

Victory And Rededication

Joshua 8:1-35

Introduction

The Book of Joshua chronicles the children of Israel's crossing the Jordan (chapters 1-5); conquering their enemies (chapters 6-12) and claiming their inheritance (chapters 13-24). No wonder it has been called God's Book for victorious living. But sometimes the Christian experiences set backs—defeats. How do we deal with discouragement—doubt—defeat? We all experience what some have called the joy of victory and the agony of defeat! We overcome—and then we are overcome. We walk carefully and then slip catastrophically. We hit the target and miss the mark. We find victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. We return to His love and His care. We know His presence and power are available to us. Israel experienced a great victory at Jericho and resounding defeat at Ai. In the land the children would have to listen, obey, march and fight the battle. Not absent the Lord—but with God's instructions—blessings and power.

The Lord dealt with Israel's sin—and now the nation was sanctified (7:13)—sin judged—the people sanctified—now God could once again lead His people forward in victory.

The Lord will give Joshua a new plan to defeat Ai (vv.1-2). The Lord will instruct Joshua to set an ambush by placing troops behind the city. Then in a series of brilliant tactics Joshua will execute God's plans to capture the city (vv.3-29). This includes setting the ambush (vv.3-9;12); staging the attack (vv.10-11, 13-14); feigning or pretending to retreat (vv.15-17); signally the men to ambush (vv.18-20) and then capturing the city (vv.21-29).

The Lord would even use their failure as an advantage in the present battle against the people of Ai. The people of Ai were confident they could defeat Israel again.

Receive Encouragement From The Lord (vv.1-2)

Joshua 8:1-35 (NKJV) 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."

The reason the Lord can say to Joshua—"Do not be afraid or dismayed" is because God's favor has been restored. God did not forsake His people. These were the same words Moses had spoken at Kadesh-Barnea—when he sent the 12 spies. These were also the same words Moses gave to Joshua when he entrusted the leadership of the nation to him (Deut. 31:8); and again the same words from the Lord after the death of Moses (Joshua 1:9).

The Lord was ready to lead—if Joshua was ready to listen! Israel suffered a devastating loss—for at least two reasons; Achan's sin—and underestimating the enemy.

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2And 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.”

The Lord wanted to turn Ai from the place of defeat to the place of victory!

Unlike Jericho—the Lord now gives permission to take the spoil and cattle for the people. “Had Achan waited but a few days, he would have had all the wealth he could have carried!” (see Wiersbe’s Outlines on the Old Testament p. 219).

Jericho was defeated by supernatural means. Ai would be defeated the old fashioned way—through hard work! By real battle.

Receive Victory By Doing Exactly What The Lord Commands (vv.3-13)

3So 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.

The plan was rather simple—send 30,000 troops to Bethel by night—and place another 5,000 troops between Bethel and Ai (v.12). Some suggest that the word—thousand—may be rendered chief—or officer—which may mean 30! brave soldiers hid near the city! They would then carry out a daring commando raid.

The Lord would use conventional war to subdue the enemy. We Christians should not be alarmed or amazed if God delivers by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit or if God uses the conventions of medicine or discipline. Jericho is taken one way. Ai another way.

4And 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.

5Then 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.

6For 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.

7Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand.

8And 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.”

9Joshua 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.

10Then 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.

11And 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.

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12So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

13And 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.

14Now 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.

15And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.

16So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city.

Imagine three—groups of soldiers—the first—30 brave commando soldiers hidden behind the city. Second—the main army—with Joshua—came up 15 miles from Gilgal early in the morning and then camped in plain view—on the north side of the city (Ai). Led by Joshua—these were to serve as a diversionary group—to lure the army of Ai out of the city. The third group—were to serve as an ambush unit of 5,000 men—positioned between Ai and Bethel to cut off reinforcements from Bethel to aid the men of Ai.

The plan worked perfectly—the King of Ai—took the bait—leaving the city unguarded.

Receive Victory By Engaging The Enemy (vv.14-29)

17There 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.

18Then 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.

19So 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.

20And 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.

21Now 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.

22Then 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.

23But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

24And 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.

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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.

This was to serve as the signal—holding the spear. Like Moses—when Joshua fought against Amalek (a type of sin—Exodus 17:8).

The destruction was so complete—archeologists still aren't certain of its location.

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.

The people of Israel—restored to favor—won a great victory! Aren't you glad? Sin was judged, the people sanctified—and they were able to know victory where before there was defeat.

God gives second chances. The Lord is ready to forgive us and restore us.

Receive Victory By Renewing Your Commitment and Covenant (vv.30-35)

After conquering Jericho and Ai—Joshua carries out Moses' parting instructions (see Deuteronomy 27:4-6).

Joshua now moves the army 30 miles to Shechem. There is a valley—which forms a natural amphitheater with great acoustics.

Once again this might seem premature or foolish. After winning such a great victory you would think they would continue to march on and conquer the surrounding peoples! But Israel—will embark on a spiritual pilgrimage—a retreat of sorts.

Scholars wondered what happened at Shechem. It was a fortified city. Did they surrender without a fight? We don't know.

Joshua will challenge the people to renew vows—covenants—to the Lord God Almighty. It will involve three significant ceremonies.

1. An altar of stones on Mount Ebal—sacrifices offered.
2. Stone pillars—whitewashed—with copies of the Law.
3. The Law was read to the people.

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30Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal,

The place would be called the Mount of curses. Joshua places the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali.

Joshua builds an altar to the Lord God of Israel—on the Mount of Curses! Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins! We see in this building of an altar a picture of sacrifice and blood. We see the sacrifice of Jesus. The Law condemns and slays—

Salvation is always by blood; “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). **The blood must be innocent—shed—applied. Salvation is always through a person—“But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9). And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9).**

Salvation is always by grace. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

When the curses were read out loud—one by one—the tribes on Mount Ebal would shout Amen! As the blessings were read—the tribes on Mount Gerizim would shout Amen!

31As 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.

32And 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.

33Then 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.

On Mount Gerizim (the place or the mount of blessing) Joshua places Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin.

34And 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.

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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.

The people affirmed the Law of the Lord was the Law of the Land!

Francis Shaeffer (Joshua and the Flow p. 121) “God was giving the people a huge object lesson; what happened to them in the land was going to depend, as it were, on whether they were living on Mt. Gerizim or Mt. Ebal. The people were to hear from Mt. Gerizim the blessings that would come to them if they kept God’s Law and from Mt. Ebal the curses which would fall upon them, if they did not”.

And so it was—the people’s response to the Word of God—determined their future. Obedience brought blessing—disobedience—judgment.

And has our nation done any better? Clearly the Law of the Lord—is not the Law of our land! Our country has no desire to enter into a covenant with the Lord. But the Bible—still tells us —“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Prov.14:34).

Woodrow Wilson in his last public address said, “The sum of the whole matter is this, that our civilization cannot survive materially unless it is redeemed spiritually”.

The survival of our country—may well depend on its willingness to be redeemed spiritually.

The people’s victory and possession of the land depended on their obedience to the Word of the Lord—the Word of God. It was more important for the nation to **hear the Word of God than to fight anymore battles!**

Over and over again we see Joshua bringing the people back to the Word of God (see 1:8; 24:26-27; 23:14).

Conclusion

The place where you have experienced miserable failure might be the place where God wants you to experience mighty victory! Victory begins when we are encouraged by the Lord—Don’t be afraid—don’t be discouraged. Sin has been judged. You have been sanctified. “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 (Psalm 37:23-24).

1. Be encouraged (v.1)
2. Believe God’s instructions—His Word (vv.1-2)
3. Be obedient —do exactly as He says (vv.3-13)

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4. Fight—the good fight—against the enemies of your soul and the enemies of God (vv. 14-29)
5. Rededicate—renew—restore—your commitments and covenants with the Lord (vv. 30-35)

Joshua teaches us so many important lessons about discipline and our Christian walk.

As long sin lasts conflict with it will be necessary.

In the battle—in our conflict the alternatives are always victory or defeat.

In this fight we have a Captain—the Lord of Hosts—Jesus Christ The Lord. If we follow Him in obedience and courage we will be more than conquerors.

In the battle there is no such thing as a slight evil—or little sin—and that we must deal with sin dramatically.

In this battle if we suffer set back or defeat—we can discover its reason through prayer to God and the reading of God's Word—**but it will take more than prayer to repair the damage. We must confess our sin and forsake our sin and trust Jesus.**

In the battle—the work of conquest and subjugation of our enemies—may not be sudden but gradual—and that success in one battle does not always insure victory in the next.

That divine help and human effort are not always mutually exclusive.