

Prayer

Glorious Lord, we thank You for the privilege of worship, and we pray for the lives of thousands of people who are unable to gather to praise You today because of persecution and intimidation. May they know they are not forgotten, and may all Your people be liberated from oppression. We ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Relatives

We will offer prayers this week for our relatives. Some have many, and others know only a few, but all are important. Thank God for the relatives He has given you.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the crisis of banking in various parts of the world*
- *Gives thanks for hard work done by carers and social services*
- *Pray for Morgan Tsvangirai, the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe*

Meditation

When everything around us happens too fast,
Lord Jesus, slow things down.

When everything that happens is incomprehensible,
Lord Jesus, grant us understanding.

When everything around us appears chaotic,
Lord Jesus, bring calm repose.

When everything that happens seems out of control,
Lord Jesus, show us Your perspective.

When everything we see has little apparent purpose,
Lord Jesus, help us find meaning.

For You are the Master of all, the great I am:
Lord Jesus, we put our trust in You,

Bible Study - Joshua 6:1-11

¹ Now Jericho was under siege by the Israelites; no one came out and no one went in. ² The LORD said to Joshua, 'Look, I have delivered Jericho along with its king and soldiers into your hands. ³ All the warriors must march around the city once, and you must do this for six days, ⁴ with seven priests bearing seven rams' horn trumpets in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When they give a long blast on the trumpets, then at the sound of this signal, all the people must call out with a great shout; and the wall of the city will collapse, and everyone will be able to charge straight ahead.'

⁶ So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and told them to take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and have seven priests carry seven rams' horn trumpets in front of it. ⁷ He ordered the people to go up and march around the

city, with the armed men marching in front of the ark of the LORD. ⁸ And so, just as Joshua had commanded, the seven priests carrying the seven rams' horn trumpets in front of the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD behind them. ⁹ The armed men went in front of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually. ¹⁰ Joshua gave the people this command: 'You must not shout or raise your voices or speak a word, until the day I tell you to shout; then you will shout!' ¹¹ So he made the ark of the LORD go around the city once. Then they came back into the camp and spent the night there.

Review

The book of Joshua begins to burst into life with chapter six, with the story of the battle for Jericho. First of all, the Lord gave instructions to Joshua for a military action that was essential to the success of the taking of the Promised Land, and just as for the crossing of the Jordan, the Lord's instructions had to be obeyed if God's people were to enjoy success. The first paragraph in our passage describes these instructions (6:2-5), and then the second paragraph describes Joshua's giving of these commands to Israel (6:6f.) and the first day's action (6:8-11).

However, it is quite clear that this was no mortal battle, and the instructions had little military significance. Christians of past generations have attempted to make a case for the success of the battle based upon the weakening of the walls by the trampling of the army around it for seven days, or the fright of the citizens inside at the sound of the trumpets, or the fear of not knowing when the Israelites would eventually attack. None of this is relevant. The battle was spiritual because it was controlled by the Lord, and the Israelites were successful because they obeyed the commands they were given. We miss the point of this whole story if we fail to appreciate how important it was for the people to be obedient, and the point is made stronger by the fact that after the battle for Jericho, the next battle at Ai (Ch.7) was tainted by the people's disobedience, and consequently, it was initially unsuccessful.

There is considerable symbolism in the story. To begin with, the city of Jericho is described as 'shut up' (6:1), using an emphatic Hebrew word also used in 2:5 for the closing of the city gates when the spies hid with Rahab. Ever since the Israelites came out of Egypt they bore a message, which was that their God was greater than the Egyptian gods. Rahab had accepted this message that the Lord God was to be obeyed. The shutting of the gates of Jericho symbolised the rejection of this message by the rest of the city; for the king of Jericho and his people, all apart from Rahab and her family, would not accept the coming of Israel into Canaan, and they stood in the way of the Lord. It was therefore important that the means of winning Jericho was not mere force of arms, but the force of spiritual obedience to the One who now claimed Canaan for His own people.

So it is that Jericho was overcome not so much by the cunning of a military exercise but by the observation of a religious ritual. You will recall that just prior to chapter 6, we read that the people of Israel celebrated the Passover meal (5:10-12). The original instruction for the Passover (Exodus 12) indicates that the Passover was to be a weeklong festival with repeated festivities for seven days before the final celebration at the end. It is no coincidence that the battle at Jericho has the same format! The presence of the Lord, in the form of the ark, was paraded around Jericho to the accompaniment of ram's horn trumpets blown by priests. Now, some translations suggest that these trumpets were used to give battle signals, and the call for the people to shout (6:10) refers to a war cry. However, no such thing is indicated in the Hebrew, for all the sounding of trumpets and

shouts were really features of the ancient worship of God. So, as the Israelites obeyed the Lord's commands and paraded around the city on the first day (6:11), what they did was more like a form of worship to God than any military manoeuvre. In verse 2, the Lord said to Joshua 'I have delivered Jericho ... into your hands'. The Hebrew verb used here is the 'perfect', indicating that the job was already done, and in order to take hold of a victory already granted, all that the people had to do was worship God according to His instructions!

In the next study, we will look in more detail at the surrounding of Jericho and the conclusion of the battle. However, the message of our passage is clear; God's people win their battles by being obedient to Him. To this day, Christians find themselves in various situations of battle with evil and with the forces of this world that oppose God. They can never win by fighting hard in their own strength. They can only win where God has already granted victory, and communicated this through giving His word about how to make the victory real and how to accomplish it. Of course, it is likely that any victory, as at Jericho, will be achieved through the worship of the Lord.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what you believe to be the meaning of the instructions given to Joshua about the coming battle of Jericho.
2. How do we win spiritual battles today? What situations in your own life illustrate the spiritual principles of this passage?
3. How do God's people demonstrate the presence of the Lord in their midst, now that we do not have the ark of the covenant?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

We have not yet looked at some important issues to do with the battle of Jericho. Some people find it difficult to read about this in scripture because it is about warfare, and they find it hard to accept that God was involved with this. We will have to deal with a number of such issues more directly in coming passages of scripture, so in this study, I have concentrated on the principles of spiritual warfare. It is sad if we cannot accept that there are real battles to be won today against some very real enemies of God, of humanity and of the world at large, and although the world does its best, it is up to God's people to identify and defeat some evils, in God's name. Today, for example, we need to fight against corporate greed, but who is really going to fight this battle?

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Reflect on how many times in your life you have had to fight a hard and difficult spiritual battle. What have been the principles by which you have won such battles, and where have you let yourself and God down? It can take some courage to work through such a question, but it is worth it.*
- *Pray for those who find it hard to accept that 'battle' is a principle from which Christians can learn, even if they are pacifists! Pray that God's people will take up a stance against the evils of our world and be prepared to fight them.*

Final Prayer

God of grace and God of mercy; we find it hard to live each moment of our lives conscious of Your presence and trusting in Your love. Be gracious to us and come upon us in power;