

March 14  
Lesson 2 (NIV)

## PROPHET OF CONQUEST

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Hebrews 11:23–31](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Joshua 5:13–6:27](#)

### JOSHUA 5:13–15

<sup>13</sup> Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”

<sup>14</sup> “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

<sup>15</sup> The commander of the LORD’S army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

### JOSHUA 6:1–5, 15–16, 20

<sup>1</sup> Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

<sup>2</sup> Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. <sup>3</sup> March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. <sup>4</sup> Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’

horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. <sup>5</sup> When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”

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<sup>15</sup> On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. <sup>16</sup> The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!”

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<sup>20</sup> When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

#### KEY VERSE

*The LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.” —[Joshua 6:2](#)*

## PROPHETS FAITHFUL TO GOD’S COVENANT

### Unit 1: Faithful Prophets

LESSONS 1–4

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize what God said about the prophet and message to come.
2. Explain how Moses' words were intended to guide Israel as God's covenant people.
3. Prepare a set of guidelines for distinguishing true from false teaching today.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

#### A. Preparing the Troops

#### B. Lesson Context

- I. Special Message (JOSHUA 5:13–15)
  - A. Joshua's Caution (v. 13)
  - B. Messenger's Command (vv. 14–15)
- II. Sovereign Plan (JOSHUA 6:1–5)
  - A. Jericho's Status (v. 1)
  - B. The Lord's Strategy (vv. 2–5)
- III. Simple Obedience (JOSHUA 6:15–16, 20)
  - A. Surrounding the City (vv. 15–16)
  - B. Seizing the City (v. 20)

### Conclusion

- A. Follow Directions
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

Canaan	<i>Kay-nun.</i>
Horeb	<i>Ho-reb.</i>
Jericho	<i>Jair-ih-co.</i>
Rahab	<i>Ray-hab.</i>

Sinai     *Sigh-nye* or *Sigh-nay-eye.*

## Introduction

### A. Preparing the Troops

On June 5, 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower addressed the Allied troops who were preparing to take part in the D-Day invasion that would occur the following day. As Eisenhower walked among those troops, he knew that many of them would not survive the attack. He felt great responsibility for the deaths that would occur. But Eisenhower masked his own fears in order to alleviate that of the soldiers. "It's very hard to look a soldier in the eye when you fear that you are sending him to his death," Eisenhower said later. But it was important both to Eisenhower and to the men he addressed that he express his care and regard for them.

In today's text the leader of the Israelites received a message from his "commander in chief," the Lord, regarding the conquest of the promised land. As instructive as the example of Eisenhower was and is, that of the Lord to Joshua is immeasurably greater.

### B. Lesson Context

We think of Joshua's role as a military commander before that of being a prophet—if we think of him at all as a prophet. He is remembered much more for his actions with the sword than for his proclamations of God's messages to the Israelites.

But was Joshua a prophet? For one thing,

he was Moses' successor, and Moses was called "a prophet" ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#); see lesson 1). Further, God spoke through Joshua to give directions to Israel, and that is one characteristic of a prophet ([Hebrews 1:1](#)). Joshua challenged the people to put away their idols and commit themselves fully to the Lord ([Joshua 23:1–24:28](#)), a common task of prophets. And Joshua may be considered a prophetic forerunner of Christ. The names *Joshua* and *Jesus* both mean "the Lord is salvation." As Joshua led ancient Israel into the promised land of Canaan, Jesus leads generations of God's faithful people into the promised land of Heaven.

The first mention of Joshua in Scripture is in [Exodus 17:8–16](#), a context not long after the exodus and the parting of the Red Sea. So by the time of the events of today's lesson text, Joshua had witnessed many mighty works of God.

The book of Joshua begins with the Lord's exhortations to Joshua following Moses' death—repeating several times the directive for Joshua to be strong and have courage in fulfilling his sacred duties ([Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18](#)). Joshua had been assured of the Lord's presence, just as the Lord had guided Moses ([3:7](#)). God's presence with Joshua also points to Joshua's calling from God, an event that precedes a true prophet's ministry. The book of Joshua goes on to trace the Israelite's entry into the promised land ([Joshua 1–5](#)), conquests and settlements in it (chapters [6–21](#)), and covenant renewal (chapters [22–24](#)).

Christians have come to consider the

book of Joshua to fit the category of "history" in the Old Testament's 5–12–5–5–12 arrangement of its 39 books (5 books of law, 12 of history, 5 of poetry, 5 by major prophets, 12 by minor prophets). But to Jewish readers the book of Joshua was part of the Former Prophets (along with Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings). Though the Former Prophets are very different from Latter Prophets (like Isaiah or Hosea), these books are concerned with God's guiding the people through his chosen leaders. The first such leader in this section was Joshua, followed by the judges, etc. The writer of the book is unknown, though it is likely he was a prophet or a priest himself.

[Joshua 3–4](#) records how the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on dry land, much as the previous generation had crossed the Red Sea on dry land under Moses' leadership. Following further spiritual preparation of the people—including circumcision of those men who had not been circumcised during the wandering in the wilderness ([Joshua 5:2–9](#)) and through the observance of the Passover ([5:10](#))—the Israelites were almost ready for the task of conquering the promised land.

## I. Special Message ([JOSHUA 5:13–15](#))

### A. Joshua's Caution (v. 13)

**13a.** Now when Joshua was near Jericho,

The city of *Jericho* was located about 10

miles northwest of the Dead Sea and 5 miles west of the Jordan River. Cities of antiquity were sited with three concerns in mind: access to water, access to trade routes, and defensibility. Jericho had all three. Because of nearby springs of water, the city was an oasis in the dry Jordan landscape. Jericho was also a strategic place to begin conquest of Canaan because of its proximity to trade routes. Jericho depended on its walls for defense, a focus of this lesson.

We should be careful not to confuse the Jericho of the Old Testament with the Jericho of the New Testament. Though called by the same name, the Jericho of Jesus' day was located above the site of the Old Testament city, the latter having been about 800 feet below sea level.

**13b. he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"**

Based on Joshua's initial reaction to the appearance of this armed *man*, there is no reason to think he looked extraordinary in any way. But putting two facts side by side yields an amazing scene: (1) Joshua's question indicates his uncertainty regarding whose side the man is on, yet (2) Joshua *went up* to this armed man anyway! The scene is therefore one of confidence in the protective presence of the Lord (see [Lesson Context](#)). As to the answer to Joshua's question, he was about to find out that the answer wasn't a simple "us" or "them"!

## B. Messenger's Command (vv. 14–15)

**14a. "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."**

This individual was likely an angel of the Lord, perhaps the same one whom God had promised would go before his people to lead them into the promised land ([Exodus 23:20–23](#)). The phrase "Lord of hosts" is familiar to readers of the *King James Version*, appearing more than 200 times in the Old Testament in that edition. In the *NIV*, that phrase is updated to "Lord Almighty." But the normal order of the underlying Hebrew words is reversed here and in the verse that follows. Thus we have *army of the Lord*. The word *army* is used as a reference to an armed force ([Judges 4:15](#); etc.). The man's identifying himself as *commander* reinforces the military overtones suggested by his unsheathed sword and the armed force at his command (compare [1 Samuel 12:9](#)).

The man does not give Joshua a straightforward endorsement of allegiance. Whether the man was for or against the Israelites depended upon their faithfulness and obedience to *the Lord*.

**14b. Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"**

The posture of *reverence* Joshua adopted should not be seen as indicating worship since angels, as created beings, do not accept worship ([Revelation 19:10](#); [22:8](#)). To what is happening here we may compare how very similar language is translated in [Ruth 2:10](#); [1 Samuel 25:23](#); and [2 Samuel 14:22](#).



Realizing that such a man would not show up just to chit-chat, Joshua's question sought to get to the heart of the man's errand immediately. Joshua's referring to himself as *servant* and to the man as *my Lord* are two more indications of Joshua's great respect for this messenger sent by God.

*What Do You Think?*

What's the single most important thing your church needs to do better in order to hear and heed the Lord's messages properly?

*Digging Deeper*

What will be your part in making that happen?

**15. The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.**

*The commander of the Lord's army did not immediately reveal the nature of his visit. His directive echoes the scene of the burning bush episode involving Moses at Mount Horeb (Sinai) in [Exodus 3:4–5](#). This incident provides another link between Moses as God's prophet and Joshua as his legitimate successor ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#); [Joshua 1:1–9](#); see lesson 1).*

### TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES

When I decided it was time to visit the Holy Land, as it is referred to, I went as a skeptic. My initial frame of mind was that of criticism. I questioned the traditional desig-

nations of places identified with Jesus' life and ministry. I also reacted against the building of shrines over some of those locations.

I was caught by surprise, however, when my trip turned into a spiritual pilgrimage! At some point, I found myself appreciating the land that gave birth to our faith. I was able to recognize it as holy because of what was done there by Jesus and others, like Joshua. One might say that I mentally removed my shoes in amazement at what God had done in that land.

When was the last time you figuratively took off your shoes in reverence for what God has done in the place where you stand?

—C. R. B.

*What Do You Think?*

Under what circumstances, if any, should you consider certain places to be holier than others? Why?

*Digging Deeper*

What role should [Deuteronomy 12:1–4](#); [Acts 7:30–33](#); [Romans 14:5](#); and/or [Colossians 2:16](#) have in your answer?

## II. Sovereign Plan ([JOSHUA 6:1–5](#))

### A. Jericho's Status (v. 1)

**1. Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.**

This note interrupts the captain's conversation with Joshua briefly (see [Joshua 5:15](#), above). In so doing, it reveals part the "defen-

sibility” aspect of *Jericho* (see [Lesson Context](#)). The fact that *no one went out and no one came in* speaks not only to the city’s ability to control access but also to the reason for the heightened security measures: the threat posed by *the Israelites*.

Joshua had previously sent two spies into the city to assess the situation there. And although they had gained entrance, one or more alert members of the populace had informed authorities not only of the intrusion itself but also where the spies were located. Under protection from Rahab, the spies had learned that the city was in a state of panic because of reports of what the Lord had done to the kings east of the Jordan River ([Joshua 2](#)).

## B. The Lord’s Strategy (vv. 2–5)

**2. Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.**

Surprisingly, *the Lord* himself, not the commander of the Lord’s army, addressed Joshua. This could indicate either (1) that the commander prepared Joshua for the Lord to arrive on the scene or (2) that the Lord had chosen first to introduce himself as commander of the army before identifying himself more fully. Either would be in keeping with ways that God had interacted with great men in the past (compare [Genesis 18:1–2](#); [Exodus 3:1–4](#)).

The description of the forthcoming conquest of *Jericho* in terms of *its king and its fighting men* reassured Joshua that the vic-

tory would be complete; it was to be a decisive win for Israel. Neither king nor soldiers would escape. We should note that the Lord did not say “I will deliver,” but “*I have delivered.*” The victory is so assured that he spoke of it as already having happened (compare [Joshua 8:1](#); [10:8](#)).

The promised land was a gift from God to Israel ([Numbers 13:1, 2](#); [Deuteronomy 4:21](#); [6:23](#); [8:10](#)). They had done nothing to earn or deserve such a gift; it was a demonstration of God’s gracious treatment of them as his covenant people ([7:7–9](#)). Because of this fact, their life in the land was to be different from that of the nations they dispossessed. That could happen only with a “clean sweep” (see [Deuteronomy 7:1–6](#)). God’s assured victory in *Jericho* was to be indicative of the sort of military campaigns the people should plan on.



Visual for Lesson 2. Point to this visual while asking learners of times when they felt they were “walking in circles” but ended up seeing God at work.

**3. “March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days.**

Because God was the giver of the land, his instructions for taking the land had to be followed. Here he began to outline his strategy for conquering Jericho.

Merely circling a *city* was not an efficient military tactic, especially without being part of a larger plan to lay siege or attack outright. It could however heighten the fear the people inside were already feeling. But it could also lose the element of surprise, as Joshua effectively used later (Joshua 8:10–29; 10:6–11). Perhaps the latter was the Lord’s intent so that the Israelites would realize that the victory was solely by his might, not theirs.

One estimate of the circumference of Jericho was approximately 2,000 feet, or just over one third of a mile. The marching would not take place right next to the wall, of course, lest the Israelites be in danger of arrows. A safe distance might therefore require a walk of a mile or more.

According to the military census in Numbers 26:1–2, 51, there were 601, 730 Israelite men able to bear arms. The amount of time the march would take depended on the width of the marching formation and the speed of the pace.

**4. “Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.”**

Unlike other nations, military success in Israel didn’t depend on numbers, technology, or skill. Rather, it depended on the Lord’s presence. *The ark* of the covenant

would symbolize that presence. But to trust in the symbolism without actually being led by the Lord was a recipe for disaster (example: 1 Samuel 4). Obeying God was the key to victory.

Other verses make clear that the priests marched on the first six days as well (Joshua 6:13–14, not in our printed text). The deviation from the pattern of the six days marked the fact that *the seventh day* would bring a different result.

Armies need ways to communicate, and the *trumpets* of curved *rams’ horns* served that purpose here. Use of trumpets for other communication purposes are seen in Leviticus 25:9; 1 Kings 1:34; 2 Kings 9:13; and Psalm 81:3. Trumpets made from different material are seen in Numbers 10:1–10.

**5. “When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”**

After days of hearing only shorter blasts of horns, the *long blast* on the seventh day would probably feel like a grand celebration for Israel. The shouts of *the whole army* in combination with that blast would precede the Lord’s bringing down *the wall of the city*. No other military action would be necessary for God to raze Jericho’s defenses. For *everyone* to go *straight in* would ensure they did not get in each other’s way.

*What Do You Think?*

What’s the single most important thing you can do today to hold yourself

accountable to acting as the Lord desires?

*Digging Deeper*

Which single Scripture passage convicts you most in this regard? Why?

**Joshua 6:6–14** (not in our printed text) records the obedience of the people, the priests, and the armed men to Joshua’s orders. Emphasized within these verses is his command for the army to remain completely silent until the time to shout. Only the priests’ horns were to be heard.

### III. Simple Obedience (**JOSHUA 6:15–16, 20**)

#### A. Surrounding the City (vv. 15–16)

**15–16.** On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!”

*The army* obeyed everything that Joshua told them from the Lord, with no deviations (see **Joshua 6:12–14**). At this time they continued to obey as the procedure changed as noted.

Joshua spoke again as though *the Lord* had already *given* them Jericho. This city was being conquered through God’s power, not through Israel’s greatness or might. Though it had not yet happened, it was as good as

accomplished.

*What Do You Think?*

Under what circumstances, if any, should Christians accept credit for something? Why?

*Digging Deeper*

How do texts such as **Daniel 4:19–37; John 5:44; 8:54; Acts 12:20–23; 1 Corinthians 3:6; 11:1; and 15:9–11** help frame your answer?

**Joshua 6:17** (not in our printed text) contains a reminder to spare Rahab and her family because of her protecting the spies previously (see **Joshua 2**). Everything else in the city was dedicated to destruction. No treasure or possession was to be spared for any reason (**6:18–21**).

The importance of following directions applied not only to the conquest of Canaan but was to be a central feature of Israelite faith henceforth. It was to be the key not only to conquering the land but also keeping it. The key to remaining in the land would never be found in military might, economic strength, or by mastering the tactics of international diplomacy. It would be found only in continuing to recognize the land as a gift from God and honoring him as the giver in every phase of life. To fail in this regard was a guarantee that no matter how powerful the army or how strong the economy, the Israelites would surely forfeit the gift God had given them.

#### B. Seizing the City (v. 20)

**20. When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.**

*The army* once again followed every command the Lord had given to Joshua (compare [Joshua 6:2–5](#), above). Although we wonder how many soldiers went up into the city after *the wall collapsed*, no record was made. While arguing from silence is often unconvincing, we may guess that numbers are not given because they were not the key to victory. God’s power was.

*What Do You Think?*

What mental and spiritual guardrails should we have in place before concluding that the misfortunes of unbelievers are God’s doing?

*Digging Deeper*

How does distinguishing between what God *causes* and what he *permits* aid your answer?

### **TEARING DOWN WALLS**

A wall can have a powerful significance beyond its mere physical presence. The Berlin Wall is a prime example, since it represented the tense relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In 1987, amidst political upheaval in the Eastern Bloc and in the Soviet Union, U. S. President Reagan challenged the Soviet leader: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Two years later, the

Berlin Wall came down, and a powerful symbol of fear and division disappeared.

Ancient Jericho relied on a wall surrounding the city to protect its inhabitants from invaders. As individuals, many of us have built walls in our hearts and minds for a similar purpose: to protect our self-esteem, to guard against challenges to our prejudices, etc.

Often such walls end up destroying our relationships with family members and friends. Sometimes those walls are so strong that only the power of God can break them down. What walls have you built in your heart that need to be torn down?

—C. R. B.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Follow Directions**

Consider the faith required to trust and obey God’s directions for conquering the city of Jericho ([Hebrews 11:30](#)). When first hearing the plan, many Israelites may have thought *What kind of strategy is this? Who conquers a city with such a battle plan?* The answer: God does, and his people do so by faith in him.

God’s bizarre (to human thinking) plan had an important spiritual lesson to teach the Israelites: Receiving the promised land could only be accomplished on God’s terms. The people were not to compromise, ignore, or tweak the terms in any way. Even though the commands of God were unconventional, those commands were to be obeyed.



Christians do well to remember that God's commands are still meant to be obeyed without equivocating. Though Christians may disagree about some particulars, we know from Jesus that our first command is to love the Lord ([Mark 12:30](#)), and loving him involves obedience ([John 14:15](#)). May we obey everything the Lord has revealed to us that we may receive his blessings!

### B. Prayer

Father, thank you for leading us with your Word and your Spirit. May they strengthen our obedience to you! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Victory follows obedience to the Lord.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

*Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).*

### Into the Lesson

Ask learners to name TV shows they like that feature a main character who always comes out on top by using unusual, improvised methods and/or devices. If learners are slow in responding, don't be hasty in filling the silence with an example—let them think

for a while. If learners need an example after 15 seconds of silence, you can mention *MacGyver* and/or similar shows.

Discuss why such shows are attractive. After discussion, lead into the Bible study by saying, "The book of Joshua offers multiple accounts that are as dramatic as such TV shows, and more so! Let's see what just one of its episodes can teach us in the twenty-first century."

### Into the Word

*Option.* As a preface to the activity in the paragraph below, distribute to study pairs copies of the "Strategies and Tactics" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Assign one text per pair to complete as indicated. Use discoveries to compare and contrast with the conquest of Jericho as the Bible study proceeds.

If you have exactly 11 class members, assign one verse of today's text to each. If you have more than 11 class member, assign the 11 verses and duplicate some assignments. If you have fewer than 11 class members, assign the 11 verses by giving some participants two or three verses.

Announce that the class will be drawing today's true story in a sequence of panels. Assure your learners that artistic talent (or lack thereof) doesn't matter. Distribute supplies appropriate to the task and ask learners to take only one minute per panel to draw their assigned text(s). For learners who are overly self-conscious about their lack of artistic ability, say that they can use words to

describe their assigned verse, without using words of the verse itself (a text-only example for [Joshua 6:20](#) might be “Hooray, we won!”).

Once all the panels are finished, collect them and shuffle. Then affix them randomly to the board in a horizontal line and ask learners to make suggestions for putting them in the proper order. (Rule: No one is allowed to comment on the placement of the picture he or she drew.)

If you used the optional activity to begin this section of the lesson, do a final compare and contrast between the account of the conquest of Jericho and those of the four entries on the activity page handout.

## Into Life

Ask the group to state spiritual preparations they see in today’s text and related texts regarding spiritual preparations to the victory at Jericho. Within the lesson text itself, expect learners to mention the worship of [Joshua 5:14](#) and the honoring of holy ground in [5:15](#).

*Option.* To see the lesson in its wider context, ask learners to note how and why victory at Jericho was followed by the defeat described in [Joshua 7](#). Expect responses certainly to include the secret sin of Achan. But learners also may note that there is no record of Joshua’s having prayed to seek the Lord’s blessing before that battle; instead, he relied on the advice of humans ([Joshua 7:1–5](#)).

Next, give each participant a blank index card and challenge them to write on it one

area in which they intend to take personal obedience to the Lord more seriously in the week ahead—and indicate how they will do so. Allow one minute for private thought on this task. Suggest that learners post their cards where they will see them daily in the week ahead.

*Option.* If you wish to weave into this task the subject of spiritual disciplines, distribute copies of the “Discipline Deficiency” exercise from the activity page. Use of this exercise in study pairs may result in accountability partnerships being formed.