

**JOSHUA 6-9 FALL OF JERICHO; ACHAN & AI; GIBEONITES**

In this study, Joshua is about to begin fulfilling God's promise to Abraham about his descendants inheriting the Promised Land, starting with Jericho. We will learn several very important spiritual lessons.

**Meeting the Pre-existent Christ**

Before the taking of Jericho, one amazing scene occurs. "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.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and *worshipped*, 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 5:13-15).

Here we see another example of what is called a "Christophany" or the appearance of the *pre-existent Word*, who is also God (John 1:1-3, 14), later coming as Jesus Christ. We know it wasn't an angel because they are *not* to be worshipped (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). This "Commander" then is another manifestation of the "angel of the Lord" mentioned in Gen. 16:7-13, where He is also called "Lord" (see also Gen. 31:11-13; 48:15-16; Ex. 3:2-6; 23:20-23; Judges 6:11).

Since the Hebrew root word for *angel* means "messenger" or "one who is sent" it is only from the *context* we see whether it refers to the *office* of the sent one (as with the pre-existent Christ sent by the Father) or to angels who are also God's messengers. Can the Word be sent by God the Father to the earth? Certainly. Jesus Christ, as the pre-existent Word said, "I say to you, *before* Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:59). So He was alive before Abraham even existed.

Why the appearance now? It was Joshua's first big test, as he faced mighty Jericho, with combined walls over 60 feet high. So it was very encouraging to know God was with him! God also tells us He will not abandon us in our trials and will help us (Heb. 13:5).

**The destruction of Jericho**

Now Jericho, being part of Canaan, represents a corrupt society that has not repented, and God had given it 400 years to repent (Gen. 15:16). "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 for 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...and 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 6:1-5).

So it was God who was orchestrating Jericho's fall, and with incredible timing. It would not be a Passover season they would soon forget. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month, when the Passover lamb was selected, God dammed the Jordan River and the Israelites crossed it. Then, on the 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Unleavened Bread, Joshua saw the Commander-in-chief of God's angelic army. The manna ceased on this day, when they began to go around Jericho for the first time. Going around Jericho during the seven days of Unleavened Bread, that represent removing sin from our lives, was a sign for Israel not to partake of Canaan's sins. So, on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, "they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner." God then said, "And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse...So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that *the wall fell down flat*. Then the people went *up* into the city...And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city...And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers and all that she had [they had placed a red string on a window]...But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord...Then

Joshua...said, 'Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with this firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates. So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country' (Joshua 6:15-27). Jericho was rebuilt some 500 years later by Hiel during the reign of Ahab (873-851 BC.). Because of Joshua's curse laid on anyone who reestablished the city, Hiel suffered the loss of his eldest and youngest son (1 K. 16:34).

"Thus the fall of Jericho became the symbol and type of the overthrow of every worldly power before the Lord, when He should come to lead His people into Canaan and establish His kingdom upon earth. On the ground of this event, the blowing of trumpets is frequently introduced in the writings of the prophets, as the signal and symbolical omen of the manifestations of the Lord in great judgments..." (*Kiel & Delitzsch Bible Commentary*).

Archaeologist Bryant Wood carefully investigated the findings at Jericho in the 1990's and concluded the biblical account was very accurate. He found:

1. The city was fortified with two great walls at the time the Bible records, around 1400 B.C.
2. The city was consumed by fire (Jos. 6:24).
3. The walls inexplicably collapsed outwardly although they were inclined inwardly (6:20).
4. The destruction was at spring harvest indicated by the large grain reserves (5:10).
5. The siege was short, since the grain stored was not consumed (6:15, 20).
6. The valuable grain was left intact (6:17-18).
7. The inhabitants did not flee and died (6:1).
8. Jericho remained empty a long time (6:26).

So everything went as planned--except for one disastrous thing. "But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan...of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel (7:1).

#### **Achan's sin and the city of Ai**

God was not only interested in Israel possessing Canaan, but for it to be spiritually different from it by observing His laws. All of Jericho was corrupted by centuries of unrepented sin, and Israel was not to take any of its sin-infested goods. But Achan lusted after them and sinned, contaminating all of Israel. It's

similar to unrepented sin in the Church, as Paul said, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6).

Thus when Israel attacked the next city, it did not have God's help. "So the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said, 'Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few. So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men...therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water. Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, 'Alas, Lord God, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?' (7:2-9).

Joshua knew what this defeat meant. It would embolden the Canaanites to unite against them.

But God quickly told Joshua the reason, "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant...For they have even taken of the accursed things and have both stolen and deceived: and they have put it among their own stuff....they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you."

God then tells Joshua to have all the tribes come before him and He would indicate the guilty party. "And Achan, of the tribe of Judah was taken...And Achan said, 'Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it...Then Joshua, and all of Israel with him, took Achan, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons...and all he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, 'Why have you troubled us?

The Lord will trouble you this day. So all Israel stoned him...and they burned them with fire...Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger" (7:18-26).

This shows the importance of keeping God's people spiritually clean before God. There is a spiritual lesson here (1 Cor. 5:6). An analogy would be of a person secretly keeping Sunday or worshipping idols in his home and still pretending to be part of God's church. He would be accursed, and also those around him who keep this secret. If a person wants to be part of the "Canaanites" pagan practices, let him do it, but not *inside* God's church.

Now that the accursed thing had been removed, God could again bless Israel. He said they would now easily take Ai, and they did. God gave them the strategy of setting up an ambush. "And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel. Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand...So those in ambush arose quickly...and entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire. And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw the smoke of their city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers...Then the others came out of the city against them: so they were caught in the midst of Israel...And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape...Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves according to the word of the Lord...So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever" (Jos. 8:15-28).

Then, as God had commanded him in Dt. 27:4-8, Joshua built an altar of whole stones on Mt. Ebal. We already covered how the remains of such an altar was found in 1982 (Study #45). There, they renewed the covenant of obedience with God (Jos. 8:30-35).

Now, what Joshua feared came true. All the Canaanites met to form an army against them. "And it came to pass when all the kings who were on this side of the Jordan...heard about it, they gathered

together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord" (9:1).

### **Gibeonites – deceit but end up as servers**

There was one city that was the exception—the Gibeonites. "But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended...and they went to Joshua and said, 'We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us'...Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions, but they did not ask counsel of the Lord. So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live, and the rulers of the congregations swore to them. And it happened at the end of three days...that they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them...Then Joshua called for them, saying, 'Why have you deceived us.? Now therefore, you are cursed and none of you shall be freed from being slaves—woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God...So he...delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord" (9:3-27).

So the Gibeonites, a Canaanite tribe, was spared because the Israelites did not consult with God and were tricked into making a solemn oath with them. Once they were found out, they humbled themselves before Joshua, and he forgave them and gave them a menial job for all time as woodcutters and water carriers for the Levites.

Yet, these Gibeonites gave Israel a tremendous lesson of loyalty and obedience. They actually were more faithful to their pact with Israel than Israel's pact with God—and He reminded them of it. When the land was divided at the end of Joshua, Gibeon was one of the cities that was given to the line of Aaron. About four hundred years later David put the tabernacle at Gibeon and praised them (2 Sam. 21:3). One of David's military advisors, his mighty men, was a Gibeonite. Much later, when the Jews returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity, there were faithful Gibeonites among them. They were given an honorary title: the Nethinim, or "Given Ones," because they remained faithful to the priesthood all of that time 1 (Ezra 2:43; Neh. 3:7; 7:25, 46).