

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Joshua - Lesson 5 - Chp. 8-9

Review of Last Lesson

In Joshua 7, the Israelites attacked the small city of Ai after having experienced a mighty victory over Jericho. However, they were quickly routed and defeated, losing thirty-six men. Joshua was shocked and perplexed, but then the Lord explained the reason for the defeat - Israel had sinned, keeping items from Jericho that were devoted to destruction or to the Tabernacle of God. God led them to identify the perpetrator. It was Achan.

Achan's sin was very grave. He took gold and silver that were to be set apart for use in the Tabernacle of God. This was the same as directly stealing from God. He also took a Babylonian garment that was to be burned along with everything else. The entire city of Jericho (minus the precious metals for the house of God) was to be completely destroyed and burned. Because Achan stole and hid items set apart for destruction, he himself was therefore set apart for destruction - and because he was a part of Israel, Israel was therefore also set apart for destruction. After Achan was identified, Joshua commanded that he and all he owned be destroyed. This would restore order and victory to the nation of Israel.

The story of Achan is best applied to the heart of the Christian. When we "cross over" to Canaan's land through water baptism, we are now God's children in His place, and we are destined for victory if we will only obey His Word and listen to the Spirit. We must renounce sin, evil, and everything that is contrary to God. There has to be a "destruction" within our hearts of everything that God hates, and we must do battle through prayer and repentance to win the victory.

If sin enters into our hearts, we must identify it and destroy it, or it will destroy us. We must destroy sin without mercy. If sin is allowed to exist in our hearts - if we hide it - it will eventually destroy us. *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*

We must fight the battle in our minds and hearts, and there are some things in us that must be completely destroyed, or we will be destroyed by them (these things are wrong attitudes, sinful desires, etc.). Christians fight battles *every day*.

Joshua Chapter 8

Joshua 8:1 (NLT) Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid or discouraged. Take all your fighting men and attack Ai, for I have given you the king of Ai, his people, his town, and his land. **2** You will destroy them as you destroyed Jericho and its king. But this time you may keep the plunder and the livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the town."

Now that Achan's secret was discovered, and Achan and all that he had was destroyed, victory could come once more. Now that sin was taken out of the way, God was speaking to Joshua once again. Sin separates, but when sin is removed, fellowship is restored. God said, "*Do not be afraid, nor be discouraged.*" Fear comes when sin rules.

God comforted Joshua after that trying time of defeat. Now they were ready for another victory, just like Jericho, but this time the spoils could be taken by the people. Therefore, God instructs Joshua to take “*all the people*.” Everyone needed to be involved in battle, and then all the people would reap the rewards. All the strength of Israel was to fight. In our Christian warfare of the heart, all of our strength should go toward winning the battle.

God gave them a strategy - lay an ambush.

Joshua 8:3 So Joshua and all the fighting men set out to attack Ai. Joshua chose 30,000 of his best warriors and sent them out at night **4** with these orders: “Hide in ambush close behind the town and be ready for action. **5** When our main army attacks, the men of Ai will come out to fight as they did before, and we will run away from them. **6** We will let them chase us until we have drawn them away from the town. For they will say, ‘The Israelites are running away from us as they did before.’ Then, while we are running from them, **7** you will jump up from your ambush and take possession of the town, for the Lord your God will give it to you. **8** Set the town on fire, as the Lord has commanded. You have your orders.”

Previously, Jericho was won by obeying the word of the Lord and doing something unorthodox in regards to warfare. Who wins a battle by walking around a city, blowing trumpets, and then shouting? And all this was done over a seven day period!

Ai would be won by a plan of normal battle strategies - and this would be accomplished in one day.

9 So they left and went to the place of ambush between Bethel and the west side of Ai. But Joshua remained among the people in the camp that night. **10** Early the next morning Joshua roused his men and started toward Ai, accompanied by the elders of Israel. **11** All the fighting men who were with Joshua marched in front of the town and camped on the north side of Ai, with a valley between them and the town. **12** That night Joshua sent about 5,000 men to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the town. **13** So they stationed the main army north of the town and the ambush west of the town. Joshua himself spent that night in the valley.

Joshua was a leader who stayed right with his men, just as our Lord Jesus Christ is with us, leading us and guiding us. Joshua had a plan, and the Spirit of God in our lives also has a plan.

14 When the king of Ai saw the Israelites across the valley, he and all his army hurried out early in the morning and attacked the Israelites at a place overlooking the Jordan Valley. But he didn’t realize there was an ambush behind the town. **15** Joshua and the Israelite army fled toward the wilderness as though they were badly beaten. **16** Then all the men in the town were called out to chase after them. In this way, they were lured away from the town. **17** There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not chase after the Israelites, and the town was left wide open.

The people of Ai were overconfident because of their first victory. They left their city unprotected. Their overconfidence would be their downfall. Israel was obedient to their leader, Joshua. After their former defeat, it was important to trust Joshua. Some of them left themselves potentially exposed to the enemy, but they obeyed and trusted their commander. Some of them were commanded to go this way. Some were commanded to go that way. They all trusted and obeyed, and this would bring about a total victory. A great quality of Israel was that they tried again after their defeat.

Joshua 8:18 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Point the spear in your hand toward Ai, for I will hand the town over to you." Joshua did as he was commanded. **19** As soon as Joshua gave this signal, all the men in ambush jumped up from their position and poured into the town. They quickly captured it and set it on fire.

20 When the men of Ai looked behind them, smoke from the town was filling the sky, and they had nowhere to go. For the Israelites who had fled in the direction of the wilderness now turned on their pursuers.

Joshua stretched out his spear. The spear to Joshua was like the rod to Moses. It was like a flag to Israel, and it motivated them to victory.

Joshua's plan was working. His plan depended on the overconfidence of the people of Ai who previously defeated Israel. The smoke from the city would be a sign to Joshua's men to continue with their battle plans.

21 When Joshua and all the other Israelites saw that the ambush had succeeded and that smoke was rising from the town, they turned and attacked the men of Ai. **22** Meanwhile, the Israelites who were inside the town came out and attacked the enemy from the rear. So the men of Ai were caught in the middle, with Israelite fighters on both sides. Israel attacked them, and not a single person survived or escaped. **23** Only the king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua.

24 When the Israelite army finished chasing and killing all the men of Ai in the open fields, they went back and finished off everyone inside. **25** So the entire population of Ai, including men and women, was wiped out that day—12,000 in all. **26** For Joshua kept holding out his spear until everyone who had lived in Ai was completely destroyed. **27** Only the livestock and the treasures of the town were not destroyed, for the Israelites kept these as plunder for themselves, as the Lord had commanded Joshua. **28** So Joshua burned the town of Ai, and it became a permanent mound of ruins, desolate to this very day.

29 Joshua impaled the king of Ai on a sharpened pole and left him there until evening. At sunset the Israelites took down the body, as Joshua commanded, and threw it in front of the town gate. They piled a great heap of stones over him that can still be seen today.

The battle was fought, and the enemy was totally defeated and destroyed. When we completely fight the battle within our heart and see it to the end, we will be victorious.

Next, the people of Israel do something that Moses commanded before they entered the land:

Joshua Renews the Covenant

30 (NKJV) Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal, **31** as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron *tool*." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings.

Worship is always in order after a victory. Israel dedicated themselves to God in this place. They built the altar according to the law of Moses, *And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it* (Exodus 20:25).

32 And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.

The Israelites were obeying a command that Moses had given them:

Deuteronomy 27:4 Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. **5** And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron *tool* on them. **6** You shall build with whole stones the altar of the Lord your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. **7** You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the Lord your God. **8** And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law."

This people were not like other armies. Other armies would have kept the momentum of victory. However, God's people are not like other people. There is always time for worship and fellowship with one another. There is always time to obey the commands of the Lord. Here, the Israelites were writing the law of God on plastered stone, and we should allow the Spirit of God to write the law of God on our hearts.

From a worldly standpoint, taking time to go about twenty miles out of their way to Mount Ebal (when they had the momentum and there were more cities to conquer) was bad strategy. However, God's ways are perfect.

33 (NLT) Then all the Israelites—foreigners and native-born alike—along with the elders, officers, and judges, were divided into two groups. One group stood in front of Mount Gerizim, the other in front of Mount Ebal. Each group faced the other, and between them stood the Levitical priests carrying the Ark of the Lord's Covenant. This was all done according to the commands that Moses, the servant of the Lord, had previously given for blessing the people of Israel.

Moses had given a command to Israel before they entered into the promised land:

Deuteronomy 11:29 Now it shall be, when the Lord your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess, that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.

Joshua obeyed Moses' command.

Joshua 8:34 Joshua then read to them all the blessings and curses Moses had written in the Book of Instruction. **35** Every word of every command that Moses had ever given was read to the entire assembly of Israel, including the women and children and the foreigners who lived among them.

God's law has blessings as well as curses. There is a heaven and there is a hell. There is blessing for hearing and obeying the Word of the Lord, and there is separation from God when sin is allowed to rule and reign. Hearing the Word of God is the first step toward obeying it.

Devoted to Destruction

After having been defeated because of sin in the camp, the Israelites finally conquered Ai. After sin was removed, God spoke to them, giving them a battle strategy, and they defeated Ai, completely destroying the inhabitants of the city.

Christian and non-Christian alike have wondered, "Why did God order the destruction of everyone, including women and children?" This is a good question, and we go to the Bible to find the answer. Regarding the battle of Jericho, Scripture says:

Joshua 6:21 (NKJV) And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

In Deuteronomy 7:1-2, God orders the Hebrews to utterly destroy the Canaanites, making no covenant with them, and showing no mercy. But why?

The answer is that this was judgment for centuries of horrible and continual sin. We first read about it when God calls Abraham (Genesis 15) and tells him that his descendants would be afflicted for 400 years and then return to the land of Canaan. It is mentioned that the people of Canaan at that time had not yet reached their height of sin (Genesis 15:13-16).

Later, while the Israelites were still in the wilderness, God said:

Leviticus 18:25 (NLT) Because the entire land has become defiled, I am punishing the people who live there. I will cause the land to vomit them out. **26** You must obey all my decrees and regulations. You must not commit any of these detestable sins. This applies both to native-born Israelites and to the foreigners living among you.

27 "All these detestable activities are practiced by the people of the land where I am taking you, and this is how the land has become defiled. **28** So do not defile the land and give it a reason to vomit you out, as it will vomit out the people who live there now.

There were centuries of idolatry, sodomy, sorcery, child sacrifice, etc., practiced in Canaan. One generation polluted the next. God told His people:

Deuteronomy 18:9 (NKJV) "When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. **10** There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or a soothsayer*, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, **11** or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. **12** For all who do these things *are* an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. **13** You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. **14** For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.

It is no wonder God went into such detail in the Law of Moses as to what Israel could and couldn't do. The inhabitants of Canaan had become so full of sin and wickedness that the time had come to put an end to it. When we read of utter destruction such as is mentioned in Joshua, we need to be fully convinced that sin is horrible and destructive. The Canaanite society was altogether sold out to sin, so God said that the remedy was destruction.

We should also remind ourselves that the Lord Jesus, God in flesh, experienced the penalty for sin in His own body so that we would not be destroyed. When we should have experienced destruction ourselves, He took the punishment for us. This is the nature of our God - just, fair, and willing to do all because of His great love for us.

In Joshua, the Canaanites were judged and condemned, and God used the Israelites to remove them from the land. God was going to give the land to Israel, but He also gave them a warning, "Don't do the wicked things that these people practiced, or I will remove *you* from the land." As we read through the Old Testament, we find that Israel did not heed the warning. They practiced terrible sins, idolatry being their chief sin. Under the reign of King Manasseh, Scripture says:

2 Kings 21:9 (NLT) . . . Manasseh led them to do even more evil than the pagan nations that the Lord had destroyed when the people of Israel entered the land.

Finally God had enough, and both Israel and Judah were taken away captive.

Joshua Chapter 9

Joshua 9:1 (NKJV) And it came to pass when all the kings who *were* on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite—heard about it, **2** that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.

For the first time, we see the nations of Canaan unite together to fight against Israel. They were “*with one accord*,” showing us that unity can be used by God’s people or by those in rebellion against Him. These kings united together as a show of force against Israel.

What made them unite at this time? Verse one says they “*heard about it*,” meaning they heard about Israel’s victory over Jericho and Ai.

3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, **4** they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, **5** old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* moldy.

While the group of kings joined together as a show of might to beat Israel, the people of Gibeon had another strategy - deception. Just as it was not beneath Rahab to lie, it was not beneath the Gibeonites to deceive. They pretended to be from a nation a long way away (a nation not on the list for destruction). In fact, they had only traveled one day’s journey and *were* on the list.

Somehow these Gibeonites knew that the God of Israel told his people to show no mercy to the inhabitants of Canaan and make no covenant with them. They knew that they could not defeat Israel in battle. Therefore, it would take cunning if they were to preserve their lives.

6 And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, “We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us.”

7 Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, “Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?”

8 But they said to Joshua, “We *are* your servants.”

And Joshua said to them, “Who *are* you, and where do you come from?”

9 So they said to him: “From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, **10** and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth.

They carefully mentioned only what God had done in Egypt through the Ten Plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea as well as the victories on the other side of Jordan over King Sihon and King Og. The Gibeonites mentioned only these victories and not the recent victories in Jericho and Ai, since they wanted to appear that they had come on a long journey. To their credit, they gave honor to the God of Israel, but they lied and deceived at the same time. This was the only way they could think of to save their lives and join up with Israel.

Joshua 9:11 Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We *are* your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us."' **12** This bread of ours we took hot *for* our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy. **13** And these wineskins which we filled *were* new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey."

Remember, Israel was forbidden to make any covenant or treaty with the inhabitants of Canaan. The Lord commanded the people at Mount Sinai:

Exodus 34:12 (NLT) "Be very careful never to make a treaty with the people who live in the land where you are going. If you do, you will follow their evil ways and be trapped. **13** Instead, you must break down their pagan altars, smash their sacred pillars, and cut down their Asherah poles. **14** You must worship no other gods, for the Lord, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you.

15 "You must not make a treaty of any kind with the people living in the land. They lust after their gods, offering sacrifices to them. They will invite you to join them in their sacrificial meals, and you will go with them. **16** Then you will accept their daughters, who sacrifice to other gods, as wives for your sons. And they will seduce your sons to commit adultery against me by worshipping other gods.

Therefore, the Gibeonites took great care to appear to be from a far off country. They were afraid for their lives, and they wanted a covenant promise made to them that they would not be destroyed.

Joshua 9:14 Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the Lord. **15** So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

We read the sad words above, "*but they did not ask counsel of the Lord.*" Israel did not seek the will of God about the matter. They trusted what they saw with their eyes. The evidence before them and the words that they heard caused them to believe that these really were ambassadors from a country a long way off. Perhaps they even felt a little honored that they were being treated like a real nation - having dignitaries visit them to make treaties with them.

*Oh, what peace we often forfeit!
Oh, what needless pain we bear!
All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer.*

Christians should pray about things. We should definitely pray about things that affect our future and our relationships with others. Israel trusted their senses instead of inquiring of the Lord. When a Christian is out of the habit of prayer, he forgets to pray about important matters. When a Christian makes prayer a habit, he remembers to pray about things, especially things that affect his future and his wellbeing. Our senses might deceive us, but God never will.

Odd as it may seem, one time when prayer is forgotten is after a victory.

Joshua and the elders made a covenant with them with an oath by the God of Israel.

Joshua 9:16 And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them. **17** Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim.

The truth of the matter was quickly discovered. These four cities had joined together in this deceit to preserve their lives.

18 But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers.

19 Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them. **20** This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them." **21** And the rulers said to them, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them."

22 Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you dwell near us? **23** Now therefore, you are cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves—woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."

24 So they answered Joshua and said, "Because your servants were clearly told that the Lord your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; therefore we were very much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. **25** And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us."

26 So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. **27** And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.

The Gibeonites did not make excuses for lying to Israel. They clearly stated that they were afraid for their lives.

These Gibeonites, though they practiced deception, became a part of Israel that day. They came under the protection of Israel to follow its laws and its God. They became woodcutters and water carriers for the Tabernacle. To make peace with the people (who complained to the rulers about what they had done), Joshua made the Gibeonites do the hard work for the house of God. The many sacrifices in the Tabernacle required a lot of wood. The Tabernacle worship required much water for washings. The peace offerings were to be cooked in boiling water.

If we think about it, the reason for the destruction of the nations of Canaan was because of their sin, and so that they would not influence the people of Israel to sin. These Gibeonites came to Joshua fearing the God of Israel. Joshua put them in a place where they would serve Israel's God and God's people. The Gibeonites are a picture to us of the sinner who comes to God and the church. Though we come to God in rags and full of deceit, yet God makes us fit to work in the house of God. We renounce our old home and we *"dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*