

Homiletics Analysis: Joshua 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Joshua 6 narrates the LORD's conquest of Jericho through a sequence of events that deliberately defies military logic: seven days of silent marching, seven priests carrying seven trumpets, seven circuits on the seventh day, a corporate shout, and the miraculous collapse of the city's walls. The chapter opens with the LORD's declaration that Jericho is already delivered into Joshua's hand (v. 2), moves through the precise ritual-military instructions (vv. 3–5), the seven-day execution of those instructions (vv. 6–20), the rescue of Rahab and her household as covenanted (vv. 21–25), and closes with the solemn curse pronounced over anyone who would rebuild Jericho (v. 26) and a summary statement of Joshua's growing fame (v. 27). The narrative is structured around divine speech followed by meticulous obedience, with the entire action framed as the LORD's gift rather than Israel's achievement. Notably, the only human act that “accomplishes” anything — the shout — happens only after the LORD has already declared the city given and after six days of apparently doing nothing militarily decisive.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to establish in His people a deep, settled confidence that His word is the operative reality of history — not military strategy, not human power, not the formidability of obstacles. The elaborate ritual of seven days is not military procedure; it is discipleship in trust. Israel must learn to act in the visible world based on what God has declared in the invisible — to march in silence before impregnable walls, to wait without explanation, to shout before the walls fall, not after. The intent is the formation of a people who believe that the LORD fights for them and that their role is structured, faithful, corporate obedience to His word. This formation is as important as the city's destruction — perhaps more so, since Canaan will require continued trust beyond Jericho.

Subject Sentence: The LORD gives Jericho to Israel through obedient faith — not military force.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating that every obstacle His people face is already conquered in His word — their calling is not to overcome by strength but to advance in structured, corporate obedience to what He has already declared done.

Interpretive Evaluation

The nature of the seven-day ritual: One common interpretive drift reads the seven-day march as psychological warfare — demoralizing the inhabitants, softening their will to resist. This reading is partially right in noting that the march had an effect on Jericho (Rahab’s testimony in chapter 2 already shows the city was terrified), but it imports a military-strategic rationalism the text actively resists. The text is not interested in explaining *how* the walls fell through secondary causes; it repeatedly emphasizes that the LORD gave the city (v. 2, v. 16). The ritual functions theologically, not tactically. It disciplines Israel in hearing and obeying before seeing results — the precise formation needed for the entire conquest and for life in covenant.

Rahab’s rescue — nationalistic versus grace-centered readings: Some expositors treat the rescue of Rahab (vv. 22–25) as an aside — an honorable mention for a cooperative intelligence asset. This reading drastically undersells the theological weight of the text. Rahab is a Canaanite prostitute — the paradigmatic outsider by every category Israel recognized: ethnicity, gender, moral history, and national identity. Her rescue through the scarlet cord is the grace counterpoint to the judgment falling on Jericho. The New Testament explicitly recognizes this (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25; Matthew 1:5), placing her in the line of the Messiah. The text insists she “dwelt in Israel to this day” (v. 25) — she is not merely saved from destruction but incorporated into the covenant community. Expositions that skip or minimize Rahab miss that the chapter is simultaneously a chapter about judgment on the rebellious and grace toward the trusting — the two always travel together in the conquest narrative.

Devoting to destruction (ḥērem): The ḥērem command — the complete destruction of Jericho and its inhabitants — is the most significant pastoral and hermeneutical challenge in Joshua 6. Liberal readings often treat this as primitive tribalism or a moral embarrassment in Israel’s history. Dispensational readings sometimes isolate it as unique to a specific phase of redemptive history (holy war as a discrete covenant category). The Reformed reading holds the ḥērem as a form of divine judgment — God executing through Israel the sentence He had deferred for centuries (Genesis 15:16: “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete”). This is not Israel acting on ethnic preference but Israel serving as the instrument of a holy God whose patience had reached its appointed limit. The ḥērem also functions to protect Israel from syncretism — the mixing of worship that would unravel the covenant. This reading does not eliminate the moral gravity of the command, but it places it in its proper theological frame: divine judgment is real, it falls on those who resist, and its fullness was ultimately borne by Christ, who became ḥērem for His people (Galatians 3:13).

The curse on Jericho (v. 26): Some readings treat this as a local historical curiosity, fulfilled literally in 1 Kings 16:34. The Reformed reading sees it as demonstrating the seriousness of the conquest — Jericho is not simply a military objective but a covenantal act of consecration. The curse underscores that what God has given to judgment is not to be reclaimed for human use or ambition.

The Reformed reading best accounts for the whole text because it holds together what the text itself insists on holding together: the utter sovereignty of God in the conquest, the genuine responsibility of Israel to obey precisely and corporately, the grace extended to faith from outside the covenant community (Rahab), and the holiness that requires real judgment on sustained rebellion.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 15:13–16** — God tells Abram that Israel will return to Canaan when “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete,” establishing that the conquest is not ethnic cleansing but delayed divine judgment, operating on a divine timetable — the theological backstory of the ḥērem.
 - **Hebrews 11:30–31** — The Hall of Faith credits the fall of Jericho to Israel’s faith and Rahab’s faith in the same breath, confirming that the chapter’s operative category is trust in God’s word — not military method — and that Rahab’s rescue is a paradigm case of saving faith from outside the visible covenant community.
 - **Galatians 3:13** — Christ becoming a curse for us is the ultimate resolution of the ḥērem logic: the total consecration-to-destruction that Jericho received finds its redemptive answer in the One who became accursed on behalf of those who deserved it — including all who are, like Rahab, outside the covenant by nature.
 - **2 Corinthians 10:3–5** — “The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” — the spiritual battle logic of Jericho (trust-shaped obedience, not human military strategy) is carried forward as the normative pattern for God’s people in every age.
 - **Revelation 11:15 / 19:11–16** — The final conquest of every hostile kingdom belongs to the LORD alone; Jericho is a proleptic image of history’s end — God’s word declaring victory, His people participating in structured obedience, and every wall that defies Him falling at His command.
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Aim: To call the reader to advance in structured, corporate obedience to God’s already-declared word — trusting that the obstacles before them are not the operative reality; His word is.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Jericho is shut up — no one	The city is already in a

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	goes out or in	posture of defeat; the verb “was shut” suggests paralysis, not strength
2	The LORD declares: “See, I have given Jericho into your hand”	Perfect tense — divine declaration of accomplished fact before a stone has moved; the whole narrative lives inside this declaration
3–5	The LORD gives precise ritual-military instructions: march, priests, trumpets, seven days, seven circuits, shout	Forty-year wilderness generation now receives unambiguous, specific commands — the testing of obedience is built into the method
6–7	Joshua transmits the LORD’s commands to the priests and people	Joshua’s role is faithfully to relay and lead — not to innovate or improve on the strategy
8–9	The armed men, priests, and rear guard take their places; the procession begins	Order and structure in the march; silence is implied — the ram’s horns sound but the people do not yet shout
10	Joshua commands the people: no shout, no word, until he gives the command	Disciplined corporate silence — trust expressed through restrained obedience; enormously difficult before impregnable walls
11	The ark circuits the city once; the army returns to camp	Day one — nothing visible happens; faith must sustain the march without immediate result
12–14	Days two through six: the same pattern, repeated	Repetition is the point — faith that endures without visible payoff; six days of apparent futility
15	Day seven: they rise early and circuit the city seven times	The heightening — seven circuits on the seventh day signals the climax approaching

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
16	On the seventh circuit, Joshua commands the shout: “The LORD has given you the city”	The shout is commanded <i>before</i> the walls fall — trust must act before it sees; the cry is faith, not celebration
17–19	The ḥērem command: the city and all in it are devoted to destruction; Rahab and her household are excepted; all silver, gold, bronze, iron belong to the LORD’s treasury	The exception reveals the grace logic underneath the judgment: faith saves from destruction; all precious things belong to God
20	The people shout; the walls fall; Israel goes up into the city	Divine act — the walls fall at the word-shaped shout of an obedient people; conquest is the LORD’s doing
21	Israel destroys everything in the city with the sword per the ḥērem	The ḥērem is carried out fully — Israel acting as the instrument of divine judgment
22–23	Joshua commands the two spies to bring Rahab and her family out	Covenant promise kept — the scarlet cord has marked her household; no one who trusts the LORD’s word is abandoned
24	The city is burned; all valuables go to the LORD’s treasury	Total consecration; nothing of Jericho remains for human use or pride
25	Rahab and her household are preserved and dwell in Israel “to this day”	The remarkable grace note — the Canaanite prostitute is not merely spared but incorporated into the covenant people
26	Joshua pronounces the curse on anyone who rebuilds Jericho	The city’s destruction is declared permanent — fulfilled in 1 Kings 16:34; the curse underscores the seriousness of ḥērem
27	The LORD was with Joshua; his fame spread throughout all the land	Conclusion: Joshua’s reputation flows from the LORD’s presence, not from

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
		military genius

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–2	The Declaration: Jericho Already Given
2	3–10	The Instructions: Obedience Structured in Advance
3	11–16	The Execution: Seven Days of Disciplined Trust
4	17–21	The Conquest: Judgment Falls, Grace Preserves
5	22–25	The Rescue: Rahab Incorporated into the Covenant People
6	26–27	The Seal: Curse, Presence, and Spreading Fame

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The LORD gives Jericho to Israel through obedient faith — not military force.

Primary Claim: God is demonstrating that every obstacle His people face is already conquered in His word — their calling is not to overcome by strength but to advance in structured, corporate obedience to what He has already declared done.

Applications (Five)

1. Reframe the obstacle in front of you according to God’s word, not its apparent size.

(*Mind/Belief*) Jericho was “shut up” — nothing going in, nothing going out, impregnable by any human assessment. But the LORD’s first word to Joshua was “See, I have *given* Jericho into your hand” — past tense, accomplished in divine declaration before the first footfall of the first march. The walls were real. The obstacle was real. But it was no longer the operative reality. What God has declared done *is* done, regardless of what the landscape looks like. The believer who anchors their understanding of their situation in God’s word rather than in the visible dimensions of the obstacle is not practicing denial — they are practicing the same faith that marched around Jericho for six days without a single visible result. Name your Jericho. Then find what God has declared about it.

2. Submit to God’s method even when it is humiliating to your strategic instincts.

(*Will/Behavior*) No military commander in the ancient Near East would have designed the Jericho campaign. Marching in silence. Carrying an ark. Blowing ram’s horns. Six days of apparently doing nothing. The temptation was not to abandon the mission but to *improve* the strategy — to add something that looked more like warfare and less like liturgy. God’s

method at Jericho was an act of anti-pride: it was structured so that no one could say Israel's military genius had taken the city. Identify where you are currently substituting your preferred method for God's stated one — where you are adding competence, strategy, or leverage to something God has called you simply to trust and obey. The discipline is submission to the shape of His command, not the shape of your wisdom.

3. Endure the days of silence without abandoning the march. (*Affections/Worship*) Days two through six of the Jericho campaign are the theologically decisive days — not day seven. Anyone can shout when the walls are falling. The question is whether you will keep marching when nothing visible is happening, when the walls are unchanged, when the city still looks exactly as fortified as it did yesterday, when observers outside Israel's camp are wondering what these people think they are doing. The formation of trust happens in the silence. If God has called you to something and you have been obedient and nothing visible has shifted — do not abandon the march. The absence of visible result is not evidence that God's word has failed; it is the training ground where faith is built. Six days of faithful silence *is* the victory being formed.

4. Do not privatize what God has designed to be corporate. (*Will/Behavior*) The entire Jericho campaign is structurally corporate: the priests march together, the armed men march together, the rear guard marches together, the whole assembly shouts together. There is no account of a single Israelite soloist who figured out the strategy on his own and executed it alone. The shout that brings down the walls is the gathered voice of the people of God, acting together, in the same moment, at the same command. The temptation to reduce Christian obedience to private spiritual discipline while neglecting gathered, corporate, structured obedience to God's word is precisely what Jericho refutes. Ask where your faith has become so individualized that you are trying to march alone — and return to the assembly.

5. See Rahab in yourself and let her rescue shape your worship. (*Affections/Worship*) Rahab was Canaanite, female, a prostitute, an outsider by every category that mattered in ancient Israel, and a resident of the city under divine judgment. She had no claim on covenant grace except one: she believed the LORD's word about Himself and acted on it with a scarlet cord in a window. That was enough. She was not merely spared — she was brought *in*, placed *among* the people of God, and is named in the genealogy of the Messiah. Every believer is Rahab: outside by nature, inside by grace, preserved not by covenant pedigree but by trust in the LORD's declared word. When the walls of Jericho fell, the rescue of Rahab was not the footnote — it was the point. Worship the God who incorporates outsiders at enormous cost to Himself.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Joshua 6 establishes that divine sovereignty over history is not abstract theology but the operative ground of covenant life — God's word precedes, governs, and accomplishes what appears impossible by any visible measure. The LORD's

declaration in verse 2 (“I have given Jericho into your hand”) is not encouragement for a difficult mission; it is the statement of what is already true in the divine economy, awaiting expression in time. This passage teaches that God fights for His people — He does not merely assist them — and that human obedience is the structured participation in what He has already determined to accomplish, not the mechanism by which the outcome is achieved. The incorporation of Rahab teaches that divine grace operates outside ethnic and moral boundaries, reaching those who trust His word regardless of their history. The ḥērem teaches that divine holiness is real, that sin’s sentence is not indefinitely deferred, and that the same God who extends grace to the trusting executes just judgment on the persistently rebellious — both dimensions of His character fully on display in a single chapter.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Joshua 6 is a canonical demonstration of the sola gratia principle in conquest form: the victory is the LORD’s gift, the method excludes human boasting, and the only human act that “triggers” the fall of the walls is a word-shaped shout of trust — faith, not force. The Reformed doctrine of sovereign grace is not a New Testament innovation but a pattern running through the whole canon, and Jericho is one of its most vivid Old Testament expressions. Rahab’s rescue — a Canaanite outsider saved through faith in the LORD’s word, incorporated into the covenant people, and placed in the Messianic line — anticipates the New Testament’s expansion of the covenant to include Gentiles by faith, not by bloodline, demonstrating that the covenant of grace was never ethnically restricted in God’s design. The ḥērem, understood through the lens of Galatians 3:13, points forward to Christ bearing the curse of divine consecration-to-destruction on behalf of those who deserved it — the ultimate resolution of the holy-war logic that Jericho introduces. Reformed exposition of Joshua 6 is incomplete if it treats the chapter only as a military-spiritual lesson about obedience; it must show how the chapter is already doing gospel work in the structure of grace, judgment, faith, and incorporation that Christ will bring to fulfillment.

Main Takeaway

The walls in front of you are not the operative reality — God’s word is. He has already declared what He intends to accomplish; your calling is to march in structured, corporate obedience to that word, in silence if necessary, for as long as He requires, until He brings the walls down in His own time and way. And when they fall, no one will be able to say you took the city — because you didn’t. He did. That is the whole point.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Reducing the passage to a motivational lesson about persistence.** The most common mishandling of Joshua 6 is treating the seven days as a principle about perseverance — “keep going even when nothing is happening!” This is not wrong, but it evacuates the passage of its theological center. The seven days are not about grit; they are about structured trust in a God who has already declared the outcome. The difference is enormous: a persistence sermon calls people to try harder; a Joshua 6 sermon calls people to believe God’s word and obey it precisely. Reconstruct the theological foundation before building the applicational house.
- **Skipping Rahab or treating her as a subplot.** Rahab occupies eight verses of Joshua 6 (vv. 17, 22–25) — nearly a third of the chapter’s verses are directly concerned with her rescue and incorporation. She is not a subplot; she is the grace counterpoint without which the chapter’s full claim cannot be stated. A sermon on Joshua 6 that doesn’t land on Rahab — on the outsider saved by trust, incorporated into the people of God, placed in the Messianic line — has preached half the chapter.
- **Treating the ḥērem as an embarrassment to be minimized or explained away.** The destruction of Jericho and its inhabitants is real, commanded, and fully executed. Expositors who rush past it, soften it with excessive qualifications, or treat it as an ancient cultural artifact that modern people should politely ignore have not served their congregations. The ḥērem requires honest engagement: What kind of God commands this? What theological framework makes sense of it? The answers — delayed judgment on sustained rebellion, divine holiness requiring real consequence, Christ bearing the ultimate ḥērem — are gospel-shaped and worth the pastoral courage they require.
- **Presenting Joshua 6 as a template for prayer, worship, or spiritual disciplines.** Some expositions extract the seven-day march as a pattern for modern spiritual warfare: march around your city, pray seven times, fast on the seventh day. This reads the text’s specific, once-for-all historical form as a transferable ritual technique, which the text does not authorize. The theological principles transfer — trust God’s word, obey precisely, act corporately — but the specific form was a unique divine instruction for a unique covenantal moment. Treating it as a repeatable spiritual formula is eisegesis dressed in piety.
- **Missing the “already declared” structure of the whole narrative.** Verse 2 is the key to the entire chapter: “I have *given* Jericho into your hand.” The chapter must be read inside that declaration. If the preacher misses or glosses this verse, the whole narrative collapses into a story about what Israel did to take Jericho rather than a story about what God did and how Israel participated in it. Preach verse 2 slowly. Everything else in the chapter is commentary on it.

- **Individualizing what the text presents as corporate.** The march, the shout, the destruction, and the rescue all happen in community — the whole congregation of Israel acting together under a common command. Sermons that draw only individual applications (“be like Joshua,” “have faith like Rahab”) miss the corporate ecclesiology embedded in the narrative. Joshua 6 is not a story about spiritually heroic individuals; it is a story about the people of God, structured and obedient together. Applications should include the gathered community and not only the individual believer.