

## The Faith Of Israel

### Jericho and the Last Day of Unleavened Bread

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Hebrews chapter 11 is a rich reminder of faithful men and women who remained obedient to God even in the midst of confusing or even impossible situations. The illustrations given there are all proof of how God's purpose is worked out by means of faith, and they are intended to instill in us a confident assurance that the same spiritual resources available to those heroes are available to us.

A small part of that chapter relates to the Last Day of Unleavened Bread:

**Hebrews 11:28-29** By faith [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

It is traditionally held that the crossing of the Red Sea took place on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, and if you look at the chronology found in Exodus 13 and 14, along with Numbers 33, everything points to seven days between when the Israelites left Egypt proper on the first day, and when they crossed the Red Sea. They started the exodus on the Night to be Much Observed, but they were not completely delivered from Egypt's power until the whole army of Egypt was destroyed in the sea.

But there is more here:

**Hebrews 11:30** By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.

This is another event that almost certainly happened on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, exactly forty years later. Josephus records in *Antiquities of the Jews* that the Israelites began their march on the first day (of the Feast of Unleavened Bread), and since they marched for seven days, then the walls of Jericho would have fallen on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. There is not a scripture which says this was definitely the case, but there is good reason for Josephus to have believed this, as we will see.

Before we get to Jericho, though, we are going to review what had led up to it. In Numbers 14 we find God's judgment against Israel because of their refusal to enter the land:

**Numbers 14:31-35** But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. I the Lord have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

Israel refused to believe that God would be with them, and this event was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Numbers 14:22 says that this was the tenth time that Israel had tested God. After ten occasions, it was pretty clear that this generation of Israelites did not have hearts which trusted God, and so God swore that they would not enter.

But Moses interceded on Israel's behalf (Numbers 14:13-19), and God relented. Every Israelite should have been dead at this point, except for the faithful leaders. Yet God showed mercy in allowing the next generation to grow up enough to be capable of inheriting the land. Even though God relented and did not destroy the whole nation, He still determined that the nation—as it says in verse 34—was going to *know His rejection*. God was also merciful in counting the time they had already been in the wilderness as time served, as it were. But the remaining 38 years were about *Israel knowing God's rejection*. Every step they took, and every day that passed without being in the land, was a reminder that they had rejected God, and now they were estranged.

Joshua 5 and 6 contain not simply the next generation of Israelites inheriting the land. Rather, what we see is a restoration of the relationship between Israel and God. The previous generation had exhibited faith in crossing the Red Sea, but then they had 40 years of tempting God. Now—exactly 40 years later—God begins to put them back on track, and He begins again with the covenant of circumcision. All of the Israelite males in Egypt had to be circumcised in preparation for the Passover, and in Joshua 5:2-7, we see that the present Israelite males had to be circumcised because they had not been doing that for the previous 40 years.

Circumcision is a requirement for keeping the Passover, but its primary significance is that it is the sign of the covenant made with Abraham. The real issue is that one must be a part of the Abrahamic covenant in order to observe the Passover, and the sign of that covenant is circumcision. The sacrifices for that covenant were prepared on Passover day, and the covenant was confirmed at the very beginning of the First Day of Unleavened Bread.

Passover and Unleavened Bread are thus closely linked with God's covenant and promises. Part of what God promised was that Abraham's descendants would be in Egypt for 430 years, and then they would be delivered. Another part of that covenant was that they would return to the land given to Abraham. When God introduced circumcision, it was in the context of Abraham's descendants receiving all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.

Prior to taking the Passover in Joshua 5:10, the Israelites entered into that covenant of circumcision. It was a reminder not only that the sovereign God had foretold their slavery in Egypt, but also of His promise of deliverance and of bringing them into the Promised Land. It was a reminder of where they had come from, and where they were going as a people, and they needed this reminder because they had let it slip during the previous 40 years.

Joshua 5:9 says that the day this happened signifies the reproach of Egypt being rolled away. One meaning of this is that the Israelites of Joshua's day were essentially in the same condition as the Israelites in Egypt. Egypt represents subjugation, and subjection by a system that is anti-God. That is what we have been delivered from.

The Israelites cried out to be delivered, and God had to command circumcision because the peoples' part of the covenant had been neglected. Then, after the exodus from Egypt, God's commands and covenant were again forgotten, and every year that went by saw more circumcised Israelites dying, and more Israelites growing up without entering into that covenant.

After 40 years, the nation had taken itself completely outside of the covenant, just as they were when God heard them crying out to Him in Egypt. And yet through circumcision, and the covenant it represented, they were able to leave their Egypt-like state, and have the hope of a homeland.

Joshua 6 relates God's instructions to Joshua, Joshua's instructions to the Israelites, and the taking of the city of Jericho. I want to draw your attention to Joshua 6:4 and Joshua 6:15, both of which mention "the seventh day." The majority of the times that "the seventh day" is used, it indicates a holy day, either the weekly Sabbath or the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. It is not in every case, though, because there are instances where it is clearly talking about the seventh day in a sequence of days, rather than the seventh day of the week or the seventh day of the feast. The mentions in verses 4 and 15 are a little ambiguous. But the majority of places where it says "the seventh day", it is talking about a Sabbath.

Speaking of sevens, God really stacked the deck here. There were to be seven priests and seven trumpets. The Israelites were commanded to march for seven days. On the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times.

As we know, seven is God's number of perfection. The Hebrew word for seven comes from a root that means *to be full* or *satisfied*. Here, it is like God is underlining this seventh day, and saying that He was satisfied, and that something was being filled to the full.

It seems quite fitting, then, that when God first speaks to Abram, He makes seven specific promises (Genesis 12:2-3), but all of the promises are dependent upon Abram going to a land that God would show him—and that was the land that the Israelites were now finally coming into. With the fall of Jericho, God was satisfied with His judgment on the rebellious generation, and He was continuing to fill His covenant promises to the full.

Another significant point here is the trumpets made of ram's horns. These were different from the silver trumpets which were used to call an assembly, to signal movement, and to commence battle. These were actually jubilee trumpets. They were for proclaiming liberty rather than declaring war. We know that there were swords involved, but the swords have to be seen in the context of the liberty God was giving, rather than the primary purpose. The priests were not actually declaring the Jubilee year in the strictest sense. They were announcing a jubilee of sorts, because the essence of the jubilee is that everyone was to return to his own land.

With the trumpets, the priests were proclaiming that the children of Abraham were returning to the land which belonged to their father. Just as the Lord God of their father had promised, He gave them the land, beginning with what was probably the most fortified city in the whole territory. Just as with Israel leaving Egypt, when Israel came into the land, the amount they contributed to the effort was a mere token compared to what God did. God had already determined the outcome. As it says in Joshua 6:16-17, even before the walls fell, the Lord had given them the city. When it came time for God to act on His promises, He did so with a speed and decisiveness that left no doubt as to Who actually did the work.

There is a parallel here with one of the signs Jesus performed:

**John 5:5-10** Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir,

I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

The lame man here serves as a type of Israel in the wilderness. He had an infirmity of 38 years, which is how long Israel was sentenced to know the rejection of God. This man's infirmity made him unable to move—unable to better his condition, and unable to make any sort of progress. All he could do was lie on his bed.

If you think about it, in type that is pretty much what Israel did. For 38 years, their feet were moving, but they may as well have been lying down for all the progress they made. They were on the move, but they were not walking with God. Their unbelief was an infirmity that hobbled everything they tried to do. After 38 years, they were right back at the place where they started.

It was not until the Son of God intervened that the man could take up his bed and walk, and it was not until the Angel of the Lord intervened that Israel could be restored to Him and move ahead with inheriting the land.

The timing of this incident is very curious. John 5:9 says that this happened on "Sabbath," without the definite article. It was *a* Sabbath. And back in John 5:1, it says that the occasion was "a feast of the Jews," in which Jesus went to Jerusalem. And since this happened on a Sabbath, it is again quite possible that this healing took place on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread.

This gets even more interesting in that one of the objections that comes up regarding whether Jericho was taken on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread is that it would mean that the God who proclaimed the sanctity and holiness of the Sabbaths would have commanded Joshua and the Israelites to not only march on the Sabbath, but to also put the whole city to the edge of the sword. That does not sound like a normal Sabbath activity, and some commentators say that if it indeed happened on a holy day, it would make God changeable.

Here, Jesus chose to heal this man—who very much resembles Israel—on a Sabbath, and the Jews of His time likewise protested that it was a violation. Christ's words in John 5:17 answer both objections: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

What the Angel of the Lord did at Jericho was no customary work. It was a work of proclaiming liberty through the Jubilee trumpets, just as this man finally experienced liberty. It was a work of restoring His nation, and of reconciling His people to Himself after years of estrangement. It was a work of fulfilling the words He had spoken to their father, nearly 500 years before. Considering all that was accomplished, it was actually quite fitting that it should take place on a day that was set apart by God, just as it was fitting for Jesus to heal this man on a Sabbath.

God gave Israel the faith that was demonstrated at Jericho, and a healing took place. Judges 2:7 says that the people served the Lord *all* the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua. That was quite a long time, and a unique occurrence in Israel's history. The overall record of the Israelites is one of faithlessness, and yet at Jericho there was enough of a healing that they had at least somewhat of a heart of belief. They still had their problems, and they did not enter the true rest of God, but they were at least serving God. Through God's grace, they had the faith to rise up and move forward with the purpose God had given them.

