

Encounter with Jesus – Joshua

In these services we are looking at people who have had an encounter with Jesus and the effect the encounter had on them. We have looked at several people who met Jesus physically during his ministry and last time at the Crippled Man at the Temple who met Jesus through Peter and John. Tonight we are going to look back to an encounter which happened in the Old Testament, when Joshua met Jesus. Hilary is going to read us the story.

Joshua 5:13 – 6:20

Who was Joshua?

We know a lot more about Joshua than some of the other people we have looked at in this series. We first read of him being appointed by Moses to lead the Israelites fighting against the Amalekites in Ex 17, while Aaron and Hur held up Moses hands holding the staff of God on the hill. So he was an experienced and recognised General, although it also says that God told Moses to write down the story and to make sure Joshua heard it so he knew it was God and not him who achieved the victory. We are also told in Exodus and Numbers that Joshua had been Moses aide “since youth”; that he went up Mount Sinai with Moses when he received the 10 commandments and that he stayed in the tabernacle when Moses left it. He was one of the 12 spies sent into the Promised Land; he and Caleb were the only two who had the faith to believe God could deliver the land to the Israelites and were the only ones of the 12 who went into the land. God told Moses in Numbers 31 to bring Joshua to the place of meeting where God commissioned him to take over the leadership of Israel and in the earlier chapters of Joshua it is recorded that God spoke to Joshua, guided him and performed the miracle of stopping the Jordan for the Israelites to cross over on dry ground. We therefore know he was a man who had faith in God, had already seen God do miracles and had been told to lead the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land.

How did he encounter Jesus?

From the sentence in 5:13 “Now when Joshua was near Jericho”, it is probable that he was conducting a reconnaissance to establish how to attack the city, which “was tightly shut up because of the Israelites”, i.e. already in a state of siege. The appearance of an armed man therefore poses a threat to Joshua and he challenges him. The response from the man, that “as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come”, produces an immediate reaction from Joshua of falling to the ground in reverence, i.e. worship, and asking what message “my Lord has for his servant”. It is clear from this that Joshua recognises the man as being God (who he has heard speak to him before), but let’s look at what Jesus, for that is who I think it was, says. He says he has come as commander of the army of the Lord – in Rev 19 John has a picture of a rider on a white horse leading the armies of heaven whose name is “the Word of God” and “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. Comparing this to John 1:1 and 1 Tim 6 these are both titles given to Jesus by John and Paul. He also does not rebuke Joshua for worshipping him, as angels do when they take a message to men and the men try to worship them – e.g. John in Rev 19. Since he accepts the worship the man must be God, and the title he chooses suggests to me it was Jesus. John says in John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”, so Jesus was around in OT times and could have come in the form of a man to meet Joshua.

What happened during the encounter?

The words Jesus uses are an indication that God has taken charge and is going to be responsible for Israel’s military success, not Joshua, just like with the Amalekites. Also, just as Moses had an encounter at the burning bush that communicated God’s plan for the exodus, so Joshua’s encounter is providing God’s plan for the conquest of the Promised Land (both are told

to take off their sandals as they are standing on holy ground). The message brought by the commander includes the strategy for attacking and taking Jericho, not by the usual methods of the day of long sieges or building ramps to get over the walls, but by marching round in silence for 7 days and then shouting – when the walls would fall down. Given that Joshua was an experienced general this would probably have seemed a highly improbable strategy, but he trusts God. The role of the priests in the plan is critical, they are necessary in order to maintain the sanctity of the ark and the importance of their lead role is to offer one more reminder that this is God's battle, not the Israelites'. The ark is symbolic in that it is God's battle standard, armies at the time often carried religious symbols into battle as a sign of their gods – the Roman Eagle was such a symbol. The trumpets referred to here are the rams' horn (*shofar*), which is capable of a variety of tones but cannot play a tune, so it was used primarily for signals in worship or warfare. . It is significant that it was the priests who carried and sounded the trumpets as the representatives of God – he was controlling the battle and giving the commands. The number of the Israelites – 12 divisions or tribes each of around 40,000– would probably have meant they completely surrounded the city while they marched round it. Hence the need for sound signals as the men on one side of the city would be out of sight of the others. When the pre-arranged signal of a long blast on the trumpets was given all the men shouted, the walls collapsed and each man went straight in to the city – from all sides. Whether the walls collapsed because of the rhythm of the marching and the reverberation of the sound or God caused them to collapse it was still God's plan and his victory.

What effect did the encounter have on Joshua?

He responds to the word and strategy given to him by Jesus and puts it into action. I can imagine the orders group he gave to his commanders – “Right -forget the plans we discussed about siege ramps and starving them out, God's told me we just have to march around the city for 7 days and then shout and the walls will fall down.” There was a chance that they would think he had gone mad and reject the plan, maybe even reject him as their leader. But Joshua trusted and obeyed God at the risk of being ridiculed and rejected – and saw his trust rewarded when events turned out just like Jesus had said.

Discussion – There are two questions for us here which I would like you to discuss in your groups and we'll then have a short feedback from each group:

Joshua met Jesus and obeyed what Jesus told him to do? How well do we obey what Jesus tells us to do?

Joshua was prepared to look foolish or even ridiculous to obey Jesus? Are we prepared to be ridiculed for obeying him?