

Back on Track?
Joshua 8

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Joshua 8: Introduction

By the time chapter 8 is over we're breathing a sigh of relief. Israel is back on track. The Lord's anger is turned away. The cities of Ai and Bethel are defeated. The people gather to worship the Lord. Yes, everything looks good.

But is it?

As we will see in chapter 9, there's still a good bit of doing it their way rather than God's in Joshua and the people of Israel. That might seem harmless enough, since so much good is happening. But by the time we reach the end of the book of Joshua, a pattern will have been established of obeying God when it's convenient or desperate. And that pattern is being laid down right here in these early chapters.

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1 Back on Track

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. 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." Joshua 8.1, 2

Reflect.

1. If you were Joshua at the end of chapter 7, what would you be thinking?
2. We note a change of tactics for the siege of Ai. Why?

Think about it.

God's Word to Joshua is reminiscent of His instructions to him in chapter 1. Joshua must have breathed a huge sigh of relief.

As with the siege of Jericho, God gives specific instructions to Joshua as to how he is to proceed against the king and city of Ai. The tactic here is more purely military, including deception and an ambush. We might wonder about this change, but there's an important theological principle at work here. God can save His people by extraordinary, even miraculous means. And He can deliver them in ways more familiar and ordinary. Either way, it's God at work, bringing His people ever more deeply into His promises and Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God came to the world through the ministry of Christ and His Spirit, accompanied by many miraculous works. But it has been advancing in the world since then through the familiar and ordinary means of Christian witness – lives and words. Either way, as under Joshua's leadership, so now under Jesus' reign, it's all the work of God, and we are "all the people of war" whom God uses for His glory.

Meditate and discuss.

1. What does it say about God that He went back to Joshua, rather than to someone else, after the disaster at Ai and Achor? How should we be encouraged by this?
2. Why do you suppose God allowed Israel to take the spoil and cattle of Ai for themselves, rather than have it all brought into the treasury of the Lord, as at Jericho? Why was it important for Israel to do this at Jericho, but not at Ai?
3. What is suggested in the siege of Ai about how God will enable His people to subdue the rest of the land of Canaan? Are we likely to see more walls falling down by trumpets and shouting? Why or why not?

"We must consider whether every attempt at deception ought to be reckoned as a lie and, if so, whether a lie can be just, when someone who should be deceived is deceived. And if not even this kind of a lie is found to be just, we must still relate what transpired with the ambush to the truth with some other meaning." Augustine (354-430 AD)

Today, Lord, I have a good many familiar and ordinary works ahead of me, but because I know You are in them, I...

Pray Psalm 25.1-15.

Pray that God would show you His ways for your path today, and call on Him to give you the strength, in all your familiar and ordinary work, to lay hold on His promises and advance His Kingdom.

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Psalm 25.1-15 (*Festal Song: Revive Thy Work, O Lord*)

I lift my soul to You; O Lord, in You I trust.

Let me not come to shame, nor let my foes o'er me exult.

All they who wait on You shall never come to shame;
Yet they to shame shall come who stand against Your holy Name.

Make me to know Your ways, teach me Your paths, O Lord!
My Savior, all day long I wait and seek You in Your Word.

Remember mercy, Lord, and steadfast love to me!
And all my sins before You let them not remembered be!

My sins have been of old, Your love is new each day;
According to Your goodness, Lord, regard my sinful way.

Upright and good are You, You lead us in Your way;
The humble You instruct in truth and guide him day by day.

The paths of God are all of love and faithfulness;
All they who keep His covenant the Lord will surely bless.

For Your sake, Lord, forgive. All they who fear You, Lord,
Shall know Your blessings day by day and follow in Your Word.

Your friends are they who fear and seek Your holy face;
Your covenant with them You share and save them by Your grace.

2 Assault Plan

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. 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. 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. 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. Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. 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." Joshua 8.3-8

Reflect.

1. What is Joshua counting on by the use of this strategy?
2. We note that God's instruction to Joshua was not very specific: "Lay an ambush for the city behind it" (v. 2). It was up to Joshua to work out the details of that mandate. Can you see a principle of Biblical interpretation in this?

Think about it.

God's instruction was not very specific. He was counting on Joshua, filled with the Spirit, to take His Word and apply it to the specific situation. Doubtless, as he recalled the report of the spies (7.2, 3) and the previous failed assault on Ai, Joshua made his plans accordingly. And this time he would make sure "all the people of war" were involved (vv. 1, 3).

We can see Joshua maturing here, both as a careful thinker and planner and a skilled military leader. He counted on what he knew of the enemy to design an effective tactic. Joshua knew overconfidence when he saw it. This time, however, he would make it work for him rather than against him.

Joshua equates his instructions ("I have commanded you") with the Word of God ("the commandment of the LORD" – v. 8). He has taken into consideration God's previous revelation about destroying Jericho (v. 2), together with His instruction to employ an ambush (v. 2), and he has developed a strategy specific for the situation based on what God has revealed in His Word.

This is what preachers are supposed to do. They must be steeped in all the revelation of God and speak His Word to His people with such scope and clarity that they can apply it effectively to the specific situations they face each day. The great confessions of the Reformed tradition hold that the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God when that preaching is faithful to Scripture and faithfully applied to the lives of God's people. This is how Joshua regarded his instructions for the second assault of Ai.

Meditate and discuss.

1. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 2.12, 13. Why is it so important to be always increasing in our knowledge of Scripture and the "spiritual things" it contains?
2. Joshua knew his enemy. He knew what the people of Ai would do once Israel began to flee before them. Is it important that we know how the enemy of our soul likes to work? Explain.
3. Here is now the second time in the book of Joshua that God has commended the use of deception in accomplishing His purposes. Should we take this as a *general* or a *qualified* commendation of deception?

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Explain.

“It was of great consequence to Joshua, as well as the people, to inspire new courage, that they might prepare with confidence to assault the city of Ai, from which they had lately been repulsed with loss and greater disgrace. God, therefore, to inspire them with intrepidity on this expedition, promises that he will give them the city. With the same view he enjoins them to fight by stratagem more than open war, to entice the enemy out, and to select a secret place for an ambuscade which might take them by surprise.”
John Calvin, Commentary on Joshua (1509-1564)

Guide me into all truth, O Lord, and help me to obey Your Word in all I do, including...

Pray Psalm 33.1-12.

Pray for our nation, that God will put in place leaders – in homes, churches, businesses, schools, and government – who look to His plans, rely on His counsel, and seek His blessing for the people they serve.

Psalm 33.1-12 (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*)

Sing with rejoicing in the Lord, for praise becomes His righteous ones!
With harps and songs raise grateful words, and let new songs of praise be sung!

Joyfully shout! His Word is true; He does His work in faithfulness.
His love prevails the whole world through; the Lord loves truth and righteousness.

God spoke and heaven came to be, and all its hosts His Spirit wrought.
He heaps the waters of the sea; the deeps their dwelling place are taught.

Let all below now fear the Lord; let all in awe of Him abide!
The worlds exist by Jesus' Word; let all on earth in Him confide.

He nullifies the nations' plans; forever stands His sov'reign Word.
All they are blessed who with Him stand – the chosen people of the Lord.

3 Baited

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. 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. 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. So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. 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. 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. And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. 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. 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. Joshua 8.9-17

Reflect.

1. Joshua took the simple instruction of the Lord (8.2) and turned it into a fairly elaborate set of tactics. Was he right in so doing?
2. Would you say that you plan your daily work for the Lord with as much care as Joshua? Why or why not?

Think about it.

First, 30,000 armed men are placed in ambush between Ai and Bethel, to the west. I think these must be the “rear guard” (v. 13) and the “others” mentioned in verse 22. They would have been for protection against the people of Bethel joining the fray and gaining an advantage on Joshua’s flank.

Next, all Israel is mustered and sets up camp to the north of Ai, across a valley. There they were in plain sight to the king and people of Ai.

From that group, another 5,000 are dispatched to the west of Ai, with the special instructions of entering and destroying the city on Joshua’s signal.

During the night, Joshua and the bulk of the people of Israel slipped into the valley between their camp and Ai. All is in readiness, and in the morning, the king and people of Ai, brimming with confidence, assemble before their city in battle array.

The bait was set, and then Joshua sprung the trap. Feinting retreat before the assembled forces of Ai (v. 15), Joshua and “all Israel” fled eastward, back toward the wilderness. The valley through which they retreated would have been a much more favorable terrain for Joshua’s plan than if Israel had fled northward, to their camp.

Seeing Israel in retreat – again – the people of Ai could not help themselves. They rushed out of the city, together with the people of Bethel, and plunged headlong into the trap Joshua had set for them. Their cities lay open and unattended as they exuberantly pursued the fleeing Israelites.

Meditate and discuss.

1. How would you assess Joshua’s battle plan? Was he faithful to the Word of the Lord? Did he make the best use of his resources, and of the terrain? Is there any guidance for us here in making plans to work our

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Personal Mission Fields (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17)?

2. Joshua had revealed the plan to the people, so everyone knew they weren't really retreating. How do you suppose the people of Israel felt as they saw Joshua's plan falling into place? Should we rejoice in the Lord when our plans work out as we intended? Explain.
3. We note again the phrase "Joshua and all Israel" (v. 15). Claiming God's promises is a community effort, and requires all the resources we can muster. How should knowing this guide church leaders in their work of making disciples?

"The question here asked by some, as to whether it is lawful to overcome an enemy by wiles and stratagem, originates in gross ignorance. First, it is certain that wars are carried on not merely by striking blows; for those are considered the best commanders who accomplish more by art and counsel than by mere violence; and secondly, the longer any one has served so as to acquire experience, the better soldier he makes. If war, then, is lawful, it is beyond all controversy that the usual methods of conquering may be lawfully employed, provided always that there be no violation of faith once pledged either by truce or in any other way."
John Calvin, Commentary on Joshua (1509-1564 AD)

Help me to plan my work and to work my plan each day, O Lord, so that...

Pray Psalm 90.11-17.

Use these verses to present your work for this day to the Lord, and to seek His blessing and glory in *all* your work.

Psalm 90.12-17 (*Landas: My Faith Has Found a Resting Place*)

So teach us all our days to note that wisdom may be ours.
Return, O Lord, have pity on those servants who are Yours.
Each morning let Your love appear that we for joy may sing.
And make us glad for every day You us affliction bring.

Now let Your work to us appear; our children show Your might.
And let Your favor rest on us; show mercy in Your sight.
The work that You have given us, confirm, and to us show,
That we Your chosen path may walk and in Your precepts go.

4 Trapped

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. 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. 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. 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. 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. But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. Joshua 8.18-23

Reflect.

1. Everyone seems to have known exactly what to do. What does this suggest about preparations for this battle, up and down the ranks of Israel?
2. Does it seem strange to you that the text offers no further mention of Bethel (cf. v. 17)? Why or why not?

Think about it.

God Himself directs the springing of the trap. He instructs Joshua to give the signal that will cause those in ambush to carry out their mission. We have not been made aware of this instruction thus far, but clearly it was communicated to the 35,000 who were in concealment between Ai and Bethel.

Joshua must have been standing on some prominence, perhaps under a banner or flag which identified him. All eyes would have been on him to know when to move. Once God spoke to Joshua and he gave the signal, the course of the battle for Ai changed.

Those in ambush entered the empty city and set it on fire. The smoke from Ai became the signal for the bulk of Israel's army, fleeing eastward into the wilderness, to stop, turn, and confront the Canaanites. The people of Ai (and Bethel?) seeing the smoke rising from their cities, would have returned to them, except that blocking their way were the "rear guard" and "others" – 35,000 troops. Now the Canaanites were in a cross-fire in front and behind. Mountains penned them in on the north and the south, and the Israelites carved them up from the east and the west. The only survivor was the king of Ai.

We admit that this was brutal – the destruction of an entire population. But when we remember the kind of people the Canaanites were, and the tendency of the people of Israel toward accommodation of pagan ways, at this point in Israel's history, such destruction was essential.

Meditate and discuss.

1. Our text does not tell us what happened to Bethel, which means "house of God." We may assume a similar consequence for them as for Ai. My sense is that the mention of Bethel here is to remind the readers – as it would have reminded the Israelites – that God had given this land to their father, Jacob. How can you see this from Genesis 28.10-22?
2. Why was it essential that "all Israel" (v. 21) should be involved in this battle?
3. We note that the destruction of the king of Ai is saved to last. All his servants are defeated first, then he is defeated. Can you see in this a foreshadowing of Jesus' ministry, both in His incarnation and at His final

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coming? Explain.

“You will read in the Holy Scriptures about the battles of the just ones, about the slaughter and carnage of murderers, and that the saints spare none of their deeply rooted enemies. If they do spare them, they are even charged with sin, just as Saul was charged because he had preserved the life of Agag king of Amalek. You should understand the wars of the just by the method I set forth above, that these wars are waged by them against sin. But how will the just ones endure if they reserve even a little bit of sin?”
Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)

Lord, let me be at war with sin in every part of my body, soul, and life, and help me today to...

Pray Psalm 97.

Glorify and magnify God, and seek His aid to help you in hating all sin and living in His light.

Psalm 97 (*Darwall: Rejoice, the Lord is King!*)

Rejoice, the Lord is King! O earth, lift up your voice;

Be glad, you islands, shout and sing: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Refrain v. 9

Beyond, above all gods and nations be exalted, God of love!

His just and righteous throne ‘mid clouds and darkness stands;

His fiery wrath consumes His foes in every land.

Refrain

Earth trembles at the sight of Jesus’ holy face;

The mountains melt before His might and praise His grace.

Refrain

The heav’ns above declare His glorious righteousness;

And tribes and peoples everywhere His Name confess.

Refrain

While Zion gladly sings, let all be brought to shame

Who to vain idols worship bring and scorn His Name.

Refrain

All you who love the Lord, despise sin’s wicked ways!

Praise Him Who guides us by His Word through all our days.

5 Devoted

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. So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. 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. 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. So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. 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. Joshua 8.24-29

Reflect.

1. Keep in mind, as we continue through the book of Joshua, that the people of the land of Canaan represented the most unbridled and violent forms of paganism, including burning their own children in the fire and ripping open the wombs of the pregnant women of their enemies. Why are these peoples an apt symbol for sin?
2. How does Israel's treatment of these people counsel us concerning our own attitude and behavior toward sin?

Think about it.

We cannot help but read a passage like this and feel sad. The city and all its people are devoted to God. Twelve thousand people – probably including the inhabitants of Bethel – slaughtered in a single day by the people sent by the God Who is love! We can argue a rational theological case for this, of course, and we should. But even the most solid case cannot keep us from feeling deep sadness over the destruction of so many lives. Truth sets us free, it's true; but it doesn't always keep us from feeling sad about the plight of sinners.

Think of what lies ahead for unrepentant sinners – people who scorn God's free offer of forgiveness and life, who refuse to acknowledge Him as Creator and Lord, who mock the claims of His Son, and whose attitudes toward one another are dominated by pragmatism, narcissism, and sensuality. Such people will know eternal punishment, a punishment of their own choosing, from which there will be no relief. The pagan peoples of the land of promise lived in fear and hatred of one another, only combining when survival was at stake or some advantage was to be gained. The pagan peoples of our world live in the fear of death and typically only work together when they discern some benefit for themselves. Such people are the very antithesis of the divine image, of the God Who gave His Son that the world might be saved.

Nevertheless, the fact that unrepentant sinners are judged and doomed should cause sadness to rise within us, such sadness as will move us to tell them about Jesus, even if they resist, revile, and reject us.

Meditate and discuss.

1. Meditate on Genesis 15.16. What do you suppose a society would look like whose sin was "complete"? The sins of the Amorites in Canaan were "complete" as Israel began their conquest. Why was it necessary to destroy these peoples?
2. In our day, the Holy Spirit and the common grace of God exert a restraining effect on human sinfulness (cf. 2 Thess. 2.6, 7). Does the Church have a role in this? Why would God choose to *restrain* sin in our day rather than to *destroy* it utterly, as in Joshua's?

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3. The king of the sinners in Ai was hanged on a tree, a sign of being cursed by God (Deut. 21.22, 23). In a dark but real way, this points us to the work of Jesus. Explain.

“Conquerors, indeed, are wont to spare captive kings, because their rank seems to carry something venerable along with it, but the condition of kings was different among those nations in which God wished particularly to show how greatly he detested the wickedness which he had so long tolerated. For while all were doomed to destruction, the divine vengeance justly displayed itself with greater sternness and severity on the leaders, with whom the cause of destruction originated.” John Calvin, *Commentary on Joshua (1509-1564 AD)*

Lord Jesus, You became sin for me so that I would...

Pray Psalm 32.1-7

Let the Lord search your heart as you wait on the Spirit to convict you of any sin.

Psalm 32.1-7 (*Hendon: Take My Life and Let It Be*)

Blessed are they whose sins the Lord has forgiven by His Word!
Pure their spirits are within; them He charges with no sin;
them He charges with no sin!

When in silence I remained, groaning in my sinful pain,
You Your hand upon me lay; all my strength You drained away,
all my strength You drained away.

I confessed my sin to You; You forgave me, ever true!
Let confession's pleading sound reach You while You may be found,
reach You while You may be found.

When flood waters threaten me, You my hiding place will be.
O'er them I will rise above, buoyed by Your redeeming love,
buoyed by Your redeeming love.

6 Covenant Renewed

Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. Joshua 8.30-35

Reflect.

1. More symbols! Why do these symbols matter so much?
2. Two different kinds of offerings are mentioned. What’s the difference? How does each point to the work of Christ?

Think about it.

Israel has just achieved a major victory in her campaign to claim the land of promise. But more than that, the nation is back on course with the Lord, and they celebrate that fact in a most symbolic manner. But this celebration is not quite what God had commanded.

You might want to review Deuteronomy 27.1-8. Note especially the wording in verse 2, “on the day when you cross over the Jordan...” Ah, now we see why the fiasco of Jericho and Ai occurred. Joshua had made sure the people were circumcised, since they were about to undertake a new phase of their lives in God’s covenant. And he took them through the Passover, as he should have done. But he failed to carry out this detail which Moses and the elders of Israel had explicitly commanded. Thus, the people went into battle against Jericho and Ai without having taken this important step of getting wholly on the Lord’s side, with His Law prominently before them. The act of covenant renewal carried out in these verses should have been done in conjunction with circumcision and the Passover in chapter 5. Joshua’s encounter with the Commander of the army of the Lord should have reminded him of this obligation. But though he failed in his duty, God graciously gave Israel victories at Jericho and Ai. We don’t know what jogged Joshua’s mind at this time, but suddenly he’s all on board with what should have been done days ago. It might be a matter of too little, too late.

When it comes to obeying God’s Word, details matter. Postponing obedience leads to disaster.

So now Joshua finally gets around to doing what should have been done at Gilgal, before the siege of Jericho. It’s not clear how much of the Law was written on those stones – probably just the Ten Commandments. Later, with all Israel assembled between the two mountains, Joshua read “all the words of the law” to them...according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.” This may refer to the book of Deuteronomy, which, as its name suggests, was the “second giving” of the Law of God, and thus, we may assume, the definitive version. Deuteronomy does not eliminate all the laws given in Exodus through Numbers. Instead, it clarifies those laws and puts them into a different setting – the land of promise as opposed to the wilderness. The principle here is that God adjusts His covenant to meet the changes in the situation of His people, but when He does so, He does not eliminate older laws so much as upgrade and improve them

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(think: upgrades to your computer's operating system).

Joshua faithfully read the Law "before all the assembly of Israel." Well done. But, as we shall see, the fact that this was done almost as an afterthought, rather than as the first priority after crossing the Jordan, will make an impression, if only at a subconscious level, on all the people: It's good to obey the Law of God, whenever we get around to it.

Meditate and discuss.

1. What makes this renewal of God's covenant especially significant? What does it add to that renewal that circumcision and the Passover did not entail? What do we learn from all these exercises in renewal about the relationship between grace and Law in our covenant with God?
2. Does it matter if we obey God on His terms, rather than at our convenience? Explain.
3. What does it mean that the priests and Levites stood to "bless the people of Israel" (v. 33) as part of this covenant ceremony? What would that blessing have involved? Why does God bless His people (Ps. 67.1, 2)?

It is said that Joshua stood that he might first bless the people, as it was the purpose of God to allure the people to himself by sweetness and winning condescension. For although Moses, to rebuke the obstinacy of the people, makes mention of curses only, it is certain that these were in a manner accidental, because the genuine method was to employ blessings as a means of gaining over to obedience those who might otherwise have proved refractory. But when humane invitation proved unavailing, curses were added as a new resource and remedy." John Calvin, Commentary on Joshua (1509-1564 AD)

Lord, keep me from trying to obey Your Word on my terms, according to my convenience, rather than according to Your Word and Your timetable. Help me every day to...

Pray Psalm 44.9-19.

We languish in our walk with the Lord to the extent that we take our eyes off Him, turn away from His Word, and strike out (literally) on our own. Let these verses lead you to a new resolve to remember the Lord always, to fix your soul firmly within His covenant, and walk with Him in all you do.

Psalm 44.9-18, 23-26 (*Faithfulness: Great is Thy Faithfulness*)

Ah, but for now in dishonor we languish.
Our armies quail while our enemies boast.
We are as spoil to our foes who despise us;
God has forsaken those He loves the most.

Refrain vv. 23-26

Rise up, awake, O Lord! Hide not Your face from us,
See our affliction, our suffering and pain!
See how our soul is sunk down with oppression;
Rise up and help and redeem us we pray!

Sold into sin and reproached by our neighbors,
You do not profit from our woeful state.
Shame and dishonor o'erwhelm and consume us;
Mocking and scorn for our sin is our fate.

Refrain

All this has come on us, but we remember:
You are our covenant God and our King!
Turn back our hearts to adore and extol You;

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Lord, keep our steps as Your praises we sing.
Refrain

7 Back on Track. Mostly.

Read Joshua 8.

Reflect.

1. What are the main differences between Israel's victory at Jericho and their victory at Ai? What can we learn from these differences?
2. How would you assess Joshua's leadership of Israel in this chapter? What did he do well? Where might he have improved?

Think about it.

We are inclined to see Joshua 8 as a course correction for Israel, a return to God's favor and a portent of good things to come. And it is that. God gave Israel an important victory, thus demonstrating that His anger had been removed from them and now they could expect Him to be with them for the rest of their campaign.

But the last part of this chapter troubles me. What Joshua led the people to do in reaffirming their covenant relationship with God should have been done immediately upon crossing the Jordan. Now we are at least two weeks beyond that event, and Joshua finally gets around to what they should have done on day 1.

We might say, "Well, at least he did it." And yes, he did. But I can't help but wonder, had Israel accomplished those offerings and participated in visual and verbal display of the Law – including the blessings and curses – whether the trouble at Jericho, leading to the trouble at Ai, might have been averted. Joshua is a great leader, but he's not a perfect leader, as we shall see again.

In many respects, what we see in the book of Joshua is typical of what we will see throughout the Old Testament. Israel is given great but flawed leaders, so that, while progress is made in realizing the fullness of God's covenant, it's not what God expects, and it ends up in a broken and failed covenant on Israel's part.

All of which left the faithful in Israel – and leaves us – longing for a better covenant, a perfect Leader, and power beyond what we possess in our own souls to help us in realizing the precious and very great promises of God. Precisely as God intended.

Meditate and discuss.

1. What do we learn from Joshua 8 about obeying God's Word?
2. From what we've seen thus far, how can the book of Joshua help us as a local church in striving for the promises of God?
3. What are we learning from Joshua about the power of sin, and how we should regard sin in our lives?

"I therefore think that by the term Law only its substance and sanctions are denoted. This made it palpable even to strangers entering the land what God was worshipped in it, and all excuse for error was taken away, when the Law was not treasured up in a book, but made manifest to the eyes of all." John Calvin, Commentary on Joshua (1509-1564 AD)

I know that Your commandments are holy and righteous and good, O Lord; help me to treasure them in my heart, so that...

Pray Psalm 19:7-14.

As you pray, ask the Lord to give you greater love for His Law and all His Word, and to guide you daily in

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faith and obedience.

Psalm 19.7-14 (*St. Christopher: Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure.
The simple man God's wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God's Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.
His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.
O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;
be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

Who, Lord, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!
Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.
O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight
Be pleasing to You, gracious Lord, acceptable and right!

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Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Why do you suppose the assault on Ai differed so greatly from the assault on Jericho?
2. What lessons for church leaders can you derive from Joshua 8?
3. What do we learn about sin from Joshua 8? How should this lead us to regard the sin in our own lives?
4. In spite of the great victory recorded here, why should Joshua 8 leave us a bit unsettled?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Joshua 8? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.