

Joshua 7-8

Good evening and thank you for joining us tonight. Would you please turn in your Bibles to Joshua chapter 7?

Last time in our study we saw how God supernaturally provided the victory over Jericho. The walls came a tumblin' down!

From all outward appearances, it would seem at this point of Israel's history they were now at the peak of power. The nation must've thought no one could stand before them, no obstacle could get in their way. Nothing could slow Israel down!

That is of course, except sin.

We're going to study both chapters 7 and 8, and the title of tonight's message is A Declaration of Dependence

Let's pray.

1 But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi,[fn] the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel. In chapter 6, we saw how God miraculously gave the city of Jericho to the people of Israel. But God commanded they not take anything from Jericho. So the walls are destroyed, the nation is rejoicing, but the tone of chapter 7 takes a somber turn. Israel couldn't be defeated by the Canaanites, but they could defeat themselves by alienating themselves from God's plan and power through disobedience.

Achan stuffed his pockets with the accursed things.

2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai. The name Ai literally means "heap," Ai was a little town that

appeared to be no problem for the people of Israel in their conquest of the Promised Land. Jericho was an impenetrable fortress, Ai was a bump in the road.

3 And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.”

4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai.

Now if you recall from our earlier studies, Joshua had been given step by step instructions from God.

In Joshua 3 God instructed Joshua how to get the nation through the Jordan river.

In chapter 5, God gave instructions for the nation to then cut away the flesh, to circumcise the nation.

God then gave Joshua instructions for the conquering of Jericho in chapter 6.

And now in verse 3, the spies return and give Joshua instructions for conquering Ai, but nowhere do we read what the Lord’s instructions were.

It appears that after conquering Jericho, Joshua made the mistake we’ve all made after wonderful spiritual victories. Joshua relied on the flesh.

This is why the Bible tells us in **Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?**

We all have the tendency to spend a lot of time praying about the “big things”, that we take for granted our need for God in even the little things in life.

And what happens when we rely upon the flesh and not the spirit?
Nothing good!

5 And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water. The thirty-six men killed at Ai were thirty-six more than were killed at Jericho, which was thought to be a much more difficult city to conquer.

Though this number of deaths was relatively small from a military standpoint, what these deaths meant was staggering to Israel. It meant that the nation could be defeated in the Promised Land.

Without realizing it, this defeat at Ai showed that what mattered was not the strength of the opponent, but the help of God. Without God's help, no victory could be achieved!

Psalm 121:1-2 1 I will lift up my eyes to the hills—

From whence comes my help?

2 My help comes from the LORD,

Who made heaven and earth.

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. Whenever we read of the tearing of clothes and putting dust upon ones head, it's describing an intense period of mourning.

Here, Joshua and the elders are not only mourning the death of thirty-six men, but more so, he and the elders of Israel mourn the loss of the blessing and guidance of God.

7 And Joshua said, “Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! Not the prayer we expect from Joshua is it? In fact, this prayer echoes the cry of the people that complained to Moses in the wilderness!

The corpses of 36 men of war are a reminder to Joshua that if God's hand of blessing and guidance isn't with them, it would be better that they had come to the Promised Land.

I think it was Tozier who said you could remove the HS from the church and 90% of the church would continue on as if nothing happened. I pray that would not be said of us.

Joshua's cry to the Lord continues in verses 8-9

8 O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?” Can you hear the hopelessness in Joshua's cry?

10 So the LORD said to Joshua: “Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? God tells Joshua to get up. There's a time to pray, and a time to act.

11 Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff.

12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. Imagine the shock in Joshua's heart as the Lord revealed the sin in the camp.

Joshua is learning that Israel couldn't fight in God's power and presence unless they walked in obedience to God.

Remember, Israel was under a covenant with God that promised blessing based upon their obedience, and also promised curses upon their disobedience.

We are not under that kind of covenant. Our position with God is because of the work of Jesus on the cross, not our own works.

Yet if we want God's power and presence in our own battles, we must walk in fellowship with Him, and this fellowship is hindered by our own sin and rebellion.

13 Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.'" Often the Lord will ask us to remove something out of our lives, and if we resist, we miss out on spiritual victories.

14 In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man. 15 Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of

the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.' "The Hebrew army was sabotaged by secret sin.

I wonder how many churches, how many families, how many individual Christians suffer from a similar problem-sabotaged by secret sin?

16 So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. 17 He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarahites; and he brought the family of the Zarahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. 18 Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Can you imagine what Achan was going through as his tribe was called, then his household was called. Sweat streaming down this forehead. His palms are clammy. Judgment is closing in...

Why in the world doesn't Achan confess, and throw himself on God's mercies?

But that's the problem with sin isn't it? Sin causes us to hide and cover up –all the way back in the garden... **Genesis 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.**

It's shocking how much power we can give to hidden sin in our lives.

19-21

19 Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."

20 And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: 21 When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.”

Notice the 3 stages of temptation that Achan succumbed to. He saw, he coveted, he took. Remember **Genesis 3:6**, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.”

We know it’s not a sin to be tempted, for even Jesus was tempted. We’re all tempted all the time aren’t we?

We avoid temptation by staying far from it. **Proverbs 4:14–15** Do not enter the path of the wicked,

And do not walk in the way of evil.

15 Avoid it, do not travel on it;

Turn away from it and pass on.

If we want to stop indulging our sweet tooth, we need to stay out of the candy store.

Remember, Jesus resisted the devil’s temptations with the truth of God’s Word, and so can we

God also provides a way of escape from temptation through prayerful vigilance. Jesus told Peter, James, and John to “watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. 23 And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the

LORD. Jesus tells us in **Luke 12:2 For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known.**

Achan had carefully concealed his sin.

24 Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. 25 And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Now this is a troubling portion of scripture, and one that some skeptics will call out as contradictory to other parts of the Bible.

Remember in

Deuteronomy 24:16 Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin. So why were Achans children killed here?

Clearly his children were adult children-not toddlers. Evidently, they were involved in the sin, because it's unlikely that Achan could bury so much under their tent without their knowledge.

26 Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor[fn] to this day. There are now 2 places of memorial stones, 1 in Gilgal remembering God's faithfulness, and another in the Valley of Achor, remembering the sin of Achan.

Notice the symbolism here. Here the sin of Achan was dealt with by death. But our greater than Joshua, Jesus stood in the gap that we may have eternal life even though we are guilty of sin.

What's interesting is if you look up the valley of Achor, it's mentioned only in 2 other books. Isaiah and Hosea. And **Hosea 2:15 I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there, As in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.**

It's through Jesus we have the door of hope.

Chapter 8

1 Now the LORD said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; Why did God tell Joshua to not be afraid? I believe Joshua was fearing Achan's sin would cause Israel to not be able to defeat Ai take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land." Joshua messed up pretty big by not seeking the Lord. But Joshua's failure was not the end of the story.

Praise God our failures are not the end of the story!!!!

Notice how many troops God tells them to send-the whole army Israel had grossly underestimated Ai

2 And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it." It's ironic, but notice Israel is allowed to take the plunder from Ai.

If Achan had just been patient! If he'd obeyed God and trusted Him at Jericho, he would've gotten all that he wanted and more after Ai.

One thing I've learned in my Christian walk is God often gives us the things we desire, but often much later than we want.

3-8

3 So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night. 4 And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. 5 Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. 6 For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, 'They are fleeing before us as at the first.' Therefore we will flee before them. 7 Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. 8 And it will be, when you have taken the city, that you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you." It's interesting that God's battle plan for Jericho was mysterious and supernatural, while His plan for Ai – was shrewd, practical and far more conventional. It once again affirms that God works in different ways at different times.

He has special plans for each situation.

9 Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people.

After we blow it, and we want to see victory, we must live with and follow Jesus, who is our Joshua.

10 Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. 11 And all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley lay between them and Ai. 12 So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. 13 And when they had set the people, all the army that was on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley. Notice for Israel to gain victory, they must take the offensive. They don't wait for Ai to bring the battle to them, bring the battle to Ai.

We often see the battle against sin in mainly negative terms, about what not to do. But we must take the offensive against the powers of darkness and temptation, and be busy about doing what the LORD would have us to do. This is part of the reason being part of a fellowship, a body of believers is so important. You fellowship, you have accountability.

14-18

14 Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. 15 And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. 16 So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. 17 There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel.

18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.” And Joshua stretched out the spear that was in his hand toward the city. This sound familiar? Exodus 17 Joshua fought the Amalekites as Aaron and Hur lifted up Moses’ heavy hands. I’m sure Joshua had no idea that the events of Exodus 17 would be preparation for this moment.

That’s so often how it is—we have no idea what we’re going through today is preparation for something else tomorrow.

19-29

19 So those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire. 20 And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers.

21 Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. 22 Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were caught in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape. 23 But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

24 And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. 25 So it was that all

who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. 26 For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. 27 Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua. 28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. 29 And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day. This is of course in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 21:23 “his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.”

Now the rest of chapter 8 is in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 27-28. The Lord told Israel when they came to the Promised Land, to come to these mountains, build an altar, sacrifice to the LORD, and read the law

30-34

30 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.”[fn] And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. 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. 33 Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the

LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. Israel journeys to the Valley of Sechem - north of Bethel. He places the people on the two peaks on either side of the valley. They're organized by tribes – six tribes on Mount Gerizim and six tribes on Mount Ebal. Then Joshua reads the Law of Moses, and reminds the people of its blessings and curses. If they obey, they'll be blessed. If they disobey, they'll be cursed.

35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them. This ceremony was significant, because it established Yahweh as God of Israel in the sight of the Canaanites as well as the Israelites.

Israel is stating their "Declaration of Dependence."