

## Joshua 6:1-27

### The Miraculous Destruction of Jericho

**Joshua 6:1** - "Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in."

i.e. it was under siege.

Rashi - According to Targum , the city was closed with iron gates and reinforced with copper bolts.

We have talked frequently about how the walled city of Jericho represents our carnal mind, which is stubborn, inflexible and enmity against God, and the hardness of our heart. And how since the Fall, we are "shut up" against vulnerability and openness to God and His mercy. Only hearing the blowing of the shofar and taking a step of faith by the shout of victory can our walls "fall down flat" (**Joshua 6:20**).

Jericho means "place of fragrance" because of its vast grove of palm trees - referring spiritually to the sweet savor of our own thoughts that continually arise like incense from our minds.

The archaeological evidence shows that as long ago as 9,000 B.C. the city's walls were embedded with the painted skulls of their ancestors, who they worshipped and would approach to receive oracles. This represents the customs and beliefs of our own society which we inherit and habitually follow without question until confronted by the gospel.

In the Hebrew text, however, something EVEN DEEPER comes to light.

### Jericho Compared to a Leprous House

"straitly shut up" = *cagar cagar* - saw-gar'; a primitive root; to shut up

This same verb is also prominent in **Leviticus 13–14**, where it occurs eleven times (**13:4, 5, 11, 21, 26, 31, 33, 50, 54; 14:38, 46**). There it is used for the act of separating a person afflicted with leprosy (e.g., **13:4**), or, more significantly, for shutting up an infected house (**14:38**).

This section on leprosy in Leviticus begins with the words, "When you enter [ואבת] the land [אֶרֶץ] of Canaan, which I am giving you [רשא . . . ותנ . . .] as a possession..." (**Leviticus 14:34**). Jericho is the first enemy stronghold they encounter there.

The infected house that is "shut up" in **Leviticus 14** has undergone previous examination. A priest had been called that "he should come [אבי] to view [תוארל] the house" (**14:36**; cf. **v. 37**, הארו, **v. 44**, אבו . . . הארו). In the first of the two narratives in

Joshua the two spies are instructed by their leader to “Go, view [וַיֹּאֲר] the land” (2:1). Shortly after their arrival in Jericho it becomes known to the men of the city that the two had “come [וַיֹּאֲב] to spy out the land” (2:2, 3).

The spies, following the analogy, would have suffered ritual uncleanness for entering the leprous house of Jericho and would need a cleansing by washing in water. So after leaving the city, they crossed through the Jordan (**Joshua 2:23**) before returning to the camp of Israel.

In **Leviticus 14** the walls of the house receive the priest’s closest attention (vv. **37, 39**) to see if there is any trace of the disease “in the walls” (תריקב). In the Jericho narrative, Rahab and her family, who offered shelter to the spies, live “in the wall” (ריקב). In both places we find the same Hebrew term, **2:15** being the sole occurrence of the word ריקב in the entire book of Joshua.

**Leviticus 14:38** immediately qualifies the acting of shutting up the house with the temporal phrase “for seven days.” The statement in **Joshua 6:1** about Jericho being shut is immediately followed by the instructions of God to Joshua concerning a seven-day period (vv. **2–5**), during which, by inference, the city will remain in its shut-up condition.

The purification ritual for the infected house involves it being sprinkled with sacrificial blood “seven times [עבש םימעפ]” (**Leviticus 14:51**), a phrase appearing in other leprosy rituals (**14:7, 16, 29**). At Jericho the Israelites are instructed to march around the city “seven times [םימעפ עבש]” (**Joshua 6:4**). The priests are, moreover, mentioned in both these verses, and are key participants in **Joshua 6** generally (nine times—vv. **4** [twice], **6** [twice], **8, 9, 12, 13, 16**), as they are in **Leviticus 13–14**. As regards the infected house, the direction of the priest leads to its stones being dismantled (**Leviticus 14:40–45**). At Jericho it is a distinctive trumpet-blast by the priests (Josh 6:4–5) that initiates the collapse of the city.

The ruins of the leprous house were to be deposited in an unclean place (**Leviticus 14:45**), while a curse is uttered over the ruins of Jericho (**Joshua 6:26**).

This leprosy analogy makes the scarlet rope in the story even more consequential for Rahab and her family. The cleansing ritual for a leper who had been declared clean included a scarlet thread:

- **Leviticus 14:4** - "Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop"

According to Maimonides and rabbinic interpretations, this scarlet thread or string was tied to one of the birds, the one that was to be preserved alive. Rahab and her family then, in a way, are comparable to the bird that is not slaughtered but kept alive.

The hyssop used in the leprosy cleansing ceremony we recall was also used to apply

the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts in the Exodus.

As an indication of their diseased condition the person afflicted with leprosy was obligated (**Leviticus 13:45**) to let the hair of his or her head to “be unkempt” or “hang loose.” The Septuagint translates it as “and his head [will be] uncovered.”

In the case of the suspected adulteress (**Numbers 5:18**), part of the instruction for the priest is “and he will uncover the head of the woman.” Rahab is identified as a prostitute. The leper and the immoral women were both associated with the same particular condition of hair, whether dishevelled, loose, or exposed.

Finally, Rahab and her family are initially placed “outside the camp [הַנְּחֹמֵל יוֹחֵם] of Israel” (**Joshua 6:23**). Here is a distinct echo of the leprosy laws where the one infected must remain “outside the camp [הַנְּחֹמֵל יוֹחֵם]” for a specific period (**Leviticus 13:46; 14:3**). Following this Rahab and her kin are evidently permitted to “live in the midst of Israel” (**Joshua 6:25**), just as the purified leper may come into the camp (**Leviticus 14:8**).

The sin of Achan (**Joshua 7**) included the taking of a "Babylonish garment." This takes on even more gravity in light of leprosy. If a garment was confirmed to contain leprosy it was to be "burnt in the fire." (**Leviticus 13**)

Rahab “hid” the spies coming to Jericho (**Joshua 2:6**) and was delivered along with her family, whereas Achan “hid” the items removed from Jericho (**7:21, 22**) and perished along with his family. In each instance the same Hebrew verb (טָמַן) is employed, establishing a clear link between the two. Achan and his family were stoned and then burned, suffering the same fate as a leprous garment.

Ultimately, this analogy with leprosy offers a degree of hope for the Canaanites themselves. While their utter destruction is divinely commanded, the possibility exists for cleansing, forsaking the practices of Canaan for the hope of Israel (cf. **Joshua 2:9–11**), as illustrated through the deliverance of Rahab and her family.

- This is adapted from "Allusions to the Levitical Leprosy Laws in the Jericho Narratives (Joshua 2 and 6)" by Nicholas P. Lunn, Wycliffe Bible Translators and Spurgeon's College, London, in the Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament  
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5e28/2b2221042f3b9ad660cfbbeba3fe799dac62.pdf>

**Joshua 6:2** - "And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor."

This reassurance is a continuation of Joshua's meeting with the Captain of the Lord's Host from the previous chapter. "The Lord said" means this is what the Captain of the Lord's Host relayed to Joshua. He explains the battle plan to Joshua.

## Strange Battle Plans

**Joshua 6:3-4** - "And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets."

This order was given, according to the Seder Olam Rabba, c. 11. p. 31., on the twenty second of Nisan, after the feast of unleavened bread was over.

**Joshua 6:4** - "And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets."

The blowing of the shofar traditionally called Israel together for a solemn convocation, or to go to war. It was also commanded at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, on the Jubilee Year, at every new moon and during the month of Elul. The sound of the shofar was heard at the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai and when King David brought the ark into Jerusalem. The shofar was blown every day in the Temple. And it will be heard at the resurrection of the dead.

- **1 Corinthians 15:52** - "for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Maimonides said the sound of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a wake up call for Israel:

"Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator. Those who forget the truth in the vanities of time and throughout the entire year, devote their energies to vanity and emptiness which will not benefit or save: Look to your souls. Improve your ways and your deeds and let every one of you abandon his evil path and thoughts." (Hilchos Teshuvah, chapter 3, halacha 4)

- **Psalms 89:16** - "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound (of the shofar): they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance."

**Joshua 6:10** - "And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout."

In once sense, the Ark and the shofar were speaking for them. The profound silence from those in the procession punctuated only by the blowing of the shofar added gravity to what must have seemed an eerie sight. The Ark contained the Law, and the shofar blasts demanded taking notice of it. No one cared what an individual Israelite thought about Jericho, or what their opinion was about it, or whether they liked this procession or had a better idea. Our mouths are shut when confronted by the Law.

- **Romans 3:19** - "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

- **Habakkuk 2:20** - "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

**Joshua 6:11** - "So the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp."

By circling the city, they implied there was no part of it that was not going to be exposed, made vulnerable and then struck by God's judgment. After hearing of the miraculous crossing of the Jordan, the Canaanites must have looked on with increasing unease and gloom.

The circling also implied a "binding" of the city.

- **Mark 3:27** - "No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house."

**Joshua 6:16** - "And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city."

This was a shout of victory, but only by faith, because nothing had happened yet. Everything still looked the same, Jericho was still strong and closed up against them. They had only Joshua's word that God had already delivered the city to them.

### The City Accursed

**Joshua 6:17-19** - "And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD."

"accursed" = *herem*, "devoted" to Yahweh; under a divine "ban." That means all the inhabitants and all the spoils of the city were to be destroyed, "only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron" were reserved and "put into the treasury of the house of Jehovah" (**Joshua 6:24** ; Compare **Numbers 31:22**, **Numbers 31:23**, **Numbers 31:50-54**).

The falling of the walls of Jericho can be considered as an emblem of the fall of Babylon. For several thousand years, Jericho had been a trade center, located on a crossroads of caravan trails and trade routes - a symbol of the world system. Thus the

similar commands - "Touch not the unclean thing." Jericho stood in the way of Israel's inheriting the land, being a frontier and barrier town; in the same way mystical Babylon resists and stands in the way of the kingdom of Christ within us. The fall of Jericho was very sudden, and not expected by the inhabitants of it; and the fall of Babylon is described in the same way (**Revelation 18:7**).

- **Isaiah 52:11** - "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."

- **2 Corinthians 6:17** - "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you"

This means we don't trust in self or in human effort. We "love not the world."

- **1 John 2:15** - "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

The sin of Achan (**Joshua 7**) illustrates this - he illegally took a garment, an ingot of gold, and a quantity of silver from Jericho. All were cursed, under the ban. The garment meant covering - we do not need or desire covering or identity conferred by the world system, or trust in the protection of the world system. The silver and gold have spiritual meanings - silver is redemption and gold is glory. We don't desire either from this world. Our redemption is from the cross of Christ through His blood, and all glory goes to him, not us.

### **Jericho Destroyed**

**Joshua 6:21** - "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. "

### **The Retrieval of Rahab and Her Family**

Rahab and her family understood this, and "came out from among them."

**Joshua 6:22** - "But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye swear unto her. And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brothers, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel."

"and left them without the camp of Israel" or better: "made to rest outside the camp of Israel" although only for a time. Like in the ritual cleansing of the leper, after a time they were allowed to enter the camp and the covenant of Israel (**Joshua 6:25**).

The preservation of Rahab's house was another miracle. Her house and the wall on which it was situated were left standing. Possibly that portion of the wall and her house

remained as a sign of God's mercy.

Rahab "perished not with them that believed not," (**Hebrews 11:31**). All her kindred were saved with her; thus faith in Christ brings salvation to the household (**Acts 14:31**).

Origen cites these scriptures in reference to the deliverance of Rahab the harlot, **1 Corinthians 6:11**, and **Titus 3:3** (see also **Ephesians 2:1-8**; **Ephesians 5:8**; **Colossians 3:7**). She is a representative of all Gentiles who have been saved by grace and have become part of the Bride of Christ. And her story is the first fulfillment of **Joshua 4:24** - "That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty..."

Josephus says Joshua "gave her certain lands immediately, and had her in great esteem ever afterwards."

One midrash story has Rahab acting as an advocate before God on behalf of all the nations of the world.

**Joshua 6:26** - "And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it."

Rashi - [This means] at the beginning of the foundation which he builds therein, his first born son will die and he will bury him, and continue [to bury all his sons] until the youngest one dies at the finish of the work, viz. the setting up of the gates.

Fulfillment: Hiel the Bethelite attempted to make it once more a fortified city (1 Kings 16:34). Between the beginning and the end of his undertaking all his children were cut off.

**Joshua 6:27** - "So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country."