

## HEBREWS CHAPTER 11 – THE HEROES OF FAITH

**Oswald Chamber's definition of faith:** "Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time."

### FAITH AT JERICHO Hebrews 11:30

***"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days."***

It is a long walk from Rameses (Num.33:3) to the Red Sea – or from Cairo to Jericho. For the Israelites, the walk was not an exercise undertaken for sheer pleasure. The Jewish journey to Jericho was the migration of a nation. They were captives set free; emancipated slaves going back to their ancient homeland. But they did not know the way and God had to lead them step by step. Walking through the Red Sea with walls of water held back by the hand of omnipotence assured them that God was their Guide and Guard.

When we come to Joshua chapter six, forty years had elapsed between the crossing of the Red Sea and the arrival at Jericho. During this time the Israelites were in the "great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water." (Deut. 8:15)

Why so long in arriving in Canaan, the Land of Promise? Two reasons:

- One reason was because of their unbelief – *"Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years."* (Hebrews 3:8-9)
- The second reason was because of God's chastisement for their failure to enter the Land of Promise at His original command at Kadesh Barnea. Numbers 14:34 records these words: *"According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection."*

Again, it is written: *"And the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed."* (Numbers 32:13)

Moses explains why the forty years in the wilderness in these words, *"Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son."* (Deut. 8:5)

Joshua records the rebellion in these words: *"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."* (Joshua 5:6)

Hebrews 3:12-15 refers to the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea and warns us with these words: *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in*

*departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

We would have thought that after the Red Sea display of the power, provision and protection of God, the Israelites would never doubt or disobey God again. But they did, and so do we! How faithless we are at times, and how faithful He is! After a delay of forty years, they have finally arrived in Canaan. Another miraculous water crossing, the walk across the flooded Jordan River, brought them into the Promised Land.

They may have said, "Whew! Praise God, we're home at last! Our problems are finally over. We are in the land that God said "flowed with milk and honey." We are now on easy street." Had they known the old negro spiritual they probably would have sung it: "Gonna lay down my sword and shield; Down by the riverside; Down by the riverside; Down by the riverside; Gonna lay down my sword and shield; I ain't gonna study war no more, I ain't gonna study war no more, study war no more."

It was not to be! Directly ahead of them was the city of Jericho. The Israelites could avoid it completely by marching around it and going on to claim their Promised Land. What would they do? In a "Peanuts" cartoon, Linus expressed the following philosophy to Charlie Brown: "I don't like to face problems head on; I think the best way to solve problems is to avoid them. This is a distinct philosophy of mine: no problem is so big or so complicated that it can't be run away from."

How do you handle obstacles in your life? Do you try to avoid them? That will not remove the obstacle. In this episode in the life of the Israelite people, we see faith overcoming the obstacle that now barred their way forward. There are lessons in this story that will teach us how to face our problems in faith. Let us look at this event as follows:

### **THE FORTIFICATION THAT WAS BEFORE THEM**

Joshua 6:1-5

*"Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. 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. 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. 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's Situation.***

Jericho was strategically situated. It was in the south of the country and protected the

approach to the heartland of Canaan. If Jericho could not be taken, Israel would always be looking over their shoulders. They must overcome here if they were to be victorious. Jericho had stood many tests over many centuries. It is said by archeologists to be the oldest known city in the world. According to recorded history, it had never been overthrown.

### ***Jericho's Size.***

Jericho was the greatest fortress city the Israelites would come up against. It was located on a mound 1,200 ft. long and 50 ft. in height. "A massive six-foot thick wall was erected on the edge of the mound. The inner wall was separated from it by a space of from 12 to 15 feet and was itself 12 feet thick." (Merle Unger: *Archeology And The Old Testament*)

"The walls were of the type which made direct assault practically impossible. An approaching enemy first encountered a stone abutment, eleven feet high, back and up from which sloped a 35 degree plastered embankment reaching to the main wall some 35 vertical feet above. The steep, smooth slope prohibited battering the wall by any effective device or building fires to break it. An army trying to storm the wall found difficulty in climbing the slope, and ladders to scale the wall could find no satisfactory footing. The normal tactics used by an enemy to take a city so protected was siege, but Israel did not have time for this, if she was to occupy all the land." (Dr. Leon Wood: *Survey of Israel's History*; p.174)

On top of the wall were houses, making the height of the wall and houses about 30 feet. Rahab's house was located on top of the wall according to Joshua 2:15. As to its population, scholars estimate that at least 10,000 people lived in Jericho. Certainly the city could not be overthrown by the might of men. It was a great city not only in antiquity, but it was a great city in iniquity also. It was paganistic to the core.

## **THE FORCE THAT WAS SUPPORTING THEM**

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?" So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."* (Joshua 5:13-14a)

### ***The Warrior That Joshua Challenged.***

Joshua was out in the fields surveying the scene when he was suddenly confronted by a figure with a drawn sword. Joshua was a courageous man for he instantly challenged this Warrior figure saying, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" The Personage replied, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." This Person did not come to take sides; He came to take over! It was not a question of whether He was on Joshua's side, but was Joshua on His side?

Who was this Person whom Joshua met? This was God appearing in human form! This was not the first time that God had assumed the figure of a man for there were several such

visible manifestations that were varied according to the occasion. Most Bible teachers agree this was one of several appearances of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament.

Charles H. Spurgeon, the English pastor and author wrote of this encounter: "The Lord Jesus usually appears to his people in a manner which proves His communion with them. To Abraham the pilgrim he appeared as a pilgrim (Gen.18:1-3); with Jacob the wrestler he wrestled (Genesis 32:24-25); to the three in the furnace he appeared as one of them in the furnace (Daniel 3:25), and to Joshua the soldier he showed himself as a warrior."

The Lord Jesus' promise to us is, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" So we may boldly say: "*The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*" (Heb.13:5-6) And, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*" (Psalm 46:1)

### ***The Worship That Joshua Offered.***

*"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" 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 5:14b-15)*

Joshua's veneration: "*Joshua fell on his face to the earth*" and his verbiage: "*What does my Lord say to His servant?*" demonstrate the reverence this Person inspired in Joshua. The real character of this Person is disclosed by His accepting the worship that Joshua gave. Furthermore, the command: "*Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy*" settles the matter. This is none other than God Himself appearing in human form!

Joshua was not rebuked for offering worship to this Person, which he certainly would have received had this been only an angel. The Apostle John, on the island of Patmos, twice, fell down at the feet of an angel to worship and was rebuked (Rev.19:10 and 22:9). In both cases the angel said, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant ..... Worship God!" Joshua did the right thing when he realized who was speaking to him. He fell on his face in worship, and made himself available to God. The Lord Almighty deserves the same from us.

This divine Commander was leading "*the army of the LORD.*" That there actually is an army of the Lord is well established in scripture. We can probably assume that it is an angelic army. There are forces at God's disposal that we'll never fully know about on the earth. It is a comforting thought to us that "*The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.*" (Psalm 34:7)

## **THE FORMULATION OF THE BATTLE PLAN**

Joshua saw a drawn sword in the hand of this Commander. There were two armies present at Jericho: one an earthly army and the other a heavenly army. Clearly, Joshua and his forces were light-weight troops. God's troops were the heavy weights! Joshua didn't know how the Israelites could conquer the impregnable city of Jericho. But with God's army, that would be no problem.

***The Promise Of Victory Was Given Beforehand.***

*“And the LORD said to Joshua: “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor.” (Joshua 6:2)*

The chapter break between Joshua 5 and 6 is a little misleading, because the conversation begun in 5:13 continues into chapter 6, after a brief parenthetical note about the situation within Jericho in verse one. There was to be the complete absence of any military effort on behalf of the Israelites which underscores the most important part of this story and that is that Jericho was to be conquered “by faith” (Heb. 11:30).

***The Participation Of The Israelites Was Outlined In Detail.***

*“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. 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. 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.” (Joshua 6:3-5)*

The mobilization orders came from God Himself. They were strange, unorthodox and unparalleled in the history of warfare. This would not be a battle for human glory or material gain for God alone would win the victory for His people and everything in the city was to be devoted to the Lord. Joshua responded with strong faith. No questions are recorded, only obedience. What a model for us!

**THE FORTRESS MIRACULOUSLY COLLAPSES**

Joshua 6:6-27

***The Overthrow Of The Wall.***

The destruction of Jericho was complete. It was indeed a mighty overthrow. No stone was pulled down by human hands, no sword was thrust by the Israelites, no spear thrown until the wall was flattened by unseen forces. President Reagan stood at the Berlin Wall and said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Joshua stood at the Jericho wall and said, “God is going to tear down this wall!” The old song says, “Joshua fit de battle of Jericho.” But, of course, he did not!

In order to understand what happened we must not forget that “*the Commander of the hosts of the Lord*” was present. If the Commander was present, His army was present. God’s unseen army pushed the walls down! The secret to Israel’s victory wasn’t in her people’s military might. It was the presence of the Lord in their midst that made the difference.

***The Outcome For The Israelites.***

*“Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. 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.” (Joshua 6:20-21)*

The victory was wonderful for the people of God but it was terrible for the inhabitants of

Jericho. However, even in the midst of God's judgment, there was mercy. Rahab and her family were saved from the onslaught. How grateful the children of God today should be to saved from the wrath to come! (I Thess. 1:10) And it is because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### SOME FAITH REINFORCEMENTS

1. *"The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."* (II Cor. 10:4)
2. There is simplicity to faith. We sometimes imagine that faith is complex and difficult. Think: Jericho was to be captured; it was an impregnable fortress; humans had not overthrown it; God said, walk, blow and shout! They were to simply trust God to do the rest. Can anything be more simple than that?
3. Remember that God said, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts".* (Isaiah 55:8-9)
4. Jesus said, *"It shall be done to you according to your faith."* (Matt.9:29) Not according to your forces, your fame, your fortune, your feelings but according to your faith!
5. *"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. "* (Hebrews 10:35-39)

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,  
And looks to God alone;  
Laughs at impossibilities  
And cries, "It shall be done!"

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**"WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD"**

Hebrews 11:6

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