



**GREAT
MIRACLES
OF THE BIBLE**

OLD TESTAMENT



**JOHN P.
SCHARLEMANN**

**LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY**

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Our purpose is to help equip believers to live joyfully in God's redeeming love and to share with others God's plan of salvation.

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STUDY STRUCTURE

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTS THIS FOUR-STEP METHOD

1. *PERSONAL* – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
2. *SMALL GROUPS* – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
3. *THE MESSAGE* – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
4. *THE NARRATIVE* – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

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GREAT MIRACLES OF THE BIBLE – OLD TESTAMENT

JOHN P. SCHARLEMANN

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PERSONAL APPLICATION – THE EXODUS MIRACLE
EXODUS 1–2, 7:14–11:10, 12:29–36, 14:1–31

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“In this study, we will examine some of the tremendous moments of our Lord’s intervention in the natural course of history and human events. This author will do so with the understanding that such miracles have literally occurred as described in Scripture. We wish to see how God’s interventions were important to His overall plan of demonstrating redemption and salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, and consider how similar “miracles” may continue today, but perhaps without the “shortcuts” provided so often in biblical history.”

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I have never in my life seen an instant healing. Not once have I witnessed an angel appear in my room in the middle of the night, directing me toward divine action. I have never seen anyone resurrected from the dead (neither have you). I would genuinely like to see the food in my refrigerator multiply on its own when the doors are closed and no one is looking. And I would certainly love to dazzle my friends by walking across the waters of Newport Bay. None of this has ever happened to me. I am doubtful it ever will, but I will never discount the possibility. Because I seriously, willfully, and wholeheartedly believe in miracles. I believe they are happening all around us.

So, what is a miracle? C.S. Lewis in his book *Miracles* defines one as “an interference with Nature by supernatural power.” I suppose we might more clearly define miracles as those moments when the normal laws of nature are violated by an outside force. Of course, that happens all the time. I can lift the pencil off my desk and hold it there, thus violating the law that “what goes up must come down.” Yet, I don’t consider myself a supernatural force. So, perhaps we need to redefine miracles as those moments when the normal laws of nature are violated by an unexplained outside force. However, as Christians, we believe in the continual presence of an almighty, all-knowing God. Thus, for us, outside

interference into the laws of nature is not unexplained. We know the source of such interventions. And that's why for believers in a real and present God, there is no solid distinction between the natural and the supernatural.

Consider, for example, the miracle at the wedding in Cana. Water is suddenly turned into wine. So what? Every year, following natural law, the Lord creates wine. He does it by creating a seed, which in soil, water, and sunlight turns into a fruit which is full of liquid, and will, under certain circumstances, ferment and become wine. So, you see, the Lord is always turning water into wine. Once, and only once, God in Jesus Christ took a shortcut. Instead of creating wine through a long process, He did so instantaneously. He intervened. But the shortcut was the miracle. The process goes on all the time.

Or consider the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. Jesus turned five loaves of bread and two fish into enough food to feed the multitude. But, every year the Lord turns a little corn into a lot of corn, a few tomatoes into a lot of tomatoes. The seed is placed in the ground and many more seeds are created. The same way, He multiplies fish. We can be amazed at the teeming fish which inhabit a flourishing lake or stream. Again, the miracle is in the shortcut, but not necessarily the process. The process occurs all the time.

In one of my children's sermons, I "defied" the laws of nature. I placed two plastic glasses on a book and turned the book upside down. The glasses did not fall. It seemed I had performed some great miracle by defying the laws of nature. Actually, it was a magic trick. I placed a staple between the two glasses, and then wedged my thumb between the glasses and over the base of the staple. The result was the impression that natural law had been violated. But, I was actually using natural law in an unanticipated fashion, creating the illusion I had superseded the natural law. Now this is not to say that the miracles of the Bible are all merely illusionary. The point is that the Lord who created the laws of nature can use those laws and change them at will. There is no reason why we should disbelieve them.

And so, I am constantly amazed at those who may be convinced in the reality of the healing of blind Bartimaeus, but never find conviction in the Virgin Birth. They confess it easier to accept the multiplication of the poor widow's flour, but stumble at the possibility of Jonah living in a big fish for three days. When it comes to our Lord's miracles, the lines between what can be believed and what should be disbelieved are artificial. If Jesus can "shorten" the laws of nature by turning a little bread and fish into food sufficient to feed the masses, then He can shorten the process of healing by which nature can heal a woman who has been hemorrhaging

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*Of course, there is one miracle that has no counterpart
in the processes of nature. That is the Resurrection.*

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for many years, or bring sight to someone who has been blind from birth.

Of course, there is one miracle that has no counterpart in the processes of nature. That is the Resurrection. As a matter of fact, the laws of nature seem to suggest that organisms grow more disorganized, that in time all which is orderly becomes disordered. That is the natural order. But, by returning from the dead after three days in the tomb, and appearing in a physical, yet glorified body, the Lord Jesus was demonstrating to us some new laws to come. As Paul wrote, “He is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The Resurrection revealed to us what will one day be the law by which we are governed. Something totally opposite our present understanding is in the works. And yet, is it so unprecedented?

In a concept which would have seemed totally absurd a generation ago, physicists suggest that our universe was created in an explosive act erupting from a mass so dense it kept light itself from escaping. In less technical language, they are beginning to understand the universe as something created from nothing. Until “something” broke the bonds of nothingness. Whether one accepts this theory as fact is really not the question. The point is we may occasionally uncover new laws which govern our universe at various times and in various places, some of them contradicting

those with which we are currently familiar. It affirms our understanding that the Lord is the Creator of all natural law and can bend and shape those laws according to His will. Thus, the Resurrection seems impossible only to those who narrowly hold to our current understanding of natural law as the norm for all time and all place.

In this study, we will examine some of the tremendous moments of our Lord's intervention in the natural course of history and human events. This author will do so with the understanding that such miracles have literally occurred as described in Scripture. We wish to see how God's interventions were important to His overall plan of demonstrating redemption and salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, and consider how similar “miracles” may continue today, but perhaps without the “shortcuts” provided so often in biblical history.

I pray this study gives us a greater appreciation of the Lord's ongoing presence in our lives and communities, an appreciation for His constant providence and care in the midst of a fallen world suffering the consequences of sin and death. May the Lord bless your study of His Word and may you gain a greater sense of His closeness as you continue your earthly journey.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

THE EXODUS MIRACLE – EXODUS 1-2, 7:14-11:10, 12:29-36, 14:1-31

Lord, guide us by Your Spirit to give thanks for Your blessings. Share with us the mysteries of Your Word so that our faith may be strengthened and our lives enriched. Amen.

1. How old was Moses when the Lord began intervening in his life and preparing for the great Exodus event? (Exodus 1:22-2:10)

Tell when the Lord first intervened in your life. (Acts 2:38-39, 16:32-34; Titus 3:5-7)

2. What does your Bible give for the meaning of the name "Moses"? Why is this an appropriate name?
-

3. How did the Lord deliver Moses as an infant from almost certain death? (Exodus 1:22-2:10)
-

4. How would you expect Pharaoh's daughter to react to finding the small baby?
-

What emotions are recorded in Matthew 2:16 by a less compassionate individual?

Who do you think may have intervened to create a sense of compassion in Pharaoh's daughter? (Matthew 19:26; Job 42:2)

Share with the class a moment in your life when your perspective toward a person or an idea suddenly changed.

How might you consider this one of God's "miraculous" interventions at a very unspectacular level?

5. At what other times did (or will) the Lord reveal His presence in the heat and light of fire as He did in the burning bush? (Exodus 3:1-6)
Exodus 19:18
-

Exodus 40:38

Acts 2:1-4

2 Peter 3:10

6. Where is the Lord Jesus present with us in a special way?

1 Corinthians 11:23-27

John 1:14, Revelation 19:13

Matthew 18:19-20

7. The Lord enabled Moses to strike the Egyptians with 10 plagues (Exodus 7:14-11:10). What happened to Pharaoh's "heart" after each plague? (Exodus 10:1-2)
-

If you had experienced these plagues personally, would you have labelled them "miracles" or "coincidences, freaks of nature"?

How might you describe the heart of a contemporary individual who refuses to believe that the Lord works any and all miracles today?

8. At what point of Israel's emotional trauma does the Lord perform the last and greatest of the Exodus miracles? (Exodus 14:10-12)
-

At what point in your emotional trials might you be more likely to appreciate a miracle? a. When everything is already coming up roses? b. When the "wolves are at the door"? Does this help explain why we tend to overlook the many "miracles" of food, clothing, shelter, and goods that God provides every day, while we pray for miracles during periods of ill health, financial crisis or some other time of sorrow? Discuss.

9. Share with your group a time when you felt your "back to the Red Sea with the Egyptians marching toward you," in other words, a time when you felt there was no escape from dire circumstances surrounding you. Tell how the Lord provided a way out.
-

10. If you had seen the miracle at the Red Sea personally, how do you think it would have affected you and your impression of God's presence in your life?

11. How long did it take the people of Israel to lose faith in their Deliverer from the Red Sea? (Exodus 16:1-3)

12. In what way does the Bible explain the creation and maintenance of faith? (Romans 10:17; John 3:5-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

Thought to ponder: The Lord does not routinely perform spectacular miracles to convert the ungodly.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

THE FALL OF JERICHO – JOSHUA 5:13–6:27

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“The Exodus isn’t just the celebration of one miracle. It’s the remembrance of a long series of miracles, involving God’s continuous intervention in the history of His people. Event after event led to Israel’s final deliverance, each step along the way an integral part of the overall plan.”

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THE EXODUS MIRACLE

Perhaps the best place to begin our observations about some of the great miracles of the Bible should be with the Exodus of God’s people from Egypt. To be sure, there are many miracles which precede this special event. The creation of the world is only one of them. Others would include the deliverance of Noah and his family from the flood, the tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the providential care provided Joseph as he rose to power and fame in Egypt. But the Exodus is the paramount miracle of the Old Testament, even as the Resurrection is the foremost miracle of the New Testament. As we consider the many and various ways in which our Lord has intervened in the history of His creation to alter the course of events, perhaps there is no better place to begin than the deliverance of His people from Egyptian slavery. So many of God’s miracles involve deliverance and liberation from enslavement in one form or another.

The book of Exodus begins by reminding us that after Joseph’s death in Egypt, his descendants multiplied through a number of generations. In fact, the people of Israel grew at such an alarming rate that the Egyptian leaders began to fear their own race would be overwhelmed and superseded by the Israelites. This seems to be an ongoing human concern in the history of mankind. One tribe grows more quickly than another. The Germanic people multiply faster than the French, the Japanese more quickly than the Europeans, the peoples of the third world more rapidly than those of the first world. And with each change in the course of the demographic stream, those who see their race or nationality grow less predominant begin to experience a growing fear for their future and a threat to their cultural integrity. This is one

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As always, the Lord had a plan of deliverance for His people. Although the Hebrews were downtrodden and oppressed, a bright and glorious future awaited them. If they could only hold on to the faith and trust of their fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

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spectacular way the devil roils our world with conflict. And his strategy was particularly effective when it involved the Egyptians and the Israelites. Because of their fears, the Egyptians turned their growing Israelite counterparts into slaves, hoping to eliminate a sizeable portion of God's people through hard work and little food. The people of God who had known such joy and freedom in the Lord's promises, now found themselves under the iron rule of their Egyptian taskmasters.

As always, the Lord had a plan of deliverance for His people. Although the Hebrews were downtrodden and oppressed, a bright and glorious future awaited them. If they could only hold on to the faith and trust of their fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

Already, the plan was in action. The Pharaoh, alarmed because the people of Israel kept growing in numbers despite his oppression, decided more drastic action was needed. He commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill the baby boys which they delivered, and save only the girls. In time, the Pharaoh hoped, this would decimate the Hebrew population. Many infants were killed, and the horror of the ongoing massacre brought despair and

hopelessness to God's people; yet the Lord's plan for deliverance continued.

Through the tender heart of Pharaoh's daughter, one Hebrew infant named Moses was delivered from certain death. Moses' mother built a basket of bulrushes, daubed it with tar and pitch, and then floated her infant son down the Nile in front of the place where Pharaoh's daughter was bathing. Pharaoh's daughter was so moved by the sight of this young child, she captured him and raised him as her own. She named him "Moses" which sounds very much like the Hebrew for "draw out," a fitting name for one who was drawn out from the river, and who would deliver God's people by drawing them out of Egypt (Exodus 2:10).

As the Hebrew people continued to suffer enslavement, Moses grew into a man. Through the years of Israel's pain, God's act of deliverance drew nearer and nearer. Day by day, week by week and year by year, Moses became the adult God had chosen to lead Israel. Moses would grow each day at a natural, normal rate. No supernatural intervention would occur until God's time was just right. How often have we called on the Lord's intervention, only to hear silence followed by stillness! Again and again we

talk to Him. And then, one day, when we least expect it, the Lord acts!

Moving deeper into the desert in search of pasture for his father-in-law's flocks, Moses encountered a strange sight. A bush was burning without being consumed. Suddenly, the "laws of nature," as we might call them, were suspended. God was intervening (Exodus 3:2).

God called Moses to lead God's people out of slavery into a promised land. Moses, of course, was horrified. He had no special qualifications for this task. He had never been to any leadership seminars; he hadn't gained any special eloquence in either Hebrew or Egyptian. He was just a shepherd. But the Lord had chosen him for an unparalleled task and Moses, whether he liked it or not, would follow the Lord's will. This was God's plan, after all. He was intervening in the course of history to bring deliverance.

Moses, and his brother Aaron, were called upon to confront the Egyptian Pharaoh. Now, naturally, Pharaoh had no intention of just letting his slaves go free. What would happen to his economy, his many construction projects, and, of course, the perverse superiority of lording it over an underclass? Of course he wouldn't voluntarily let the Hebrews enjoy their freedom. And so, the Lord began intervening in a number of ways.

Moses was given power to inflict plagues on the people of Egypt. If the Egyptian people were to feel the consequences of violating God's will, they would become discontent and angry at their leadership, and place a tremendous pressure on the Pharaoh to free

God's people. First, Moses and Aaron smote the river Nile with a rod and the river became blood before the eyes of Pharaoh and his court. The fish died and the water became undrinkable; the Egyptian people began to suffer (Exodus 7:20-21).

When Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews go, frogs came swarming out of the river, covering the land, hopping into people's food and into their beds and making life miserable. Then lice arose from the dust of the earth and afflicted both man and beast. Then followed swarms of flies, cattle disease, an epidemic of boils, hailstorms that destroyed the crops, clouds of locusts that ate any crops remaining, and three days of total darkness (Exodus 8-11).

In the past years of living in Southern California, many of us have endured a taste of these ten plagues. Over the course of years, we experienced floods, brush fires, riots, severe earthquakes and drought. It is enough to numb the senses. I have the feeling if a modern day Moses had arisen and proclaimed, "Let my people go," most Angelinos would have handed over their car keys, described the nearest route to the freeway, and waved goodbye.

Well, something like that happened to the Egyptians. But it took one final plague to drag them beyond the limits of their endurance. The last plague was the worst. In every Egyptian home the eldest son was struck dead, from the king's son to the son of the worst felon in prison. Perhaps this was perfect justice for a kingdom which had at one time demanded the death of every male baby born to the Israelites.

The Egyptians now had a taste of their own cruel and savage behavior. By morning, the nation knew the meaning of horror. And the Israelites learned the meaning of "Passover," because when the angel of death strode in fury through the Egyptian streets, only those Israelites who had smeared the blood of sacrificed lambs on their door posts escaped the angel's wrath. In essence, God's anger "passed over" them.

The Pharaoh summoned Moses and surrendered unconditionally. All the people of Israel were to leave immediately. The Egyptians were so desirous of their departure, they gave the Israelites costly gifts and demanded they leave the country. "Just get out," they cried, and God's people were free.

They were free, at least, until Pharaoh once again changed his mind and wished to herd the Israelites back to captivity. What a strange and stubborn man to experience so many plagues and still feel the need to contradict God's will! The Bible states that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. It must have been, indeed, to behave in such a stubborn and self-destructive manner. With all the chariots of Egypt, Pharaoh began the chase to recapture the Israelites. It would lead them to the Red Sea, where Moses and the people of Israel stood puzzling at their escape. How could they cross this body of water and escape the onrushing armies of the powerful Egyptians? Where would they go? Many surely felt they would be

slaughtered or drowned and they looked to Moses for answers.

Moses stood up and pronounced some of the most inspiring words of the Old Testament. He shouted, "Do not be afraid! Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:13-14).

And with that, Moses stretched his rod over the sea. A strong wind arose, parting the waters so that a wall of water stood on the right side of the people, and another wall of water on the left side. The people of Israel walked right through the divided water on dry land and reached the other side safely. When the last man and animal had crossed over, the Egyptian armies began their race across the dry land where the sea once lay. But their chariot wheels stuck in the mud and fell off. Moses raised his hand and the wind abruptly stopped.

Finally, the Egyptians gained a glimpse of their folly in fighting God. They panicked. All army discipline collapsed and they fled for the shoreline. We can only imagine the sense of desperation felt by the Egyptian army as they watched the waters collapse around them. The rushing sound of the wind was suddenly replaced by the roaring of the mighty waters, and every Egyptian soldier was drowned (Exodus 14:26-31).

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*Hear again the words of Moses to his people:
 “Do not be afraid! Stand firm and you will see
 the deliverance the Lord will bring you today... The
 Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”*

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It took many years for the Lord’s plan to reach its fruition, and many acts of intervention which ranged from the mundane to the spectacular. Moses was a grown man before he was able to experience the deliverance of God’s people from Egypt. But throughout his life, the Lord had been patiently, carefully preparing events for the great miracle of the parting of the Red Sea. He had touched the heart of Pharaoh’s daughter so that she would protect the infant Moses from certain death. He allowed Moses to grow in Pharaoh’s court so that Moses would be familiar with the customs and language of the Egyptians as well as the Hebrews. He had called Moses to demand the Hebrews’ release from Pharaoh and given Moses the power to unleash 10 deadly plagues. He had allowed the people of Israel to escape the Lord’s wrath at Passover, and delivered them from the water of the Red Sea.

So, you see, the Exodus isn’t just the celebration of one miracle. It’s the remembrance of a long series of miracles, involving God’s continuous intervention in the history of His people. Event after event led to Israel’s final deliverance, each step along the way an integral part of the overall plan.

It is important that we who profess to be children of God view our Lord’s actions in the same way. Our lives are a series of events by which the Lord unfolds His purpose and power. When we struggle against His will for our lives, we face a futile and exhausting battle. When we follow His will, we will find Him working through us to perform His remarkable deeds. Hear again the words of Moses to his people: “Do not be afraid! Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today... The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

PERSONAL APPLICATION*THE FALL OF JERICHO – JOSHUA 5:13-6:27*

Father in heaven, I pray for a greater appreciation of the miracles You have performed, past and present. Help me to see Your hand guiding me in my life, even as You led the people of Israel. Be with me as I study Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. To whom does “the army of the Lord” refer in 5:14? (2 Kings 6:8-18; Matthew 26:53; Revelation 5:11)

Who is “commander of the army of the Lord?” (Daniel 12:1)

The army of the Lord incorporates more than spiritual beings. Who is the Lord using to conquer the Promised Land? (Joshua 1:10-11)

Share a time in your life when the Lord used another human being as an instrument for bringing a “miracle” to you?

2. What does the commander of the Lord’s army tell Joshua to do? (5:15)

Who, and of what experience, does this remind you? (Exodus 3:5-6)

What miracle did the Lord perform for Israel to allow them safe passage into the Promised Land? (Joshua 3:14-17)

Of what similar miracle does this remind you?

Why do you think the Lord is repeating through Joshua some of the miracles He performed through Moses? (Joshua 1:5)

3. When the people of Israel arrive at Jericho, how do they find the city? (6:1)

Why? (Joshua 2:9-11)

4. How many days are the people of Israel to march around Jericho? (6:3, 15)

How many priests, blowing how many trumpets, and how many times did they march around the city on the seventh day? (6:4)

In these references how does the Lord use the same number?
Genesis 2:2

Exodus 12:19

Exodus 20:10

Revelation 1:16, 20

In these few verses, what seems to be the Lord's favorite number?

5. Describe how you picture the wall of Jericho falling. (6:20)

6. Which citizens of Jericho were spared the destruction and why? (6:22–25)

What would be the sign by which these individuals would be spared, and who would not be spared? (Joshua 2:18–19)

What other event does this resemble? (Exodus 12:7, 13)

7. What curse did Joshua put on the city of Jericho forever? (6:26)

Relate what happened in 1 Kings 16:34.

Who else is under the threat of the Lord's curse? (Matthew 25:41–43)

When we think of the Lord's "miracles," we often consider them solely and purely beneficial to those who are involved. How has this question placed a different perspective on the related effects miracles can have on those who reject the Lord?

Why should this not alarm us? (Romans 8:28)

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8. To what personal miracle does the Bible equate the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and by their similarities, the crossing of the Jordan? (1 Corinthians 10:1-2)

Because the Bible makes this link between the deliverance of God's people through these waters and His children's deliverance from Satan through the waters of baptism, how often have you witnessed a miracle as great as the crossing of the Jordan? Do you know the date of your baptism and how do you celebrate this great miracle?

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9. Why was it so important that the people of Israel bring the Ark of the Covenant with them as they circle Jericho and await its destruction in Joshua 6:6? (Exodus 25:22)

How might this suggest we may find a bit of extra courage when we confront the world with a Bible in our hands?



PERSONAL APPLICATION – THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL
JOSHUA 10:1–28

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“Jericho represented God’s judgment on all the Canaanites and their pagan religions. In a way, Jericho became the “firstfruits” of the Promised Land, the “firstfruits” of the destruction of God’s enemies.”

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THE FALL OF JERICHO

After Moses led the Israelites out of slavery through the Red Sea, the people’s sins of unbelief and faithlessness (Numbers 13–14) provoked the Lord into condemning an entire generation of His people to wander through the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. Throughout those many years, Moses continued to be Israel’s guide and intercessor, but because of Moses’ own act of unbelief (Numbers 20:1–13), the Lord refused to let Moses actually lead God’s people into the Promised Land. Moses was able to climb Mt. Nebo, which overlooked the Promised Land, but he himself would never enter it. Moses died in Moab, and the joyful task of leading God’s people into the land of milk and honey was left to his successor, Joshua.

After sending two spies across the Jordan into Jericho, Joshua prepared his people for entrance into the land which had been promised since the time of Abraham. Led by the Ark of the Covenant, a new generation of Israelites entered the new land. And as they went, they witnessed a miracle similar to the crossing of the Red Sea. In order to leave the desert and enter the land promised to them, the Israelites confronted a large river, the Jordan. There were no bridges by which they could cross. But the Lord had a plan for leading them once again through seemingly uncrossable waters. When the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant reached the Jordan River, and their feet touched the waters, the river stopped flowing and piled up in a heap upstream. The ground dried up, and once again, God’s people could cross a large body of water without harm (Joshua 3:6–17).

It is no coincidence that the miracle of the Jordan crossing mimics the crossing of the Red Sea. Those who are finally entering the land promised generations ago to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are of a

different generation than those who crossed the Red Sea. It is forty years after that first remarkable miracle. In essence, this is to be a new and different people of God than the bunch that had denied Him in faithlessness and unbelief while escaping from Egypt and wandering in the desert. God was beginning anew, and these new people were to experience the same act of deliverance reserved for God's chosen. They commemorated their miraculous crossing by taking twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, each stone representing a tribe of Israel, and placing them as a memorial. The new generation of Israelites was circumcised in recognition of their special status as God's people, and Joshua was ready to begin the conquest of the land promised to the Israelites. Jericho would be the first Canaanite city to be defeated.

Joshua realized where his conquest would begin as he was standing near the city of Jericho and suddenly noticed a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword. Considering this a peculiar sight (and mildly threatening as well), Joshua went to the man and asked whether he was an ally or an enemy of Israel. The man responded that he was neither, rather, he was the "commander of the army of the Lord." After hearing those words, Joshua fell in awe before God's angelic warrior and asked what message was to be given. The Lord then told the leader of the Israelites that he was on holy ground and should remove his sandals. Once again, the Lord was preparing a miraculous intervention in the history of mankind.

The Lord would give the city into the Israelites' hands. And the conquest of the city would be performed in a miraculous, supernatural manner. Of course, the residents of Jericho had already heard about the invading hordes of Israelites nearing their city, and when the story of Israel's miraculous crossing of the Jordan reached their ears, they panicked. They shut themselves behind the city walls and hoped for the best. It often happens that we think we can secure ourselves by building stronger walls and higher fortresses, but in reality, strong walls and barred gates can be signs of weakness and fear rather than strength. It certainly was so for the citizens of Jericho. God's people were approaching, and they knew of little else to do but close themselves off and hope for the best.

The procedure for this conquest would be a strange one indeed. The people of Israel, including all the warriors, were to gather together and march around the city once a day for six days. The Ark of the Covenant would be an integral part of this procession, and in front of the ark, seven priests would carry trumpets made out of rams' horns. As the people circled the city walls, these seven priests would blow their trumpets. After them would come the rear guard. Presumably behind the rear guard would follow the main body of people. Apart from the blowing of the trumpets, the people proceeded in silence.

The seventh day was to involve a different ritual. Once again, the people of Israel along with the Ark of the Covenant were to circle the city walls of Jericho in silence except for the sounding of the trumpets. On the seventh day, after the trumpets were sounded, the people were to shout at the top of their lungs. They were told to holler and scream, until

the walls of the city came tumbling down.

Now isn't it interesting how often the Lord was going to use the number seven in performing this miracle? Of course, seven is God's sacred number, and so it was also held sacred by the Israelites. Even more interesting is that the number was held sacred by other Eastern tribes. Not only did the seven rams' horns, the seven priests, and the seven days' marching inspire the Israelites, it must certainly have created psychological terror in the hearts and minds of the people of Jericho.

The people of Jericho had already been frightened by the news of Israel's miraculous passage through the Jordan River. And now these potential enemies were engaged in a ritual around their city walls, which used the number seven predominantly. Those inside the city didn't know what to expect. This was sure and certain psychological warfare. Here was an invading force which surrounded their city once a day in a deafening silence broken only once a day by the sound of blowing trumpets. It wouldn't take much time before such behavior began to rattle their already fragile nerves.

It should be noted that the number seven is particularly dominant in the book of Revelation. Throughout this biblical prophecy, John uses the sacred number to communicate his message of repentance and judgment. In Revelation, seven churches are addressed. Seven seals are unloosed to allow seven plagues into the world. In the midst of the seventh seal, seven trumpets and seven bowls underscore the dark forces unleashed against a rebellious and unrepentant world. So you see, it behooves us to understand that even as the God of Israel used the seven days encirclement, and the seven trumpets and priests to bring judgment to Jericho, so,

in Revelation, He uses the sacred number in a variety of ways to warn the world of a swift, surprising judgment against those who have rejected the message of gospel grace.

So often we are tempted to think of the God of the Old Testament as somehow different than the one portrayed in the New Testament. But in so many ways, even in subtle ways (like the use of the sacred number seven), the Bible reveals the similarity of God's actions in both. And that should not surprise us. He is, after all, the same God!

Sooner or later, God acts. We can imagine how futile the march around the city may have seemed for those six days. But, in God's time, intervention and judgment happen. In God's time, there is success. We, too, pray the Lord to help us in our desperate situations. We wish we could witness His intervention in our fallen and distraught lives. And sometimes, nothing seems to happen. Our dreams fade and our hopes disintegrate. We ask the Lord, "How much longer?" and seem to hear only silence. But then, God acts. When the Lord promises, "Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened to you" we can't expect to add our own qualification such as "by 9 o'clock Tuesday, Lord, if you please." The Lord is faithful to His promises, however, and when His time is right and according to His will, He will give us that which we need to know and enjoy, eternal salvation under the forgiving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As God promised the Israelites, on the seventh day of circling Jericho, after the trumpets had blown, and the people had lifted their voices in wild, riotous shouts of victory, the walls of Jericho fell down flat. Isn't that an interesting description provided by Scripture? "The walls fell down flat." They didn't just crumble

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away. They didn't erode over the next few months. One section didn't collapse to allow entrance into the city. All the walls fell to the ground immediately. The walls of Jericho fell by divine act, not by any efforts from the Israelites, and they fell at once. Not with a whimper, but with a bang.

Scholars and scientists are always attempting to find some rational explanation for what happened to the city walls because there is some archeological evidence to support this biblical description of Jericho's fall. The site where Jericho lay is known today as Tell el-Sultan. It's the site of more than two dozen ancient cities. These cities were built and destroyed, one on top of each other. With that many cities built on top of each other, it's difficult to discern for certain the position of Jericho. However, there are some ruins which give evidence of a terrific holocaust, supporting the Bible's description of the people of Israel burning the city and all its remains (6:24). And the abundance of foodstuff in some of these ruins supports the possibility that the harvest had just been gathered as suggested by Joshua 5:10–12. Of course, for those of us who see God's miracles all around us and believe in His periodic interventions, archeological proof isn't of the essence. We trust that the Bible presents an accurate description of God's control over the power of nature.

Why would the Lord exact such a devastating price on the city of Jericho? After all, what had they done that was so wrong as to merit complete annihilation? The city wasn't merely conquered. Everything that was in it was destroyed. As a matter of fact, the city was "devoted to the Lord for destruction" (6:17). "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword" (6:21). All of Jericho's inhabitants were put under the curse of death, and all of the city's treasures which could not be destroyed were consigned to the Lord's house. This is a spiritual conquest more than a political one. Jericho represented God's judgment on all the Canaanites and their pagan religions. In a way, Jericho became the "firstfruits" of the Promised Land, the "firstfruits" of the destruction of God's enemies. A holy and just God cannot compromise with evil. A holy and just God cannot even abide with evil unless God is also present in grace.

That's why it's so warming to see the Lord reveal His grace in the midst of the holocaust. As you remember, not all the inhabitants of Jericho were destroyed. One woman and her household were spared. Before Israel had crossed the Jordan, Joshua sent two spies to scout out Jericho's strength. These two spies entered the city, but the king of Jericho learned of their presence somewhere within the city walls. When the king learned they had been sheltered by a prostitute named Rahab, he demanded she give them up. But Rahab hid the two spies on her roof, and told the authorities that they had left the city under the darkness of night. Rahab protected the spies because she respected the power of Israel's God, and realized He was able to accomplish whatever He willed. In return for protecting the spies, Rahab asked that when Jericho was destroyed she and her household would be spared. The grateful spies agreed. Rahab then helped the spies escape by lowering them on a cord through her window and down the town wall.

Rahab may have engaged in a disreputable profession, but she is recognized for placing the law of God and the love of her family above the dictates of her evil king. For her, God became the first duty of life, and her pledge to the Lord would not be compromised. As a result, her life and the lives of those who remained under her roof during the invasion were saved. As a mark of our Lord's incredible grace, she was chosen as Jesus' ancestor. Through her lineage, the Savior would one day be born (Matthew 1:5).

Were we not familiar with the story of the fall of Jericho, the means by which God performed this miracle of conquest and deliverance would appear ludicrous. It seems ridiculous to march

around the city walls carrying the heavy Ark of the Covenant for six straight days in silence, except for the occasional blowing of the ram's horn. To us it appears ridiculous to think that on the seventh day of circling the city, blowing the trumpets, and shouting, the walls of the city should mysteriously collapse.

One marvels at how the Lord used what was rather absurd to perform the profound. And yet, how typical of our Lord and His miracles! This is the same God who gives us wine and bread and declares them to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ. By taking this bread and wine, we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. These seem foolishly simple substances for the Lord to use. But this is what He chooses to provide for our salvation. By having water poured over our heads, and the name of the Triune God spoken, we are made children of God in baptism, and enter a covenant of grace which lasts into eternity. And the Lord uses simple, ordinary people like you and me to witness our Savior's grace and love. Through you and me the Gospel message of life and salvation is brought to others. Why you and me? We're just too ordinary to be of much use. But through that which is ordinary God conceives miracles.

The fall of Jericho is evidence of Paul's magnificent observation in 1 Corinthians 1:27–29: "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." In a way, the fall of Jericho should seem no surprise at all. That's often all the method by which God works miracles.