

Trust Him

Joshua 6:15-25

15 Early on the seventh day, they started at dawn and marched around the city seven times in the same way. That was the only day they marched around the city seven times. **16** After the seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets, and Joshua said to the people, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. **17** But the city and everything in it are set apart to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and everyone with her in the house will live, because she hid the men we sent. **18** But keep yourselves from the things set apart, or you will be set apart for destruction. If you take any of those things, you will set apart the camp of Israel for destruction and bring disaster on it. **19** For all the silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron, are dedicated to the LORD and must go into the LORD’s treasury.” **20** So the people shouted, and the trumpets sounded. When they heard the blast of the trumpet, the people gave a great shout, and the wall collapsed. The people advanced into the city, each man straight ahead, and they captured the city. **21** They completely destroyed everything in the city with the sword—every man and woman, both young and old, and every ox, sheep, and donkey. **22** Joshua said to the two men who had scouted the land, “Go to the prostitute’s house and bring the woman out of there, and all who are with her, just as you promised her.” **23** So the young men who had scouted went in and brought out Rahab and her father, mother, brothers, and all who belonged to her. They brought out her whole family and settled them outside the camp of Israel. **24** They burned up the city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD’s house. **25** However, Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, her father’s household, and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent to spy on Jericho, and she lives in Israel to this day.

Exploration

If you grew up attending church, you've probably heard the story of the battle of Jericho dozens of times and you may have even sung songs about. Even if you didn't grow up going to church, there is a good chance you are familiar with this iconic battle where the Israelites destroyed the massive walls of heavily fortified Jericho simply by marching around it. What we often miss in this story, however, is that God told Joshua before the Israelites began their military campaign that He had already handed Jericho over to them. In other words, before Joshua took his first action as general of the Israelite army, God essentially told him, "You've already won!" And yet, God commanded Joshua to do some very specific things. He told them to march around the city once a day for six days with the ark of the covenant out in front of the army. On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven consecutive times and then blow a trumpet which would result in the walls crumbling, leaving the most fortified city in the promised land vulnerable.

If God had already determined that Joshua and the Israelites would be victorious, why did He command them to do all of these specific things? What was the point? Why couldn't they simply march on Jericho right away? God had promised that Israel would be His special possession—they would demonstrate His power and glory to all other nations (Ex. 19:5-6). By commanding the Israelites to march around the city these thirteen times, He was showing the Israelites a great kindness—He was teaching them to trust Him. When we trust God, we know that He will accomplish all His purposes and that our job is simply to obey.

CONTEXT (JOSH. 2:1–6:27)

Joshua "secretly sent two men as spies... saying, 'Go and scout the land, especially Jericho'" (2:1). In Jericho, the spies took refuge in the home of a prostitute named Rahab. The king of Jericho, when told of the presence of the spies, commanded Rahab to surrender them. Instead, she hid the men on her roof and deliberately misled the king by informing him that the two men had escaped. Grateful, the spies promised to protect Rahab and her family when Joshua and the Israelites destroyed Jericho. The men instructed her to identify the location of her house by tying a scarlet cord to her window.

The two spies returned to Joshua and reported: "The LORD has handed over the entire land to us" (2:24). Starting early the following morning, Joshua led the Israelites to the Jordan River. The Lord instructed Joshua to charge the priests to stand in the river with the ark of the covenant. When the priests obeyed, the "water flowing downstream stood still" (3:16) and the Israelites crossed on dry ground (3:17). What sheer joy the Hebrews must have experienced to actually be in the promised land!

The Lord instructed Joshua to march around Jericho with his army for six days. Seven priests, each carrying a ram's horn trumpet, would accompany the men (6:3-4). On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times. With one prolonged trumpet blast as a signal, the Hebrews were to shout. The Lord promised: "the city wall will collapse, and the people will advance" (6:5).

Conversation

Discuss what students discovered as they explored this session's passage. Specifically, turn their attention to the following quick response questions and ask several students to share their answers.

› **Have you ever competed in an important competition (a championship game or a band competition)? How did you go? What was the outcome?**

› **How did you prepare for this competition or game?**

The more significant the game or performance, the more carefully we typically prepare. When gearing up for a big game, athletes spend countless hours practicing. They may even watch video of their opponents in hopes of becoming familiar with their tendencies and exploiting their weaknesses. Many professional athletes spend time visualizing. They literally close their eyes and picture themselves scoring, outmaneuvering their opponents, and winning the game. In Joshua 6, Israel was preparing for their first big "performance" in the mission God had given them of taking the promised land. Here God calls the Israelites to prepare in a rather peculiar way. Rather than having them visualize winning the battle or plotting out a well-crafted strategy for victory, God commands Joshua to simply lead the Israelites in a series of marches around the city. While this may seem strange to us, God was teaching them a far more important lesson than military tactics or visualization—He was teaching them to trust Him. In the mission God has given us, we must trust that God will accomplish all His purposes—our role is simply to obey.

JOSHUA 6:1-14 (CONTEXT)

Ask a few students to read the first fourteen verses for the group in order to understand the context of Joshua 6:15-25.

› **How was Jericho described in verse 1? What challenges did this situation create for Joshua and the Israelites?**

› **The Lord told Joshua that the city was "handed over" or delivered to them (v. 2). Why did God use the past tense when the Israelites had not yet conquered the city?**

Jericho was well fortified with outer walls that were 6 feet thick and inner walls that were 50 feet high. It was an imposing structure. The city's inhabitants saw the Israelites coming and hunkered down for a fight. This situation made the task of taking the city that much harder for the Israelites, but not for their God. The statement in verse 1 shows a potentially daunting obstacle that is effortlessly overcome by the all-powerful God.

Leader Prep

JOSHUA 6:15-17

In these verses the conquest of the promised land began. Early on the seventh day the Hebrews made final preparations for conquering Jericho. They marched around the city seven times, carefully obeying the instructions of the Lord (6:4). The words that was the only day they marched around the city seven times emphasizes the people's complete obedience to every detail of God's command.

After the seventh time, Joshua commanded the people: "Shout!" Prior to this final pass around Jericho, the people had been told to be silent. Joshua had instructed them: "Don't let one word come out of your mouth until the time I say, 'Shout!' Then you are to shout" (6:10).

Joshua gave additional instruction that everything in the city would be set apart to the Lord for destruction. This commandment was not a new one; God had given it to Moses years before. In Deuteronomy 7:4, the Lord commanded Moses to destroy the people living in the promised land for fear the inhabitants would "turn your sons away from Me to worship other gods." (See also Deut. 20:16-18.)

The inhabitants of Canaan were unspeakably wicked, and God did not want His holy people contaminated by them. His people needed to be pure and separate from pagan religion.

Joshua gave special instructions concerning Rahab. Only Rahab the prostitute and everyone with her in the house will live. As discussed in earlier, Rahab had shown kindness to the spies when she hid the men (Josh. 2:2-7). The spies promised to protect her and her family when the Israelites destroyed Jericho (2:14-21). Interestingly, Rahab would appear in the genealogies of both David and Jesus (Matt. 1:5,16). God not only spared Rahab's life, He gave her a prominent place in the genealogy of Christ. No one's life is beyond the touch of God's grace if they are willing to repent and place their faith in Him.



In Joshua 5:13-15, just prior to being called by God to conquer Jericho, Joshua had a vision of a powerful angelic warrior who signified the presence of God as He instructed Joshua to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. Many commentators think that this angelic figure, "the commander of the army of the LORD" is actually preincarnate Jesus. In any event, it is further evidence of God's plan and promise to fight for His people.

Conversation

› **How does Joshua's order given to the people compare to the instructions God gave Joshua? What does that tell you about Joshua?**

› **Why was the ark of the Lord marched around the city? What was the significance of the ark?**

Beyond the instruction God gave him, Joshua gave further instruction regarding the armed guard that was to walk out in front of the ark. Joshua also expanded upon the way in which the ark was referred to: "the ark of the covenant" (v. 6) and "the ark of the LORD" (vv. 6-7), focusing the people's attention on it and its significance. The battle plan was God's and the success would be God's. Joshua had faith and was obedient. The ark was God's footstool; it was the location where the Israelites could encounter the one, true God. The ark led them through the wilderness and it would once again lead the march. God marched before His people.

JOSHUA 6:15-21

› **How do you think the soldiers felt as they marched silently? Explain.**

› **Why did they have to march so much—thirteen times total, once per day for six days and seven times the last day? What did that require of them?**

After marching around the city once a day for six days, the Israelites woke up on the seventh day and did just as God had commanded and marched around the city seven consecutive times. The priests then blew their trumpets and the people shouted and the walls of the ancient world's most highly fortified city crumbled and Israel descended upon the city in victory.

It was likely ominous marching around the city in silence. It called for great faith, and the persistence of their march showed their trust in God. Similarly, God calls us to be persistent in our faith. We are to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17) and trust in the Lord continually (Ex. 19:9; Isa. 26:4). Too often we think of faith as a decision we made at one point in time to trust Jesus for salvation. Faith is so much more than that. It is an active trusting that the Lord is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do. From the outside looking in, these thirteen marches around Jericho seem unnecessary and maybe even excessive. However, like the Israelites, we're called to persevere. God also calls us to have a persistent faith—one that trusts that His ways are good and right, even when they don't make sense to us.

Leader Prep

JOSHUA 6:18-21

Joshua gave a final warning regarding the material things inside Jericho. Wandering in the wilderness for 40 years had left the Israelites a poor people. The silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron would be a temptation to such a destitute nation. With a play on words in the original Hebrew, Joshua informed the people to keep themselves from the things set apart lest they be accursed set apart for destruction.

Disobedience to this command would bring disaster on the Israelites. The Hebrew word translated bring disaster occurs twice in Joshua 7:25 (“troubled,” “trouble”), where it describes Achan, a man who disobeyed this command, kept some of Jericho’s treasure, and paid for it with his own life and the lives of his family (Josh. 7:1,16-26). God desires complete obedience from His people.

In fulfillment of God’s command in 6:5, the people shouted as the priests blew their trumpets. The trumpet blast heralded the moment of God’s victory. We can only imagine the astonishment on the faces of the Hebrews as they watched the wall of Jericho, seemingly indestructible, collapse. If hesitation occurred at all, it evidently lasted only for a moment. The people advanced into the city. Israel’s conquest of Canaan had begun. Obeying the Lord’s command, the Hebrews completely destroyed everything in the city.

JOSHUA 6:22-23

One amazing fact should not be lost in Jericho’s rubble. Previously, the writer of the Book of Joshua revealed the fact that Rahab lived in a house built in the wall of the city (2:15). How easily Rahab and family could have been crushed as the wall collapsed. Visualize once more the Israelites as they watched Jericho’s wall disintegrate. Now visualize them as they observed one particular section of the wall remain intact. The Lord rewarded Rahab. As Rahab protected the two spies, the Lord protected Rahab and her family.

What a beautiful picture of what God does for us as well. When we come to him in faith, he saves us from the judgment all around us, plucks us from the crashing walls, and places us into his chosen family. Surely it must have been difficult for Rahab to watch her city being burned even though she and her family remained safe. It was all she had known, and now it would be left behind. Sometimes we have trouble letting go of our sin and past life.



It is important to note that God commanded the Israelites to march around Jericho with the ark of the covenant, which signified God’s holiness and presence. By taking the ark with them in their hike around the city, particularly on the seventh day when God would crush the walls of Jericho, God was demonstrating His superiority over the false gods of the Canaanites.

Conversation

› What was Joshua to do with the city of Jericho and its inhabitants (vv. 17-18)? Who in Jericho did God command the Israelites to spare?

Most of the other cities in the promised land were not treated as harshly as Jericho (Deut. 20:10-15), but the Lord commanded Joshua and the Israelites to devote the city and its inhabitants to destruction (v. 17; see also Deut. 20:16-17). In other words, they were to wipe out everyone in the city. While this may seem harsh to us today, it is important to note a few things. First, God's command to devote Jericho to destruction was for a specific time and place, it does not justify such military actions today. Second, God's intention was to punish the sins of the Canaanites (Gen. 15:16) and to protect the Israelites from falling into idolatry (Deut. 7:1-6). While it is difficult to stomach the thought of wiping out all the people of Jericho, it is important to remember that no one is innocent (Rom. 3:9-10). Finally, stress to students that prior to trusting in Christ, they were God's enemies (Rom. 5:1-8) and that Jesus, by dying on the cross for us, forever changed how we should think about and relate to our "enemies." He calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44). We see a foreshadowing of Jesus' mercy even in the destruction of Jericho as Rahab, a Gentile and a prostitute, was spared because of her faith in God demonstrated through helping the Israelite spies who were scouting out the promised land (Josh. 2:1-21).

JOSHUA 6:22-25

› In what ways did God keep His promises? Why is it important to understand that God keeps His promises?

God kept His promises by delivering the city (except for Rahab and her family, who He had pledged to protect because they cared for the spies—Josh. 2:14,17-20). We must always remember we are praying to the God who keeps His promises. They may not be kept immediately, but in the end, He is who He says He is and always stays true to His promises.

➤➤ **ITEM 5 (LEADER PACK)** Display the **Joshua 1:9** pack item with the diagram of the walls of Jericho for students to see. Point out how these walls made Jericho an incredibly intimidating city to attack, and as a result, their victory would require that the Israelites lean into God's promises, power, and presence.

Leader Prep

But God wants us to move forward and take up a new life that He provides as He did for Rahab. They had to be placed outside the camp of Israel for a period of cleansing before they could join the assembly of the Israelites.

JOSHUA 6:24-25

The Israelites burned up the city and everything in it. Unable to destroy the silver, gold, iron, and bronze, they put it in the treasury of the Lord's house. Once again, we are reminded that only Rahab and her family survived this initial battle in the promised land. And once again, her act of faithfulness was recorded—she hid the men Joshua had sent to spy on Jericho. Some commentators have taken notice of the fact that almost as many words describe Rahab's deliverance as describe the conquest of the city. (In 6:17-25, 86 Hebrews words are used to describe Rahab's salvation and 102 words are used to describe Jericho's destruction.)

New Testament writers commended Rahab for her faithfulness: “By faith Rahab the prostitute received the spies in peace and didn’t perish with those who disobeyed” (Heb. 11:31). *“And in the same way, wasn’t Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by a different route?”* (Jas. 2:25). True faith is demonstrated by obedience, and God honors those who faithfully obey Him.

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Application

CENTRAL TRUTH

God will accomplish all His purposes—our role is to obey.

NOW WHAT?

Guide students to try to put the Central Truth in their own words. Challenge students to think about the various ways God is calling them to obey Him today as they seek to live on mission for Him. After they have shared their thoughts, walk through the Central Truth and use the Now What questions to help them process how the truth affects their daily lives.

- › **Why does living on mission for God require faith? Why does it require obedience?**
- › **What are some of God's purposes for your life that you know from Scripture? What distracts you from focusing on and living out these purposes?**
- › **What can you learn from the Israelites' conquest of Jericho in terms of trusting God and living in obedience to Him?**

When students read the story of the fall of Jericho, they probably wonder why Israel had to march around Jericho once a day for six days with the ark of the covenant and then seven times on the seventh day. What in the world did all this marching have to do with the mission God had given them of taking the promised land? God had already promised Joshua that He would give Jericho into his hand, why did he have to do all this hiking? Couldn't God have shattered the walls of Jericho on day one rather than day seven?

God was teaching Joshua an invaluable lesson—the lesson of trust and obedience. By asking Joshua to do exactly as He laid out, God was teaching Joshua to trust Him. We serve a God who is infinite in strength, wisdom, knowledge, and goodness. Given who God is, will we always know why He does the things He does? Of course not. God is wiser, stronger, and better than we are. So, why march around the city thirteen times? Because God said so and God is wise, good, and strong. Remember God's challenge to Joshua—be strong and very courageous. And how would Joshua do that? By leaning on God's promises and trusting His Word.

- › **In what areas of your life is it most difficult for you to obey God? What is one step you will take this week to begin living in obedience to God?**

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage students to memorize the verse listed for this session. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the Keep on Digging section in their Personal Study Guides and to take the truths of this section and apply them to their lives.

› **Dwell:** Read Ephesians 1:3-14. Take note of what the apostle Paul says about God's plans, purposes, and will. Take some time to consider God's purpose in saving you (v. 7) and the implications of this on your daily life. Look closely at verse 11 and consider how knowing that God works all things according to His purposes might give you confidence to live on mission for Him.

› **Memorize:** Joshua 4:24

› **Pray:** Thank God for being strong where you are weak. Thank Him for sending Jesus to die on the cross while you were His enemy because of your sin. Pray that you would grow to trust Him more so that you would grow to live more faithfully and consistently on mission for Him.

KEEP ON DIGGING

Read the following verses. Then take notes about what each tells you about the importance of obedience to God and what He promises to those who obey Him in faith.

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| › Exodus 19:5 | › Ephesians 6:1-3 |
| › Deuteronomy 11:1 | › 2 Corinthians 10:5 |
| › John 14:15 | › James 1:25 |
| › Romans 1:5 | › Revelation 14:12 |



For an expository verse-by-verse sermon outline/discussion guide that complements this session with a study in Galatians, see lifeway.com/ETBWIN17JJR. For **free** training, go to MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.