

August 20, 2016 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Joshua 6:1-24 Rated R for Relevance: Genocide and Jericho by Andy
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This morning some of you are facing what you think are impossible challenges. Maybe it's a situation at work or with career opportunities or lack of opportunities and you just can't see anyway through, from your vantage point its impossible.

Maybe you are a parent with an impossible problem with a child.

Some may face a diagnosis that creates in you a feeling of impossibility, there's no way out.

There are marriages. Situations that seem impossible to fix. Hurts that won't heal forgiveness that seems impossible to extend, dullness that won't go away.

Alcohol, drugs, pornography, addictions of all kinds may surround some of you with high walls that make freedom a seeming impossibility

Some of you are so dry spiritually you feel you make the Sahara look tropical. You once "felt" it but right now there's none of that and getting back to connected with God seems impossible

There are people you love for whom you are praying but in reality in your most honest moments you fear impossibility

The chains of impossibility can be confining and depressing and suck the life out of us and while today's story is one that causes its own cognitive dissonance it is also one that can break the chains of impossibility thinking and open us up to what God can do. Our God, the God of the Bible, the God who is revealed in Jesus is the one who specializes in impossibility.

Sometimes when we read scripture the very scriptures themselves seem to conflict and we find it nearly impossible to hold two or more seemingly contradictory beliefs, ideas or values simultaneously. Managing paradox can seem like another impossibility.

In this series on Rated R for Relevance we are looking at some cases, some stories that cause us to scratch our head. We are stressed to reconcile the behaviors in these stories with what we believe about God and about ourselves as humans. And today's story certainly fits. And maybe we can reconcile the story and our understanding of God and/or, maybe we are called to hold seemingly incongruent beliefs about life or ourselves or God in paradox, trusting that were the curtain of understanding pulled all the way open we could see how it all fits, but with just the pieces in our hands, with just our immediate understanding we can't see how all the pieces of this complex puzzle come together to form any coherent picture.

Before we deal with the details of today's story, let me set the context and remind you of the setting.

Really even the setting the history that proceeds this piece of history is the unfolding of the God who makes the impossible possible.

Hundreds of years before our story God came to Abram and God, based on God's will, God's knowledge, God's power promised Abram that he would be the father of a great nation and his family would be huge virtually numberless like the grains of sand on the beach or the stars in the sky. This wasn't a literal number but simply a way of communicating to Abram that his family would be really really big and they would come back and inherit the land of promise.

Huge nation from a man aging with no children impossible but not with the God of possibility.

You may remember famine brings his descendents, the sons of Jacob whose name was changed to Israel, these children of Israel come to Egypt and eventually are enslaved there. God raises up Moses who he uses as the human leader as God miraculously does the impossible and frees the nation of Israel from enslavement in Egypt. They meet God in the desert, are made God's covenant people, they whine, and rebel, and when they have the first opportunity to enter the promised land, 10 of 12 spies give a fearful report and the people buy into the fear, in fear they determine following God's plan is impossible. They reject God's plan to enter the promised land and so they end up wandering around the desert for 40 years.

Our story today happens as they are again presented with the opportunity to enter this land, the land of the Canaanites, which was promised to Abraham their ancestor.

The mantle of leadership has passed from Moses to the new leader Joshua. Moses dies on Mt Nebo and Joshua leads the people to a camp on the western side of the Jordan river. From there he secretly sends out two spies to cross the Jordan river and spy out the first impediment to their taking the land, the walled and fortified, the impregnable city of Jericho, and impossible hurdle. (Next week we will unpack the story of Rahab who befriended the spies).

I wonder if Joshua carefully selected spies with faith and vision. He didn't send a party of 12 like he had been a part of when they spied out the land 40 years before. I'm sure he was remembering how only two, he and Caleb had given a good report. So this time he only sends two, and when they return they said, "The Lord will certainly give us the whole land, for all the people in the land are terrified of us."

Joshua leads the people across the Jordan river and the impossible happens again the waters part for them like the Red Sea had done for Moses, a confirmation of Joshua's new role and they camp on the western side of the Jordan River.

The city of Jericho was located only a few miles west of the river crossing. It was known as the city of palms, on the trade route from east to west. This is the city which claims today to be the oldest city. It's spring was healed by the prophet Elisha. It was where Jesus encountered Zacchaeus the tax collector who climbed a tree to see Jesus. It was the destination of the traveler who was headed down to Jericho from Jerusalem and was robbed, beaten and left for dead that Jesus told about and introduced us to the good Samaritan.

It is really a road Down to Jericho. Jerusalem's elevation is 2582 feet above sea level and Jericho sits at 846 feet below sea level, giving it a tropical feel. Today they grow bananas in the area.

It was while they were camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho that they renewed the rite of circumcision and they celebrated the Passover, and it was just after the Passover celebration that the manna stopped and they began to eat the crops in Canaan. Talk about impossible how to feed that multitude for 40 years of desert wandering but God sent manna.

There's this great little story right before our main story. Joshua is approaching the city of Jericho and he looks up and sees a man facing him with a sword in his hand, and Joshua asks him are you for us or for our enemies? His reply sets the stage for the coming of Israel's children into the promised land. He answers, "Neither, I am commander of the Lord's army."

At his Joshua falls at his feet and surrenders, "I am at your command, What do you want your servant to do?"

"Take off your sandals for the place you are standing is holy ground." This is like Moses' burning bush. This is the clarity of who is really in charge. This is the encouragement and support Joshua will need as God uses him to lead the people.

In all the stories of the Bible the real issue isn't, "Is God on my side." He's not on our side or the side of our enemies, The question is am I on God's side.

Joshua chapter 6 opens with these words, Now the gates of Jericho were tightly shut because the people were afraid of the Israelites. No one was allowed to go in or out. But the Lord said to Joshua, "I have given you Jericho, its king, and all its mighty warriors. Your entire army is to march around the city once a day for six days. Seven priests will walk ahead of the Ark, each carrying ram's horn. On the seventh day you are to march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the horns. When you hear the priests give one long blast on the horns, have all the people give a mighty shout. Then the walls of the city will collapse, and the people can charge straight into the city." People have sung the song, "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho" and the walls came tumbling down. But the battle was the Lords not Joshua's!

Can you imagine the consternation of the warriors of Israel with this plan. "We're going to do what?" March in silence around the city once each day for 6 days, and the on the 7th when there's one long blast of the ram's horn everybody just shouts and the walls will fall! S-u-r-e sounds like a plan. Impossible! And from every human angle it makes no sense. But what is impossible with man is possible with God.

Crazy as it seems it worked, the walls fell, everything that wouldn't burn was dedicated to God and everything that would burn was set ablaze as an offering to God. Only Rahab and her family were spared as promised by the spies she'd protected.

When these people who had been wandering in the desert for 40 years, eating manna, waiting for a faithless generation to die off, when they came across the Jordan on dry ground before them was Jericho and Jericho represented impossibility.

It was impregnable from their perspective.

It was armed and dangerous.

It was in many ways bigger than life, more than they could ever handle. It personifies every impossibility you face.

But God had a plan, // he always has a plan.

Right here at the start of receiving the promised land they were to be impressed that the conquest of Canaan would not be theirs by their fighting for themselves. But instead they were to simply be instruments to execute the will of God.

They had visions of sugar plums, riches, good days of prosperity, but these needed to be set aside and recognize that they were there for the glory of Jehovah.

It is hard, really hard in our cultural context to reconcile “God is love” with God crashing down the walls of Jericho. I’ve said it many times that whatever the stories of scripture, however they seem to represent God they must find context and meaning within the picture of God we are given in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The Bible Project does a great job of addressing at least some of our cognitive dissonance—listen and watch. *(This is a clip 4:48-7:26 from this link. <https://www.rightnow.org/Content/Series/181310#8> Here it explains some of how we can reconcile the ideas of “Loving your enemies” and God driving out the Canaanites.*

First the Canaanites were really wicked in two distinct ways- they were morally corrupt (Lev 18) and they offered child sacrifices (Deut 12:29-31) God didn’t want these practices to influence Israel so the Canaanites had to go.

Second, the question then is did God really command the destruction of all the Canaanites like a Genocide? At first glance the language used , Totally destroyed, left no survivor, nothing left that breathes,

etc. But when you look more closely you see that these phrases are clearly hyperbole and not literal. Go back to the original command about the Canaanites in Deut 7 Israel is first told to “drive out” the Canaanites, but then told to totally destroy them. Then that’s followed by commands to not intermarry them or enter into business deals with them. You can’t marry someone you destroyed so it seems evident that some form of hyperbole. The same applies to the stories of Joshua. Joshua 10 says that no survivors were left in the cities of Hebron or Debeer, but then in chapter 15 we encounter these cities and they’re still populated by Canaanites. So Genocide won’t fit here because first God was open to those who would turn to him as Rahab and the Gibeonites.

Third these battles mark a unique moment in Israel’s history. It was limited to a handful of groups living in the land of Canaan. With all other nations Israel was commanded by God to pursue peace-see Deut 20. These are stories of God bringing justice on human evil and preventing Israel from being annihilated by the Canaanites.)

Sometimes with a quick reading we can imagine that God is only in love with Israel’s children.

We can get caught up in our individual and collective heritage and live with the illusion that God only wants us, loves only us. But that can never be true. God’s love is not exclusive but inclusive.

No where can you find support that God so loved Israel
God so loved this tribe or that tribe that he gave his only son.

No what scripture teaches is that God so loved the world. That’s a very inclusive love.

This tells me that God loved the people inside the walls of Jericho as much as he loved those walking around that city. Forty years before those walls fell the stories of the opening of the Red Sea, the judgments upon Egypt were known to the residents of Jericho.

More recently they had heard of the overthrow of the kings of Midian, of Gilead, and Bashan. They knew of the holiness of God's character and his abhorrence of impurity. In the book Patriarchs and Prophets it says, "Like the men before the flood, the Canaanites lived only to blaspheme heaven and defile the earth. And both love and justice demanded the prompt execution of these rebels against God and foes to man." P. 492

God is interested in evicting evil from our world. There's no redeeming value to evil. No matter how attractive the sin you love. No matter how appealing, no matter the massive pleasure that might be had for a season, the end is no good. The end are chains that bind you and brainwashing that will make you believe any other option to be impossibility.

Attachment to sin is detachment from God. And our attachment to sin makes us all dead men walking without the grace and forgiveness of God we are doomed. Paul calls us children of wrath. Listen, Jesus who knew no sin, not the smallest slightest adoption of evil in himself, became sin for us that we might have his absolute perfect righteousness given to us free and clear.

I don't know where you wrestle. I don't know where the devil has fooled you into believing in some impossibility. Some of you right now are up against sin in such a way that victory seems an absolute impossibility. It has impregnable walls, it is fortified, and you feel helpless and small and defeated before you even fight.

The lesson we must learn is two fold. God will evict sin from this world, Jericho is just a foretaste, an hors d'oeuvre. Left to our own we will be so enmeshed so attached to sin that we risk eviction by attachment. But hear the lesson Israel was to learn from Jericho and we too must learn. "It was to be impressed upon their minds that their strength was not in the wisdom of man, nor in his might, but only in the God of their salvation. They were thus to become accustomed to relying wholly upon their divine Leader. God will do great things for

those who trust in Him. The reason we have no greater strength, the reason we believe in impossibility is that we trust our own wisdom too much, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power of possibility. He is present and will help us in every emergency if we will place our entire confidence in him and faithfully obey him.” Ibid. 493

That night in the garden Jesus is clawing at the ground like a trapped animal seeking for some way to escape. Going forward seems like an impossibility. He feels the weight of the sin he carries, separating him from his Father. And in that moment he seeks not his own but the will of his divine leader and he relies wholly on the Father, and what seems like an impossible plan goes through and he bears our sin dies our death and gives us eternity and makes all things possible.

But it isn't just for us...it is for everyone. For God so loved the world. He died for the sins of the Canaanites, and the Pharisees, for all prideful, greedy, selfish, abusers, for the sins we love and the sins we hate. And because of Jesus we can, we must trust God and let him do his work –and our part? To obediently and silently follow the plan. Circle all the fortresses binding our lives. And let him make the impossible become possible. We walk around in silent obedience let him by his power break every chain that binds us. If Christ has set you free then you are free indeed.



Who has been a good mentor to you (like Moses to Joshua)?

What do you think it felt like when manna stopped and Israel ate produce of Canaan?

What do you think about the exchange between Joshua and the “Captain of the Lord’s army” in Joshua 5?

How can your testimony like the spies influence outcomes?

What do you think Joshua thought about the march around the city plan? The soldiers

What do you think the citizen of Jericho thought of the silent march?

How does God is love square up with the Jericho story?

Whose battle is being fought?

How is Jericho’s fall protecting worship of God and spiritual health of Israel?

What sin fortresses in your life are you willing to have collapse?



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