

“By Faith . . . After”

by Walton Weaver

One of the examples of faith cited in Hebrews 11 is that of Israelites taking the city of Jericho. Verse 30 says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days." Now that verse does not say simply that the walls of Jericho fell by faith. It says that the walls of Jericho fell AFTER they were encircled for seven days. The word "after" is significant.

It is true that it was "by faith" that the walls of Jericho fell. The verse plainly tells us that this was the case. But this is not all that the verse says. It also tells us WHEN the walls of Jericho fell by faith: AFTER they were encircled for seven days.

THE LORD'S COMMAND

To appreciate the significance of the word AFTER in this verse we must go back to the time when the Lord gave Israel instruction concerning the taking of the city of Jericho.

...And the Lord said to Joshua, 'See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. And you shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days. Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And it shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead' (Joshua 6:2-5 NASB).

The Lord begins His instructions by informing Joshua that he has given the city of Jericho into their hand. That sounds rather strange, doesn't it? Especially in view of the fact that the Lord then proceeds to tell them the conditions upon which the walls of Jericho will fall. How could the Lord say, "I have given Jericho into your hand;" and then require that certain things be done BEFORE the city would be given to them? Because the promise was a conditional promise. The city would be given in response to obedient faith, yet it would be by a sovereign act of God that the walls of the city would be brought down. It was so certain that God would accomplish this sovereign act in response to

Israel's faith that the act itself could be spoken of as though it had already been done--"I have given."

THE CONDITIONS

When conditions are attached to a promise and the conditions are met and the promise is fulfilled, the thing is received does not become something less than a gift just because conditions were required. This story illustrates this conclusion. God gave the city of Jericho to Israel, but he did not give her the city until AFTER she had met in detail the conditions God Himself had laid down. The conditions were plain, and to the honest heart they were not subject to misunderstanding. What were they?

1. She must march around the city once each day for six days.
2. She must march around the city seven times on the seventh day.
3. Seven priests must carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark.
4. After completing the seven trips around the city on the seventh day the priests were to blow the trumpets.
5. When the priests made a long blast with the ram's horn the people were to shout with a great shout.

It was only AFTER these five conditions had been met that the walls of the city would fall and the people would go up and take the city. This would be true whether or not there was any connection between the means employed and the end to be accomplished. When one looks at the conditions he must conclude that there was no possible connection between the means employed and the end itself, but the city would not be given until AFTER the conditions were met. Israel would never have done what she did on her own because reason would not suggest to her that there could have been anything accomplished by marching around the city as she did, blowing the trumpets, shouting, etc. She acted as she did only because God had commanded her to do so. This made her action obedience of faith. In other words, it was her faith in God that led her to do as she did. God commanded, and Israel obeyed. So the Hebrew writer says it was by faith that the walls of Jericho fell, but it was AFTER Israel had circled the city as commanded.

FAITH THAT WORKS

God has never blessed faith until after it manifested itself in some way. James says, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26). In verse 18 he says, "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works:" Jesus did not bless the faith of the four who brought the paralytic to Him before they brought Him, but AFTER they brought him. It was when He SAW

their faith that Jesus forgave his sins (Mark 2:5). Faith was not blessed until after it was manifested, or until Jesus saw their faith demonstrated by their action.

All the other heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 are given as examples of what they DID by faith, and how God blessed them. AFTER they had obeyed God in carrying out what He had commanded. No one can find one case in all the Bible where God ever blessed faith before that faith manifested itself in some way. We read about Noah being saved by water, but he was not saved until AFTER he had build the ark; Abraham received an inheritance, but not until AFTER he obeyed God in leaving Ur; Abel was accounted righteous by God, but not until AFTER he offered an acceptable sacrifice to God; Naaman was cleansed of his leprosy, but not until AFTER he had dipped seven times in the waters of the Jordan; the firstborn sons of the Israelites were spared when the firstborn sons of the Egyptians were being killed, but not until AFTER they had applied the blood to the doorposts and lintel of the houses; the murmuring Israelites were cured from the poisonous effects of the snake bites, but not until AFTER they looked upon the fiery serpent that had been set upon a standard in their midst; etc., etc.

Now remember, every one of these things were done by faith, but not in one single case was that faith ever blessed until AFTER that faith had obeyed in the manner in which the people had been commanded to obey. In fact, when there were a series of things that were commanded, or a number of things that were to be done in connection with a promise, the faith that was required was not blessed until after everything that had been commanded had been carried out exactly as God had commanded. Take as an illustration the matter of the Israelites taking the city of Jericho, the example we began with in this article.. The faith of the Israelites was manifested on the first day when they marched around the city one time as commanded. But did God bless their faith at that time, at the very moment that their faith was first manifest? Certainly not! The walls of the city did not even fall on the second day, or the third, or the fourth, etc. Yet faith had been manifested on each day prior to the seventh day. But their faith was not blessed--the city was not given to the Israelites — until the city had been encircled about for seven days.

SONS OF GOD BY FAITH

Paul says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). So the question is not whether one becomes a child of God by faith; Paul affirms that we do become sons of God by faith. The only question is: WHEN? At what point in our faith do we become a child of God? This is a legitimate question. It's like asking, "At what point in the faith of the Israelites did the walls fall?" Everyone agrees that the walls fell by faith, but they did not fall by faith on the first day, or the second, or the third. They fell AFTER seven days and only after they had followed exactly God's instructions each day for seven days. So although the faith of the Israelites was alive and active from day one to day seven, the city was not given to them until AFTER they had done all that God commanded right on through the seventh day.

The dipping of Naaman in the waters of Jordan illustrates the same principle. He was not cleansed from his leprosy after dipping the first time, or the second time, or the third or fourth, etc. Only AFTER he had dipped seven times as commanded was he cured. Was his faith alive and active before he dipped the seventh time? Yes, but it was not perfected, and therefore would not accomplish what the prophet had promised, until AFTER he had dipped the specified number of times. Before faith will accomplish what God promises it must first be alive, it must be doing what God commands, but what God has promised will not be given until all that He has commanded in relation to the promise has been accomplished.

We become the sons of God by faith, but WHEN? Only AFTER we have done all that God commands that we must do to be saved. It is with the heart that man believes unto righteousness (Romans 10:10), we are justified by faith (Romans 5:1), or we are made the sons of God by faith (Galatians 3:26). But there are other things that precede salvation from sins.

1. REPENTANCE is unto life (Acts 11:18), thus showing that it precedes life; it is commanded for, or in order that one might receive, the remission of sins, showing that it comes before remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

2. CONFESSION with the mouth of the Lord Jesus is unto salvation (Romans 10:10), so it also comes before salvation.

3. BAPTISM in water is for, or in order that one might receive, the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), so it also comes before remission of sins. Both faith and baptism come before salvation: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). If this statement does not show that faith and baptism come before salvation, then the statement that says that the one who believes and confesses "shall be saved" (Romans 10:9) does not show that faith and confession come before salvation. The word "for" in Galatians 3:27 introduces the reason why we are the sons of God by faith, the reason being that we have been baptized into Christ. Thus baptism is involved in becoming a child of God; it is not something we do because we are already a child of God.

CONCLUSION

The matter of salvation by faith is exactly parallel to the taking of the city of Jericho by faith. All one needs to do to see that this is a valid conclusion is to put the commands side by side and he will see that the statement of the writer of Hebrews, "By faith ... after;" properly applies to each.

TAKING JERICHO

1. Given by faith.

SALVATION

1. Given by faith

2. Given by faith AFTER encircled
for seven days

2. Given by faith
AFTER repentance,
confession and
baptism.

Someone might say, "But we are not told that we are saved by faith after certain things are done." It is true that we are not told that in these exact words, but neither are we told in these exact words that Naaman was cured of his leprosy. In fact, the word faith is not even used; but we know that the reason he finally dipped in Jordan as he was commanded was because he believed the word of the prophet, and he was cured only AFTER he had dipped seven times, even though the word itself is not used. The same may be said for the examples of Noah, Abel, Abraham, etc., but the principle stated in the case of Jericho is the same for these examples as well.

We are saved by faith only AFTER we have repented, confessed our faith in Jesus and been baptized because these things are commanded in order that we might be saved, just as the Israelites were commanded certain things in order that God might give them the city of Jericho. Just as God gave Israel the city "by faith ... after" she had obeyed His commands exactly as He had given them, so we are made the sons of God "by faith ... after" we have obeyed Him in repentance, confession and baptism as He has commanded.

My friend, have you become a child of God by faith?