

Joshua: Walking by Faith, Growing in Grace

Second Chance

Joshua 8:1-35

October 5, 2025

HDBC

Sometimes success comes through the back door of failure. As we begin this chapter, I am reminded of a couple verses in Psalm 119.

*Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word (vs. 67);
It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes (72).*

In this chapter we again see the grace of God and the truth of restoration. Defeats never have to be the end. They may in fact be the beginning if we will just respond to the grace of God as a loving and caring heavenly Father who works to produce spiritual growth and Christ-like changes in us.

This doesn't minimize the consequences of sin. In the ***Ai incident***, God's name had been dishonored, people lost their lives, and a family suffered for their sins. The momentum Israel gained at Jericho was temporarily lost and God's people were filled with gloom and despair.

The story of Ai is a warning. It reminds us that sin cannot be tolerated in our lives, our families, our churches, our nation. It grieves the Holy Spirit and stops the flow of God's blessing on our lives.

It is also a declaration of hope. It reminds us that there is life & hope after sin & failure, if that sin is confessed and dealt with.

Israel acknowledged and dealt with the sin in the camp. Because they honored the Lord in response to Achan's sin and the recent defeat, they were given a ***do-ever*** a ***second chance*** to get it right. In life second chances are not always available. ***Some things are truly one and done.***

Not so with God. When it comes to our failures and sins, ***God of second chances and new beginnings. ALWAYS!***

1. The Comfort from the Lord (1)

With the sin of Achan judged, God's favor toward the nation was restored. The next thing we read concerns God's new revelation to Joshua to both encourage him and give him directions for victory. The first words Joshua heard were **do not fear or be dismayed**. Joshua had heard these words before.

These were the words Moses spoke in Kadesh-Barnea as he sent out the 12 spies (Deut. 12:21).

They were the words Joshua heard from Moses 40 years later as he turned the reins of leadership over to Joshua who would then be responsible to take the nation into the land of promise (Deut. 31:8).

Joshua would hear similar words directly from the Lord as He commissioned him to lead the people into the land (Josh. 1:9).

Later, Joshua would use these same words to encourage the nation in the face of their enemies, and they would be used on **three other occasions** when Judah would be facing the enemy and terrible odds (Josh. 10:25; 2 Chron. 20:15, 17; 32:7).

2. The Call to Battle (1b-2)

1) Don't underestimate your enemy

God's word to Joshua was to use all the fighting men of Israel. Though the primary cause of the defeat at Ai was Achan's sin, a secondary cause was underestimating the enemy, overestimating themselves, and presuming on the Lord. So they are now told to take all the fighting men and to go forth at God's command trusting in God who would give them victory.

2) Keep the spoils of this victory

In verse 2 Joshua was told that the spoils of Ai and its livestock could now be taken by Israel.

As the first fruits of the land, Jericho had been placed under the ban, but this was not the case with Ai.

What irony. If Achan had just been patient he would have benefited from the spoils of victory. But he was impatient and greedy. How easy it is to take matters into our own hands and go ahead of the Lord! The path of obedience and faith is always best.

3) Change Your Strategy (vs. 2b)

The strategy used with Ai differed entirely from that employed at Jericho. This is highly instructive for us in ministry, in spiritual battles, and in following the Lord's lead. The Israelites did not march around the walls of Ai 7 times, nor did the walls fall miraculously. Israel was now directed to conquer the city through normal combat.

Principle: We should not expect God to work the same way every time. We need to be open and sensitive to the various ways God may lead. As the Sovereign God of the universe, He is never limited to one particular method to accomplish His purposes. He is a God of infinite variety.

3. The Plan for Battle (3-13)

The strategy for the capture of Ai was ingenious (vs. 3-9). It involved placing an ambush behind the city. God Himself told Joshua to do this (vs. 2, 8). The outworking of this plan involved three detachments of soldiers. The first was a group of commando-type warriors who were sent by night to hide on the west side of the city. Their mission was to rush into Ai and burn it after its defenders had deserted it to pursue Joshua and his army as they had previously done.

This unit is said to have numbered 30,000. The presence of large rocks in the region made it possible for all these men to remain hidden, yet this seems like an excessively large number of soldiers for this particular mission. **Regarding the 30,000 Ryrie points out,**

A seemingly large number for an ambush. It has been suggested that “thousand” should read “chief.” If so, Joshua sent 30 chiefs on a commando-type ambush.

The second contingent was the main army which walked the 15 miles from Gilgal early the next morning and camped in plain view. Led by Joshua, this army was a diversionary force to decoy the defenders of Ai out of the city.

The third contingent was another ambush numbering 5,000 men who were positioned between Bethel and Ai to cut off the possibility of reinforcements from Bethel to aid the men of Ai.

4. The Record of the Battle (14-29)

The plan worked like clockwork (vs. 14-22). When the king of Ai saw Israel’s army he took the bait and pursued the Israelites who pretended to retreat in fear as they had done before. This left city unguarded.

At the Lord’s command, Joshua signaled the troops hidden in ambush on the west side. They rushed into the city and set it on fire. This left the men of Ai surrounded with no place to flee for now Joshua and his men with the 5,000 hidden in ambush all turned to fight the men of Ai.

But before they could gather their wits they were caught in a pincer movement of Israelite soldiers and were destroyed.

The dead totaled 12,000. Plunder was taken from the city as God had said they could do (vs. 2). The city was made a heap of ruins.

Ai’s king, who had been previously spared, was hanged on a tree until evening and then buried beneath a pile of stones (cf. Achan’s similar burial, 7:26). The king’s body was taken off the tree at sunset. (Deut. 21:22-23; cf. Josh. 10:27).

5. The Worship Service (30-35)

Joshua then led the entire nation into a national worship service. It involved building an altar to present sacrifices of praise to God. It involved the reading of the Word of God and the writing down of the ten commandments as a lasting memorial.

Joshua wanted all the glory to go to God.

Joshua wanted to reinforced the importance of the Word of God.

Joshua wanted to leave a lasting memorial at that place.

I'm so glad chapter seven was not the end of the story.

I'm so glad the failures in my life are not the end of my story.

I'm so thankful for chapter 8; redemption and second chances.

I'm so thankful for the redemption of God in my life, and second chances.

Before I close I want to share the powerfully encouraging words found in Psalm 37:23-24. *The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. **Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand.***"

I hope you have a sense of how much God delights in you and in the path that you're following. We will fall, but the Lord is right there to pick us up. He delights in us even when we fail, if we turn to him and ask him to pick us up. That is the good news, no matter what mistakes we may have made. In a sense, the worst mistake we can make is to give up and not try again.

Alexander Whyte once said, *The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings.*

I can't disagree with his assessment. Let's seek to avoid the failures. But when we do fail, let's confess, repent, and experience the redemptive power of God **to give us a second chance.**