

INTRODUCTION

We have discovered that the story of Joshua leading Israel into Canaan is MORE than just a historical account about a military conquest. It's a picture of how every child of God has come out of Egypt (which pictures a lost person); and how we should not be content to live in the wilderness (a picture of the carnal Christian life). Instead we should cross over into the land of God's promises: the victorious Christian life. And in order to do this, the walls of your personal Jericho need to fall down.

My generation grew up with reality of something called the Berlin Wall. After the surrender of Germany in 1945, Berlin was divided into two sections. East Berlin was supervised by the Soviet Union and West Germany was under the control of the British and American allies. In 1961, the Soviets built a wall 96 miles long to prevent the East Germans from defecting to the West. Over the next 25 years more than 5,000 East Germans escaped to freedom, and almost 200 others were killed while trying to escape.

In one of the pivotal points in history, President Ronald Reagan gave a speech at the Brandenburg Gate on June 12, 1987 in which he said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" It didn't happen overnight, but on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall was torn down, and for the first time in a quarter century, families and friends in both sides of Berlin could be together. If you come to understand the meaning of a spiritual stronghold in this message, you will be able to look the old devil in the eye and say, "Mr. Lucifer, tear down that wall!"

As our scripture begins in Joshua 5, the children of God are ready to begin their conquest of Canaan. But standing in their way was the most heavily fortified city of the ancient world: Jericho. This is a story of how the walls came tumbling down.

Joshua 5:13-15 – 6:1-5. "Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, 'Are you for us or for our enemies?' 'Neither,' he replied, 'but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.' Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, 'What message does my Lord have for his servant?' The commander of the Lord's army replied, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.' And Joshua did so. Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the Lord said to Joshua. 'See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.'"

Now skip down to verse 15 to see what happened:

Joshua 6:15-17. "On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven

times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, 'Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord...'

Look down to verse 19 to learn the rest of the story:

Joshua 6:19. "'All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.' When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city."

The land of Canaan represents the land of VICTORY for us. We love to sing about victory don't we? One of our favorite hymns is that wonderful song written by E.M. Bartlett which says,

*O victory in Jesus, my Savior forever,
He sought me and bought me
With His redeeming blood;
He loved me 'ere I knew Him,
And all my love is due Him,
He plunged me from victory,
Beneath the cleansing flood!*

Great words, but it's one thing to *sing* about victory in Jesus and it's another thing to *claim* that victory. I'm reminded of a quote from A.W. Tozer, who wrote, "Christians don't tell lies they just go to church and sing them." Are you experiencing daily victory? Do you have victory in your battle against temptation? Can you honestly say that you have daily victory over worry, fear, depression, bitterness, anger, and greed? As a Christian, you must understand that you don't fight FOR victory. You fight FROM victory. Jesus has already won the battle, and we fight on the basis of His victory of sin, death, and hell. Victory is our birthright as God's children. The Bible says in I John 5:4-5: "...This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." And Romans 8:37 says, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

If you aren't experiencing much victory, this message is for you. In the story of the battle of Jericho there are three important keys we can learn about how to have victory in Jesus:

KEY #1: FALL ON YOUR FACE IN SURRENDER TO JESUS

On the night before the battle for Jericho, Joshua probably had trouble sleeping. So, he took a walk to review his battle plans. As he looked at Jericho in the distance, he must have been thinking about how many ladders, battering rams, archers, and foot soldiers he would need to deploy. Then he saw a man standing there with a drawn sword. Joshua didn't recognize this soldier so, he asked, "Are you on our side, or their side?" The strange soldier said, "I didn't come to take sides—I came to take over!"

He identifies Himself as the captain of the Lord's army. Just WHO was this soldier? Some think

it might have been a mighty angel like Michael or Gabriel. But, like many Bible scholars, I suspect this is one of the rare pre-incarnate appearances of the Lord Jesus, the Second Person of the Godhead. The evidence for this belief comes from two clues. First notice Joshua's reaction. When Joshua realized who was before him, he fell facedown in worship. Throughout the Bible, angels never allow themselves to be worshiped. In fact, in Revelation 19, when the Apostle John was escorted around heaven, he was so overwhelmed he fell down to worship the angel. The angel had a celestial fit and said, "Don't worship me! Worship God!" (Revelation 19:10) But this Commander accepts Joshua's worship, inferring he is Divine.

The second divine clue is seen in what the Commander said. He told Joshua to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Sound familiar? The last time we read those words were when God spoke them to Moses at the burning bush.

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth man in the furnace, and he described him as appearing as the Son of God. Jesus is indeed the Commander of the armies of the Lord. When Peter drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told him to put it away. And Jesus said, "Don't you know I could command twelve legions of angels to rescue me?" (Matthew 26:53)

Personal Lesson: Your battles are won in prayer!

That leads us to the personal lesson we can learn about having victory in Jesus: Your battles are won in prayer! When Joshua fell on his face before Jesus, the Lord told him that the battle was already won. In Joshua 6:2 the commander said, "See, I have delivered [past tense] Jericho into your hands." When Joshua got on his face, it was a done deal. The same is true for us.

Have you discovered that your battles are fought and won in prayer? There's a great example of this in Exodus 17. This was when Moses was still leading Israel, and Joshua was his captain. They were involved in a battle against the Amalekites in the valley of Rephidim. Moses was on the mountain watching the battle. When Moses lifted his hands in prayer, Joshua and the Israelites prevailed. But when he lowered his hands and stopped praying, the Israelites started losing. After a few times, Moses finally figured out that he'd better keep praying. So he lifted his hands in prayer, and when he got tired, Aaron and Hur stood beside him to hold up his hands. As a result, it says in the KJV that "Joshua discomfited the Amalekites in the valley of Rephidim." In Texas jargon, that means Joshua beat the living daylights out of the Amalekites. But the battle wasn't taking place in the valley—it was actually taking place up on the mountain in prayer. So, just remember you can win the battle on your face before Jesus, then you just get up and go out and collect the spoils of the war.

The great British expert on prayer, A.T. Pierson wrote: "At Waterloo, the English troops obeying orders fell on their faces for a time and let the hot fire of the French artillery pass over them. Then they sprang to their feet and rushed to the thickest of the fight and beat back their foes. The Lord wants His people flat on their faces, before they attempt to meet the great crises of life."

KEY#2: FOLLOW YOUR COMMANDER'S ORDERS EXACTLY

Before great battles, there have been many inspiring speeches given to encourage the soldiers to charge into battle against overwhelming odds. For instance, who can forget the speech made by Henry V to the English troops before the battle on St. Crispin's day when he called them, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers?"

Or who can forget the inspiring speech given by William Wallace to the Scottish rebels before the Battle of Stirling Bridge where he said, "Aye, fight and you may die. Run and you may live at least for awhile, but today we must tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they will never take our freedom!"

Or who can forget that soul-stirring speech given by General George S. Patton to the 3rd Army as they prepared for Operation Overlord, in which he said, "Every man is scared in his first battle. If he says he isn't, he's a liar. The real hero is the man who fights even though he is scared."

Or who can forget Independence Day and the inspiring speech given by President Bill Pullman as the rag-tag volunteers prepared to attack the evil aliens...oh, wait a minute, that was just a movie. But, hey, it was pretty inspiring when he said, "We will not go quietly into the night. We're going to survive. Today we celebrate our Independence Day!" Whoo, I don't know about you but I was ready to kick some alien astronauts!

The point is, go back with me in your mind to the scene at Joshua's camp. Joshua probably had some gung-ho speech ready to inspire his troops, but after meeting the commander of the Lord, all his plans change. Imagine him gathered in the battle strategy tent with his generals, colonels, and captains. These guys have been waiting for this fight all of their lives. They are armed to the teeth and itching to attack. The air was thick with sweat and you could cut the testosterone with a knife. They await Joshua's battle plan. Then Joshua says, "Well, guys, tomorrow we're going to march to Jericho, then we're going to march around it in silence, and then come back to camp." I can imagine some of the warriors thinking, "What? What kind of battle plan is that? Well, maybe we're just going to reconnoiter the first day, and attack the next day." And Joshua says, "The next day we're going to do the same thing...and the next day...and the next day." I can just hear one of the generals saying, "Excuse me sir, is that ALL we're going to do?" And Joshua says, "Well, no. Actually on the seventh day we're going to walk around Jericho seven times and then we're going to blow the trumpets and shout. That's the battle plan."

But thankfully, the army of Israel had learned the lesson to obey God exactly. So they walked around the city each day carrying the ark of God. God was teaching them humility. They thought of themselves as an invincible army and God had them walk around the city thirteen times. I can imagine after a few days, the troops of Jericho started laughing and calling them a bunch of cowards. How tempting it would have been for one of the soldiers to break ranks and fire an arrow up at a soldier in Jericho.

God was teaching them stamina and patience. Gilgal was about an hour's march away, and according to the archeological ruins, it would have taken about two hours to march around the city, so that was four hours of marching each day. Then on the seventh day, it would have taken them 14 hours just to walk around the city; they would have been exhausted by the time the walls fell down.

What would have happened if the army had rebelled after three days or after twelve and a half laps around the city? There would have been no victory. But because they obeyed God *precisely*, they experienced a victory that came from God.

Personal Lesson: Obey God's Word, even if it doesn't make sense!

Here's the lesson we learn: Obey God's Word, even if it doesn't make sense! Do you ever wonder WHY God commands you to do things a certain way? In the 1980s there were a series of movies called "The Karate Kid." Daniel wanted to learn karate and his teacher, Mr. Miyagi had him do things like paint the fence. Daniel kept saying, "I don't want to paint fences, I want to learn karate!" And Mr. Miyagi would just smile and say, "You paint fence!" It didn't make any sense at the time, but later Daniel came to understand that the motion and muscles used to paint the fence were actually training him for the proper karate moves.

I think God does the same for us. He tells us to do things sometimes that don't seem to make sense at the time. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, it doesn't make sense when God says that if you give Him 10% of your income, that you will be able to live better on the remaining 90% than if you kept all 100% for yourself. Any CPA would say that doesn't make sense. But if you obey Him, you'll find that you start trusting Him instead of your money.

It doesn't make sense when God tells us in James 1 to "Count it all joy when you face various trials and tribulations." But as I've said before, when God's commands don't mean to make sense to us, it's because we don't have enough sense to make sense out of God's sense!

KEY #3: FOCUS ON DEMOLISHING YOUR PERSONAL STRONGHOLDS

On the seventh day, they marched seven times around Jericho with the priests blowing a ram's horn, called a shophar. The shophar was not a battle trumpet; it was used as a call to worship. So they continued to march and play...shophar so good. Then at the conclusion of the seventh circuit, the trumpets blew a long sustained note, and all the people shouted. I don't know what they shouted. Perhaps they shouted "PRAISE THE LORD! HALLELUJAH!" But when they shouted, the walls came tumbling down. And there is abundant archeological evidence that the walls crumbled from the inside out, which confirms the story of the Bible.

You've probably heard the old song that says, "Joshua fought the battle of Jericho...and the walls came tumbling down." It's a nice song, but it's all wrong. Joshua *didn't* fight the battle of Jericho—the Lord fought the battle. He was the victor. As the saying goes, "To the victor goes the spoils." And God told them, "Don't touch my stuff!"

But we're not only talking about a city that was conquered 3,300 years ago. We're talking about my Jericho and your Jericho. The Bible teaches the possibility exists that there may be personal strongholds—or fortified cities that impede our spiritual progress.

Before we read the passage about strongholds, let me give you a definition of a spiritual stronghold: An outpost that the enemy has built in your mind. Think of it this way: Your life is

occupied territory; it belongs to Jesus. But the enemy, Satan, is always on the attack. If you have a weakness, he will try to exploit it. He will try to build a fortress, a stronghold and use it as his base of operations to thwart your spiritual growth.

I'm not making this up. The Bible says, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

Just as the walls of Jericho came tumbling down by the divine power of God, the Bible says that we have divine power to demolish strongholds. But before you can demolish your strongholds you must identify them. You can never attack unless you have a target.

A stronghold may be an addiction, an obsession, and unhealthy thought pattern, or a recurring habit. The key to demolishing it is to *focus* your mind on bringing your thoughts into obedience to Christ.

Personal Lesson: Your spiritual progress is halted until you destroy the enemy's fortress in your life!

So, here's the lesson we learn: Your spiritual progress is halted until you destroy the enemy's fortress in your life! Temptation and strongholds operate within the realm of your mind, which is the Bible often calls your heart. As the Bible says, "As a person THINKS in his heart, so is he." So in order to have victory, you must get rid of stinking thinking. I'm not talking about positive thinking here, I'm talking about Jesus. I know I'm about to use a double negative, but it's to press a point: You don't win the battle by not thinking about the wrong things. In other words, you don't have to concentrate on *not* thinking about the bad stuff because when you try *not* to think about it, you're thinking about it. Are you confused yet?

Let me make it simple. Your mind can only grasp one image at a time. Let's perform a little experiment. Let me borrow your mind for a moment, if you're not using it right now. I want to show you that you have the power to project any image you choose onto the screen of your consciousness. For instance, close your eyes, and I'm going to suggest an image and see if you can project that image on your mind's screen. Ready? Imagine a chocolate sundae with vanilla ice cream, chocolate syrup and a red cherry on top. Can you see it? Good. Now, let's change the image. Now imagine an ugly crocodile with crooked teeth. Now, your mind is amazing, but unlike Microsoft Windows, it can't multi-task. You can either imagine a sundae or a crocodile, but you can imagine both simultaneously. Oh, you can imagine a crocodile eating a chocolate sundae, and you might try to split screen it, but you can only focus on one image at a time. That's the divine power to demolish strongholds. You have the God-given power to bring your thoughts captive to Jesus.

How do you do it? By thinking about the right things. That's why the Bible says in Philippians 4:8, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent and praiseworthy—think about such things."

Those eight words describe the person of Jesus. He is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. So, when those wicked thoughts try to take control of your mind, just take your thoughts captive and project an image of Jesus hanging on the cross dying for your sins. When you do that, the walls will come tumbling down!

And once you demolish those strongholds, don't allow Satan a place to build another one. For instance, uncontrolled anger is one of many strongholds and the Bible says in Ephesians 4:26-27 "In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." If you give the devil an inch, he will take a mile. If you give him a foothold, he will build a fort.

CONCLUSION

There's an interesting story that comes out of Haiti. A certain wicked man was selling his house for \$2,000. A man wanted to buy it but couldn't afford the full price. The seller offered to sell it to the buyer for half price with only one stipulation—that the seller would retain ownership of a large nail protruding over the front door. The buyer agreed and his family moved in.

A month later the original seller wanted to buy the house back for only \$500, but of course, the new owner refused to sell at that price. So the wicked man went out and found the carcass of a dead dog and hung it from the nail he owned. Soon the stench of the dead dog made the house unlivable and the occupant sold the house back to the owner for \$500. The moral of that story is that if we leave the devil just one small peg in our life, he will hang his rotting garbage on it.

Does the devil have a nail in your life? Has he built any strongholds in your life? Are there any walls that are barriers to your spiritual growth? Remember, just as the walls of Jericho came tumbling down, through Jesus Christ you have divine power to demolish strongholds by bringing every thought captive to obedience to Christ. So look the old devil in the eye in the name of Jesus and say, "Mr. Lucifer, tear that wall down!"

OUTLINE

"This is the VICTORY that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." *1 John 5:4-5*

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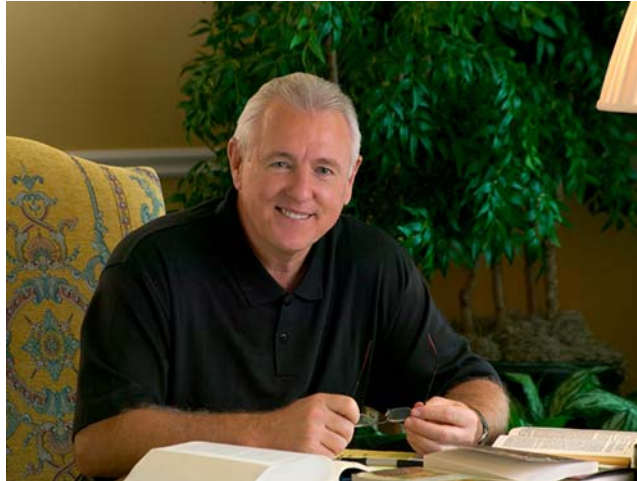
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes