

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord God, I offer to You this small and seemingly insignificant fraction of time. It will pass unnoticed in the greater scheme of things, unless I take the crucial step of letting You take control right now, to change both what I do and what I think about what I do. And if, in this very moment, I commit myself to do Your will and let Your power envelop all I do, then the future changes and Your Kingdom is built. All praise to You, Lord God: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: The Future

1. For yourself

Ask the Lord to bless you in the day ahead, it is your immediate future

2. For your friends and family

Pray for the Lord's blessing on each of your close family and friends as they go about their daily work; it is their immediate future

3. For the church and its work

Ask the Lord to work through His people, the church today, so that His people might walk into their future, today

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for God's blessing on those who plane the future of our world, through technological innovation, through the scientific exploration of our world, and more

Meditation

The words of Jesus are precious,
When spoken into our hearts.
He said: 'Come, follow me',
And I followed without knowing where;
He said: 'Walk in faith',
And I learned to trust Him all the more;
He said: 'Be bold and strong',
And I took courage in my simple path of life;
He said: 'Do what is good',
And I grew to discern right from wrong;
He said: 'Be close to my Word',
And the Bible came to life in my mind;
He said: 'I am the Way, the truth and the life',
And when He said this to me
I knew in my spirit it was true.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Joshua 6: 12-21

¹² Joshua got up early in the morning and the priests lifted up the ark of the LORD. ¹³ The seven priests carrying the seven ram's horn trumpets before the ark of the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets continually. The armed men marched ahead of them and the rear guard marched after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets continued to sound; ¹⁴ and on the second day, they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

¹⁵ On the seventh day, they rose early, at daybreak, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, and it was only on that day they encircled the city seven times. ¹⁶ And so it was that on seventh time around, when the priests had sounded the trumpets, Joshua commanded the people,

'Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! ¹⁷ The city, both it and everything in it are given over to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house will live, for she hid the messengers we sent. ¹⁸ But you must keep yourselves away from what has been given over to the Lord, lest the same happen to you, and by taking any of them you make the camp of Israel liable to the destruction and bring trouble on it. ¹⁹ All the silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron, are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.'

²⁰ So the people began to shout and the trumpets were sounded, and at the signal from the trumpets the people gave a great shout, and the wall fell down flat. Then the people charged straight into the city and captured it.

²¹ They gave the city over to the LORD by putting to the sword everything living within it; men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

Review

This is the amazing story of the capture of Jericho, the first major battle of the people of Israel when entering the Promised Land; and it is a remarkable and controversial story. The army of Israel encircled the city with the Ark of the Covenant and to the sound of the blowing of trumpets a total of seven times. Then, on the last day, the whole assembly encircled the city seven times before a final signal and shout, heralding the collapse of the city walls and the final invasion of the city. The whole narrative tempts our imaginations. What panic must have been produced in the city! Did the trampling of the army undermine the foundations of the city walls? Surely, this was a miraculous event, pure and simple! Was the encirclement of the city an ancient tribal ritual for staking a claim over a plot of land? The questions raised by this incident have kept people discussing it for a long time!

Archaeologists have argued over the story for the last hundred years, and at the turn of the last century, proof of the collapse of Jericho's walls was discovered, only for later archaeologists to dismiss the claim using improved dating techniques. It had been hoped that the Bible record could be proved by archaeology, but Biblical scholars have for 60 years accepted what they were told, and consequently offer us theories about how the battle of Jericho was created as a 'myth' of the 'occupation'. Other Christians have angrily rejected such an approach; for them, the Bible is not to be reduced to mere stories, 'made up' to construct some mythical history! I agree with this, but it is profoundly hard to 'prove' ancient events. In recent years, however, basic scientific questions have again been raised about archaeological dating methods, and some have found that when they use the Bible as a 'primary source' for investigation, the results have been consistent. The battle of Jericho does fit into a good history and 'dating' of ancient events according to a new and better system of dating ancient history. It is unfortunate that Biblical scholarship in general has not yet caught up with this.

There is one reason, however, why many have difficulty with the whole story. This is because of the concept in verses 17 to 19, translated here as 'given over to the Lord'. The Hebrew word for this, 'cherem', refers to some object or person that is an offense to God, and which must be given over to Him and His will (see Deuteronomy 20:16-18). In the case of Jericho, this meant destruction and slaughter (6:21). The city had 'closed its gates' to the Lord's messengers (2:2f) and now stood in the way of His will, and consequently had to be destroyed so that God's people could take possession of their land. Only Rahab was saved because of the help she gave to Israel's spies (Joshua 2). Even though the idea is ancient, rooted in the social structure of times long before our own, and with little relevance to arguments about morals or pacifism today, many feel that they cannot accept this concept of 'devoting to destruction' as it is sometimes described.

In truth, this story is central to the occupation of the land by Israel, according to God's Covenant promise to Abram (Genesis 13:14f.). All mass movements of people involve displacement, as we well know today. When there is a fuller study attached to this passage, I will be able to say more about the ancient meaning of

'cherem', and explain why our modern sensibilities are somewhat ignorant of what it was like for people back then. Moreover, our story illustrates the important principle that those who stand in God's way will ultimately be defeated, just as Satan and all evil will be defeated; and those who rebel and sin against God to His face will be destroyed. If we cannot face these issues, then we call into question the basis of Christ's work on the Cross and the nature of the Gospel of redemption, not just the battle of Jericho.

What happened at Jericho for seven days was not a military action, but a religious festival, and we should not think about the reactions of the people inside the city, but the faithfulness of God's people in obeying God's instructions outside. When we have to face real evil today, whether social, demonic, or personal evil, then we will not overcome it ourselves by following rituals, but by being obedient to what God requires us to do. In addition, we will have to ensure that like the Israelites at Jericho, we keep ourselves separate from what is evil and must be handed over to the Lord; ultimately, for His destruction because it is evil. This is the right spiritual principle to take from this story.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss in your group the significance of trampling around the city seven times in seven days, etc.
2. What can we learn from God's instructions to the people of Israel about how they should take the city?
3. Discuss what justification there might be in the slaughter of animals and people in this story, as the Israelites entered the city.

Discipleship challenges

- *Can you think of times when you have had to be extremely obedient to the Lord and follow some path that has been difficult to understand, or perhaps cut across your own understanding of how things should be done? It is a real test of character and faith, and it is important for our spiritual growth in Christ.*
- *Pray for those involved in archaeological research that has a bearing on issues such as the falling of the walls of Jericho, and other Biblical stories. Pray that truth will win in such academic debates.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, may I be like a tree planted by a stream drawing water from the eternal springs and growing stronger every day, fed by Your warmth, light, and water. May I so grow that in due season I bear the fruit I have been created to produce, and contribute to Your harvest; an offering of thanksgiving dedicated to You. AMEN