



# Hard Passages in the Bible

Gaining confidence for engaging the  
biblical story

# Joshua 5:13-6:21 (LEB)

## The Commander of Yahweh's Army Appears Before Joshua

<sup>13</sup> And it happened, when Joshua was by Jericho, *he looked up*,<sup>[r]</sup> and he saw a man standing *opposite him*<sup>[s]</sup> with his sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said, "Are you with us, or with our adversaries?" <sup>14</sup> And he said, "Neither. I have come now as the commander of Yahweh's army." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and *he bowed down*<sup>[t]</sup> and said to him, "What is my lord commanding his servant?" <sup>15</sup> The commander of Yahweh's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals<sup>[u]</sup> from your feet,<sup>[v]</sup> for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

**6** Now Jericho was shut up inside and out because of the presence of the *Israelites*;<sup>[a]</sup> no one was going out or

coming in. <sup>2</sup> And Yahweh said to Joshua, "Look, I am giving Jericho into your hand, its king and the soldiers of the army. <sup>3</sup> You will march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once; you will do so for six days. <sup>4</sup> And seven priests will bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you will march around the city seven times, and the priests will blow on the trumpets. <sup>5</sup> And when they blow long on the horn of the ram, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people will shout *with a great war cry*, and the wall of the city will fall flat,<sup>[b]</sup> and *the people will charge, each one straight ahead*."<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>6</sup> So Joshua son of Nun summoned the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests carry the trumpets of the rams' horns before the ark of Yahweh." <sup>7</sup> And he said<sup>[d]</sup> to the people, "Go forward and march around the city, and let the armed *men* pass before the ark of Yahweh.

<sup>8</sup> And when Joshua spoke to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the presence of Yahweh went forward and they blew the trumpets; and the ark of the covenant of Yahweh followed behind them. <sup>9</sup> And the armed *men* went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while they were blowing the trumpets. <sup>10</sup> But Joshua commanded the people, saying, "You will not shout, and you will not let your voice be heard; a word will not go out from your mouth until the day I say to you 'Shout!' Then you will shout." <sup>11</sup> And the ark of Yahweh went around the city, *circling once*, and they came *into* the camp and spent the night in the camp. <sup>12</sup> Then Joshua got up early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of Yahweh. <sup>13</sup> The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of the rams' horns before the ark of Yahweh went on continually, and they blew on the trumpets. And the armed *men* went before them, and *the* rear guard came after the ark of Yahweh, while the trumpets blew continually. <sup>14</sup> And they marched around the city once on the second day, and they returned *to* the camp. They did *this* for six days.

<sup>15</sup> Then on the seventh day they rose early at dawn, and they marched around the city in this manner seven times. *It* was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. <sup>16</sup> And at the seventh time the priests blew on the trumpets, and Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For Yahweh has given you the city." <sup>17</sup> The city and all that is in it will be devoted to Yahweh; only Rahab the prostitute and all who *are* with her in the house will live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. <sup>18</sup> As for you, keep away from the things<sup>[g]</sup> devoted to destruction so that you do not take them and bring about your own destruction, making the camp of Israel an object for destruction, bringing trouble upon it. <sup>19</sup> But all of the silver and gold, and the items of bronze and iron, *are* holy to Yahweh, and they must go to Yahweh's treasury." <sup>20</sup> So the people shouted, and they blew on the trumpets. And when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell flat. *The people charged, each one straight ahead into the city,*<sup>[i]</sup> and they captured it. <sup>21</sup> And they utterly destroyed *by the edge of the sword*<sup>[ii]</sup> all who were in the city, both men and women, young and old, ox, sheep, and donkey.

# Reaction to the reading

- What words or phrases stand out to you?
- If you already “knew” the story, what did you notice in it that was new to you?
- Were you taught this story as a child? If so, how were you taught to read it?
- Does this passage present a difficulty for you? If so what?

# Conventional reading of Jericho story

- Often taught to children
- This was a military battle in which God helped the Israelites conquer the city of Jericho.
- This was part of God's plan for allowing the Israelites to inhabit the land.
- The people of Jericho were wicked people and deserved to be conquered.
- Warfare is sometimes God's will (some may take this passage to contradict Anabaptist peace teaching)

# Possibilities for interpreting

- Allegorical/spiritualized reading (early Christians like Origen)
- God knows best and whatever God commands is “good.”
- God worked through violence in the past, but after Jesus a different “age” has begun in which we no longer are commanded to go to war.
- Reading the story as ritual reenactment; language not as explicitly violent in Hebrew as in translations (Wilma Ann Bailey)
- Joshua as political propaganda from Josiah’s reign
- Themes of dependence on God, receiving God’s promise as sheer gift, undivided loyalty to God

# Questions

- Where does this passage fit in the biblical story?
- How do you wrestle with this or similar passages in the Bible?
- How does hearing multiple ways of interpreting Joshua 6 give you more confidence for reading and interpreting this passage?
- In what ways do you continue to wrestle with this passage?
- What wisdom, insights, or call can we take from this passage, as followers of Jesus, reading it in light of Jesus ?