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June 8th: Joshua 6 & Luke 21:5-38

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Alastair Roberts

Defeating Jericho. The coming of the Son of Man.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Joshua 6. Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out and none came in. And the LORD said to Joshua, See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valour.

You shall march around the city all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of ram's horns before the ark.

On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him. So 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 ram's horns before the Ark of the

Lord.

And he said to the people, Go forward, march around the city, and let the armed men pass on before the Ark of the Lord. And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of ram's horns before the Lord went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord following them. The armed men were walking before the priests who were blowing the trumpets, and the rearguard was walking after the Ark while the trumpets blew continually.

But Joshua commanded the people, You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth until the day I tell you to shout, then you shall shout. So he caused the Ark of the Lord to circle the city, going about it once, and they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp. Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the Ark of the Lord.

And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of ram's horns before the Ark of the Lord walked on, and they blew the trumpets continually. And the armed men were walking before them, and the rearguard was walking after the Ark of the Lord while the trumpets blew continually. And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp.

So they did for six days. On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times.

And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, Shout, for the Lord has given you the city, and the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. But you keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction, and bring trouble upon it.

But all silver and gold and every vessel of bronze and iron are holy to the Lord. They shall go into the treasury of the Lord. So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown.

As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city. Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and donkeys, with the edge of the sword. But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.

So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her, and they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel, and they burned the city with fire and everything in it. Only the silver and gold and the vessels of bronze and iron they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive.

And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, Cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates.

So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land. In Joshua chapter 6 we actually begin the conquest of the promised land. The book of Joshua has 24 chapters.

Of these, the first five are devoted to preparation and entry into the land. Only chapters 6-12 really directly concern the work of the conquest itself. Perhaps surprisingly to many readers, the significant majority of the book focuses elsewhere.

The defeat of Jericho is a story of immense importance. It's recounted in a way that makes this clear. A lot of attention is devoted to the Lord's instructions, and then to the Israelites' faithful fulfilment of these.

This is the first city of the land to be defeated, and as such it represents the whole land. It's the first fruits of the land. We are presented with the great obstacle that Israel faces in the first verse.

Jericho is shut up behind thick walls. The crossing of the Jordan occurred on the seventh day, and the destruction of Jericho occurs on the seventh day too. There is a sabbatical character to Israel's entry into the land.

The Lord is giving rest to his people. However, the Sabbath day is also the day of the Lord. It's the great day of judgment, and it will be that for the city of Jericho.

Israel walks around Jericho once a day for six days, with the Ark of the Covenant and seven priests before the Ark blowing ram's horn trumpets. On the seventh day they go round the city seven times, and at the long blast of the trumpet the people shouted with a great shout, and the walls fell down. The Lord had announced that all of this would happen in advance, giving them the instructions what they ought to do.

And it all happened as the Lord declared. The instructions and the fulfilment showcase both Joshua and Israel's faithfulness at this point, and the Lord's power. We might ask ourselves why the defeat of Jericho is so liturgical in character.

Israel is essentially given a liturgical procession to perform on seven successive days. This all seems a bit superfluous to requirements. Surely God could just bring the city walls down, and they could just go in without any of this rigmarole of walking around the city for six successive days, and then seven times on the seventh day, with the trumpets blowing.

Looking more closely at this, I think there is a reason for all of these details, and it can help us to understand the meaning of the event more generally. Rabbi David Foreman first alerted me to some of these connections, particularly from Leviticus chapter 25, where we have the instructions of the year of Jubilee. In verses 8 to 13, The very name of Jubilee is connected with the ram's horn.

With this trumpet blast. And the beginning of the year of Jubilee is proclaimed with a trumpet blast at the time of the Day of Atonement. The year of Jubilee is connected with something else, and that's with the Feast of Weeks, which is mentioned in chapter 23 of Leviticus, verses 15 and 16.

Both in the case of the year of Jubilee and the Feast of Weeks, there is a counting of seven sevens. And then there is this feast that celebrates Israel's possession within the land. Israel returns to its property in the year of Jubilee.

The time before this where the trumpet appears is at Sinai. On the morning of the third day, there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

The Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. That's Exodus chapter 19, verses 16 to 20. So let's try and fit some of these pieces together.

We've noticed a close similarity between the Feast of Weeks and the year of Jubilee. There is a loud and long trumpet blast at Sinai. Much as there is such a blast of the trumpet at the destruction of Jericho.

At the destruction of Jericho, there's an emphasis upon the number seven. Seven days, seven trumpets, seven circuits of the city on the final day. A further connection is seen in the fact that Sinai is connected with the Feast of Weeks.

The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, is a feast that is associated with the giving of the law.

Things are slowly starting to come together. The description of the Feast of Weeks, seven weeks that have to be counted out, and then the year of Jubilee, seven weeks of years that have to be counted out, suggests that Pentecost might be thought of as a mini-Jubilee, and the year of Jubilee as a mega-Pentecost.

So if Sinai is connected with Pentecost, can we see Jericho connected with the year of Jubilee? I think we can. There is the same blast of the trumpet, there are the repeated sevens, and then, most importantly, the land is being given into the hands of its true possessors. Sinai is the event that formally declares Israel's release from slavery.

However, being released from slavery might not mean so much if you aren't given land. The slave released without land is vulnerable and dependent in unhealthy ways. Jubilee ensured that Israelites weren't reduced to such long-term dependence and landlessness.

Jericho's emphasis upon sevens and the blowing of the trumpet should tip us off to the fact that it is a Jubilee-style event that is taking place here. The land is being given to its proper owners, and the gift of the land is completing the liberation from slavery that the Exodus and Sinai began. With this symbolic pronouncement of Jubilee, they are finally entering into the freedom for which God set them free.

They have not just been released from the clutches of Pharaoh, they have now been planted within the new land, and they will start a new life here as free people. Israel is strictly charged not to take any spoil, but to devote it all to destruction, save for the silver and the gold, and the iron and the bronze vessels. These will be devoted to the treasury of the Lord.

Such instructions can be found in Deuteronomy 7, verses 23-26. But the Lord your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. And He will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven.

No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them. The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it.

For it is an abomination to the Lord your God, and you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction. The city of Jericho is completely devoted to the Lord, its contents either being given to the Lord's treasury or being utterly destroyed.

Rahab and her household, however, were saved. This is a Passover event for them. The reference to Rahab living in Israel to this day may not refer to Rahab personally, but might be a reference to her offspring.

The chapter ends with a curse declared upon the person who would try and rebuild Jericho. Now while people lived in the area of the destroyed city, there was not a true attempt to rebuild the city from the ground up until later on in 1 Kings. In 1 Kings 16, verse 34 we read, A question to consider, where in the New Testament do we find the defeat of a city in a way reminiscent of the defeat of Jericho by Joshua? What further parallels could be found between the two cities? Luke chapter 21, verses 5 to 38 And he said, But before all this they will lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.

This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers, and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake, but not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it. For these are days of vengeance, to fulfil all that is written.

Alas for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth, and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars. And on the earth distress of nations in perplexity, because of the roaring of the sea and the waves. People fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world.

For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

And he told them a parable. Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves, and know that the summer is already near.

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness, and cares of this life. And that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For

it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man. And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

In Luke chapter 21, the Olivet discourse begins with some of Jesus' disciples admiring the temple buildings. Jesus makes clear that these buildings are not going to survive, that one stone will not be left upon another. Jesus begins by listing a number of things that would occur before his coming, but which would not themselves be signs of his coming.

He ensures that his disciples don't jump at false positives. A number of potentially unsettling world events would occur before his coming. Jesus mentions famines, earthquakes, pestilences, other natural disasters.

The disciples will also face persecution, they'll be thrust out of synagogues, they'll be brought before rulers. This will serve as an occasion for their witness before the rulers. The witness of the disciples to governors and kings is important, particularly in the book of Acts.

Paul, like Jesus, faces four trials, and in these trials he bears witness to the gospel before kings and rulers. Jesus is a king and a ruler, and the disciples are his emissaries to the rulers of this world. They will face treachery and betrayal, even from their own families, their closest relatives will turn them over.

They will be hated, but if they persevere they will be saved. Not a hair of their heads will perish, Jesus says. By their endurance they will gain their lives.

There is something of a paradox here. When you're suffering the sort of persecution that Jesus describes, how can it be said that not a hair of your head will perish? The solution to the paradox is found in the next statement, that you will gain your life through your endurance. This is what it means.

Those who lose their lives for Christ's sake will gain them. This is not the way that human reason would suggest to stay safe. You keep silent, you don't cause trouble, you don't rock the boat, you don't upset family members and people in authority who might turn you over.

However, to take that way is to lose your life, to forfeit your very soul. Jesus instructs his disciples to flee when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies. And at this point the Jerusalem Christians did indeed flee to the mountains, as they were instructed by Christ, to Pella in the Transjordan.

Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5 in the early 4th century writes

about this. But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by revelation, vouchsafed to approve men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come there from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.

These, Jesus says, are the days of vengeance, to fulfil all that was spoken. Here Jesus is alluding to Isaiah Chapter 61, verses 1 and 2. Now the interesting thing is we've had that verse before, that's been quoted in Luke Chapter 4, verses 18 to 19. There's something missing there.

What's missing is the reference to the day of vengeance of our God. For many modern theologians this has suggested that Jesus was just bringing a message of complete peace, no judgment whatsoever. For John the Baptist the question was where is the fire? Where is the judgment that I was expecting this one coming after me to bring? Well here we see that element that was left out of the original quotation surfacing again many chapters later.

Now in reference to that event in which Christ's wrath would truly be seen, the fire is going to come and it's going to come in AD 70. The time will be painful and difficult for all who must live through it, particularly for pregnant women or women who are nursing children. Israel will suffer the wrath of God and Jerusalem will be occupied by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The Jews will go into captivity. Reading such passages many struggle with their language. It seems cosmic and extreme.

Surely the only thing it could seemingly refer to is a complete meltdown of the physical order. But that's not necessarily the case if we look in Isaiah Chapter 13, verse 10. Chapter 34, verse 4 of Isaiah.

Ezekiel Chapter 32, verses 7 to 8. All of this language is being used to describe the fall of Babylon and Egypt. These are historical events. This is not the meltdown of the physical order but it is the end of a world order.

The same is true of the destruction of Jerusalem. The whole world order will change. When we read the reference to seeing the Son of Man coming on the cloud we think that this is a downward movement from heaven to earth.

But it is the coming of the Son of Man into heaven itself that is in view here. The background of all of this is found in Daniel Chapter 7, verses 9 to 14. As I looked, thrones were placed, and the ancient days took a seat.

His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him.

A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking.

And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed, and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the ancient days and was presented before him.

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Seeing the Son of Man coming in a cloud is seeing the reality of this, seeing the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and Christ, which all begins with judgment falling upon Jerusalem.

And when they see this, they should lift themselves up, they should be alert, they should recognize that the days of the Lord have come. This is the vindication of the exalted Son of Man by the dispossession of the wicked tenants. Jesus gives the parable of a fig tree, the fig tree being a symbol connected with Israel.

Just as they are able to read the signs of the seasons in a tree, they shall see the signs of these times and recognize that the time has come. And that generation will not pass away until everything occurred, not just some of it, all of it. This makes it very hard to argue that this is referring to anything other than the events of AD 70.

In the statement about heaven and earth passing away but Christ's words not passing away, Jesus is probably alluding to Isaiah chapter 51 verse 6. The fact that Jesus says that all these things would occur within that generation and then immediately declares how certain his words are, has proved an embarrassment for many Christians. It might seem that Jesus' words did not come to pass after all, that Jesus' claims about the sure nature of his word are not in fact true. But yet, all of these things did come to pass.

They came to pass in the destruction of Jerusalem and the events surrounding that. And if we know how to read Old Testament prophecy, none of this should be surprising to us. Jesus is using the language of the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus was not a false prophet then, rather he faithfully foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. He ends the discourse with a charge to watchfulness and

wakefulness. For everyone else, life will be going on as normal, but they must keep awake, so that the day does not trap them.

Everything seems to be going on as it always has, and then suddenly, everything changes in a moment. Your entire world order, which you thought so absolutely rock solid and certain, can collapse. How do you avoid getting destroyed with this? You keep awake.

You watch. You ensure that you do not get trapped in the cares of this life, in dissipation and drunkenness. You pray fervently that you might have the strength to stand before the Son of Man, to escape all of the fate that is coming upon the world, and to prove to be faithful in that day of testing.

A question to consider, how in Jesus' description of these coming days would his disciples be progressively distinguished from the people around them?