

JOSHUA

Lesson 12 - Chapter 8

As we continue our lesson in Joshua chapter 8, I'd like to begin by borrowing and paraphrasing the words of Trent C. Butler, one of the foremost Christian scholars and writers in our era on the subject of the Old Testament. Trent Butler is a former professor at Baptist Theological Seminary in Switzerland, and received his PhD. from Vanderbilt. I add that brief bio because I want to employ the thoughts of this acclaimed conservative, evangelical academic to help set the tone for our examination of the battle of Ai, the sin of Achan, and the great God-principles they demonstrate; meant for not only the ancient people of Israel, but also for the 21st century contemporary Judeo-Christian community.

In parallel with setting the foundation for this morning's study of Joshua, Professor Butler's profound thoughts also go right to the heart of expressing perhaps the primary goal of Torah Class: to demonstrate once and for all to modern Christians that the *entire* Bible is alive and well, and that to turn our backs on any part of it is to deny the divine and eternal nature of its contents and origin (and we do so at our own peril). It is my fervent hope and desire for us, together, to boldly and bravely turn back the clock on our beloved Church to recapture the spirit of the early Body of Messiah. To return to those heady decades immediately following our Savior's passion on the cross, to when those very first Believers met, worshipped and studied in spirit and truth, and put what they learned into practice in faith, purity and simplicity. It is my longing that we can somehow be released from the burden of weak and tired manmade doctrines that have been developed over the centuries; doctrines that have served to divide us into competing denominations and sects, and (equally as sad) designed to separate us from our elder brothers in the faith, the Jewish people. Instead let us take on the lighter yoke of God's Holy Scriptures and the immutable truths and rock-solid principles they command, all at the direction of our Messiah Yeshua.

Professor Butler says this: "Joshua chapters 7 and 8 play a key role in defining the identity of the people of God. Here the people of God return to the reality of life (after all the festivity of their miraculous victory at Jericho), learning now to deal with defeat (at Ai). They learn that even God's treasured people face the anger of God when they act in self-confidence, refusing to look to God for direction or giving Him glory for their victories. The lesson learned by the fathers (the Patriarchs) had no effect on the sons in the Promised Land; they had to learn those lessons all over again.

The people of God will not always travel giddy with joy after crossing through the Jordan on supernaturally dried ground, and marching around a doomed Jericho that stood no chance against them. Often God's people find themselves in utter defeat, falling before the Father with

pleas for mercy and renewal.

People of God do not only have problems relating to God, they often have problems relating to one another. They feel slighted by other groups who are also part of God's flock. Warfare among the members of the group (the tribes) can be the result.

Through the agonies of defeat by their enemies and battling among themselves Israel learned one major lesson. They learned what it meant to be the covenant people of God. Covenant meant more than simply accepting wonderful promises of the Lord to multiply the nation and extend her power into the Land of Canaan. It meant more than going through the ritual of circumcision and the celebration of the yearly festivals. It meant adopting the divinely ordered lifestyle. It meant making each decision of life in the light of divine leadership, not in the darkness of personal self-confidence or manmade rules.

It meant that God could, and indeed would, undo the elements of salvation history; but He did it when He chose to punish His people, not in response to when His people were afraid and so retreated from hardship and setback."

What powerful words this learned man, Trent Butler, came to realize and utter after years of Biblical study and maturation in his faith. I hope many of you were as struck by them as I was.

The battles of Jericho and Ai are but the essential **backdrop** to the MEANING of Joshua 7 and 8; in these verses Israel, and we, are taught the meaning of life as lived in the light of the divine presence. Only those who are the covenant people of God can EVER expect that divine presence in our lives, but they (and now we, Believers) had to learn that the divine presence was demanding as well as promising. They (and now we) had to learn how to react and respond to a punishing as well as a merciful God. They (and now we) had to learn that the divine presence of Yehoveh had greater value than material things that were temporary and fleeting.

But, thank you Yeshua, they (and now we) also had to learn that God's anger was not His last word. He was willing to wait for the people He loves (and who love Him) to seek Him once again; to lament and then confess to Him, and at last repent and agree with Him. THEN the wonderful message of redemption and peace with God would again flow and abound among the people of God.

Let's re-read the first few verses of Joshua 8.

RE-READ JOSHUA 8:1 – 8

How often in the Bible we read, "do not fear" or "do not be afraid" as a preamble to a message to Israel from the Lord. Fear is both learned and instinctive. Move a day old infant in a sudden falling motion and they react in terror even though they had never been dropped. Make a sudden loud noise that harms no one and I defy any baby, child, or elder not to be startled or frightened. At the same time, unless taught otherwise, children have little to no fear

of approaching strangers or even going off with them. They will even try to touch a shimmering hot flame, once. They had not yet learned to fear the evil of men or the dangers of fire.

Most young soldiers, untested, have little fear of battle. Oh they're nervous, not really knowing what to expect, but most young men can't wait to experience it and have a chance to prove themselves. They are certain that their youth, training, strength, passion and being on the side of right will give them victory and protection; they don't see themselves as mortal nor have they stood next to the stench of death.

It was like that for Israel as they entered Canaan. This was the 2nd generation of the Exodus. They had not experienced the degradation and servitude of the 1st generation who had lived in Egypt. They had not fled across the Sinai with Pharaoh's soldiers nipping at their heels as had their parents. This group knew only of victory. They had defeated the armies of the Trans-Jordan. They experienced a miraculous crossing over the Jordan River, not even getting their toes wet. They knew only of making a procession around the dangerous fortress of Jericho, and then watching wide-eyed as the city walls fell without even shooting a single arrow in anger. They saw Joshua as their invincible general, with his brilliant battle strategies, leading an enormous Israelite army and easily defeating their outclassed Canaanite foes.

But then it happened: Achan had secretly misappropriated some of God's holy property from Jericho, Israel became arrogant and self-confident over their resounding victories, and the Lord's anger burned at Israel for these sins. The consequence was that the army of Israel was stung by defeat outside the walls of Ai. NOW they knew fear.

After self-examination, punishment of the guilty party (Achan) thereby satisfying God's justice, communal confession and national re-consecration and thus restoration, the Lord ordered Joshua to again attack Ai. Naturally the formerly fearless troops and their families were afraid because of what had happened to them just days earlier; so the Lord prefaced His command to again go to war against Ai by telling the people NOT to despair (not to fear) because, like Jericho, the LORD had already given Ai over them. All they had to do was to be obedient, grateful, and do as instructed.

In fact in verse 2 the Lord is even going to allow the soldiers to take the war booty of Ai for themselves; the Lord has decided NOT to impose the ban upon the livestock and possessions of this enemy. That is God has determined that He will NOT declare the possessions and animals belonging to the residents of Ai as His holy property. Why? Although we're not told, I believe it revolves around the ending portion of last week's lesson that spoke of the principle and pattern of firstfruits. You should refer to that lesson if you want a review or more extensive explanation; but in brief the idea is that since Jericho was the first of Canaan to be taken (the firstfruits of the cities of Canaan) the Lord was entitled to ALL of it. Ai being the 2nd city taken meant that the people of Israel could share in the spoils. We'll see this principle memorialized in the requirement that all new vineyards or groves planted in Canaan after Israel's arrival were set apart for the Lord until the 5th season. The first 3 seasons were a time of growth and maturation of the plants and trees, and no picking of fruit was permitted. The 4th season was the first time the trees were ready to bear a mature crop, but the entire crop was to be devoted and set aside, given to the Lord (the people got none of it). The 5th season (the 2nd season of

an edible crop) the people could partake of it (getting the majority of the crop for food) although of course the Lord got His portion first.

Thus the disposition of the spoils of Ai, the 2nd Canaanite city conquered, operated under less stringent rules for what the people could or could not take for their own as opposed to the total ban placed on the first city, Jericho, the firstfruits.

Israel was camped in Gilgal, which is about 12 miles or so from Ai. Not taking any chances this time, Joshua selected 30,000 men that he considered his best troops. They went out in the night so as to go undetected. Night raids in this era were very rare; and when it did happen, to a fault it was because the attacking force was smaller than the target. This is a strategy that we'll see Israel employ successfully a number of times because it was so unexpected.

The strategy was for the battle to be waged as an ambush. The long and short of it is that the 30,000 men will be divided into two groups. One group (a smaller group) will hide and remain unknown until the proper moment. Another and larger group will feign a more typical siege warfare style of frontal attack upon the gates of the city of Ai. When the Canaanite troops on the walls of Ai see this frontal attack, they will respond. Seeing this the Israeli troops will turn and run, and then the army of Ai will come out from their barricaded city and chase Israel. Once they are outside of their stiff defensive position the Canaanites are vulnerable. Joshua gives the signal and the smaller group of Israel troops will come out of hiding, race into the emptied city of Ai and take it. Then Israel is to burn it.

Joshua is using the defeat from a few days earlier to his advantage. He surmises that the army of Ai will expect Israel to do what it did before, turn tail and run when the battle begins. Setting the city on fire does three things: first it stops the men of Ai from chasing after Joshua so that they can quickly return to their city and try to save it. Second the smoke tells Joshua that his men have taken Ai. Third this is the way that the Lord gets His portion; remember, the Lord has declared that the structures of Ai and the people of Ai are His ban (the peoples livestock and possessions go to Israel's troops). They are devoted to God therefore they must be destroyed and, generally speaking, burned up with fire like a sacrifice on an altar.

RE-READ JOSHUA 8:9 – 17

These verses go to great length to show us that all which God said to do, Joshua and Israel did. This is as opposed to the first attempt at taking Ai where Joshua and the army relied on their own ideas and own strength. Let us also not forget that while the earlier attempt did indeed use a somewhat flawed strategy of using barely enough men to get the job done, the real reason for the failure was not the strategy but the condition of Israel. Israel was in a state of sin because of what Achan had done; therefore the Lord turned His face from Israel with a catastrophic result. **Major lesson alert!** Sometimes when we seem to be failing and running in quicksand, it may not be the plan, it may be our relationship with the Lord that is flawed. It may be that we are striking out on our own, taking the credit for earlier victories instead of giving it to God, or even operating under the burden of sin that's the problem. These things must be remedied FIRST and then it is time to go ahead with plans.

It is in verse 9 that we get a clue as to the actual location of Ai; it is near Beit-el (Bethel in the more typical English transliteration). Let me comment that scholars do not agree upon the exact location of Ai. And part of the problem is that the location of Beit-el is also controversial. The general area is accepted, but there are several possible sites that could be the correct one. Further, as is the crux of archeology, it's not that ruins that fit the Biblical descriptions of Ai and Beit-el haven't been found (they have) but the time frame of their inhabitation doesn't fit according to the dating system used today. In fact this issue of dating is at the heart of what has caused many archeologists and so-called Bible investigators to declare that many of the places and events described in the Bible are fairy tales. But it is also a fact that each year some new discovery is made that exactly corresponds to a Biblical event and so another Scriptural narrative that had been accused of being mere legend is proved. There is a great deal of discovery happening as we speak in the City of David (the original Jerusalem) that lies a few hundred yards down the hill from the Temple Mount. Not only has the original, enormous, Pool of Siloam just been found, but a large palace structure has also been unearthed that exactly corresponds to the time of King David. These finds, of course, don't deter some academics from continuing to insist that much of the Bible is just a series of tales with made up places and people.

Ai is most often identified today with a ruin called el-Tel. Beit-el is thought to be at the place that is today called Beitin. However it may be that Beit-el is not properly located, thus it's sister city of Ai would also have to be moved. Anyway, it's an open question and I really have no opinion other than if these are NOT the right places, they are certainly very nearby.

Let me also remind you that Ai is Hebrew for ruin. So some archeologists argue that what was really attacked was called Beit-el and later it came to be called by the name "ruin", Ai. In fact a walled and fortified city from the 13th century BC has been found at what is thought to be Beit-el, and this lends credence to this possibility. Don't let this throw you. Over time cities were renamed. Over time cities were destroyed, and then rebuilt very short distances away and then given the same name. Over time we'll find multiple cities and places given exactly the same name, especially because more often than not it was not an attempt to develop a name for a place, it was simply a description of the place that was being spoken (such as Ai, ruin). So it is a complex matter and we don't need to get upset if some scientist casts doubt on the proper identification of an ancient place. Only occasionally are ancient places ever proven to be what tradition says they are using the scientific method. After all, they didn't hang up signs on the walls of their cities saying, "Welcome to Bethel".

We begin to get some details about the attack some of which we won't go into (such as compass directions). We do find out, though, that Joshua put 5,000 men into hiding for the ambush, leaving 25,000 to make a show of it as they openly approached the city gates (and then fleeing) in hopes of drawing the fighting men of Ai out into the open and thus vacating the city.

In verse 17 we get another reference to this relationship between Ai and Beit-el that puts a lot of doubt as to the theory of some that they were the same place, just two different names. This passage indicates that they were two separate cities and they had a close alliance and fought together as one army. This was very usual and normal for that day just as it is now for a group

of nations to form a military alliance and pledge to fight together if one is attacked. What then puts the possibility that they were actually one place is that BOTH cities were said to have completely vacated with the implication that both were taken by Israel. We may never know. By the way: saying all the people left the city does NOT mean the civilians; it is referring to the fighting men.

RE-READ JOSHUA 8:18 – 29

Verse 18 makes it clear just who was running this battle; it was the Lord. Although in this age of Islamic Jihad especially, it is hard for us as peaceful Believers to see the Father as a Divine Warrior in fact that is exactly how He is portrayed. I have many friends who simply cringe at this concept and some who use the more typical contemporary evangelical approach that is to explain that while the God of the Old Testament was indeed a blood thirsty, severe, punishing God, that the God of the New Testament (Jesus) is meek, mild, loving, and peaceful. I have little doubt that when the Church of the 2nd century became gentile dominated, it became all the more difficult for the believing people of that day (who did not share in Israel's long history) to reconcile the God of the Torah with the divine Yeshua of Nazareth, even though the Old Testament was STILL all that existed in the way of Holy writings (it would be another century or so until ANY of what we now call the New Testament was determined by the gentile church council to be divinely inspired).

I have one dear friend in particular, a very articulate intelligent gentle soul who avoids the subject at all cost so bothered is he about it. I don't want a show of hands, but I suspect many in this room (and many who are listening on the Internet from all around the globe) struggle with this aspect of our faith. Thus we have one of the primary reasons that the Christian Church is so quick and adamant to declare that the Old Testament is dead and gone, nailed to the cross, that the nature of God has fundamentally changed, and the newest and best example of Yehoveh is His Son, Yeshua. Well let me throw a little cold water on that concept. We have seen time and again that Jesus personally declared the Torah to still be alive and well and that until that day in the future when the current heavens and earth were melted back into their elements and recreated to form new ones, that not one iota of its principles would be changed or abolished.

But let me throw one other little reminder at you; our Messiah may have gone out like a lamb but he's returning as a lion. This persona of Yeshua as a Messiah who wouldn't harm a fly, and thus indicates a new type of God who only has one side (mercy and love), is certainly not the one depicted in Revelation, is it? When Jesus returns He will come back as (guess what?) the Divine Warrior of the Old Testament! He will lead the Saints in a literal Holy War to end all wars; a war called by the Church the Battle of Armageddon. He will be ruthless in eradicating evil; He will give no quarter and accept no excuses; He will personally slay millions upon millions of God's enemy and lead His army of Believers to do the same. All the elements of the conquest of Canaan will be present once again on this planet, but on an unimaginable scale. Only instead of the Divine Warrior giving His orders from His heavenly throne (or perhaps from above the Mercy Seat atop the Ark of the Covenant) through a human general (Joshua), the Divine Warrior will be present in person in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. We are

told that the blood He will cause to be spilled by His own hand will run the length and breadth of the Jezreel Valley, as high as the bridle of a horse.

Our Messiah Yeshua is indeed a perfect picture of the Father; if you have seen Yeshua you have seen the Father, He said. Kind and severe. Demanding and promising. Merciful and avenging. Prince of peace and Commander of the Lord's army. The Divine sacrificial lamb and the Divine Warrior lion. And folks I'm talking only about the NEW Testament!

Verse 18 reminds us of a very similar scene when Moses was still living; Joshua is told by Yehoveh to point his spear (or possibly, sword) towards Ai as authority and signal for the destruction of Ai to begin.

Recall Moses using his staff to command the Nile to turn to blood, to itself turn into a serpent, to order the parting of the Red Sea. Recall how Moses sat on a hilltop overlooking the Israelites as they battled the Amalekites, holding his staff over his head with the help of two assistants.

Moses' staff was the symbol of God's authority in Moses' hand. That staff was also used to set things of God into motion; God's saving acts and His wrathful acts. Moses was like a Messiah, a Savior, for Israel. Thus he was a shepherd and of course used a shepherd's staff as the symbol of his rule. Joshua on the other hand was a military leader; he was a general, a fierce warrior. Therefore it was appropriate that the symbol of divine authority placed in Joshua's hand was a spear or a sword (a symbol of war). Do you see that? Again we have a perfect typology not only of Yehoveh the Father, but also of Yeshua the Messiah. Their nature is both the Shepherd and the Warrior; not one or the other. In His first coming Christ ruled like a shepherd leader, Moses. In His second coming He will rule like a Warrior King, Joshua, and Revelation says that Messiah's rod of authority (his staff, the symbol of his authority) will be a rod of iron. Unbending, unyielding, hard and not dissuaded.

When Joshua raised his spear at God's order, instantly the men laying in ambush raced towards the city, through its gates, and captured it. They set Ai on fire and as the smoke billowed skyward the men of Ai saw it and knew they had been had. They were caught as in a vise. Joshua wheeled his army around 180 degrees and charged the now distraught Canaanites. They could not flee back to the safety of Ai and Beit-el, and so the army of God set about slaughtering every last enemy soldier. But, as customary, they captured the King of Ai and brought him before Joshua.

After the Israeli troops had finished with the enemy soldiers they returned to Ai and killed every last human inhabitant, male and female. These human inhabitants were ban, devoted to God, holy property, and thus their destruction.

Verse 27 tells us that the only things that escaped destruction were the livestock and the valuable possessions of the former residents of Ai; these were divided among the soldiers who participated in the battle.

Verse 29 says that the King of Ai was hanged on a tree until sunset when he was taken down.

He wasn't given the honor of burial; he was simply discarded at the gates of his ruined city, and stones piled upon his carcass as a reminder of his demise.

Don't get a mental picture of a noose around the King's neck or of crucifixion. Rather "hung on a pole" means to impale. He was killed and then his body impaled on a pole for all who passed by to see; the worst sort of ending for royalty. This was custom for that day, as gruesome as it was.

RE-READ JOSHUA 8:30 – 35

These final verses pose all kinds of problems on the one hand, and on the other they give us principles that we would do well to pay close attention.

Even the ancient Hebrew sages agree that this episode of Ai, then Mts. Ebal and Gerizim, are not in chronological order. For one thing, Israel was now based in Gilgal and would be for some time (Gilgal was around 12 miles or so north of Ai and Beit-el). Ebal and Gerizim were well to north, at Shechem. It is unimaginable that Israel would have broke camp at Gilgal, went 3 days journey north, had this ceremony then turned around and ventured back to Gilgal. So exactly when this occurred is up for grabs.

This narrative is the fulfillment of Moses' instructions to Israel in Deuteronomy 27. Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim are twin hills with Ebal to the north of Gerizim. On top of Mt. Ebal Joshua had an altar built, following the instructions that it was to be made of stones not shaped by iron tools. I told you some weeks back that without doubt some shaping of the stones DID occur, but not with a metal tool; rather flint knives would have been used.

The ancient Hebrew sages give us a good understanding of the symbolism of using stones untouched by iron for the altar and I find it quite profound for contained within this symbolism is the amazing irony that is our God; in His justice system the death of an innocent saves the life of the guilty. The purpose of an altar was to preserve life (human life) by means of atonement. The death of an animal provided the blood that would atone for the sins of men who deserved to have their lives terminated. So for the average person who averts their eyes and thoughts over the concept on an animal dying and be burned up, they see the altar as a place of death. Not so, it is a place of life.

Iron is usually symbolic of destruction. Iron is used for weapons. This it would be totally inappropriate for a tool of iron (a tool of destruction) to be used to form an altar of life.

Even more the altar is the place of attaining peace between the Father and mankind. It is not fitting that tools used for war would scar such a place. This exact symbolism is brought across to the well-known proverb that in the Day of the Lord weapons of war will be beaten into ploughshares. This is speaking of iron implements. And the notion is that iron that has been used for war and death will be reshaped into an iron implement used to bring forth life from the earth (crops, food) in peace.

So pay close attention in God's Word when it speaks of altars and iron, it has deeper meaning than meets the eye.

In addition to building an altar Joshua has some stone monuments built that has the Word of God inscribed upon them. Now there is wide disagreement over exactly what portion of the Torah was written on those stones. Some say it was only the 10 Commandments; others say it was all of what we call Deuteronomy; still others say it was a kind of summary of the 613 laws. No one seriously believes that all of Torah was written on these stone slabs.

When the place was readied, the altar built, the stone slabs completed, and Ark of the Covenant placed there and the priests and Levites in attendance, all Israel including those foreigners traveling with them stood before these two hills; half facing Ebal and the other half Gerizim. As instructed by Moses the Torah was read, all of it, including the blessings and the curses.

What was the point of these final verses of Joshua 8? It was to show that Joshua was indeed the archetypal Israelite monarch. He did what he was supposed to do, and ruled as he was supposed to rule. He followed the Torah and ruled from the Torah. He understood that the basis for his leadership was the Word of God and the power of God and that without it His leadership was weak if not bogus. It shows Joshua's great care to be obedient to the Lord, which is the proper response of a covenant people to the divine covenant the Lord has given them.

The last verse of this chapter points out something very important for Jews and gentile Christians to always remember: the Torah is for everyone. It is for the women as well as the men, it is for the children as it is for the adults, and it is as much for the foreigner, the ger, that sojourns with Israel as it is for the Hebrew. And it is for everyone to KNOW. Even though it is tradition among the Orthodox Jews that men and women do not study together, it is fully expected that the women study Torah as well (women studying with other women). Children begin studying Torah by the time they are 5 or 6, and they begin with the book of Leviticus (not the easiest book, is it?)

We could spend more time in Joshua 8 but we need to move on. So let me close with this thought: in this chapter Israel is taught the real meaning of the command to obey God. It means to live the divine life style that Torah teaches. But Israel also learns an even deeper lesson: if and when they're identity as the people of God is lost, there is a way back and it begins with self-examination and then confession of wrong doing. From there is repentance and then a reintroduction to the Word of God. The result is obedience on their part, and renewal and redemption on the Lord's part.

Have you walked away from the Lord? Do you have a spouse, or parents, or children who have fallen away and they are in such danger especially should their lives unexpectedly end? All is not lost, there is a way back but it is a path not of our design or making; for it is well defined path, God-ordained and written in the stones of Mt. Ebal. It is the path of self-examination, confession, repentance, internalizing the Word of God, and obedience. The result: renewal and redemption.

We'll start Joshua 9 next week.