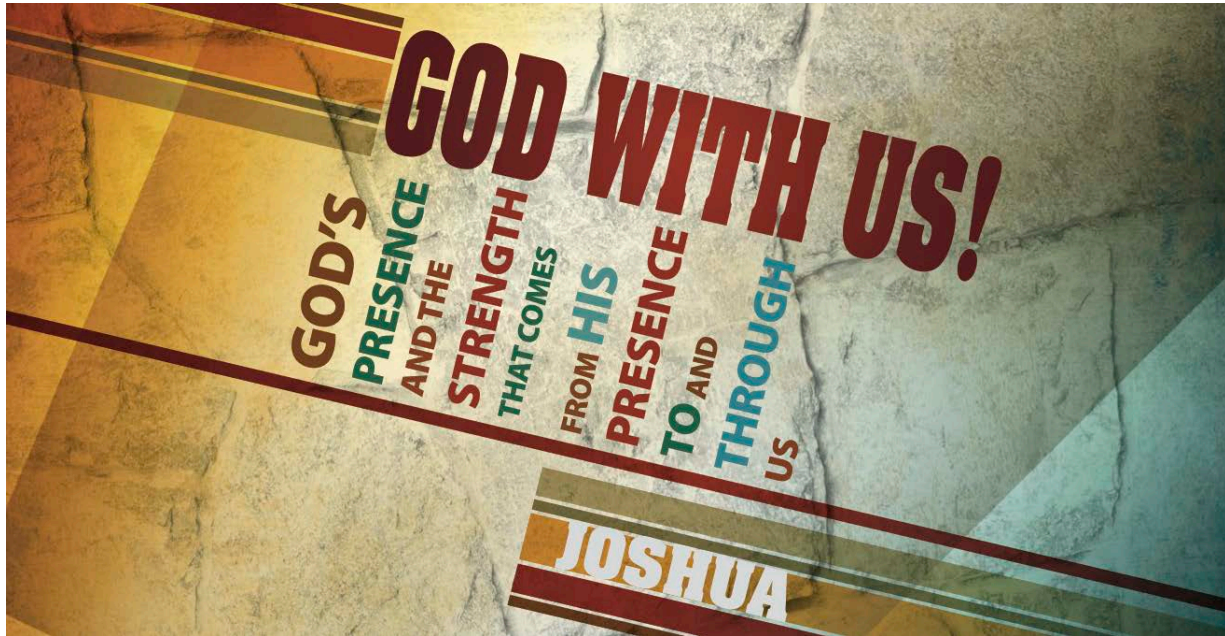


Week 6, Joshua 7–8

Hook



Main Point: God calls for faithfulness.

Current Event: It was April of 1985 and the war between Coca-Cola Company and Pepsi was raging. Coca-Cola had been losing market share to Pepsi and sought a new strategy to secure its place as the number one cola; the answer: a new Coke. After nearly a century of success, the company boldly changed the sacred Coca-Cola formula and in so doing set about a whirlwind of negative response. According to polls, only 13 percent of soda drinkers approved of the new Coke; dissatisfaction prompted some fans to launch grassroots campaigns across the nation in efforts to see the classic formula return. Some went to extremes, creating anti-new Coke organizations, signing petitions, creating hotlines, and seeking media support to attack the Coca-Cola Company. The voice of the people won and in June of 1985 the President of Coca-Cola announced the return of the classic recipe.¹

Discussion Questions

What companies in history have unsuccessfully attempted to stray from their core product or competency? Did the companies regain their footing?

In what ways does the Holy Spirit make you aware of areas in your life that need course-correcting?

¹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/30-years-ago-today-coca-cola-new-coke-failure/>

How should the believer respond when convicted by the Holy Spirit to make a change?

Today's lesson follows the Israelites as they experience military failure for the first time in the Promised Land. Joshua and all of Israel are witness to the loss and devastation that comes from sin.

Week 6, Joshua 7–8

Book

Main Point: God calls for faithfulness.

Text Summary: After Jericho, Israel is shocked to lose a battle against the smaller city of Ai. When Joshua beseeches the Lord in prayer, He reveals sin in the camp—Israel had taken things devoted to Him from Jericho. Achan is identified as the guilty one and punished. With truth uncovered and relationship restored, Israel attacks again. This time Ai is defeated.

Joshua 7 (Read)

Sub Point: God demands we serve Him only.

Israel's journey into Canaan continues with a battle against Ai. Riding the victory of Jericho, Joshua prepares for battle, but not in the right way. There are two problems in this narrative: the sin of the people, and the pride of Joshua. Joshua will come to see that leading sinful people comes at a cost.² This portion of the narrative also reveals Joshua's reliance on himself. Unlike the previous victory at Jericho, this military strategy is devised solely on the basis of perceived strength of the enemy, not on the strength of and dependence on Yahweh.³

If the Israelites assumed that their comparative size and ability were what would bring victory, they were swiftly reminded that it is the presence of the LORD that makes them strong. The death of 36 soldiers and an embarrassing defeat led Joshua to pray. The LORD revealed that they had sinned by taking *herem*, or "devoted things," from Jericho. What can we learn?

For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light" (Luke 8:17).

God's faithfulness does not ignore wickedness. This sin of Achan was not simply an issue of theft. No, this was the sin of unfaithfulness.⁴ Wickedness and righteousness are matters of the heart, and God is fully invested in His children's hearts. God desires us to be faithful to Him, rather than possessions or professional successes, both of which were temptations for Joshua and Achan.

² Longman III, Tremper and David E. Garland, [2012] *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Numbers–Ruth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 900

³ Hess, Richard [1996] *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Joshua*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, p. 160.

⁴ Howard, David [1998] *New American Commentary: Joshua*. Nashville: B&H Publishers, p. 187.

What's interesting is the Hebrew word *akor* is used several times, and in 1 Chronicles 2:7, Achan's name is Achor, "who brought trouble on Israel by violating the ban on taking devoted things."⁵

None of us operates in isolation. The Lord said that Israel had sinned, yet it was one man who took the sacred things to himself. Our actions affect people in ways we may never know. We live in an individualistic age, but the truth of community solidarity is reinforced for every believer in the body of Christ:

"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Failure must bring us to prayer. The failure at Ai led to Joshua's lament. We see his doubt, very similar to the cries of the Israelites after the Lord brought them out of Egypt and into the desert. Joshua, just like the Israelites, questions God.⁶ His prayer was accusatory and victimized, but it was prayer none-the-less, and He quickly did as the Lord commanded, "Get up!" It is better to say the "wrong" thing to the Lord than to isolate oneself from His presence. After all, it was by prayer that Joshua learned of Israel's disobedience and it was by prayer that he knew what to do next.

God will not share His glory. God will not tolerate unfaithfulness and He will not compete with any other source for glory. God lets Joshua know that it's Him, or the devoted things. He will not stay if this hidden idolatry is not done away with. This account serves as a warning against yielding to future temptations.⁷

Restoration comes with repentance. It is difficult to understand the severity of Achan's punishment, yet we must not avoid the truth: because of his repentance and death, God pardoned Israel and restored the people to relationship with Him. We see the victory that will come in chapter 8 is made possible because of cleansing from sin.⁸ In that sense, we give eternal thanks to Jesus Christ who took our punishment and died our death so that we can be restored to relationship with a Holy God.

Read the prayer Joshua prayed after experiencing the loss at Ai (7:7–9). What do you notice about the prayer? How is it like/unlike yours?

⁵ Longman III, Tremper and David E. Garland, [2012] *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Numbers–Ruth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 908

⁶ Howard, David [1998] *New American Commentary: Joshua*. Nashville: B&H Publishers, p. 191.

⁷ Hess, Richard [1996] *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Joshua*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, p. 157.

⁸ Howard, David [1998] *New American Commentary: Joshua*. Nashville: B&H Publishers, p. 187.

Achan's greed brought trouble and destruction to his family. How does greed affect today's families? In what ways do we try to hide or cover up real greed?

Jesus Christ was executed so we don't have to be punished for our sin, but God still expects us to make some things right. How?

Joshua 8 (Read)

Sub Point: Repentance restores relationship.

God's presence demanded truth and repentance and, when the Israelites obeyed, they were granted another opportunity at Ai. This time, God's instructions preceded the battle:

"Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land" (8:1).

This time, the Lord promises the same result as Jericho because the dependence on the Lord is the same as Jericho. God honors faithful obedience and dependence on him. The divine guidance that was missing from the first attack of Ai is present in the second attempt.⁹

Again, God gives the victory; Israel's role is to obey. There is a real interplay of divine instruction with human strategy, success with failure, prayer with repentance, and obedience with consecration. All of this is evidence of the tender yet sacred relationship between God and His people throughout the conquests in Joshua.

When the battle at Ai is said and done, Scripture records Israel traveling further north to Mt. Ebal in order to fulfill Moses' instructions recorded in Deuteronomy, *"And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal"* (verse 4a of 27:1–8).

The Israelites refocus just as before on their sacred relationship with Yahweh. They pause to confess and to celebrate with sacrifices and covenant renewal.¹⁰ After the violation of their covenant with the Lord, repentance was necessary and a turning back to the Lord from sin and reestablishing the covenantal relationship with their God. What is evident is the theme of obedience to God through observance of the Mosaic Law.¹¹

What did the people do to consecrate themselves in verses 34 and 35? What does that kind of consecration look like today?

⁹ Hess, Richard [1996] *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Joshua*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, p. 175.

¹⁰ Howard, David [1998] *New American Commentary: Joshua*. Nashville: B&H Publishers, p. 212.

¹¹ Ibid.

Why does God command repentance?

Week 6, Joshua 7–8

Took



Main Point: God calls for faithfulness.

In Today's Culture: No one wants a legacy like Achan's; temptation can be fought and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, overcome. Break your class into small groups and ask them to discuss and generate three concrete actions that the class as a whole could employ in efforts to support one another in the fight against temptation. Answers might include: forming accountability groups, contacting a class member when he is absent, etc.

Lesson Conclusion: Israel's battles at Ai remind us that it's God who conquers the enemy as we obey Him, not our ability. Sin will stop any believer in his or her tracks if it is not brought into the light of God's truth. When setbacks occur, let's lament openly before our King and be quick to pray, quick to obey, and quick to try again at His word.

Challenge

Pray. What failure or disappointment has stopped you in your tracks? Joshua prayed an accusatory lament to God in 7:7–9. His accusations were certainly not grounded but the act of approaching the Lord in prayer led Him to righteousness. Open your mouth and pour forth an honest heart. Then listen.

Read Scripture. In response to our cry, God often uses His Word to shine light on an area we have tried to cover up or hide. Since He knows about every secret and hidden thing, come clean quickly.

Try again. Sometimes a failed attempt intimidates us from trying again. Is there an area in your life where you need a holy do-over? Get a word from the Lord on it: Does He say to you (as He said to Joshua), *"Do not be afraid ... go again"* (8:1).