Bible Study: Great Bible events

1. The Fall of Jericho

Prepared and taught
By Dr. John Birley
The conquest of Canaan

JOSHUA and the City of Jericho
The walls of Jericho

As they look today

Artistic impressions
Plan of the walls of Jericho

Walls of Jericho

DOUBLE REDOUBTABLE WALL FOR THE ANCIENT CITY OF JERICHO
**Battle Plan**

*Joshua 6*

**Configuration of the Jericho march**

1. Armed guard marches first
2. 7 priests carrying trumpets march second
3. Priests carrying the ark march third
4. Rear guard marches fourth
5. Israelites march around Jericho once a day for 6 days, with the priests blowing trumpets
6. Israelites march around Jericho 7 times on 7th day
7. Israelites shout and blow trumpets on 7th march around Jericho

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**The Jericho Battle Plan**
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**Introduction**

Sadly today many Christians do not have a great deal of passion or enthusiasm for the history of the Old Testament. It's sad because the OT is full of wonderful stories, amazing characters, supernatural events and most importantly the interaction with His creation of our Almighty God. To neglect or ignore the OT is to miss so much. I hope I can excite you to get reading and studying the OT through this study of one of the great bible events. This study will look at the Fall of Jericho.

I am sure you are very familiar with the Fall of Jericho account. As an experiment let us see how you might answer the following questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jericho was the first battle in the Israelites conquest of Canaan</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Joshua had experience of siege warfare</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The method of attacking Jericho was Joshua's idea</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jericho was a very large heavily populated city</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>All of the Israelites were to join in marching around the city walls</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Israelites marched around the city seven times a day for six days</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>God used an earthquake to destroy the city walls</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Every living thing (people and animals) inside the walls of Jericho were killed</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The battle for Jericho took a long time</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>After the battle Joshua was replaced as the leader of the people</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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What do we know about the geography of Jericho (see map)

**Location** - Jericho is situated on the wide plain of the Jordan Valley at the foot of the Judean Mountains about 8 miles north west of the place where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea. It is located about 5 miles west from the Jordan River.

**Climate** - Jericho is about 800 feet (243 m) below sea level making it the lowest city on Earth. It has a climate that is tropical and, at times, very hot. Only a few inches of rainfall are recorded there each year. This however is not the complete picture.

Jericho is a natural oasis. It is blessed with numerous underground springs. In biblical times it was known as **“the city of palm trees”**

“the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.” (Deut. 34:3)

Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. (Judges 3:13)

It is still famous today for date palms, banana trees, balsams, grapes, lemons, oranges sycamore trees, and henna.

**Archaeological excavations – What do they reveal?**

After Jerusalem Jericho is the second most excavated site in Israel. The first documented excavation in Jericho was undertaken in 1867 and 1868 by the famous British engineer Charles Warren.

The first major excavation at Jericho was conducted by an Austro-German expedition under the direction of Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger from 1907 to 1909 and again in 1911-1913. This of course took place when accurate dating methods were not fully developed.

Watzinger concluded that Jericho was unoccupied during the Late Bronze period (c.1550-1200 BC) the time when the Israelites first appeared in Canaan.

British archaeologist **John Garstang’s** questioned these findings and mounted his own expedition. He conducted excavations from 1930 to 1936 which yielded significant information.

He believed he had found evidence of Joshua’s destruction of the city.

He discovered an inner wall about 12 feet (3.6 m) thick and an outer wall about 6 feet (1.8 m) thick that he concluded had been destroyed in about **1400 BC**. Most notably his
excavations showed that the wall had been destroyed by fire. Garstang's findings mesh with the biblical account.

Kathleen Kenyon directed excavations at Jericho from 1952 through 1958. She thought that Garstang's findings were wrong and that the walls had been destroyed later than 1400. Her estimate was that the walls had collapsed around **1550 BC**.

In 1954 Kenyon discovered part of a wall about 21 feet high on the western edge of Jericho. The wall circled the entire city which she estimated had a population of about 2400 to 2600. A large moat had been scooped out of rock at the foot of the wall.

**What are we to make of the two claims?**

In terms of the dating of the cities collapse /destruction we have two contrasting opinions

| Garstang = 1400 BC (in line with the bible) | Kenyon = 1550 BC |

As is usually the case when the bible disagrees with science the majority of secular archaeologists sided with Kenyon and against the biblical account.

However, The March/April, 1990 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* contained an article titled, **“Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?—A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence,”**

written by Dr. Bryant G. Wood.

Dr. Wood was a visiting professor in the department of Near Eastern studies at the University of Toronto. He has served in responsible supervisory positions on several archaeological digs in Palestine. In this scholarly article, Wood contends:

“**When we compare the archaeological evidence at Jericho with the Biblical narrative describing the Israelite destruction of Jericho, we find a quite remarkable agreement**” (1990, 53)

**Garstang’s original date for this event appears to be the correct one!**

Was this destruction at the hands of the Israelites? The correlation between the archaeological evidence and the Biblical narrative is substantial:

- The city was strongly fortified (Joshua 2:5,7,15, 6:5,20).
- The attack occurred just after harvest time in the spring (Joshua 2:6, 3:15, 5:10).
- The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs (Joshua 6:1).
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• The siege was short (Joshua 6:15).
• The walls were levelled, possibly by an earthquake (Joshua 6:20).
• The city was not plundered (Joshua 6:17-18).
• The city was burned (Joshua 6:20).

What do we know about the city itself?

**History** – The name Jericho means either “moon” or “place of fragrance” It is claimed to be the oldest city on earth with a history going back to 8000 BC. Throughout history there have been several settlements all called Jericho in the area.

A) The Jericho of Joshua  
B) The Jericho of Herod  
C) The Jericho of the Crusades  
D) The city of Jericho still standing today.

In Joshua’s' time It was the gateway city into the Jordan valley and therefore strategically important.

**How big was the city?**

For many Christians who first heard the story of the fall of Jericho in Sunday school as a child it is common for them to picture Jericho as a huge fortified city or castle. This is often reinforced in pictures of the scene or visual presentations of Jericho in movies.

However the bible as we shall see is somewhat vague in its descriptions of Jericho. Should we imagine a massive fortified city? Perhaps not, in fact the city may have been much smaller than you might imagine.

Jericho in the bible is referred to as an *ir* (pronounced *ear*). This Hebrew noun is used 13 times in chapter 6 of Joshua to describe Jericho. The word can be used to describe a city but it has many more applications. Literally it refers to a “population center.” It is used for example to describe a small town, the village of Bethlehem as well as tent encampments and most significantly to describe a fortress. In both the following verses the word *ir* refers to a fort or fortress.

“*Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David).*”  
(2 Sam 5:7)

“*Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the people of Ammon, and took the royal city.*”  
(2 Sam 12:26)

The point then is if Jericho is simply a fort it may be fairly small with just military personell inside. If Jericho is a city then obviously there would be many more people inside.

The question is, does *ir* in reference to Jericho indicate it is a city or a fortress?
Evidence for a small fort rather than a city

1 The Israelites could march around it 7 times in one day and still have the energy to fight.
2 The archaeological remains suggest a walled structure of only about 9 acres. If we work on the assumption made by many archaeologists of 200 people per acre that would give us 1800 people living inside Jericho. We might estimate that more were living in the space between the two walls so we might estimate between 2-3000 people.
3 In the text the only people mentioned specifically in the account are, Rahab and her family, the king and his soldiers.

It is quite possible then that Jericho was a fortress manned by a relatively small garrison of soldiers and led by a “king” or royal ruler. Rahab and family perhaps ran a small inn that served the fort and its visitors.

4 Importantly Jericho is never mentioned in the bible as being anything other than an ir. Other places are prefixed with the adjective “great.” Gibeon for example is described as a “great city, gib’on ir”

“that they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty.” (Joshua 10:2)

The point here then is we should be careful of reading into a bible text our traditions or assumptions. Let us always let the biblical text speak for itself and not impose what we think upon it.

The city walls (see diagram)

Both archaeological and biblical evidence points to Jericho being a strongly fortified walled fortress. It appears to have had two surrounding walls with a slope between them. The only entrance was through a fortified gate. The Bible indicates that Rahab’s house was built into the wall.

Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. (Joshua 2:15)

During excavation work a number of houses were found just inside the retaining wall, which could have abutted the wall. These would have made making an escape easy. The evidence indicates that this area was the “poor quarter” of the city. Just the kind of place we would expect to find a prostitute's house.

The historical context

You are probably familiar with many of the details of the fall of Jericho (Joshua 5-6). However before we look at this in detail let us begin by putting it into the context of biblical history.

Following 400 years living in exile in Egypt the Israelite people led by Moses made their escape. After spending forty difficult years wandering in the desert of Sinai, the people of Israel were now on the eastern banks of the Jordan. Their challenge was to conquer the land
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of Canaan, the Promised Land (the land of milk and honey). It was the land God had promised to Abraham over 500 years earlier.

- Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you —‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ (Deuteronomy 6:3)

Moses was not permitted by God to enter the promised land. This was because he had broken faith with God and not upheld God's holiness (Deut 32:51-52).

After the death of Moses God raises Joshua to a position of leadership and authority. It is Joshua who will lead the people into the promised land.

- 1 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: 2“Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. (Joshua 1:1-3)

Let us imagine the scene. The people of Israel are gathered together and are waiting. The promised land lies before them across the Jordan River. However there is an obstacle in their way. The ancient city of Jericho, a seemingly unconquerable, walled city. Its prominence and position as the gateway to the Promised Land meant it had to be taken and defeated.

Joshua therefore being a wise leader sends two spies to check out the land.

- Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” (Joshua 2:1)

Whilst on their spying mission they meet the prostitute Rahab. She allowed them to stay in her house.

- So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there. (Joshua 2:1)

Later when the king of Jericho found out she hid the spies. For her kindness she would be spared following the attack on the city.

- And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country.” So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country.” 4 Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. (Joshua 2:3-4)

The spies returned to Joshua to give him the news.
23 So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. 24 And they said to Joshua, “Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us.” (Joshua 2: 23-24)

Heartened by their report and confident in God Joshua led the people across the Jordan River (Joshua 3:1). Following this Joshua circumcised the men at Gilgal (Joshua 5) and the whole nation celebrated the Passover. They were now ready to take the city of Jericho.

**When did all this take place?**

Can we determine historically when the fall of Jericho took place? In order to do that we need to put a few pieces together.

“And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord.” 1 Kings 6:1

1 Kings 6:1 states the fourth year of King Solomon's reign over Israel was 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt, or 440 years after they entered the Promised Land. Since Solomon's fourth year was about 966 B.C. Jericho's walls fell 440 years earlier, or about 1406 B.C. At the Jericho excavation site there is evidence that one level of the city's layers represents its destruction at about that time.

**Time line for these events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1446 BC</th>
<th>1446-1406 BC</th>
<th>1406 – 1388 BC</th>
<th>962 - 922 BC</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The exile from Egypt begins</td>
<td>Wilderness wanderings</td>
<td>Conquest of Canaan</td>
<td>Reign of Solomon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(40 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fall of Jericho</td>
<td>4th year of reign 966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1406 BC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ancient warfare**

In ancient warfare cities like Jericho were either taken by assault or surrounded and the people starved into submission (a siege). The invaders might try to weaken the stone walls with fire or by tunnelling, alternatively they might simply heap up a mountain of earth to serve as a ramp from which to attack the city. Each of these methods of assault took weeks
or months and the attacking force usually suffered heavy losses.

Despite Joshua's military experience he had never led an attack on a fortified city that was prepared for a long siege.

There was also the question of armaments. Israel's army had no siege engines, no battering rams, no catapults, and no moving towers. Their only weapons were slings, arrows, and spears which would have been useless against the thick walls of Jericho.

However, the strategy to conquer the city of Jericho was unique in two ways. First, the strategy was laid out by God Himself, and, second, the strategy was a seemingly foolish plan. God of course knew exactly what he was doing as we shall see.

The fall of the city of Jericho would be a wholly supernatural event. God would use the people of Israel but it was the unseen angelic host that would bring down the cities walls.

**Strategy**

Perhaps the most puzzling aspect of the whole Jericho account is the strategy that God commands the Israelites to follow. Why does God have them follow this procedure? Marching around the city for seven days in silence. From a human perspective it seems to make little sense. Or does it?

Here at some possible answers to why God adopted this particular strategy.

**The seven day prelude – a period of preparation**

The Israelites are commanded to march around the city for seven days. The verb used for “go all around” is the Hebrew word *naqaph*. It is also used significantly in these verses.

“Walk about Zion, And go all around her. Count her towers.” (Psalm 48:12)

In this context a pilgrim is told to walk around Jerusalem to admire its gates and defences. *Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.”* (2 Kings 6:14)

In this context the Arameans surround Dotham in order to capture Elisha.

Joshua's army then symbolically “surrounds” Jericho and on each circuit inspect the gates to see whether the inhabitants have relented and will open their gates to the army. On each of the 7 days they are prepared to enter if allowed. The sevenfold refusal brings things to completion. Seven remember is the number of perfection or completion. The inhabitants had opportunities to surrender and did not. Now that the period of preparation is complete God will act.

**The role of the seven day period**

In the life of the people of Israel this event took place during the feast of the unleavened bread. They had just celebrated passover (Joshua 5:10-12) on the 14th day of the month.

The Feast of unleavened bread followed as a sign of Israel's holiness before God.
History of the passover

Passover 1 – The night of the tenth plague in Egypt.

From then on every year the Jews were to mark this date as a remembrance of what God had done. The significance here perhaps is that the passover preceded God working in a miraculous way on this first occasion. Maybe here the passover celebration reminded the Israelite army of how mighty God was and that with Him in control they need not fear.

The fall of the walls

God's means of bringing down the walls has a parallel in other ancient writings. A Hittite text exists that details how the deity Shaushga helped the Hittities take a fort in a similar way. The point here being that perhaps God is using this method to demonstrate to the surrounding people groups that their gods pale into insignificance next to Him.

It's importance as the first major victory

The author of Joshua devotes more space to the conquest of Jericho than any other city or fortress in this book. This significance of the battle of Jericho is it that it is Joshua's first campaign as leader.

God gives Joshua this amazing and decisive victory to provide His endorsement of Joshua as leader. From this moment onwards the people would follow Joshua without question. They would remain loyal to the man God had put in the position of leader.

It also sent a resounding message to the other rulers of Canaan that with God on their side the Israelites could not be beaten.

The biblical account (Joshua 5:13-15, 6:1-27)

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”

14 So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”

15 Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.

1 Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out,
and none came in. 2 And the LORD said to Joshua: “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. 3 You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. 4 And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him.”

6 Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, “Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the LORD.” 7 And he said to the people, “Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the LORD.”

8 So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the LORD advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them. 9 The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. 10 Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, “You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, ‘Shout!’ Then you shall shout.” 11 So he had the ark of the LORD circle the city, going around it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp.

12 And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. 13 Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. 14 And the second day they marched around the city the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times. 16 And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: “Shout, for the LORD has given you the city! 17 Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. 18 And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. 19 But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.”

20 So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. 21 And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of
the sword.

22 But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, “Go into the harlot’s house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her.” 23 And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel. 24 But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. 25 And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father’s household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

26 Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying, “Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates.”

27 So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country.

Let look more closely at the text now.

God's messenger arrives

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”

Joshua is preparing his strategy and planning what to do when this man appears before him. He is holding a sword and appears to be a mighty warrior. As the shepherd or leader of Israel Joshua is quite right in asking whether this person is a friend or an enemy. This was a challenge that anyone appearing at a time of war or conquest and with a drawn sword would anticipate.

14 So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”

The man's answer might surprise us. “No,” was not a proper answer to Joshua's question. This is because the question is not the most important one at that time. The question really to ask at this time was not is God with Joshua and the people but rather are they aligned with God and His will. Are they ready and fully prepared to fight for God?

The man identifies himself as “Commander of the army of the Lord” (literally Captain or chief of the Lord's host). The army of the Lord implies an angelic army.

Who exactly is this man? Is it God (theophany), is it an angelic being or is it the pre-incarnate Christ (Christophany). The answer comes from Joshua's response.

He falls to his face in worship.

This indicates it was not an angel. Angels of course are not to be worshipped. Also an angel would not accept worship (Rev 19:10, 22:8-9)
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**Only God is to be worshipped** (Exo 34:14, Luke 4:7-8)

Our conclusion therefore must be that this is a divine presence, either God in the form of a man or the pre-incarnate Christ.

Unlike Moses who questioned God at length regarding His plan Joshua seems to have been ready and willing to accept without question all the commands the Lord will give him.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>15Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.</th>
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</table>

The command to remove his sandals is a direct link to Exodus chapter 3 where God appears to Moses in the burning bush. Joshua is commanded to remove his sandals as now he is in the presence of the perfect holy God. Taking off ones sandals was a sign of reverence and respect. It reminds us how unworthy we are to come before our almighty God.

To understand why God might choose to make an appearance like this we must consider the situation the Israelites faced. They were about to begin a difficult military campaign under a new leader. They also had little if any experience fighting sieges and were poorly equipped to mount an attack on a city like Jericho. We must imagine then that they had some fears and anxieties about it.

The purpose of this encounter then was to inspire Joshua with humility and reverence. He was to take encouragement that God truly was in full control of the situation. It was not a time for fear or anxiety. God was on their side and if they obeyed Him things they would triumph.

**The fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in.</th>
</tr>
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</table>

The city was “tightly secured.” Braced and ready for action. We might say it was at a high level of readiness and anticipation. It also gives the impression of strong fortifications that are now tightly shut. No one was permitted into or out of Jericho.

This was the standard operating procedure in ancient times when an enemy was near. Inside the city would be water and animals. The people would be prepared for a siege of many months.

The reason for this action in Jericho was that the feared Israelites were coming. Gilgal where Joshua was camped was just 2 miles from Jericho.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 And the Lord said to Joshua: “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor.</th>
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</table>

We should notice here the tenses used here. Although no fighting has yet taken place God can rightly say that the battle is already over. He has given Jericho into Joshua's hands. Whatever military power Jericho possessed would be no match to the power of God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days.</th>
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</thead>
</table>

The method of warfare was one that made absolutely no sense according to military
intelligence. In fact from a human perspective it seemed stupid and pointless.

From God's viewpoint this is wholly intentional. To follow what from human wisdom was such a strange and pointless course of action required total dependence on God. The writer does not explain the reasons for Israel circling Jericho "once" a day for "six days," and then "seven times" the seventh day.

This strategy did, however, give the king of Jericho an opportunity to surrender.

4 And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.

The whole Israelite nation did not march around the walls of Jericho. (see appendix – Battle plan). Only "warriors" and "priests" circled the city. The seven priests carried the rams horn trumpets called the shofar.

They people were to remain silent for all circuits of the city except for the final one. Twelve circuits in silence before the horns and shouting on the conclusion of the 13th circuit. The number seven was among the Israelites the symbolic seal of the covenant between God and their nation.

The emphasis on the number seven (fourteen times in this chapter the use of ceremonial trumpets (made from ram's horns), the presence of priests, and the prominence of the ark all indicate that the conquest of Jericho was more than a military campaign; it was a religious event. Israel must always remember that the land was God's gift to them.

Seven is a significant number in Scripture: It signifies perfection or completion which reminds us that God’s plan, no matter how foolish it may seem to us, is always perfect and cannot be improved or bettered.

5 It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him.”

The blowing of trumpets in Israel reminded the people of God’s miraculous activity for them, in providing their needs and fighting their enemies. The priests also used them to call the people to follow God, who had led the way ahead of them, with the cloudy pillar, in the wilderness. Both functions were applicable on this occasion. The trumpet blasts signaled judgment to the Canaanites, but victory to the Israelites.

“**The wall of the city will fall down flat.**” The implication from this verse is that the ground opened up before the walls and they collapsed into the chasm. Literally the ground swallowed up the walls. This would allow the Israelite army to go straight up into the defenceless city. Interestingly this would explain why later archaeologists were unable to find extensive sections of the wall.

Normally when a city is attacked a breach is made in the wall and this is used to gain access to the city. This does not appear to be what happened in Jericho.
6 Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, “Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the Lord.”

Note that none objected or questioned Joshua. Everyone agreed to what God had commanded.

7 And he said to the people, “Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the Lord.”

8 So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the Lord advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them.

9 The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets.

These verses illustrate how the procession progressed around Jericho (see appendix). From a human military viewpoint the whole process probably seemed ridiculous. We can only wonder what the people watching from Jericho thought.

We might note here that those inside had ample opportunity to either surrender or make an attack of their own. They chose to do neither.

10 Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, “You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, ‘Shout!’ Then you shall shout.”

No sign of triumph was to be raised; but the Israelites, their priests, and the ark of their covenant were in solemn silence as they processed around the city. This was to be the case until they were commanded to raise the shout of victory. It must have made for a strange and eerie spectacle to the inhabitants of Jericho.

11 So he had the ark of the Lord circle the city, going around it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp.

At the end of each day they returned to their camp.

12 And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord.

This detail I think is included to emphasize what a diligent and prepared leader Joshua was. He could have delegated some duties to a junior officer but instead he rises early to set a good example and ensure that all is ready as it should be.

13 Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the Lord, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets.
We get here a similar repetition of the days action.

**14 And the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. So they did six days.**

The second day's procession seems to have taken place in the morning. In all other respects, down even to the smallest details, the arrangements of the first day continued to be the rule followed on the other six.

**15 But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times.**

Why did God command this long pause of suspense and expectation? Possibly to teach us that His ways are not our ways, and that we had better leave the issue in His hands. It required both trust and patience on the part of the Israelites. We are very often impatient with God. We want Him to act immediately. This then was a test of their patience and trust in God.

We do well to remember that there is a time to act and a time to wait patiently. If we seek His guidance by prayer, He will let us know when we are to act and when we are to wait.

**16 And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: “Shout, for the Lord has given you the city!”**

The “shout” was to be a cry of victory and joy for the Israelites. We should note here that to emphasize the divine intervention, no secondary causes for the collapse of the wall are mentioned. Recently there has been work to try and attribute the collapse to an earthquake or even that the sound blast caused the damage. I remember watching a TV documentary that tried to test both of these claims. The bible is quite clear, this was a supernatural event and cannot be explained by natural causes.

Sadly in recent years with the influence and rise of modern liberal theology we have seen many Christians seeking to distance themselves from the supernatural. These “stories are just too embarrassing.” The world thinks we are fools for believing such things.

This is nothing new, Thallus (the 1st Century Roman historian) attributed the darkness at the crucifixion to “an eclipse of the sun.” Those that said otherwise were simply predisposed to see in the event a miracle.

Modern liberals therefore dismiss the biblical miracles as well as the story of Noah, the parting of the red sea, the fall of the walls of Jericho and other “fantastical” events and claim they are myths, legends of fables. Alternatively they try to find natural explanations that can explain these event. The truth is that we serve a supernatural God. He can and frequently does use natural means operating within natural laws. However on occasion He suspends these laws in order to facilitate a supernatural act. He is outside of these laws so of course this is a simple matter for Him. Even if He did decide to use an earthquake to destroy the walls of Jericho that would still make the event a supernatural act. After all, what are the odds of an earthquake occurring exactly when the people finished walking around Jericho and then shouted?

**17 Now the city shall be doomed by the Lord to destruction, it and all who are in it.**
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Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

The city shall be doomed = the Hebrew word is chêrem

Depending on your bible translation this Hebrew word is translated as accursed, doomed, devoted or turned over to destruction.

The idea being conveyed here is one of the city being devoted or given over the the Lord. The city and its inhabitants should be “devoted to destruction,” and the riches and spoils of it dedicated to sacred uses, and not become the property of the Israelites.

Remember that this was the first city in the had of Canaan that was conquered. As such it was to serve as the firstfruits of the conquest and therefore it was right that it should be the Lord's. For the people of Israel the “firstfruits” of any harvest belonged to the Lord. This was an acknowledgment of his gift of the land unto them, and a reminder that the victory was owing to him

The city was to be burnt, and all the lives (human and animal) in it sacrificed without mercy. No life in it might be ransomed upon any terms; they must all be put to death.

To us today this seems excessively harsh and cruel. However we must remember that Jericho was a wicked pagan city. It was probably the center for worship to the “moon god.” As such God is rightly condemning them for their evil religious practices.

Also as we pointed out before the “city” might actually have been simply a fortress. This is the argument of OT scholar Richard S. Hess. Therefore the only people inside Jericho were soldiers, their “king” or leader and a small number of support staff and workers. It certainly then didn't include all of the inhabitants of the area or region who may well have fled into the hills when the Israelites arrived.

18 And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.

They were not permitted to take any booty from the fallen city. This was because the city had been cursed and therefore to take possession of a cursed thing brought the curse upon yourself.

19 But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord.”

Any silver or gold that was found would be taken and used for the Lord. It would be put in the Lord's treasury.

20 So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

The statement about the men being able to charge “straight ahead” is significant. It calls our attention to the fact that they were able to charge in from all around the city. There were not just one or two breaches in the wall where soldiers were able to enter the city. The whole
wall around the city collapsed with the exception of the portion where Rahab’s house was located.

21 And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

The total destruction called for by God was faithfully carried out. The Israelites completely destroyed only three Canaanite cities west of the Jordan along with their entire populations: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor.

“utterly destroyed all...”

This is a verse that is often brought up to show the “cruel and mean“ nature of the God of the OT. Atheists love to cite it as evidence of God being a cruel despot or tyrant.

However what we read in this verse is actually stereotypical ancient Near East language. The “all” people describes attacks on what turn out to be military forts or garrisons containing soldiers not a general population that includes women and children. We have no archaeological evidence of civilian populations at Jericho.

“So for Joshua, mentioning “women” and “young and old” was stock or generic ancient Near East language that he could have used even if “women” and “young and old” were not living there. The language of “all” (“men and women”) at Jericho and Ai is a “stereotypical expression for the destruction of all human life in the fort, presumably composed mostly of combatants.” The text does not require that “women” and “young and old” must have been in these cities (Paul Copan)

22 But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, “Go into the harlot’s house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her.”

Joshua has not forgotten Rahab and her family and her act of sacrifice and kindness for the Israelite spies. They were all spared according to the promise (oath) the spies made to her back in Joshua 2:18-19.

We learn from this that the town walls were not demolished universally, at least all at once. Rahab's house was allowed to stand until her relatives were rescued according to the promise made to her.

23 And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel.

Rahab's family is outlined in Joshua chapter 2:18 – Her family consisted of a mother, father, brothers and unnamed others. The spies she hid went and retrieved them.

24 But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.

The archaeological evidence shows that the walls were burned. Excavators have found abundant evidence of this city being destroyed by a huge and purposeful fire, with a layer of ash over 1 meter thick.
25 And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father’s household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Rahab and her household were saved. They coupled their faith in the God of Israel with a willingness to follow through on what God's messengers told them to do: stay at the house with the scarlet cord hanging from the window.

“So she dwells in Israel to this day.” This shows that Joshua was written at the time of Joshua; this was not the fanciful re-construction of an imaginative writer working centuries after the fact.

26 Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying, “Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates.”

This "curse" on whoever attempted to rebuild Jericho would have discouraged anyone from re-fortifying this city. It was to stand as a symbol of military power. God wanted His people to trust in Him for their security, and not to rely on physical defenses primarily.

The curse is very explicit. Whoever rebuilds Jericho will lose his first-born son when he begins and his youngest son when it is complete.

God executed this curse upon Hiel when he rebuilt Jericho under the reign of King Ahab.

33 And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. 34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the Lord, which He had spoken through Joshua the son of Nun. (1 Kings 16:33-34)

27 So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country.

“So the Lord was with Joshua” We are probably to think here in terms of counselling and directing him in what to do and how to lead the people. His fame spread and grew because he had shown great wisdom and courage. He had led the people well and was loyal and faithful to God. As a result he had many successes. It was clear to all who looked at Joshua that God was working with and through him.

God was fulfilling the promise He had made back in the first chapter of Joshua.

“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.” (Joshua 1:5)
Conclusions
The fall of Jericho, and the subsequent defeat of the Canaanite tribes, was a result of God's celestial hosts, His angelic army, not the Israelites. It was God's unseen warriors who brought down the walls of Jericho, not the shouts of the Israelites. God used the Israelites in these battles, but the victory was supernatural, not natural.

What can we learn from the account of the fall of Jericho?
Though they may have seemed foolish from a human perspective Joshua followed God's instructions exactly. When the people did finally shout, the massive walls collapsed instantly, and Israel won an easy victory. In fact, God had given the city of Jericho to them before they even began to march around its walls.

It was when the people of God, by faith, followed the commands of God that the walls of Jericho fell down.

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

The description of the complete obliteraton of Jericho was recorded in Scripture in order to teach us several lessons. Most important is that obedience, even when God’s commands seem foolish, brings victory. When we are faced with seemingly insurmountable odds, we must learn that our victories are won only when our faithful obedience to God is complete.

**Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.** (1 John 2:3)

**And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him** (Hebrews 5:9)

There are other key lessons we should learn from this story.

1 **There is a vast difference between God’s way and the way of man.**

Though militarily it was irrational to assault Jericho in the manner it was done, we must never question God’s purpose or instructions. We must have faith that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will.
Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)

2 The power of God is supernatural, beyond our comprehension.

The walls of Jericho fell, and they fell instantly. The walls collapsed by the sheer power of God. Too often we forget the spiritual dimension to existence. There is a world that our senses can perceive and another that lies beyond it.

3 There is an uncompromising relationship between the grace of God and our faith and obedience to Him.

Although their faith had frequently failed in the past, in this instance the children of Israel believed and trusted God and His promises.

As they were saved by faith, so we are today saved by faith. Yet faith must be evidenced by obedience. The children of Israel had faith, they obeyed, and the walls of Jericho fell “by faith.” Saving faith impels us to obey God.

4 God keeps His promises.

The walls of Jericho fell because God said they would. God’s promises to us today are just as certain. They are just as unswerving. They are exceedingly great and wonderfully precious.

Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass. (Joshua 21:45)

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:4)

5 The saving of Rahab and her family.

She is the only person living in Jericho who is named. In chapter 6 verses 16-25 which describes the destruction of Jericho 102 words (in Hebrew) are used to describe the destruction. However 86 words are used to describe the salvation of Rahab.

What does this mean? It means that for the original author the destruction of the city was of almost equal importance to the saving of Rahab and her family. We worship a God who saves.

6 Finally, we should learn that faith without works is dead.

It is not enough to say, “I believe God,” and then live in an ungodly manner. If we truly believe in God, our desire must be to obey God. Our faith is put to work. We make every
effort to do exactly what God says and keep His commandments. Joshua and the Israelites carried out the commands of God and conquered Jericho. God gave them victory over an enemy that was trying to keep them out of the Promised Land. So it is with us today: if we have true faith, we are compelled to obey God, and God gives us victory over the enemies that we face throughout life.

Obedience is the clear evidence of faith. Our faith is the evidence to others that we truly believe in Him.

We can conquer and be victorious through life by faith, a faith that obeys the God who gives us that faith as a free gift.

I hope that you have been engaged, instructed and encouraged through this study of The Fall of Jericho. I hope it will reaffirm your love for the Old Testament and give you a desire to read and see how our mighty God worked through history with His chosen people.