

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA PART THREE – CHAPTERS SIX TO NINE – WHY VICTORIES AND DEFEATS?

God had overcome obstacle number one, the River Jordan, simply by having the priests stand in the middle of the river holding the ark containing the word of God. Now they were in the Promised Land. Obstacle number two, the mighty city of Jericho, stood in front of them. Could they possibly capture it? How many thousand lives would it take? Supposing they failed! Where would they go? Back to the wilderness? But the Captain of the Lord's army had invited them on to His side rather than just offering some help. What was His plan?

Israel was to make the strangest assault on a fortified city in all history. Again the word of God was to go around carried by the priests. They were to be preceded by the whole army of Israel, silent except for the blowing of rams' horns. On day one they made their first circuit of the city and returned to the camp. Nothing happened. On day two they repeated the same process. Again nothing. Day by day for six days they repeated the routine and every day nothing happened. Imagine the thoughts and feelings of the Israelites as they waited in vain for a miracle. Perhaps they should go to Plan B, a costly military assault? Imagine the tension in Jericho. Had Israel's God overstretched Himself? Can we forget about Him as a threat in future? On day seven the march around Jericho was to be repeated seven times, again in silence except for the rams' horns blowing. Only after the seventh circuit was the whole army to shout at once. It was a celebration of victory, not a call to battle. At that moment the city walls collapsed, and so did the morale of the defenders. The Lord had given Israel total victory over the enemy as He tells us, 'We overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.'(Rom.8:37)

As Israel moved in to claim the city they were given three instructions. Take nothing from the city as spoil. All that is valuable belongs to God. Victory was His work alone. Remember the Lord's prayer 'For Yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever.'(Matt.6:13) The second instruction was to rescue Rahab and her family. The two spies who had been protected by her were personally responsible to find and save her. The Lord accepts those who trust Him regardless of their past lives. She later married an Israelite, Salmon, and became the mother of Boaz who would marry Ruth, who several generations later would produce King David. Thirdly the city of Jericho was never to be rebuilt. There is no going back on the victory God has given. Many centuries later, Hiel the Bethelite would ignore this ban with tragic consequences for his family.(I Kgs.16:34) God does not change His mind even after 500 years.(chap.6)

Achan obviously thought he deserved some reward for the battle for Jericho. He took some valuables from the city and hid them under his tent. The consequences of his pride and disobedience quickly became apparent when the Israelites faced their next battle. The spies sent to check out Ai assumed the little town would be easy to capture. Joshua listened to their advice and took God's support for granted without asking Him first. A small force was dispatched and rapidly routed. Israel and Joshua were devastated! The whole nation was damaged by the sin of one man. The Lord showed Joshua why He was angry and step by step led him to identify the culprit. The death sentence on Achan and

his family may seem harsh to us if we do not take God's clear instructions seriously. The New Testament several times spells out the same terrible warning.(Acts 5:1-11; 12:23) A second pile of stones was erected as a reminder that God means what He says.(chap.7)

What should Joshua now do about Ai? This time he did not underestimate the enemy. The revised battle plan drew on the wisdom of God. It was clever and worked perfectly. The army of Ai was fooled, defeated and wiped out. The last to die was the king of Ai, as the Devil will be the last enemy of God defeated.(Rev.20:10) A third pile of stones marked the execution of the king of Ai. The whole difficult episode of Ai ended with an altar to God, always in the Old Testament a reminder of the cross of Christ, the secret for us of victory over the Devil, the flesh and the world. The Ten Commandments, the summary of the law were engraved on the altar. The ark which contained the commandments was placed there. The whole population was distributed between two neighbouring mountains, Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim while Joshua read them the entire five books of Moses. The cross which covered the sin of the past and the word which would feed them for the future had been the foundation of their victory and the occupation of the land which was now possible.(chap.8)

Word was getting around the Promised Land that the new owners had arrived. Most leaders decided to resist what God had done. The people of Gibeon came up with a cunning plan to convince Joshua that they lived a long way away and could therefore safely be accepted as allies of Israel for the future. Joshua was fooled by their clever disguise as long distance travelers. He simply forgot to ask God for wisdom. It was exactly the same mistake he had made at Ai. Joshua was honourable and faithful to his mistaken promise to the Gibeonites despite the fact that he had been tricked into making it. They were accepted among God's people and allowed to remain, although they would always be confined to the lowest jobs. They, in turn, accepted this role willingly as the price of their survival.(chap.9)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What were the important steps Joshua and Israel had to take to see Jericho defeated? How does the New Testament teach the same principles?(Rom.8:31-39; Jn.16:33; Heb.11:30) Consider how step by step you might apply this story to seemingly impossible challenges in your own life?(chap.6)
2. What mistake did Joshua make regarding the battle for Ai? How do we sin as Achan did at times? What can we learn from the way his sin caused suffering to others? Why was Achan executed despite his confession of sin?(chap.7)
3. How did Joshua do so much better in his second attack on Ai? What happens when we correct our past mistakes?(I Jn.5:9) What lessons would Israel remember from the three piles of stones,(4:7; 7:26; 8:29) they had so far built in the Promised Land? Why was it so appropriate to read the first five books of the Bible to Israel before they went any further into their new lives? How might this be applied to our lives?(chap.8)
4. Why was Joshua fooled by the Gibeonites? Compare how they were treated to the way Rahab was received?(Heb.11:31) What can we learn from both stories?(chap.9)