

# CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## DHW BIBLE CLASS

### LESSON 8

### JOSHUA

### CHAPTER 8

**Joshua 8:35** – *“There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.”*

## INTRODUCTION

In chapter 6, the Israelites experienced the mountain-top victory of Jericho. In chapter 7, they experienced the valley-bottom defeat at Ai. The cause of the defeat was hidden sin in the midst of the children of Israel. Joshua learned the far-reaching consequences of hidden sin. He had become aware of the need for personal holiness among his people.

They were on a spiritual mission. Sin defeated them when the might of the people of Jericho were helpless against them. This was a most precious and crucial lesson Israel and Joshua must learn and learn fast. They were already in

enemy territory. There was no turning back. The enemies ahead of them were fierce and great. Sin must not enter into the camp of Israel again. Too many men have already died because of the sin of Achan. Ai was a smaller city compared to Jericho. Yet it was not in Jericho that Israel tasted defeat but in Ai.

The main thrust of chapter 8 is that defeat is only temporal. Victory is assured in the lives of every believer if only they would obey the LORD. If they have sinned, it is never too late to repent and return to the LORD. Once the fellowship with the LORD is restored through sanctification, the protection and favour of God over His people remains just as strong as before the sin.

Chapter 8, therefore, is a delightful chapter of sanctification and the LORD's mercy and grace.

The following is an outline of the chapter:

- (1) Victory Assured (8:1-2);
- (2) Strategy of Warfare (8:3-8);
- (3) Ai Captured (8:9-26);
- (4) Division of the Spoils (8:27-29);
- (5) An Altar Built unto the LORD (8:30-35).

## COMMENTARY

### Victory Assured (8:1-2)

In contrast to the preceding chapter, the opening statement of this chapter has these words: “And the

LORD said unto Joshua: Fear not, neither be thou dismayed.” It was a most reassuring word to Joshua being the leader and of course to all the children of Israel. The children of Israel had suffered a humiliating defeat at Ai. Thirty-six of their warriors were killed. The “hearts of the people melted and became as water” (7:5), and Joshua was distraught and despondent. The LORD had seen and heard the groaning of His children. He taught and showed them the way back to Him. Having dealt with the sin that stopped the flow of God’s blessing upon them, the children of Israel’s covenant relationship with God was restored.

Apart from reassuring Joshua, the LORD gave him very clear instructions on how to capture Ai: “Take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai” (verse 1). This was a far-cry from the three thousand men who were previously sent to conquer Ai. This time the LORD told Joshua to use all the men of war. Joshua had not sought the LORD’S guidance in the first instance. If he had, the LORD could have told him of the hidden sin among the people, and would have told him how to take Ai, which He now instructed Joshua.

Then the LORD assured Joshua that the conquest of Ai was a “done deal” – “see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his

people, and his city, and his land” (verse 1). Like what they did to Jericho, they were to do the same to Ai and her king. The LORD God was with Israel, so no one could defeat them. Once again, throughout Scriptures, the principle that God’s initiative in fulfilling His will through men’s cooperation is evidently clear.

### **Strategy of Warfare – 8:3-8**

The LORD gave Joshua the strategy on how to capture Ai—“lay thee an ambush for the city behind it” (verse 2b). Joshua sprang to action. He called up 30,000 of his brave and elite soldiers to ambush behind the city on the north side (verse 13). Observe that Joshua told his men “to go up” to the city. The city Ai was about 975 metres above sea-level, and about 24 kilometres from Gilgal. He sent them under cover of the night. On the other hand, Joshua would assign a second group of soldiers numbering 5,000 men to lie in ambush on the west side of the city. Joshua himself would lead the rest of his soldiers to confront the men of Ai.

The plan was to lure all the men of Ai to leave their city in pursuit of Joshua and his soldiers. Joshua would then signal the 30,000 Israelites, who were hiding in ambush, to attack, capture and burn the city. At that point of time, Joshua and his soldiers would turn around to fight against the men of Ai. The 5,000

Israelite soldiers lying in wait would then attack the men of Ai from behind, thus surrounding the men of Ai and they would later be joined by the 30,000.

### **Ai Captured – 8:9-26**

The plan was a military ingenuity. It had all the elements of danger, surprise, precaution and alertness. The battle was engaged. Joshua, who led the rest of the men of Israel, managed to draw the men of Ai to come out of their city in hot pursuit of the Israelites according to plan, and there was “not a man left in Ai.” At this juncture, the LORD instructed Joshua to hold and point his spear toward Ai. The raised spear symbolized the victory the LORD had promised Joshua and the children of Israel.

At the same time, it was the signal for the 30,000 soldiers to rise up to attack and sack the city of Ai. Then the other 5,000 rose up and surrounded the fighting men of Ai. The Israelites killed all the inhabitants of Ai. The king of Ai was taken alive at first, and later he was hanged on a tree. The public humiliation and hanging of the king portrayed the defeat of his people. All the men and women (including children) of Ai who were killed numbered 12,000 (verse 25). With this success, Israel now controlled the central part of the Land

Joshua’s success owed much to his complete dependence on God.

He had just experienced defeat against Ai. So, he was humble enough to repent and to trust God once again in His promises and His plan. The strategy against Jericho was for them to march around the walls of Jericho. In the strategy to take Ai, there was no marching around the walls of the city. This time the strategy to take Ai was through the normal operations of war. God did not limit Himself to any one method of working. God chose how He wanted to work, and He was infinitely creative.

### **Division of the Spoils – 8:27-29**

Another interesting thing the LORD said to Joshua was that the spoils of war would now be given to the people (verse 2). They could take the cattle and all the material things for their own reward. This was different from the command given in Jericho when all the gold, silver and every thing were consecrated to the LORD God. If only Achan had contained his greed and selfish desires, and obeyed God at Jericho, he would now have had all the things his heart desired in addition to God’s blessing and approval as well. But he took matters into his own hands, and stole from the LORD.

God knows the needs of His people. He would provide for them in the new Land in His time. There was still much Land to be conquered and this provision now would help to

sustain the nation for continued advances against the enemies.

### **An Altar Built unto the LORD – 8:30-35**

The next significant thing that Joshua did was to build an altar to the LORD God of Israel at Mount Ebal, which was about 50 kilometres north of Ai. It is about 950 metres above sea-level. Standing south of Mount Ebal is Mount Gerizim, which towers at 890 metres. The peaks of these two mountains are about 2.5 kilometres apart. As one stands at one place between the two mountains, a natural amphitheatre exists. On the top of these mountains, one can see not only the valley below, but also the surrounding regions. If one stands on either side of the mountains, one can hear everything when spoken in a loud voice.

Joshua brought all the children of Israel to this valley from Gilgal. When all Israel were gathered in the valley, he built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel. He did it in order to fulfil the requirement given by Moses (Deuteronomy 27:4-8)<sup>1</sup>. He built the

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 27:4 Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister. 5 And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. 6 Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God: 7 And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God. 8 And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly.

altar on Mount Ebal. The altar was erected from natural uncut stones. No human tools had been used to carve or shape them. The altar was a place of offering sacrifices to the LORD. God wanted the Israelites to understand that they could not approach God on a humanistic level. The Israelites were reminded that their approach to God must always be through the burnt-offering of an animal prescribed by God. It was not by keeping the Law or any other works of man for all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. And having built the altar, the priests, on behalf of the children of Israel, offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Now on the stones of the altar, Joshua commanded the inscription of a copy of the Law of Moses. This copy of the Law of Moses was probably the list of cursing and blessing recited from Mount Ebal and Gerezim (see Deu. 27 and 28). The Ark of covenant of the LORD was borne by the priests and the Levites in the valley. And all the children of Israel — their elders, officers and judges—stood before the Ark and the priests and Levites on the slopes of the two mountains. Six tribes stood on Mount Ebal, and six tribes stood on Mount Gerizim.<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 27:12 These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: 13 And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

does not include every single person but their tribal representative. Then Joshua “read all the words of the Law” (verse 34). He read the blessings according to the Law from Mount Gerizim, and the cursings according to the Law from Mount Ebal.

It was significant that the altar was built on Mount Ebal, the mountain of cursings, and not on Mount Gerizim, the mountain of blessings. From Mount Ebal, the cursing of the Law was proclaimed to warn the people of God the serious consequence of sin. If the people sinned by transgressing the Law of God, these cursings would befall them. This was an expressively powerful reminder to the people that they must not sin and remain in sin. When they sin, God had provided the way to return to Him by offering burnt-sacrifices on the altar. Then the giving of peace offerings would indicate the restoration of their fellowship with God, and the enjoyment of His presence and power.

Burnt offerings were for the atonement of sins and peace offerings were to show that they now have peace with God since their sins have been atoned for. These two offerings would show their acknowledgement that they were sinners in need of cleansing and it is only by the LORD’s strength and faithfulness that victory was assured. This would be an

expression of their working and living in harmony with God.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

The first comforting truth which we learn in this revelation is that when sin is dealt with in God’s prescribed way, and our relationship with God is restored, the flow of God’s blessing to us continues as before. When the children of Israel removed the sins that beset them, God reassured Joshua, “fear not, neither be thou dismayed” (verse 1). We need constantly to remind ourselves of the character of God. God is holy, and sin which He abhors, breaks the fellowship which we normally would enjoy with Him. But when we sin, we must remember to confess our sin and plead for the blood of Christ once again, and as God has promised, He will forgive us and enjoyment of His presence and power will be restored.

Many Christians have the mistaken idea that God should always directly and miraculously intervene in helping them to get out of dire situations. God will help His children but He does not necessarily help by performing miracles. This is evidenced by the experience of the Israelites in conquering Ai. The method God instructed Joshua to use in taking Ai is very different from that of taking Jericho. In the case of Ai, the method used was the normal military way. So,

we learn that God does not limit Himself to performing miracles all the time, but He has other creative ways of helping His children. The sooner we understand this truth, the better it is for us to do our part in situations which we would ask God to intervene.

Another important trait concerning our relationship with God is God's work must be done God's way. Man's way is fraught with problems and more often than not, it is also a sin and brings no honour to God. The desire for "instant gratification" is a distinctive feature of modern society where the ends justify the means. If we allow ourselves to be influenced by this desire, we will run ahead of God in our daily walk with Him. We will experience that God does not seem to provide what we want. We make our own arrangements. We need to trust God for He knows our needs. In His time, He will provide. God has given us the way to seek His way and help, through prayer. The Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples (Matthew 7:7): **Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.** The Apostle Paul experienced this truth and shared it with the Christians in Philippi (4:6): *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.* Pray to God. Tell Him precisely our desires, and in

the process of praying to God, He will teach us to ask aright.<sup>3</sup> His way and timing are perfect.

Moses taught the children of Israel very well; particularly for Joshua, whom he knew was God's choice to succeed him and lead Israel into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 27:2-8). Joshua led all Israel to the valley flanked by Mount Ebal on one side and Mount Gerizim on the other. Joshua learned from Moses that God's leaders are not what they are, just by virtue of their personality, or intellect, or confidence. They are leaders by virtue of what is given to them by God. There can only be authenticity in the leadership of a church insofar as the leaders declare God's Word after Him. The church belongs to God. It does not belong to any man or any group of men. And for the church to be a true church of Christ, it must proclaim and practise the Word of God. So, Joshua made all Israel to declare the Law of Moses; the blessings from Mount Gerizim, and the cursings from Mount Ebal. And if they ever sinned against God, they must confess and repent at the altar before God. Does your church declare the whole counsel of God and do it? This also applies individually to Christians. All of us should take stock

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<sup>3</sup> James 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts.

of our own lives. Find out what God is saying about our walk with Him on a daily basis. AMEN.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Joshua 8:1-13; 1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11.

**TUESDAY:** Joshua 8:13-22; Acts 27:21-35.

**WEDNESDAY:** Joshua 8:22-35; Romans 8:31-39.

**THURSDAY:** Joshua 8:1-30; Galatians 3:6-14.

**FRIDAY:** Joshua 8:1-35; Acts 20:27; Romans 4:1-3; Hebrews 9:22.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think that God bade Joshua to take all the people of war, and also set an ambush for the capture of so small a place? (cf. 8:3,

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2. What do verses 34, 35 teach us about our duty as Christians in relation to the Scriptures?

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3. What lessons can we learn from this chapter about overcoming our past failures and sin, and about receiving a "second chance" from God?

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4. If Joshua was assured "fighting a battle already won", how do we work out the same principle in our Christian living?

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5. What is the secret of victory for the Christian?

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6. Why did Joshua build an altar on Mount Ebal and not on Mount Gerizim?

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7. What impact would the reading of the law have on the children of Israel?

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8. What reminders can help keep us from sinning?

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