

May 18–24: Joshua 1–8; 23–24, “Be Strong and of a Good Courage”

Introduction - Destruction of the Inhabitants of Canaan

In today's lesson, we will see that the Israelites were commanded to destroy the inhabitants of the Promised Land. Can you think of other instances where the Lord has destroyed an entire group of people?

(Noah, Sodom & Gomorrah, Jericho, Nephites and Lamanites when Christ appeared, Nephites)

An Old Testament manual describes what the Canaanites were like at this time.

"The Hittites, Hivites, and Jebusites were direct descendants of Canaan. By the time Israel approached the promised land, these Canaanites had become an extremely wicked and idolatrous people....

"Sexual immorality had become religious practices to the point where the people were entrenched in depravity and proud of it. Their iniquity was 'full' or total. Accordingly, God sentenced them to death and made Israel the executioner." (Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, pp. 92–93.)" (Old Testament Student Manual Genesis-2 Samuel)

In Deuteronomy, we read that God considered them ripe for destruction and would carry out His work through the Israelites.

Deuteronomy 9:3

3) Understand therefore this day, that the Lord thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the Lord hath said unto thee.

As a result, Moses commanded the Israelites to utterly destroy the Canaanites.

Deuteronomy 7:1-2,16

1) When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;

2) And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:

16) And thou shalt consume all the people which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee.

With our understanding of the gospel of Christ, how can we accept the commandment to “utterly destroy them” and “have no pity”?

1 Nephi 17:32,35

32) And after they had crossed the river Jordan he did make them mighty unto the driving out of the children of the land, yea, unto the scattering them to destruction.

35) Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God. But behold, this people had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity; and the fulness of the wrath of God was upon them; and the Lord did curse the land against them, and bless it unto our fathers; yea, he did curse it against them unto their destruction, and he did bless it unto our fathers unto their obtaining power over it.

Joseph Smith uses this passage from Deuteronomy to teach an important principal.

Joseph Smith

"That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. God said, 'Thou shalt not kill;' at another time He said, 'Thou shalt utterly destroy.' This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted--by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire." (TPJS, pg. 256)

Joshua

Recall from the Book of Numbers that Joshua was one of the twelve spies sent into the Promised Land to evaluate the strength of the Canaanites.

Numbers 14:6-9

6) And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes

7) And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

8) If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

9) Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not.

What gave Joshua and Caleb the confidence that Israel could possess the land despite the strength of its inhabitants?

(If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us

Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land)

As a result of their faith, Joshua and Caleb were the only Israelites from Egypt who were allowed to enter the Promised Land.

The Lord assures Joshua that He is with him.

Josh 1:5-9

5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

What does the Lord repeatedly command Joshua to do in this passage?

(Be strong and of a good courage
be thou strong and very courageous
Be strong and of a good courage)

What blessings does the Lord promise Joshua if he is “strong and very courageous”?

(Thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest
The Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest
As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.)

How can we apply this counsel when we feel the Lord has asked us to do things that seem beyond our abilities?

Young Men and Young Women General Presidencies

“In the space of four verses in the first chapter of Joshua, the Lord commands Joshua to be strong and courageous—three times! Then the Lord promises Joshua that he will succeed in bringing the Israelites to their land of inheritance, that strength and courage will come to him because of his obedience to all the law, and—most significantly—that the Lord will be with him wherever he goes.

“That same call to courage is yours. And the same promises are yours as well. With the Savior’s help, you too will succeed in your callings and in your life. You will have strength to withstand any temptation as you obey the commandments.”

“There were many unknowns facing Joshua. He didn’t know how he would be able to bring the children of Israel into the promised land, but he trusted in the Lord. You might feel uncertain about your future in these troubled times. But be of good courage. The Lord is with you. You can trust in Him. He will help you succeed. (“Facing Challenges with Courage,” New Era, Jan. 2010)

Crossing the River Jordan

They miraculously crossed the Jordan River. When the bearers of the Ark stepped into the water, it parted, and the Israelites were able to cross on dry ground.

Josh 3:6-8,15-17

6 And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.

7 And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

8 And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.

15 And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,)

16 That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho.

17 And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.

What does the priests’ example teach us about acting in faith before seeing the miracle?

(the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water)

Neal A. Maxwell

"We all have a need to understand that we must walk to the edge of the light, obediently going as far as the Lord has told us to go before expecting him to help us with the next step. Why not, in this connection, link the better

known and far more dramatic crossing of the Red Sea with the episode involving Joshua and the children of Israel when the time came for them to cross the flood-swollen Jordan River. Notice that in the latter episode the Lord required them to get the soles of their feet wet first before he stopped up the swollen Jordan so dramatically." ("Teaching Opportunities from the Old Testament," Ensign, Apr. 1981)

During the Exodus, the Lord gave great blessings to the Israelites even though they were not yet capable of demonstrating strong faith. As He brings them into the Promised Land, we will see that He expects this generation of Israelites to demonstrate their faith before He delivers the miracle.

The Walls of Jericho

Joshua is visited by a heavenly being.

Josh 5:13-15

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?

14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?

15 And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

Recall from Joshua 1:5 that the Lord told Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee."

What in this passage suggests that the being who appeared to Joshua was the Lord Himself?

(the place whereon thou standest is holy)

Bruce R. McConkie

"Christ himself is the chief soldier in his own army; as Commander, he carries the title captain of the Lord's Host. By this name he appeared to Joshua, who seeing 'him with his sword drawn in his hand,' and hearing him say, 'As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come'.

"Among righteous messengers from the spirit realms, none but Deity will accept worship from mortals, and none but the Lord himself hallows a spot so that mortals are commanded to remove their shoes." (Mormon Doctrine, pg. 112)

The Lord gives Joshua instructions on how to take the city of Jericho.

Josh 6:2-5

2 And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.

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.

5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

What does the Israelites' response to these unusual instructions suggest about their spiritual state?

Howard W. Hunter

"Joshua carried out the instructions he had been given by a messenger of the Lord. His commitment was to complete obedience. His concern was to do precisely as he was instructed, that the promise of the Lord would be fulfilled. The instructions no doubt seemed strange, but his faith in the outcome urged him on.

"As Joshua and his people approached Jericho, the instructions of the Lord were followed precisely, and according to the scriptural account, 'the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city' (Josh. 6:20.)." (CR, Oct. 1982)

Hebrews 11:30

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

The Sun and Moon Stand Still

A number of other battles are recorded in the Book of Joshua that make it clear the Lord gave them success when they were obedient and demonstrated faith.

In chapter 10, we read about how the Lord caused the sun and moon to stand still until the Israelites were able to defeat their enemies.

Josh 10:12-14

12 Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.

13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun

stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.
14 And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel.

What does this account teach us about Joshua's faith and the Lord's response to it?

(the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel)

Joshua's Final Admonition to Israel

In the last two chapters, Joshua delivers his final discourses to Israel.

Josh 23:11-13

11 Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God.
12 Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you:
13 Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you.

What does the Lord say will happen if Israel fails to drive out these nations and instead adopts their ways?

(they shall be snares and traps unto you... until ye perish from off this good land)

Josh 24:13-16

13 And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.
14 Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.
15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.
16 And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods;

What does this passage teach about the importance of choosing whom we will serve?

(fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth)

choose you this day whom ye will serve)

Ezra Taft Benson

“The Lord has given us the assurance that if we live righteously, if we keep his commandments, if we humble ourselves before him, all will be well. I turn to two passages of scripture today which I’d like to read:

“...Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest’ (Joshua 1:9).

“This was the Lord’s admonition to his son, Joshua, encouraging him to trust in God. Joshua answered that admonition in counsel to his people in these words:

“...choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’ (Joshua 24:15).

“Embodied in these two passages of scripture are the two principal essentials for security and peace: first, trust in God; and second, a determination to keep the commandments, to serve the Lord.” (CR, Oct. 1950)