

Covenant Restored, Conquest Resumed

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- [0 : 0 0] This is our third and final look at this little part of Joshua. If you haven't been here, the story so far has been that Israel at long last have begun their conquest to take the promised land.
- They started at Jericho, where God guaranteed them victory, having appeared to them as the commander. And he gave them instructions to carry out, which they did, and they took the city.
- All they had to do was obey him. Jericho was taken, but Israel, and more particularly Achan, didn't fully obey the ban.
- Achan stole gold that was forbidden. And so Israel were under wrath, and we could see how serious that breaking God's covenant was.
- Achan came to a nasty end. He faced punishment, severe punishment, for breaking God's covenant. Israel faced wrath because they were defeated by little Ai.
- [1 : 0 8] So now that that's been dealt with, now that Achan has been punished, what of this little city of Ai? Well, that's what we're going to read today.
- So please do turn to chapter 8 of Joshua. We're going to read most of the chapter, beginning in verse 1.
- And the Lord said to Joshua, So Joshua and all the fighting men arose to go up to Ai.
- And Joshua chose 30,000 mighty men of valor and sent them out by night. And he commanded them, Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city behind it.
- Do not go very far from the city, but all of you remain ready. And I and all the people here with me will approach the city. And when they come out against us, just as before, we shall flee before them.
- [2 : 3 5] And they will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city. For they will say, They are fleeing from us just as before. So we will flee from before them.
- Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city. For the Lord your God will give it into your hand. And as soon as you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire.
- You shall do according to the word of the Lord. See, I have commanded you. So Joshua sent them out and they went to the place of ambush and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai.
- But Joshua spent that night among the people. I'm going to skip on to verse 18. The verses we're leaving out are Israel keeping these instructions and things going as planned.
- So verse 18. Then the Lord said to Joshua, Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand. And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city.
- [3 : 4 3] And the men in the ambush rose quickly out of their place. And as soon as he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it. And they hurried to set the city on fire.

So when the men of Ai looked back, behold, the smoke of the city went up to heaven. And they had no power to flee this way or that. For the people who fled to the wilderness turned back against the pursuers.

And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city went up, then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. And the others came out from the city against them.

So they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And Israel struck them down until there was left none that survived or escaped.

But the king of Ai, they took alive and brought him near to Joshua. When Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the swords, all Israel returned to Ai and struck it down with the edge of the swords.

[4 : 56] And all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand, all the people of Ai. But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction.

Only the livestock and the spoil of that city, Israel took as their plunder, according to the word of the Lord that he commanded Joshua. So Joshua burned Ai and made it forever, a heap of ruins, as it is to this day.

And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening. And at sunset, Joshua commanded, and he took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day.

At that time, Joshua built an altar to the Lord, to the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, just as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the people of Israel. As it is written in the book of the Lord of Moses, an altar of uncut stones upon 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 people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.

[6 : 22] And all Israel, sojourner as well as native-born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded at the first to bless the people of Israel.

And afterward, he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded Joshua, that Moses commanded Joshua, that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel and the women and the little ones and the sojourners who lived among them.

Please do keep your Bibles open as we look at this passage. When Mother's Day approached every year when I was young, my mom would often have a phrase for us.

If we'd been playing up the week or the weeks leading up to Mother's Day, she would say, boys, there's no point in buying me a card and a present and saying nice things for one day of the year.

It was a day to be thankful for a significant relationship, but if we were abusing that relationship, if we were not being nice and kind and appreciative before that day, then the card was meaningless.

[8 : 00] Well, as we come to the end of this small section in Joshua, we see something very similar highlighted. We see that more important than God's people fighting in the conquest, winning battles, taking cities, more important than all this is God's people being obedient to him, being people who treasure his covenant with them.

Jericho was wiped out by God's hand. We see his blessing here. But then at Ai, they were sent fleeing, running.

We see part of God's curse here then as Achan is killed. Well, that disobedience has been dealt with and now we return again to the conquest.

The conquest had been broken because the covenant was broken. But now, as that's dealt with and we move on, the conquest resumes. In our passage today, God's blessing returns and Ai meets the same fate as Jericho.

Our first heading then is the results of a restored relationship, verses 1 to 29. Achan has been dealt with. There's no great fanfare over this because it is tragic.

[9 : 24] There's a great heap of stones raised over him in 726 so that Israel would remember what happened. Chapter 8 then simply begins, Do not fear and do not be dismayed.

Take all the fighting men with you. Your eyes go up to Ai. I have given it into your hands. This beginning of chapter 8 has significant echoes with chapter 1.

The Lord repeats here what he commanded Joshua then. Don't be afraid. Don't be dismayed. For I am with you, he says in chapter 1. And so after this break in the covenant, it's been dealt with and he's saying, I'm still with you.

As we go to fight Ai, I am still with you. This horrible episode is behind them. They no longer have to fear. They can see that God is going to give this city into their hands.

Their relationship is restored. Israel are to be blessed again in battle. God's presence is with them. They're no longer under wrath. Things continue as they were.

[10 : 38] Stain removed, blot deleted, anger dealt with. Don't fret, Israel. I am still with you. The breach is dealt with.

Don't fret, Christian, when we break relationship with God by sinning. It doesn't have to be permanent. Nobody needs killed or sacrificed again. We turn back to him, trusting that Jesus was the payment for all our sin as we do this.

As we repent, as our relationship is restored, it's dealt with. We move on just like this, straight away. So let's look at how this plays out for Israel.

The passage gives us the battle in two parts. We see God's tactics laid out, then we see God's triumph. Once God has said he will give Ai into Israel's hands, in verse 2, we see God say, now lay an ambush.

This is to be the master plan for defeating Ai. It's not marching around the wall to get it to fall down. It's going to be an ambush. And as we move through the detail in this story, we actually get to see that it's a well-thought-out ambush.

[11 : 57] It takes advantage of their previous defeat. The text eases us into the battle by gradually unfolding the plans. There was to be an ambush, but the instructions don't end there.

The more we read, we see it developed. And cleverly, we see that Ai won't be surprised by Israel fleeing again. This forms the basis of the attack.

It means that an ambush can cut them off from both sides. They're going to chase because they think they're going to defeat Israel once again. But this does not happen.

This is yet again God giving to his people victory, just like at Jericho, now with Ai. It's his victory once again because he has laid out the plans and they follow them.

He even uses the circumstances of their defeat where they're said fleeing and their hearts melt. He uses this and turns it as an opportunity to defeat their enemies.

[13 : 08] So this is the tactics and then from verses 10 to 29 we see God's triumph playing out. The plans and the strategies start to unfold. In verse 10 to 13 the troops were stationed into position and Joshua and part of the army tempt the king of Ai out to chase them and just as planned Israel flee as a trick.

And as Ai come out and pursue them their city's abandoned and so the ambush go in and take the city. Simple. God's plan works.

works so well that Ai turned to see their city in smoke. It's burnt and they realize all of a sudden they're caught in the middle of two armies.

This is a crushing triumph just like at Jericho. This time Israel do all that was commanded and they destroy all of Ai and God allows the plunder to be Israel's this time.

He's not stingy. And remember this is another sign that what happened with Achan is behind them. This time they're allowed to plunder.

[14 : 25] So as we turn further on to verse 26 and the battle has finished Ai has totally been defeated. God has destroyed his enemies. He has destroyed wicked Jericho and now wicked Ai.

and God still defeats his enemies. He still gives victory to his people. If this book was as is very possible written for exiled Israel then they needed to know this.

Whilst in exile seemingly defeated living amongst foreigners the truth that God would produce victory for his people defeating his enemies even when they're held as captives and it seemed unlikely this is a reminder of God's grace to them.

And we too are exiles in this world people who belong in the promised land of heaven. We too can be assured that we will make it there.

God still defeats his enemies. enemies. God has defeated Satan. He has defeated sin.

[15 : 46] And God defeating his enemies in this passage is not some insignificant truth that we glaze over. Of course he defeats his enemies we might think. This has something to say to us too is the basis of us returning home from exile returning home to heaven.

God has been working in Joshua to keep his promises of the land. And this echoes for us the future promises that we have of heaven.

And in verses 28 to 29 we see the real punch of this battle. Ai is left as rubble. A heap of ruins destroyed.

And then verse 29 the king is hanged on a tree. The sign of a man truly accursed. These concluding verses in this section reemphasize to us what we saw with Jericho.

Canaan is wicked. They are God's enemies. They are perverse child sacrificers. sinners. This is God's judgment on them.

[17 : 04] They meet a grisly end because they are wicked enemies of God. And the king is accursed. You may think this is barbaric that a king would end this way hung on a tree.

But if you think like this you miss that God was giving his precious people victory over a perverse people, the king hanging on a tree was a visible sign to all that gross sin would not be tolerated.

The Gentile king hanging on a tree is no different to Achan buried under rocks. Sin is serious and God will deal with it.

The danger for us here is that we decry his hanging as a foul thing that only happened back in 1400 BC. If we say such a thing we may also say that a man hung on a tree in AD 30 in such barbaric way has no significance for us in our sophisticated age.

Sin will not be tolerated by God. Achan found that out and so too did Canaan. We do well to see the king hanging on a tree as a picture of how serious God takes sin.

[18 : 30] After all we know another king the king of the Jews hung on a tree as the greatest show of the seriousness of sin. Christ becoming a curse for us.

God and I entitled this point restored relationship the results of restored relationship and the only way to have this restored the only way to mend the torn covenant is by trusting Christ and seeing God's wrath poured out on him.

He became a curse for us. And as we read the concluding verses of this chapter in verses 30 to 35 we see relationship again at front and center.

We see our second heading that covenant is over conversions. The final section focuses on the reading of God's covenant word in verse 34.

This comes after the altar is built and sacrifices and offerings are made in verse 31. This is all about relationship and if we take a step back and look at this passage along with chapters 5 to 7 all that we've looked at we see that it's a book ended section it's finishing with the covenant word being read but chapter 5 starts with the covenant sacraments there's circumcision there's the Passover and in the middle is this incident with Achan the covenant broken the curse in the middle of this section the blessing either side and the covenant book ending it look at verse 34 the law the blessing and the curse of the law we've seen in our three passages both the blessing of the law

[20 : 32] Israel defeating their enemies conquering the wickedness we've also seen the curse wickedness defeated but also Achan's disobedience being dealt with faith it's no mistake that this section takes place at Mount Ebal in Shechem not only does it hark back to the very promise to Abraham that was made in the same place but it closes off this section and highlights that Achan's episode is the central point in all this story verses 30 to 35 show God's people prioritizing their relationship with him the covenant with God they're making sure that they're right with him they sacrifice they make offerings and they're reminded of every part of the law not one word was left out every part of the covenant that makes

Israel God's treasured possession in short these verses hit us with the spike that shouldn't really surprise us they tell us that the covenant that right relationship with God that our holiness our obedience is much much more important than fighting in a conquest that our relationship with God is far more important than whether we teach our kids the Bible well far more important than evangelism far more important than working for a church far more important than helping our friends become Christians these things are all good and they're part of being obedient but they must spring from a relationship that's right with God that treasures his covenant that loves him all the way through these chapters we've seen that God assures people of victory he assures his people that they will win battles he tells them beforehand that he will give them into his hands there's a reason the text keeps telling us that

God assures and grants victory not as an incidental truth for us but to tell us that he takes care of winning battles and winning souls yes Israel had to march around Jericho yes they had to lay an ambush they had to do some fighting and yes we must be obedient and telling people about Christ but if we do all this and steal gold and deceive God or try to if we give in to sin and tear our relationship with him then nothing else matters no amount of giving no amount of serving no amount of evangelizing can mend that terror no amount of preaching Jesus no amount of good deeds deals with the seriousness of sin it didn't matter how well

Achan fought it doesn't matter how many people we help lead to faith our relationship with God is above all the most important thing obedience to his covenant as people that he's redeemed Israel learned this and see the benefit in chapter 8 the relationship was restored God's wrath has been turned away onto one man and there's no delay in this text the relationship picks up and God assures Joshua of his presence and they defeat Ai don't be afraid don't be dismayed I'm here I'm with you now go and ambush win this battle I'm giving you victory God treasures his people and these passages tell us that we ought to treasure God you'd better make sure your sacrifice has been made you better make sure that you trust Christ to have fully dealt with the wrath for your sin that he was accursed for you that his sacrifice is all that you cling to in faith for God does not delight in sacrifice he does not take pleasure in burnt offerings but a broken spirit a broken and contrite heart

God will not despise he didn't want his people to carry out his judgment on Canaan if they themselves were mixing with and corrupting themselves with the same wickedness his people are subject to his laws the distinctive way of life that are redeemed treasures person of God is to live this conquest wouldn't be holy if God's people were cheating on him our mission to see the spirit bring people into the kingdom and the church crumbles if the church they're joining is rebellious isn't faithful to God but don't be discouraged in this yes sin is serious yes there's somberness laced through these passages but the covenant stood the conquest continues and the book of

[26 : 23] Joshua unfolds again and again that none of God's promises feel that his words don't fall as sure as he was faithful to Israel he is faithful to us he continually invites us to join with Joshua and Israel to deal with sin and submit again to his words his covenant word that was read at the end of this chapter because far above the conquest and far above any conversions we can encourage is his covenant with us back to my mom's phrase there's no point buying me a card or a present if you don't show any appreciation or kindness the rest of the year there's no point serving Christ week by week if months go steadily by with growing habits of sin

God offers a restored relationship wrath turned away Christ cursed on our behalf so don't go on fighting in his army serving in his church if you won't accept this if you won't accept reconciliation follow the covenant mend the relationship then fight then serve the covenant is far above the conquest for Israel and it's far above us serving in whatever way we do yes we must serve but we must see that our relationship with God comes first amen let's pray father we do thank you for your word we thank you that it teaches us about you it teaches us how to relate to you it teaches us of your grace father we pray that we would not take lightly these stories from Joshua these wonderful historical truths that we wouldn't miss how seriously you take sin and how important it is that we keep your covenant with you so father help us that we might be more and more faithful to you that we might love you more and so be obedient to all you've commanded please help us in this

Lord for we need you and now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all Amen