

The Fall of Jericho

The whole of **Hebrews 11** is full of people, named and unnamed, who are given as examples of faith in action. Some names we know well, like Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Samuel. Some, like Barak and Jephthah, are less familiar and we might need to dig around in a concordance to even find a reference to them. In amongst all these **people** is just one **place**, Jericho - why?

Joshua is not even mentioned! If anyone had faith, surely it was Joshua? Only he and Caleb, out of all the thousands who had left Egypt, lived to actually enter Canaan. It was he who brought the people into the promised land, led them into battle and saw them begin their occupation of the land as the LORD had told them. Why is he only mentioned twice in the whole New Testament and not at all in **Hebrews 11**, where even someone obscure like Barak is named?

Joshua had to learn some important lessons before he came to Jericho. He had the task of implementing the vision given to Moses, putting it into practice very literally 'on the ground'. Perhaps we will see how these lessons help us to understand why he seems to have vanished into the background.

1) The Glory is the LORD's. In **Numbers 13**, the twelve men were selected to go in and spy out the promised land, *"all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel"* (v. 3), and we read in **verses 8** and **16** that 'Hoshea' was selected from the tribe of Ephraim but that *"Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua"*.

This was not just Moses giving Hoshea a new nickname, nor was Joshua the young man that we might think. He was about 40, maybe a little older, a man with responsibility as a leader in the tribe of Ephraim, and all those years ago, when he had been born as the child of slaves in Egypt, his parents had given him the name Hoshea - "salvation". The name they chose for their son spoke of their hope of the LORD's deliverance from slavery and their moving to the promised land. Now, as Hoshea started to rise to prominence, Moses saw the need to redirect that hope. Instead of Hoshea himself embodying salvation, his new name pointed away from himself to the source of that salvation - Yehoshua (Joshua) - "The LORD is salvation".

Moses was the one to whom the Name of God had been revealed (**Exodus 3:13-15, 6:3**). Although the tradition later grew up for the Jews

never to pronounce the Name (saying "LORD" instead), it spoke of the personality of God rather than just being a title. Perhaps it would be similar if every time we saw the Queen's personal name written down, we considered it too familiar for us to refer to her as "Elizabeth" and call her "her Majesty" instead. Although the Jews may not have said the Name of God, they could see it represented there in the document. This tradition does not seem to have stopped them from incorporating the Name into their own names, as Moses did here. "Salvation" becomes "Yah is Salvation". Moses had changed his name, and every time Joshua heard it, he would be reminded that the salvation and rescue of his people lay not with him but with the LORD.

Curiously, when Mary is told to give the same name of Yehoshua to her firstborn, the name no longer points away from him but underlines that he himself is the source of salvation for his people. See **Matthew 1:21**. ("Iesous", the Greek version of the name, is used in the New Testament for both 'Jesus' and 'Joshua').

2) The Timing is the LORD's. Joshua and Caleb had seen that the people could and should have gone into the promised land 40 years before they did. They had been right, the majority had been wrong, but still they had no choice but to leave it with the LORD and believe his promise that his word and their faith would be vindicated in the end, even if it took 40 years. Even then, there is no hint of 'I told you so' from either Joshua or Caleb. See **Numbers 14**, especially **verses 1-10** and **27-38**. Wouldn't it have been easy to insist that it **was** the right time to go into the land (and it was!) and not be prepared to wait for the LORD to accomplish what he needed to do with the people? Or perhaps even to endorse the stubborn and foolhardy attempt to enter the land, recounted in **Numbers 14:39-45**? Joshua did neither. Certainly by the time he came to Jericho, excited as he must have been to be entering the land at last, he had learned to wait for the LORD's timing even when it seemed as though evil had triumphed.

3) The Victory is the LORD's. By the time he comes to Jericho (**Joshua 5**) he is now the leader. He has just achieved what Moses could not do; he has brought the people over the Jordan in a similar way that Moses had brought their parents through the Red Sea. He has set up permanent memorials to these historic events. As a result, the people have the same awe of him as they had of Moses and the surrounding rulers are demoralised. (**Joshua 4:14, 5:1**) He has re-established circumcision as a sign of the LORD's covenant with his people, and they have therefore been made fit once again to observe the Passover. (**Joshua 5:2-12, Genesis 17** and **Exodus 12:48**) The manna has stopped; proof positive that their wilderness existence has ended. Can Joshua allow himself to revel in

success? Read **Joshua 5:13-15**. He has to be reminded that it is not just a case of 'us against them and God is on our side'. His visitor is on neither earthly side but totally for the LORD's purposes. The LORD's army is not there as reinforcements for the army of Israel. On the contrary, Joshua's only route to real success is to put himself and the whole nation at the disposal of the LORD's commander-in-chief. He is not the 'big leader', he is the servant of the LORD.

Now, and only now, is he ready for 'the battle of Jericho', ready to exercise and share the faith which he has been learning over the years!

a) Faith starts with the word of the LORD. "*And the LORD said to Joshua . . .*" (**Joshua 6:2-5**). It is amazing how often we seem to try to have faith when the LORD has not said anything to us; we try to 'believe for' things because we think that is how faith is supposed to work. In every case cited in this 'roll of honour' in **Hebrews 11**, faith starts with the word of the LORD, and Jericho is no exception. We will do well to bear that in mind.

b) Faith requires us to hear and recognise the LORD's voice. Joshua had been commissioned on two occasions. In **Deuteronomy 31**, he is recognised by Moses, firstly in front of the people (**1-6**), then personally (**7-8**) and then by the LORD himself (**23**). In **Joshua 1:1-9**, after the death of Moses, he hears the LORD tell him the same things again - very valuable confirmation!

One of the most crying needs of the people of God today is that we learn to hear and recognise the Lord's voice. It may seem easy to 'receive a word' in the setting of an uplifting meeting, but the Lord wants to train us to his heart's desires as he did with Joshua, not only to receive prophetic 'telegrams'.

c) Faith results in obedient action. After the LORD confirms his commissioning, Joshua takes action on the basis of what he has been told (**Joshua 1:10-11**). In a sense, he has no choice. If he trusts what the LORD has told him, he must take action. If he takes no action, he proves that he does not trust the LORD's word.

This seems to be a shared experience today, when we find ourselves faced with a 'no choice' choice. We know only too well that, if we are to go on in our relationship with the Father through the Lord Jesus, there is no option but to obey him on the specific issue facing us. It is usually a tough choice, even on a 'small' matter, and we start to learn the reality of one of Paul's phrases, "the obedience of faith"

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In the case of the walls of Jericho, how did faith operate?

- 1) The LORD spoke to Joshua.
- 2) He trusted the word and passed it on to the people.
- 3) The people trusted the word.

4) All of them got on with it and did what the LORD had told them to do. It didn't seem to matter how illogical the instructions were. There is no record of any dissent or ridicule, no opposition, no one questioning the validity of the message or the messenger.

Joshua had made good progress in learning the lessons which the LORD had been showing him. Now they were not just lessons for him; the people had started to learn them too!

1) As they expose themselves to the risk of looking foolish for the LORD's sake, they begin to learn that **the glory is the LORD's**.

2) As they spend a week in seemingly fruitless (and rather strange) activity, they begin to learn that **the timing has to be the LORD's**.

3) As the walls of Jericho fall without them doing anything directly, and the whole city lies defenceless before them, they begin to learn that **the victory is the LORD's**.

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Hebrews 11 is written in the context of encouragement to hold on, not give up, not throw away our confidence in the Lord Jesus and our need of endurance in order to receive what has been promised to us (**Hebrews 10:35-39**). Although Joshua may have thought that he was bringing the people into the promised land (or rather that the LORD was using him to do it!), in actual fact neither he nor any of the others in this 'roll of honour' received what was promised. Nor will they receive it until 'we' (the Church) enter into our inheritance (**Hebrews 11:39-40**).

Joshua learned these important lessons of faith in order to see the people of God receive the promised land.

If we are to see the people of God receive the inheritance of "*a kingdom which cannot be shaken*" (**Hebrews 12:28-29**), we also need to learn them, being prepared like Joshua to fade out of the spotlight to allow the Lord's purposes to be accomplished.

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