,500 + 52,700/2$ (Num 26:7, 18, 34) = 110,580 who were "able to go to war" (Num 26:2). If *xaluc* means "armed," they violated the universal statements in Num 32:21, 27, but if it means "withdrawn, selected," then these should be translated, "all the detachment."
 - Conclusion for Josh 6: those who lead the procession are not "the armed men," but "the detachment," that is, of RGM/2, who led the procession in battle as they led across the Jordan in ch. 4.
2. The priests with trumpets, sounding throughout the six days, but blowing the special Jubile call the seventh.
3. The ark. Previously, during the wanderings in the desert, it always led the people. Now it is in their midst.
4. The rereward. The division is "rere-ward," not "re-reward."
 - "rere" is alternative spelling for "rear," "after."
 - "ward" has the sense of "guard."
 - Thus the "rereward" is the "rear guard," the portion of the army preventing attack from behind.

Application: Once again, we find RGM/2 thrust into the fore. They are not merely tagging along to fulfill their obligation to the nation, but are setting the example, moving out in advance of the rest of the nation, risking greater danger to win an inheritance for the other tribes than those

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tribes are. Compare the NT exhortations for each of us to seek, not just our own welfare, but that of others:

- Phil. 2:4, Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
- The function of the body in 1 Cor. 12:22ff.

Do we love one another this much? Are we this zealous in serving one another? God grant that we might have the attitude of RGM/2 in our dealings with one another.

15-26, Day 7

15, *The March (Continuation of Obedience)*

16-19, *Joshua Commands*

The Condemning of the City and its Goods

“Accursed” or “utterly destroyed” (v.21) renders noun and verb, respectively, from *xrm*, which describes things *devoted* to God. Includes

- living things, which are to be slain, both man and beast (v.21); also used of condemned criminals, Exod 22:20.
- riches, which are to be taken into the tabernacle treasury as “consecrated” or “holy” (*qode\$*).

The notion of devotion to God reminds us of sacrifice, but 1 Sam. 15:15-23 plainly distinguishes the two. The difference appears to be that sacrifice is something that the worshipper brings voluntarily, as a personal transaction before God, while devoted things already belong to God and Israel is simply his instrument to take them forcibly. Thus the error of 1 Sam. 15 was not only disobedience, but thinking that they could offer in sacrifice something that already belonged to God.

Throughout Canaan, the people are to be killed. Sometimes the goods and cattle are given to the Israelites, sometimes they too are devoted to God. Israel is not fighting for her own enrichment. She is executing God’s judgment on a population whose iniquity has finally become full (Gen 15:16). This distinction is critical in responding to inevitable criticisms of Israel’s conduct.

Application: Motives often make the vital difference in whether something is right or wrong. For Israel to conquer cities in order to enrich itself would be wrong, but for her to execute God’s judgment on sinners is right.

The Spies as “Messengers”

When Joshua sent out the spies, he did so secretly, without telling the rest of the nation (2:1, “saying secretly, ...”). They were gathering intelligence for his personal use, not (as in Num. 13) to direct a public referendum. This appears to be the first time he tells the others about their visit to Jericho, and when he does, he calls them, not “spies,” but “messengers,” because they brought Rahab and her family into the covenant nation. The NT memorializes both roles, “spies” in Heb. 11:31 and “messengers” in James 2:25.

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Application: Whatever job we think we're doing, we are also God's messengers. We are to be ready always to give an answer to everyone around us (1 Pet. 3:15).

20-26, The People Obey

Fourfold distribution of the conquest, showing how completely the Lord claims dominion over the conquest. Though in later cases the people sometimes are given access to the spoil, this first battle sets the expectation and the baseline. The land is the Lord's; they are simply his instruments in conquering it.

- Rahab and her family spared, because she hid the messengers.
- All other living things put to death.
- All inanimate wealth taken into the tabernacle treasury.
- Even the real estate excluded from future use. Joshua curses anyone who would rebuild the city. 1 Kings 16:34 reports that in the days of Ahab, a particularly wicked king, someone ignored this curse and did try to rebuild, with disastrous results.

Application: How differently Rahab and her family are treated from the rest of the city...and yet how similarly! Even she is "devoted to the Lord," his complete possession. Reminds us that there is no escaping God's sovereign claims over us. We can be his in salvation, or he will take us in judgment.

27, Joshua's Reputation

This is the final one of the three framing passages describing the land's fear of the Israelites. As in the first but not the second, the scope is the entire land. The conquest of Jericho has set the stage for the rest of Israel's campaign.