

Joshua Chapter 8: v. 1-35. – Ai is defeated.

Now the LORD said to Joshua: “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; 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. <sup>2</sup> 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.” <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. <sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> So it was *that* all who fell that day, both men and women, *were* twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.

## Introduction

Two weeks ago we studied the sad story of the defeat of Ai. We noticed that by observing the literary structure of the chapter we discovered the reason for the defeat.

In chapter 7 v. 1 we were told that God was angry, and in v. 28 God ceased from His anger.

In between these verses we discovered the reason for God's anger. One man in the army of Israel had disobeyed God's instructions through Joshua. His name was Achan. He had taken accursed things from the battle for Jericho, these were things that God had ordered to be destroyed. He had also taken silver and Gold and Bronze for himself. These items were to be kept for God's purposes.

As a result of Achan's sin, God had punished the whole of Israel by allowing the defeat of their army at Ai. When the sin of Achan and his family was discovered, then God punished them by death. God was making it clear to His people that sin was serious, not just in the lives of the pagan nation, but in the lives of His people.

Yes defeat happened to Joshua and his army through one man, but now the sin was dealt with and God was able to make progress with His battle for the land.

I would like to make one spiritual point here before we move into chapter 8.

Dealing with the sin of Achan was a painful process for Joshua and the Israelites. However it had to be done in order for God's work to continue and progress to be made.

Some Christians are not willing for the discipline of God in their life and as a result they do not make any spiritual progress. They are not willing for the pain and disruption that it will cause in their life. They reap the consequences, no progress is made and usually it ends in bitterness and a turning away from God in their heart.

However like the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15, there is always a way back to God. We need to realize, repent and receive God's forgiveness. This can be very painful but God is always willing to offer forgiveness to repentant sinners.

Let us now look at the text in Joshua chapter 8.

### 1. God's encouragement to Joshua v. 1-8

It appears in v. 1 that Joshua may have been on his knees or lying face down on the ground. He was probably praying and still mourning about the sin of Achan and wondering what to do?

God gave Joshua 5 things to encourage him.

#### Firstly God gave Joshua a word of comfort – v. 1

God said "do not be afraid nor be dismayed". Joshua was in need of assurance about the future. God had promised him in chapter 1: v.5 that no man would be able to defeat him all the days of his life. Joshua was probably feeling very upset with the whole situation.

In boxing terms, Joshua was knocked down, but he was not knocked out.

I learnt this week that professional boxers are at their most vulnerable position when they have been knocked to the ground.

They are allowed 9 seconds in order to get up. If at this point they can gain strength and give it all they have got, they can often surprise the other boxer and win the fight.

If we are ever knocked down spiritually, after repentance, the answer is to give everything you have got for God's glory. A complete surrender of your life to God.

This will turn defeat into victory.

God can then use you to fight another battle in the spiritual realm.

God is the God of "All Comfort". (Isaiah 40: v. 1, 1 Thess. 5: v. 11)

He comforts us through His word. (Psalm 119: v. 128)

Like Joshua God doesn't want us to lie in self-pity, He wants us to get on with His work in His way.

Secondly God gave Joshua a word of Instruction – v. 1-3

In v. 1 God said to Joshua to take ALL the people of war, (soldiers over 20 yrs. of age) and go up and defeat Ai. We know from v. 3 that this was 30,000 mighty men.

What a contrast from last time when Joshua sent out 3,000 men. (Chapter 7; V. 4)

God wanted ALL the people to be involved. Joshua had experienced defeat by only taking about 10% of his army in the last battle.

(We know Joshua had at least 35,000 men in his army. See v. 12)

God was telling Joshua that He was now involved and that He required ALL his fighting men to be involved.

Application – When we attempt a project for God, EVERYBODY needs to be involved.

The people of God that is everybody at OIC that is born again and professes faith in Jesus, needs to be involved in the work of God at OIC.

If OIC is to go forward with God, then everybody needs to be involved.

If we want to solve our financial problem at OIC then EVERYBODY must be involved in "Tithing" and giving of their "Offerings"

If we want to solve our Sunday school problem, then everybody needs to be involved.

If you can't teach, or translate, or be a helper, then be a prayer person for the Sunday school.

I am going to be controversial here but it is very Biblical. God must come first before your employment. Your employer is not your God.

Matthew 22: v. 36-40

<sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is *the* first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup> And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

I know there is a strong obligation in Japan to work long hours for our employer.

However those hours are not always productive.

In England they have a Nissan Factory that produces cars. At first the Japanese managers wanted to extend the working hours to produce more cars.

However the English management convinced them that they could produce more cars by working an 8 hour day, and a 5 day week, than they could produce in Japan by working longer hours.

The English management were proved right and the Nissan factory in England is the most productive in the world.

When you are tired you make mistakes, and you are not necessarily productive.

If I worked for a Japanese Employer I would make a case for serving them faithfully by working shorter hours, and being more productive.

In the extra free time I would be able to rest and serve God.

This would put me in a position to prove God. Maybe God will give you the courage to at least try it?

God says in His word in 1 Samuel 2: v. 30 “...those who honour Me I will honour..”

So let us go back to Joshua.

#### Thirdly God gave Joshua a word of strategy – v. 2

God told Joshua to “lay an ambush” for the city of Ai. They were not told to march around the city like Jericho. God had other plans. God does not always work in the same way. God wants 100% dependency in Him and not in set formulas or programmes or ways of doing things.

God gave Joshua a wonderful strategy for his battle. This was God’s plan and the people needed to obey it 100%.

Faith is no substitute for hard work. Even though God had promised them victory, they still needed to do their very best and listen to God’s plan.

As we learnt a few weeks ago, we sometimes make our plans and ask God to bless them, but what we should do is to ask for God’s plan, follow that one, with all our might and we will be assured of success.

In 1 Corinthians 15: v. 58 we are exhorted to abound in the work of the Lord, because our labor is not in vain.

(1 Cor. 15: v. 58 in N.K.J.)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

In Eph. 6: v. 13 we are exhorted to take up the whole armour of God.

God’s plan is usually hard work. In this case it was no exception.

#### Fourthly God gave Joshua a promise – v. 1

God promised Joshua that he would be successful. In v. 1 God said “I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and the land.”

All that Joshua had to do was to trust God’s word and get on with the job, doing it God’s way.

When God really speaks a word into our hearts, even if it is humanly impossible, we can go through difficult things, knowing that in the end God will be faithful to what He has promised.

Our job is to get close enough to God in order to hear His “Still small voice” through His word, the Bible.

God still speaks today, like he spoke to Joshua. There are still battles to fight in our own spiritual lives and there are still things that God wants to do in and through us.

Fifthly God spoke to Joshua about a reward. – v. 2.

There would be a reward this time after the battle. God was going to give all the livestock and everything that was useful for them to have.

Achan could not wait for God’s will and timing for his reward. The people that did obey and wait were now promised a reward.

Sometimes if we would wait a little longer, we would see the hand of God, guiding and directing us in the right way.

I remember an incident that happened about 12 years ago. If I had only waited a few more weeks, I would have heard of God’s plan for the next step in my ministry.

Perhaps I could have avoided a very difficult time.

Leaving a Church as a Pastor to be a director of a missionary society seemed right at the time, but I had to repent of that decision and paid the price of a burn out experience.

However God was sovereign in my life, and eventually I moved out of London to Pastor a Church in my home town for 10 years.

Please don’t learn the hard way by stepping out of God’s will, wait for Him to speak to your heart directly, wait for Him to open doors that are right for you.

God will reward you if you wait for Him to direct you. As you read God’s word He will speak to you.

We now move from the encouragement that God gave to Joshua to the Battle that Joshua was going to fight.

## 2. Joshua’s delivery of the battle instructions – v. 3-29.

In v. 3-9 we have Joshua giving out his instructions for the battle of Ai and then the obedience of the 30,000 fighting men to Joshua’s instructions.

Joshua told his men that this battle was going to be a secret ambush.

In v. 3 Joshua told his 30,000 men to go by night and lie in wait behind the city.

(Joshua 8: v. 5-9)

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. <sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> 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.

Note in v. 9 note that Joshua lodged among his soldiers. He was there both encouraging and challenging his soldiers.

In v. 10 we are told that Joshua rose early in the morning and he took about 5,000 men with him to confront the people of Ai. This was a trick.

The people of Ai were now the ones to have self confidence in their army to defeat Israel like last time.

The King of Ai took ALL his people out to fight and left the city unattended. This was a bad move. As a result the 30,000 men poured into the city, took all the best things out of it and burnt the city.

When the men of Ai saw their city on fire, fear came upon them. Then they discovered that they were trapped with 5,000 men in front of them and 30,000 behind them.

The people of Ai lost the battle because God was in charge and His people obeyed all the instructions that God gave them.

God secured his judgement upon an evil society.

He will do that in our world society one day. More Christians are being killed today for their faith than in any other time in history and it is worldwide. Where Christian are not killed or persecuted there are ridiculed or abused. This is happening in the U.K and in the U.S.A.

(Revelation 6: v. 10)

<sup>10</sup> And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

God is going to bring judgement one day. The second coming of Jesus is not far away.

Application

The difference between defeat and victory is all about obedience to the word of God.

It is also about doing the best you can in the situation that you find yourself in.

When we give up our lives fully to the Lord Jesus, He is able to use our failures and turn them around to glorify Him as He allows us a second chance, and a 3<sup>rd</sup> and a 4<sup>th</sup> and so on.

The British preacher F.W. Robertson said this;

"Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps. (Mistakes) Poor mediocrity may secure that; but he is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes; organize victories out of mistakes.

Henry Ford, who founded the Ford Motor Company in the U.S. defined a mistake as an opportunity to begin again more intelligently. Joshua certainly did that and we can do that too in our Christian lives. We learn from our mistakes and intelligently follow God's word.

### 3. The Renewal of the Covenant – v. 30 -35.

To understand v. 30-35 we need to go back further into the Old Testament. Turn with me to Deuteronomy 11: v. 26-32.

<sup>26</sup> “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: <sup>27</sup> the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; <sup>28</sup> and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Are they not on the other side of the Jordan, toward the setting sun, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinth trees of Moreh? <sup>31</sup> For you will cross over the Jordan and go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and you will possess it and dwell in it. <sup>32</sup> And you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.

Now move forward to Deut. 27: v. 1-8.

Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: “Keep all the commandments which I command you today. <sup>2</sup> And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. <sup>3</sup> You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’<sup>[a]</sup> just as the LORD God of your fathers promised you. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. <sup>7</sup> You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. <sup>8</sup> And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law.”

Moses was given the instructions on what should be done when God’s people reached the Promised Land.

Joshua was now carrying out those instructions.

Joshua led the people of Israel about 50 kilometers to Shechem. This lies in a valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Please notice the significance of the place.

Let us turn to Genesis 12: v. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land. <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

The very place that God had promised Abraham about the future land of his people was the very place where God led His people to hear the Law and the blessings and curses.

Our writer wants us to recognize the significance of the place to point us to the faithfulness of God. It was his way of saying that time does not invalidate God’s promises. This is encouraging for us too. Maybe we are waiting for God to fulfill His promises to us.

My wife Wendy was promised by God in March 1992 that one day we would come back to Japan. This was a few weeks before we left Japan to return home with our 4 children. It took 23 years for God to fulfill His promise to Wendy. BUT He did fulfill that promise. God is faithful to His promises.

Verse 30 tells us that Joshua built an altar to the Lord on Mount Ebal.

The altar had to be of whole stones over which no man had wielded an iron tool. The stones had to be uncut.

There were two offerings, first the burnt offering and the Peace offering.

The burnt offering was totally consumed on the altar, this signifying total surrender. The Peace offering was not totally consumed. Part of the offering was eaten by those who brought the offering. This was to signify that they had fellowship and communion with God.

In v. 32 we are told that Moses then wrote on the stones a copy of God's Law. This is the 10 Commandments.

Then after this Joshua read out all the blessings and curses.

This was done in a dramatic way on the top of two mountains. Half of the Elders and officers were on Mt. Ebal and the other half on Mt. Gerizim.

These two mountains almost touch each other with a green valley 450 meters between them. ( This was Shechem ) A natural Amphitheatre is formed. It could hold a large number of people. You can go there today if you visit Israel. If you were in the middle of these mountains you could hear both the blessings and curses.

On one mountain the Blessings were read out and on the other mountain the curses were read out. We find these blessings and curses in Deuteronomy Chapter 28.

I just want to read out the conditions of the blessings and the curses.

Read Deut. 28: v. 1-2 and v. 15.

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup> And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:

<sup>15</sup> "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

God was very clear in His instructions to His people as they entered the land where He wanted them to live.

Joshua fulfilled all that God instructed to Moses and ALL of the people of Israel heard the words of Joshua, including the women and children.

### What can we learn from this section and apply to our lives today?

There are two main things that we can learn from this passage for ourselves.

1. We can learn from the two offerings that God required, the burn offering and the Peace offering.

Firstly the altar was not to be man- made. Joshua was obeying Exodus 20: v. 25. No human work was to be associated with the sacrifice.

The burnt offerings according to Lev. 1: v 3 were to be a male without blemish. This pointed to the future sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a male without sin.

He gave His life totally for us to save us from the consequences of our sin. Jesus held back nothing, He gave everything for us.

Likewise He expects that we should give our whole lives unreservedly for Him as a "Living Sacrifice"



(Quote Romans 12: v. 1-2)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. <sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Have you done this is your life yet?

The Peace offering was shared, with those who brought it and with God. This signified that we could have fellowship with God and rejoice before Him.

There is only peace with God, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

## 2. The necessity of the word of God in our lives.

Joshua not only read out the word of God but he also wrote down the word of God. He read it in a way that the people could understand, even the children.

The word of God needs to be central in our own lives and in the life of our corporate worship.

The correct translation, and understanding of the word of God and its application to our lives, will keep us following in God's way.

Many people write books that in some small deviate from God's word. We must not be persuaded by man's ideas of the word of God, but we must be persuaded by God's word.

Joshua didn't change God's word, he declared God's word.

God is not interested in what we think about His word, He wants us to believe it all by FAITH, including 6 literal 24 hours in creation, and apply it to our life.

May God help us to remain true to His word.