

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JOSHUA 5-8

Two watershed events marked the early history of Israel. **The parting of the Red Sea** liberated the Hebrews from slavery, while **the rolling back of the Jordan River** opened the door to God's blessing...

At the Sea they said good-bye to *their past*. At the River they embraced *God's purpose for their future*.

Verse 1 picks up the story immediately after the crossing of the Jordan River... *"So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel."* When God dammed up the waters of the Jordan River for His people to cross, it scared the Canaanite kings spit-less. *This wouldn't be a fair fight. It was obvious that Israel had supernatural help.*

In 1887 an archeological discovery confirmed this verse. *"The Amarna Letters"* were sent by a coalition of Canaanite kings to the Pharaoh in Egypt requesting his military assistance to stave off a powerful group of invaders called the **Habirus** - *or Hebrews*. No help was sent. Obviously, the Pharaoh had already had enough of these Habirus... Today, these hundreds of letters can be seen in museums from Berlin to Chicago...

Now shifting gears, did you hear of the Catholic priest, Pentecostal preacher, and Jewish rabbi who all met frequently to discuss theological issues? Each of the three clergy believed their way was best, so one day they proposed a test. They'd all journey into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and attempt to convert the bear. The most successful conversion would win.

Well, when they returned to compare results it was an interesting meeting... Father Flannery, his arm in a sling, and on crutches, spoke first, *"When I found the bear I read him the Catechism, but he didn't listen, instead he started slapping me around. I grabbed some holy water, sprinkled it on him, and as soon as I did it, amazingly the bear grew as gentle as a lamb."*

Well, Preacher Billy Bob was in a wheelchair, with both arms and legs in a cast. He said, *"When I found my bear, Glory Hallelujah, I preached him my best fire and brimstone sermon. We don't sprinkle, so when I laid hands on him he didn't like it. We wrestled up one mountain and down another, until I threw in him the river. I dunked*

that bear's hairy soul - praise God - and suddenly the animal became as gentle as a lamb."

Finally, Rabbi Feinstein, was rolled in lying in a hospital bed with an IV drip, his whole body was in traction. The rabbi was in bad shape. Feinstein says, *"Well, looking back on the experience, circumcision may not have been the best way to start with a bear."*

But circumcision was exactly the way God started with Israel! The second generation out of Egypt had never been circumcised, *yet with Abraham, God's covenant was passed through birth, through the seed, thus this was the mark God used to identify His people.*

In verse 2 we're told, *"At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins."* I'm sure that wasn't the name of the hill before the experience, only afterward... Today *"the hill of foreskins"* is covered with **juniper** and **eucalyptus** trees in memory of this event. *It's a joke... Jew-nipper trees... You-clipped-up trees...*

"This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised." Once slaves, now nomads - the people lacked an identity to be proud of.

"For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD - to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey."

The penalty for unbelief was death in the wilderness. *And that's still its penalty today.* Even after you're saved you have to believe... To live in victory you have to see yourself in Christ. *You belong to God...* His victory and blessings *belong to you.* Fail to lay claim to His blessings, and you'll also die in a desert of despair.

Verse 7, *"Then Joshua circumcised their sons..."* And verse 8, *"So it was when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed."* If you're an adult male... imagine, a flint knife - out-patient surgery with no anesthesia. *Yo, hernia checks are enough for me to avoid a doctor. A*

circumcision is off the charts!

But here's what's more painful, to live aimlessly, with no purpose. To live defeated, oppressed, enslaved...

The rite of circumcision was an identity forging experience. Circumcision was the Hebrew ID - an Israeli soldier's dog tags - the proof he carried on his body that he belonged to God. It solidified his identity.

He bore God's mark on his most intimate part. He was special. He and his offspring belonged to God.

And this is what water baptism does for a Christian. It too is a mark of identity. Once baptized there's no turning back. Baptism labels you as a child of God.

And like circumcision, baptism can also be painful. It's humbling to be dunked. It cuts back my flesh. Like circumcision, it peels back my pride. It's death to what I am apart from Christ. It now identifies me with Jesus. And it opens me up to a new, fresh work of His Spirit.

It's interesting, Jesus was baptized at the very spot the Hebrews crossed the Jordan. John 2:28 identifies the place as **Bethabara** or "house of passage." It's where Israel passed from wanderers to conquerors.

Verse 9, "Then the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day." "Gilgal" means "rolling." The stigma the Hebrews carried from their time of slavery in Egypt, and their failures in the wilderness, rolled away at Gilgal. Their circumcision at Gilgal marked a new identity for Israel.

And a new day begins for us when we take hold of the life our salvation entitles us to live. When we see ourselves in Christ - that's when old things pass away, and all things become new. At our spiritual "Gilgal" or "rolling" is where the Christian life really *gets rolling*.

And notice what else happens at Gilgal, verse 10, "The children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho." Passover was another identity forging experience. Eating the Passover meal forced them to connect with their spiritual heritage.

And this is what happens to a Christian at communion - eating the bread and drinking the wine forges a deeper spiritual connection. *Communion with Jesus and with each other* really gets rolling.

Passover reminded the Hebrews of the events that made them a nation - *the miracles of the exodus*. And communion reminds us of the event that makes us God's

people - *the cross of Jesus*... It's not coincidental that as soon as the Hebrews cross the Jordan River, God ordered circumcision and Passover to forge in the Hebrews a new identity... And likewise, baptism and communion are Christian faith-builders.

Verse 11, "And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year." Wilderness rations are now over. It's time to rise up in faith and possess all God that had promised.

And here's a lesson for us. I think God is more prone to work miracles for younger believers, because He knows their faith is weak and needs tangible support. But the time comes when faith needs to grow up. God stops spoon feeding us, and expects us to feed ourselves on the treasures He's given us in His Word.

And the end of Chapter 5 marks a turning point for Joshua... If I asked you who led Israel in the battle of Jericho? You'd remember the song, "Joshua fought the battle of Jericho" - and you'd say, "Joshua" - but you would be mistaken! *The answer will surprise you!*

Verse 13 "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho..." General Joshua was on a reconnaissance mission. He was scouting the city. Jericho's walls were enormous. There were actually two walls - the inner wall was 6' thick and 11' high. The outer was 12' thick and 35' high. And its slope had a 35 degree incline that made it nearly impossible to scale. Joshua is thinking, "How will we ever conquer these impenetrable walls?"

That's when "he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand." This man was armed and ready to fight. "And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" He's being a good sentry. Joshua confronts the unidentified soldier, and shouts, "Who goes there? Are you friend or foe?"

So He said, "No, (that is, neither) but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." The Commander reframes Joshua's question, It's not, "Am I on your side?" But it's, "Are you on God's side?" So often we hope God to be on our side, but the real question is always, "Am I on God's side?" God calls the shots, not me. God is Commander and Chief, not me.

General Joshua is being told here to move over. Heaven has come to help. He's being replaced. God dispatches His Commander to lead this battle.

“And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?” A humble Joshua is quick to submit. He recognizes military rank. He bows his own authority and surrenders to a higher command. “Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.” Joshua receives the same command that God gave to Moses at the burning bush on Mount Sinai. What a comfort this must’ve been to Joshua and to Israel. On the eve of their first major battle - up against impossible walls - the Commander of the Lord’s army comes to take over the campaign.

And who was this Commander? The clue is in how Joshua treats Him - he worships Him. This precludes him being an angel. Angels are never worshipped. Only God is to receive worship. That’s why I believe this Commander was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. *Who fought the battle of Jericho? Jesus did!*

And who fights the battles in the Christian life? Jesus is also **our Commander**. Whether it’s a crag in the rock on Mt. Sinai, or under the palm trees of Jericho, He turns ordinary places and times into holy moments. When we face a foe Jesus is faithful to meet us and remind us that the battle is not ours, *but His...* What He asks is that acknowledge His rank, and bow and obey.

Years ago I ran across a humorous list entitled, “**The Rules of Combat.**” Here they are, ten rules of combat.

1) If the enemy is in range, so are you... 2) Incoming fire always has the right of way... 3) The easy way is always mined... 4) Try to look unimportant, the enemy may be firing at the brass... 5) Teamwork is essential; it gives the enemy someone else to shoot at...

6) Don’t draw fire - it irritates the people around you... 7) When the pin is pulled, Mr. Grenade is no longer your friend... 8) Five second fuses only last three seconds... 9) It is inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed. You won’t be welcome!... 10) “If it’s stupid but works, it isn’t stupid.”

And # 10 is how Joshua must’ve felt after the battle of Jericho. In Chapter 6 the Commander of the LORD’s army gives Joshua some strange instructions.

Ingenious generals have used unorthodox battle strategies before and since, but none this bizarre...

“Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in.” With the Israeli army camped outside their walls the city was on lockdown. “And the LORD said to Joshua, “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all you men of

war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him." This is not your typical West Point plan, or Pentagon strategy. *Imagine Joshua at the staff meeting trying to sell this battle plan to his generals?*

Verse 6, "Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." It's interesting, the Commander of the LORD's army tells Joshua to break several Levitical laws... According to the Mosaic Law, neither the Ark nor the priests, were to go into battle. At Jericho both led the way... They also fought on the Sabbath. On the seventh day they were to march seven times around the wall. Which far exceeded the limits the Sabbath rules placed on Sabbath Day travel... *Why these discrepancies?*

I think it's because **Jesus is leading the charge!** The point is being made that victory over sin is never achieved by keeping the Law, but by following Jesus!

In verse 8-9 the battle begins, the Hebrews go on the march. Verse 10, "Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout." For six days Israel's army conducted a silent march... Imagine the men of Jericho on top of the walls mocking and taunting these crazy Hebrews. Yet they remained silent. No trash talking or shouting matches. The Lord was about to do all their talking!

"So he had the ark of the LORD circle the city, going around it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp." And they did this for six days.

Verse 15, "But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times." Thirteen times in all the Israelis men of war circled the walls of Jericho with silent steps.

I'm sure the Lord was testing their faith... It would've been easy had the walls fallen after the first pass, but Hebrews 6:12 tells us it takes faith and patience to inherit God's promises. *A persevering faith is what wins spiritual victories.* And thirteen trips around these colossal walls gave the Hebrews plenty of time to inspect them for breaches and vulnerabilities. I'm sure they concluded they could never take this city on their own.

There are times when God has to bring us to the same conclusion before He's ready to deliver us.

"And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city! Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things (stay away from idols, and good luck charms, and occult paraphernalia), lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it." This is a foreshadowing of trouble to come.

"But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron (the spoils of victory), are consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD."

Verse 20, "So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat." The impossible occurred. God worked the miraculous.

"Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city." God's orders to General Joshua and his army were crazy, ludicrous - yet they believed and victory was won.

And sometimes God's instructions to us are just a preposterous... Think about basic discipleship. *The Jesus' way... You gain when you lose - you get when you give - you live when you die - you're great when you serve - you're first when you're last - you are most honorable when you're mocked - you speak loudest when you stay silent - you're strong when you're weak...*

Here's the challenge to following Jesus... **Do you have faith?** *Here's how Christians win victories - how spiritual enemies are defeated* - through fearless faith and ruthless obedience to the commands of Jesus...

How does joy issue from sacrifice? I don't know, but it does! *How does abundant life flow from total surrender?* I don't know, but it does! Following God's battle plan made Israel a laughingstock to the men of Jericho. And following Jesus will seem foolish to folks around you. *Just remember who got the last laugh!*

Verse 21, "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword." Recall Canaan was a hotbed for the occult and witchcraft. This was an irredeemable civilization. They'd passed the point of no return. It was a severe mercy to end it.

"But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, "Go into the

harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her." And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel." This woman, Rahab, had saved the lives of the two spies Joshua had sent on reconnaissance. Now he honors their promise to spare her life and her family.

"But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." In fact, Rahab ends up marrying a Hebrew name "Salmon." They have a son named "Boaz" - who marries a woman named "Ruth" - who has a son named "Obed" - who has a son named "Jesse" - who has a son named "David" - who became king and fathered a dynasty that eventually gave rise to the eternal king named Jesus.

Not only is Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus, but she also makes the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:31. This former pagan prostitute was richly rewarded for her faith in God... *And you will be too, if you trust in Jesus.*

"Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying, "Cursed be the man before the LORD who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates." Here's a prophecy fulfilled 450 years later, in 950 BC. King Ahab orders a man named Hiel to rebuild Jericho. 1 Kings 16: 34 reads, "He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the LORD, which He had spoken through Joshua..."

Modern archeological digs at Jericho have unearthed a large house that had encased in the foundation of its walls and in its gates, jars containing the remains of infant children - *which had apparently sacrificed to Baal.* This could've been the house of Hiel... *and if true this would make for amazing confirmation of the Bible.*

Chapter 6 ends with the obvious, "So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country." After Jericho, Joshua set his sights on further conquests. His plan is to divide and conquer. He'll split Canaan in half. He'll defeat the southern coalition of kings first - then the northern kings at Hazor. Gilgal, in the center of the land, will be his headquarters.

But west of Jericho, just up the road was a tiny town with no fortress or walls. After toppling the impregnable city of Jericho, Ai would be easy pickings. *Joshua didn't know seeds of defeat had been sown at Jericho.*

On the cover of a 2024 Time Magazine, the war in Ukraine was labeled, “The first AI War.” But Time was off 3,429 years. Joshua 7 deals with the first AI war. It too was fueled by man thinking he's smarter than God.

Chapter 7, “But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.” And pay attention, God does get angry with us when we sin. His anger doesn't cancel His love, but He gets angry nonetheless... And here's what angers God most... our sin keeps us from receiving His blessings and Him fulfilling His purposes. Sin just gets in God's way of blessing our lives. Thus, He hates it.

Wesley Hunt writes, “Sin causes the loss of God's power and presence. Sin shuts off the showers of blessing. Sin stifles and strangles the abundant life promised in Christ. Sin paralyzes and immobilizes the believer and the local body. God's message to Joshua applies to God's people today in times of obvious spiritual defeat and decline; namely, deal with sin!”

“Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, “Go up and spy out the country.” So the men went up and spied out Ai.”

And they come back confident. Just 2-3 thousand men is all it'll take to whip Ai. The people are few.

Yet the unthinkable occurs. Underdog Ai inflicts on Israel a devastating defeat - their army gets chased down the mountain, and 36 soldiers die in battle. The embarrassing loss demoralizes Israel and energizes the enemy. Any momentum from Jericho gets lost at Ai.

Verse 6, “Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, “Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all - to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!” He's blaming God. “O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?” Joshua is

sucking sour grapes. He says his defeat is God's fault.

"So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you." **They'd been sabotaged by secret sin.** And how many Christians, and Christian families, churches, businesses have suffered a similar problem?

God says you're the problem. There's sin in your camp. They were *ache'n* because a man named *Achan* had buried some forbidden stuff in his tent... And here's the question, are you holding on to an attitude, or habit, or object that's angering God? Is He refusing to bless you until you clean house. ***Are you hiding a accursed thing?*** From the outside looking in there's no reason your marriage, or family, or business, or ministry shouldn't be prospering, but God sees there's sin in the camp, and He won't bless you until it's gone.

This is why God says in verse 13, "**Get up...**" Hey, there are times when we drop to our knees to repent and pray. But if there's secret sin you can pray until you're blue in the face, and it'll do no good. It's not time to *kneel*. It's time to *deal* with it - take decisive action.

Joshua says, "**Sanctify the people...**" Call them out. It's accountability time. We're going to flush out the sin.

Verse 14, "**In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man. Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.**" Hey, this will be somebody's last night on this earth.

The next morning the parade began, "**So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarahites; and he brought the family of the Zarahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken.**" Imagine, Achan at this moment? He knows he's the culprit. Sweat beads up on his forehead. His palms are clammy. His knees are knocking. Judgment is about to fall... *Why doesn't he confess his sin, and throw*

himself on God's mercies?

But that's the problem with sin, it causes you to hide and cover up, and believe you're the exception to the rule. Sin is delusional. You start thinking you can fool God, and be the first man in history to get away with it.

"Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

Notice the three-fold temptation: *he saw, he coveted, he took*. Genesis 3:6 said of Eve, "When the woman **saw** that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she **took** of its fruit and ate." It starts with a **delight** – turns into a **desire** – then spawns a **deed**.

But you won't do the deed, if you don't cultivate the desire - and you won't grow the desire if you harness your delights. The Psalmist says, "**Delight in the Lord.**" **You overcome temptation by taking joy in the Lord.**

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD." Our mistake is we think we can keep our sin a secret. *Oh, I'm not hurting anyone. I'm only effecting me.* But that's not true...

Secret sin infects the whole camp. God will remove His blessing from a whole family because of a dad or mom's private perversions... A church leader with unconfessed skeletons in his closet can hinder what God wants to do in an entire church... *A gold wedge buried in your tent, or pornographic files on your hard drive, or an inappropriate relationship brewing at work, or bitter words* - can have this effect. They cause God to remove His blessing from you and people you love.

Verse 24, "Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor." which means *the Valley of Trouble*. "And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day."

So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger.” Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day.”

Chapter 8 describes the conquest of Ai. Now that the secret sin has been dealt with, God is ready to fight for Israel, and He plans a good old-fashioned ambush.

“Now the LORD said to Joshua: *“Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you,”* This is no longer a small detachment, but the whole army. *“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.”* Unlike Jericho, Israel is allowed to take plunder from Ai. *Oh, if Achan had just been patient?* If he’d obeyed and trusted God at Jericho, he would’ve gotten all he wanted after Ai.

God continues His orders, *“Lay an ambush for the city behind it.”* So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 mighty men of valor and sent them away by night.”

They’re to go behind the city and wait. In the morning, Joshua will go up against Ai - then flee and draw the people of Ai out of their city, allowing the Israelites in hiding behind it to invade an empty Ai.

It’s interesting God’s battle plan at Jericho relied on supernatural intervention, while at Ai - though shrewd and cunning - it was far more conventional. It teaches us God works in different ways at different times. Don’t put Him in a box. His plan is unique for every situation.

Let me summarize what happens, 30,000 soldiers lie in ambush west of Jericho. Joshua takes 5000 men into a valley north of the city. The king of Ai thinks he has Joshua trapped. His army leaves the city to attack the Israelites. Joshua flees, and leads him on a chase.

The army of Ai leaves the city empty. Joshua raises his spear, *which was the signal* to the 30,000 Israelites hiding in ambush, to take and burn the city. The men of Ai see smoke, but find themselves trapped between Joshua and his troops. Israel mows down the enemy’s army, kills 12,000 survivors, and hangs the king of Ai.

Deal with the secret sin and victory will resume!

Notice verse 25-26, *“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.”

Remember Israel’s wilderness war with Amalek. Joshua and Hur held up Moses’ weary arms and kept high the rod of God. As long as his arms were held up Israel prevailed. Here, Joshua makes sure he keeps his spear stretched high until the battle has been won.

Verse 30, “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.” In the rest of Chapter 8 Joshua fulfills God’s instructions in Deuteronomy 27. Israel journeys north of Bethel - to the Valley of Sechem. He places the people on the two peaks either side of the valley. Six tribes on Mount Gerizim and six tribes on Mount Ebal.

From Gerizim they shout out God’s blessings. From Ebal His curses. For if they obey the Law they’ll be blessed. If they disobey they’ll be cursed. Chapter 8 closes, “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.”