

God's Reassuring Word of Promise

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[0:00] But what's going on now is we're going to open our Bibles and read together in God's Word. And Paul Brennan has been leading us through these early chapters of the book of Joshua in the Old Testament.

You don't have a Bible with you. There are some at the back, some at the sides, red Bibles scattered about the place. Do go and pick one up. Don't be embarrassed. And you'll see on those Bibles, it's page 183.

And we come to Joshua chapter 8. And these are very dramatic stories that we've been reading in these early chapters of Joshua.

And here is a very dramatic story again this evening. I'm going to read the whole of the chapter. Joshua chapter 8, then beginning at verse 1. And the Lord said to Joshua, 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.

[1:03] And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city behind it.

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 who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out against us, just as before, we shall flee before them.

And they'll come out after us until we've drawn them away from the city. For they'll say they're fleeing from us just as before. So we will flee 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. Soon as you've taken the city, you shall set the city on fire. You shall do according to the word of the Lord.

[2:07] See, I've 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 the night among the people.

Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people. And went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. All the fighting men who were with him went up and drew near before the city.

And encamped on the north side of Ai with a ravine between them and Ai. He took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai to the west of the city.

So they stationed the forces, the main encampment that was north of the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. And as soon as the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the men of the city, hurried and went out early to the appointed place to ward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle.

But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness.

[3:17] So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them. And as they pursued Joshua, they were drawn away from the city. Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel.

They left the city open and pursued Israel. Then the Lord said to Joshua, stretch out the javelin that is in your hand towards Ai.

For I will give it into your hand. And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. 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.

[4:17] 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 sword. All Israel returned to Ai and struck it down with the edge of the sword. And all who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000.

All the people of Ai. But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he had stretched out the javelin. Until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction.

[5:20] Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as their plunder. According to the word of the Lord that he had 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 they took his body down from the tree. And they threw it at the entrance to 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, 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 law 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.

[6:22] 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. And all Israel. Sojourner as well as native born. With their elders and officers.

Their judges. They 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. It was not a word of all that Moses commanded. 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. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

[7:22] And help us to understand. Its command for us today. Amen. Well good evening. Please have Joshua.

Open in front of you. That will be very helpful. Joshua chapter 8. This evening. Now last week. Joshua chapter 7. Marked.

A real low point. Following the great victory. In Jericho. Next in line. was the much smaller town. Of Ai.

Surely. A walkover. Given all that happened in Jericho. Surely Ai would be a piece of cake. But no. It proved to be. A humiliating defeat.

I think the English rugby team know the feeling. And the French. And the French. A good weekend for the underdogs. But it was a humiliating defeat.

[8:25] Last week. Against AI. And the reason for it. The reason. That God's people lost that battle. Was because of the sin. Of one man.

And Achan. Thinking the rules. Didn't apply to him. He took for himself. Some of the plunder. That was meant to be set apart. For the Lord. He took some for himself.

And the consequences. As we saw. Were severe. For Israel. And for Achan. And his household. And by the end of chapter 7. As we see that heap of stones.

Marking the place. Where Achan was put to death. Along with his family. We're wondering. What hope is there? What's next. For Joshua.

And Israel. And all the people. It's a huge. Low point. Would this embarrassing defeat. At the hand of AI. Mark the beginning of the end. Of the conquest.

[9:21] Would God. Be able to keep his word. He had promised. The land. Would God. Keep his word. Well chapter 8.

Provides. A resounding answer. To those questions. God is faithful. To his word. He would. Give them the land. He would never leave. Or forsake his people.

This chapter. Is a timeless reminder. To God's people. That his promises. Are not thwarted. Or extinguished. By our past mistakes. Our sins. But rather.

His promises. Remained. Unmoved. Unshaken. And he beckons us. To trust in his words. To trust. To trust his promises. To walk.

Forward. In confident obedience. It's yet another episode. In this astonishing book. That records. God's great faithfulness.

[10:16] His steadfastness. To his word. And what reassurance. This chapter gives. After the disaster. Of the battle of AI. Part one. Comes the resounding.

Total defeat. Here in part two. Of the battle of AI. And central to the whole thing. At the very core of it. Is God's word.

His reassuring word of promise. To a repentant people. Come look at chapter eight. Verse one.

Here's the first thing we see tonight. We see God's tender word.

Of protection. God's tender word. Of protection. Look at verse one. The Lord. Said to Joshua. Do not fear.

And do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men. With you. And arise. Go up to AI. See. I've given. Into your hand. The king of AI. And his people. His city.

[11:12] And his land. God speaks. Such tender words. To Joshua here. Given the absolute calamity. Of chapter seven.

Given. The gross nature. Of the sin. The devastating consequences. Most obviously. Seen in the loss. Of what should have been. A walk over battle victory. Joshua.

Might well have considered. Beating a retreat. Let's go back. Let's go back to the Jordan. Let's go back. To where we came from. Fearful. Perhaps. Of what was going to happen next. Dismayed.

At the shock. Of the defeat. But God spoke. And what wonderful words. Of reassurance. They are for Joshua. Don't you think? How tender. How kind.

Yes. God had already given. His word of promise. To Joshua. In the very opening chapter. Of the book. Just a few weeks beforehand. God promises to Joshua.

[12:09] That he will be with him. He will never leave or forsake him. God has already given. Those promises to Joshua. But. He's already said to Joshua. Do not be frightened. Do not be dismayed.

For the Lord your God is with you. Wherever you go. But the Lord knows. That Joshua needed these words. Again. These words of reassurance. The shocking defeat.

Of AI. Fresh in the mind. The Lord had turned. From his burning anger. End of verse. End of chapter 7. No longer was it time to mourn. But now is the time to move on.

Defeat was not the last word. For Israel. And failure. Doesn't have to be the last word. In the life of God's people. Or your life. Major sin.

Does not need to be. The defining moment. In your life. It wasn't to be for Israel either. Israel's history. Doesn't stop here. At the end of chapter 7. It continues. Joshua wasn't to languish.

[13:10] In self pity. Or contemplate. What could have been. No. It was time to press on. Because. God's word. Was unmoved. And unchanged. He is faithful.

To his promises. And so he tenderly. Reassures Joshua here. The conquest. Continues. I am still with you. Joshua.

And all of Israel. Had nothing to fear. And even. For the small town. Of Ai. Ai. Joshua needed. This word.

Of reassurance. From the Lord. And it's a word. That reminds Joshua. Where the real power lies. It's a reminder. Of the need. To depend on God. For all things.

And that without him. Victory. Was impossible. Even for the small. Town of Ai. God's presence. With his people. Is required. If victory.

[14:06] Is going to be achieved. Heat. One preacher. Put it this way. With. The power of God. The great Jericho. Could be taken.

Without his power. Not even. The small town. Of Ai. Could be overrun. God. And so. God. In his tender mercy.

His grace. Speaks. His word of promise. Again. To Joshua. Doesn't the Lord. So often do that. For us. He speaks to us.

Tenderly. Through his gospel. After a season. Of drifting. Perhaps. Maybe. A serious sin. In the gospel.

Of his son. The Lord. Jesus Christ. Speaks words. Of life. And restoration. As you. Return. To him. As you. Repent. And turn.

[15:01] To him. The Lord. Speaks. So tenderly. To us. Doesn't he? He reminds us. Again. Of all his promises. His protection. His presence.

How sweet. Those words. In verse one. Would have been. For Joshua. Don't you think? After all. That's happened. He promises. I am with you. Do not fear. Do not be dismayed.

And maybe. Maybe that's you. Maybe. He has brought you. To that point. Of real. Repentance. You confessed. Your sin. But the Lord.

Doesn't expect you. To wallow in it. To dwell upon it. Over and over again. No. No. If God. Forgives sin. We have no.

Right. To be preoccupied. With it. Says one preacher. No. No. He sets you. On your feet. He reminds you. Of his great promises. And don't we have.

[16:01] Even greater promises. Than Joshua. We who live. This side of the cross. We can look back. With great certainty. On God's promises. Fulfilled in Christ. And so the Lord.

Says to you. Do not fear. Do not be dismayed. The past. Is now the past. And it remains there. The future. Is full of certainty.

And hope. And promise. The Lord's word. The words never fall to the ground. He keeps. All his promises. And he will surely. See you. Safe. Into his eternal kingdom.

That's his promise to you. Nothing can shake that. No. Past. Sin. Too great. No. Past. Stumble. Too serious. He speaks.

These words. Even to you. Do not fear. Do not be dismayed. That's the first thing we see. God's tender word. God. Of protection.

[16:58] Number two. Verse two. We see God's gracious word. Of provision. Not only. Does God promise. Protection. And victory. In battle.

Not only. Does he provide direction. And instruction. Not only. Does God. Provide all this. But God also. Gives more. He gives an abundance. To his people. Look at verse two.

That is what God says. There in the middle. Only. Only. It's spoil. And it's livestock. You shall take. As plunder. For yourselves. God allows.

His people. To take. Ai's plunder. And spoil. For themselves. Now hold on a minute. You might be thinking. Back to last week. And what happened. Why is God.

Now saying. It's okay. For the people. To take the plunder. It was the very thing. That Achan. Got in trouble for. This is the very thing. He told them. Not to do in Jericho.

[17:54] As he changed his mind. What's going on? Well. The reason it's okay. Now. Is because. God says so. He's saying. It's okay. Now. You can take the plunder.

And I think also. Because Jericho. Was the very first city. In the conquest. As the first city. To be defeated. Its plunder. Was a first fruit. To be devoted to the Lord. And now they're in the second city.

AI. The Lord is saying. You can take this for yourselves now. You can enjoy. The fruit. Of battle. And in light of this great generosity.

From the Lord. You can't help. But think of Achan. His covetousness. Just the chapter before. How needless. Were his actions. If only.

He'd waited a few days. He could have filled. His whole tent with plunder. In AI. And how easy it is. For God's people.

[18:52] To lose sight. Of the Lord's generosity. To question. His goodness. Achan wanted. What he wanted for himself. Perhaps doubting. The Lord was generous. But there's no need.

If he'd waited a week. He could have had. All the spoil of AI. He could have filled his boots. You see. Our God is a good. And generous God. Isn't he? More than providing.

What we simply require. He does often provide. In abundance. And it's one of Satan's. Oldest and greatest tactics. To make us doubt. God's goodness. His generosity. His provision. Way back in the Garden of Eden.

The serpent. Sowed words of doubt. Didn't he? Into Eve's ears. Did God actually say. You shall not eat. Of any tree in the garden. That's not what God said.

At all is it? What God said was. You may surely eat. Of any tree in the garden. But of that one tree. Of the knowledge. Of good and evil. You shall not eat. See the enemy.

[19:55] Twists God's goodness. Doesn't he? He turned. God's gracious words. Of command. On its head. He cast doubt. On his generosity. And goodness. He zoomed in.

On the one restriction. That God imposed. Rather than focus. On the lavish gifts. He was giving in abundance. There's one way to put it.

It's the device of Satan. To insinuate. Into human hearts. That God is being unfair. In his dealings with us. God is being unfair. To you. That's what the enemy.

Would have you think. And how easily. We fall for it. How quickly. We suspect. God's goodness. His provision. So let's remind ourselves.

Often. Of the great goodness. That God has lavished upon us. Rather than zooming in. On what he prohibits. Remember all the good.

[20:53] He has lavished upon us. If only Achan had waited a week. And in church life. It's very easy. Isn't it? To become consumed. With the areas of.

Of irritation. To completely miss. The lavish gifts. That God gives us. He's poured out upon us. We can think. If only I had this. Or if only I had that.

If only our church. Had this or that. We can forget about. All the good he has given us. All the abundant goodness. He's given. Perhaps in our own lives. We so quickly doubt.

God's goodness. And generosity. And we focus relentlessly. On the one thing. That for the moment. He's withheld from us. We focus on that one thing.

To the exclusion. Of all the other blessings. He's given us. Perhaps we grasp. For the one thing. We don't yet have. Not realizing.

[21:51] If we just waited. He would perhaps. Provide. Ten times more. If only we waited. God is a generous God. He sees things.

That we don't. He knows better than we do. What we need. So trust him. If only you could grab. A can by the labels. Look brother.

Just wait. Wait a week. Don't worry about. The plunder of Jericho. AI is coming around the corner. We can fill our boots. Well there's verses 1 and 2.

God's word to Joshua. His word of provision. His word of protection. He reassures Joshua. Of his presence. That victory is theirs.

What wonderful words. They were for him. And then in the middle section. Verses 3 to 29. This big section in the middle. We see. The people's response. To God's word.

[22:47] And we see the obedience. Of God's people. That God. Was giving Joshua. And his people. His word of sure victory. Did not absolve them.

Of taking action. Of careful thinking. And planning. God. Had guaranteed. And commanded certain things. Joshua was to take. All the fighting men. God would give them victory. Over the king. The people. The city. The land. Joshua was to do to Ai. Exactly as he did to Jericho. And they could take the spoil. And the livestock was plunder. But that's it. In terms of instructions. From the Lord. The manner of the battle. How they go to battle. How they're to go about it. Was very much down to Joshua. The Lord told Joshua. To set an ambush. Verse 2. But he didn't tell them. How to set an ambush. Joshua observed. How the last battle at Ai went.

[23:44] And so he bases his battle plans. Around that. Yes. God is sovereign. But that sovereignty. Does not remove. Joshua's responsibility.

To plan. To fight. And what an intriguing battle it is. You can imagine. The tension in the camp. Plans are drawn up. You can imagine.

Joshua. Perhaps on the ground. He's sketching out his battle plans. In the earth. With his finger. Showing people where to go. How it's going to unfold. How the ambush was to be set. And the people move into place.

The trap is set. And the men of Ai fall for it. Look at verse 16. So all the people who are in the city. Were called together to pursue them. And as they pursued Joshua.

They were drawn away from the city. Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel. He did not go out after Israel. The ambush has worked. The people of Ai have fallen for it.

[24:43] They've followed the Israelites out. Leaving the city empty. And again. God directs the action. Verse 18. Stretch out the javelin that's in your hand.

Towards Ai. For I will give it into your hands. And the people do all that the Lord commanded them. Look on to verse 26 and 27.

Joshua did not draw 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 did Israel take.

As their plunder. According to the word of the Lord that he commanded Joshua. They did all. That the Lord commanded. Obedience to God's words brought victory.

Obedience didn't earn victory. But it was through their obedience that victory would be theirs. Disobedience. Disobedience on the other hand. Have brought defeat.

[25:45] Chapter 7. Same city. Same Joshua. Two very different outcomes. And as we'll see in our final point. It is this commitment to God's words. This trust.

In what he has said. This submission to his words and his ways. That's the only way to true blessing. Then and now. It was by listening to God's words.

Responding in obedience. That victory came. And we need to observe again here. The shocking nature. Of what unfolds.

Notice what happens. With the inhabitants of Ai. And the king of Ai. From verse 22 onwards. Devoted to destruction. Everyone. Is put to the sword.

The city is burned with fire. The king. Is hung up in a tree. Probably once he's already dead. You can read more about that. In Deuteronomy 21.

[26:43] What's unfolding here. Is just what's said out there. In Deuteronomy. People were put to death. For certain capital offenses. And then they were hung in a tree. In order to serve as a warning.

To everybody else. This is what happens. When you break the laws. That are punishable by death. And by hanging the king in this way. So publicly. It was a very somber sign.

To all the land of Canaan. That this nation stands. Under the judgment of God. And remember what the people had done.

To warrant God's judgment. Listen to this from Deuteronomy. It says there. Do not say in your heart. After the Lord your God. Has thrust them out before you. It is because of my righteousness. That the Lord has brought me. To possess this land. Whereas. It is because of the wickedness. Of these nations. That the Lord. Is driving them out before you. That is why this is happening.

[27:44] That is why the conquest. Of the Canaanites is happening. It is because of the wickedness. Of these nations. That is why judgment. Is

falling upon them.

And what we read here. It is shocking. It is gruesome. Isn't it? And we should struggle. To read it. It's meant to shock us. As we see what happens here.

To the king of Ai. And one preacher put it this way. Perhaps. The living God. Must stoop. To such spectacles as this.

Or else we might never fear sin. The Lord is making it so clear. About what he thinks about wickedness.

And sin. And evil. And that is often our problem. We don't really grasp. The gravity of sin. We underestimate. The holiness of God.

[28:42] We overestimate. Our goodness. We underestimate. Just how serious sin is. Perhaps. We need chapters like this one. We need passages like this one.

To jolt us. Out of our complacency. To realize that yes. God is serious about sin. It's not some trivial matter. No, no. God really does judge sin.

He really does take it seriously. And the thing is. If we find this disturbing. Then we need to read the far more vivid warnings.

That come to us in the New Testament. From the lips of the Lord Jesus. He speaks. More clearly than anybody else. Doesn't he? About the reality of hell. And of judgments. And about the warning of cunning judgments.

It's a very sobering thing to read. Isn't it? But by the end of this chapter. God has done what he promised.

[29:42] The city of Ai. Has fallen. Joshua. And Israel. Victorious. The conquest. Continues. The Lord has kept his word. From the depths of despair.

End of chapter 7. The Lord delights to give a second chance to his people. Ai. Part 2. Is a glorious victory.

But our passage doesn't finish there. We've got this little paragraph at the end. From verse 30. To the end of the chapter. Just cast your eye over that.

It seems like a complete sidetrack to the story. Doesn't it? We've been swept along. In the scene of battle. The exciting stuff. The ambush. The victory.

The battle. And now the camera pans back. From the battlefield. And we move. To another place entirely.

[30:43] A new location. And what we see here. Is a very somber. Covenant. Remembrance service. It seems a bit jarring. Out of place.

Doesn't it? But perhaps this is exactly the writer's purpose. In including this here. He's drawing our attention to this. Because what happens in this brief paragraph. At the end of chapter 8.

Is crucial. To the whole conquest of the land. In terms of how the book. Is put together. How it's structured. It's very clearly significant. If the first four chapters of the book of Joshua.

Are about crossing over into the land. That amazing crossing of the river Jordan. Then. These chapters we're in the middle of now. Are all about the conquest.

So chapter 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. They're all about the conquest. Of the land. It finishes in chapter 11. At the very end. Where it says these words.

[31:41] The land had rest. From war. So until the end of chapter 11. We're in the midst of battle. And this conquest section.

We're in the middle of here. From chapter 5. To chapter 11. Is split into four parts. And each begins. With a very similar heading. It's almost like chapter titles.

So we do a bit of page flicking. So come with me to chapter 5. And look at verse 1. Look how this begins. This is the beginning of the conquest. Section of the book.

Chapter 5. Verse 1. As soon as all the kings of the Amorites. Who are beyond the Jordan to the west. All the kings of the Canaanites. Who are by the sea. Heard. That the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan.

Now stop there. That's all you need to notice. As soon as the kings. Heard of the Lord. Okay. That's section 1 of the conquest. Flick over to chapter 9. Verse 1.

[32:45] See if you recognize these words. Chapter 9. Verse 1. As soon as all the kings. Who are beyond the Jordan. In the hill country. The

lowland. Along the coast. Of the great sea. Towards the Lebanon. And so on.

When they heard of this. End of verse 1. They gathered together as one. To fight against Joshua and Israel. So that's part 2 of the conquest. Chapter 10. Verse 1.

As soon as Adonai Zedak. King of Jerusalem. Heard. How Joshua had captured Ai. And then again. We get the same. In chapter 11. Verse 1. When King Jabin.

King of Hazel. Heard of this. He sent to Joabab. King of Madon. So each of these sections. Begins with kings. Hearing about the Lord's work. And they come to fight.

Against Joshua. Joshua. And God's people. Four sections. And we are at the end. Of section 1. We've just seen the battles. Of Joshua. Of Jericho.

[33:42] And Ai. Next week. We're into phase 2. Against the Gibeonites. Now that's all very interesting. You might think. I love thinking about structure. And all these things.

But these are effectively. Chapter headings. In the conquest. Now what's the point? Why do I draw that out? To make a point about it? Well the bit we're in this evening.

We're coming to the end. Of phase 1. Of the conquest. It begins in chapter 5. And it ends in this section here. And what's interesting. Is how this whole section.

Begins and ends. So last bit of page flicking. Go back to the start of the section. Chapter 5. Chapter 5. And just cast your eyes.

Over verses 1 to 12. What happens. In this section. Here's the beginning of the conquest. What happens. Well there's no battles.

[34:40] There's no strategy meetings. There's no battle planning. Rather what we see happening here. Is a bit surprising. We read about circumcision.

Of the whole army. We read about Passover. Verses 10, 11 and 12. Before any battle coincidences. That's what's happening.

The old covenant sacraments. Of circumcision. And Passover. And look how this phase of battle ends. The bit we're just in tonight. Look at chapter 8.

Verses 30 to the end. How does this first part of the conquest finish. Well. It's a renewal of the covenant. Joshua reads the words of the law of God.

He reads the blessings and the curses. In other words. This first phase of the conquest. Is bookended by a focus on the Lord. His word. His sacraments.

[35:38] Worshipping the Lord. The covenant renewal ceremony. Demonstrates the centrality of God's unchanging word of promise to the conquest. All Israel was gathered together.

To hear the words of the law of Moses read out. It's deeply significant. This is how the conquest begins. It's bookended.

By setting themselves apart to worship the Lord. To hear his word. To see the marks of the sacraments being given. Circumcision and Passover. And this wasn't a hastily arranged ceremony outside Ai.

Notice where this takes place. Verse 30. Mount Ebal. It's about 20 miles away from Ai. It's a good day's walk. And it's a place of great significance for God's people.

The place where Abraham first received the promise of the land. The place where Jacob returned to after long exile. They returned to the very same place. It's all these centuries later.

[36:43] It's a stunning visual demonstration of God's enduring and never failing promises. And the whole people are there. Everyone's there.

Verse 33. All Israel. Sojourners as well as native born. Their elders and officers. Their judges. Everyone's there. But why? Why? Well not only was it a place of great significance for the people of Israel.

But Joshua is doing this in obedience to the command of the Lord. In Deuteronomy 27. Which in reality takes place just a few weeks or months before these events.

In Deuteronomy 27. Moses instructs the people to do this very thing. Once they're in the land. He instructs them to go to Mount Ebal.

And to go there. And read. To all the people. The blessings and curses of the covenant. And Joshua knew that central to everything that people were going to do.

[37:49] Central to the conquest. Of the promised land was God's word. It was a clear indication that worship. Not warfare.

Was the priority for the lives of God's people. The first and greatest priority. Was not. Moving on to the next city to fight. But rather it was submitting themselves to God's word.

And responding to it by obeying. Every word of it. If the conquest was to happen. Then what mattered most. Was the submission of all God's people to all God's ways.

And Joshua is careful to do just as Moses instructed them. He gathers the people there. Standing between the two hills. Mount Ebal. And Mount Gerizim. And the events of Ai could not make for a clearer illustration.

As Moses. As Joshua reads out. The blessings and the curses. From Jeuteronomy 27. Stand between those two mountains. They've just experienced the curse of God.

[38:58] With the defeat of Ai. With Achan. But they've also experienced the great blessings. With Ai part two. And as Joshua stands there.

Reading. The blessings and the curses. The people of Israel could be in no doubt. As to their priorities. They move on. Into the lands. All the people must give their wholehearted and total obedience.

To all God's word. Because his word is unailing. His word is powerful. He is a God of faithfulness. And he will achieve all that he's promised.

There will be blessings for obedience. And curses for disobedience. And whilst we do not live under the Mosaic covenant now.

It's absolutely the case. That obedience is still the way of blessing for us. And disobedience the way of cursing. The Bible is a big book.

[39:59] In many ways of curses and blessings. From the very beginning in Genesis 3. Cursed be the snake as he thithers on the ground. Yet there is blessing. The one is coming.

That though he will grasp at his heel. He will crush the head of the serpent. There is blessing. And then the announcement of Abraham. In chapter 12 of Genesis. I will bless you.

And I will make your name great. And you will be a blessing. Not just to Israel. But to the nations. And we are the inheritors of these great blessings. If we belong to Jesus Christ.

There are still curses. And there are still blessings. Choose the way of blessing. Choose the way of obedience. David Jackman writes this.

Obedience is not the price that God demands. In order to dispense blessings from his otherwise reluctant grasp. Rather. Obedience is the means by which the channels of overflowing grace are kept open.

[41:00] So that all the blessings of the covenant faithfulness of God. Can be experienced by dependent people who trust and obey. And so as the people are stood there.

Between these two great mountains. Mount Ebal. Mount Gerizim. As Joshua reads out. The blessings on the one hand. And the curses on the other.

He's setting before the people. Choose the way of blessing. Choose life. Choose the way of obedience. obedience. And the Israelites needed those two hills to remind them.

It's not automatic. There are two ways to go. There are only two ways to live your life. There is the way of abundant blessing. Through obedience to God's command.

Or there is the way that God forbids. There is the way of unthinkable disaster. And you've seen it. You've seen it with Achan.

[42:01] Don't go that way. And the Lord Jesus says the same thing, doesn't he? Two gates leading to two places. Two trees.

One fruiting to life. The other cast into the fire. Two houses. Only one built on the rock. By responding to God's word with obedient faith.

Only that one will stand in the judgment. The other will crumble away. So which will you go? As they stand on the brink of the rest of the conquest.

Which way would God's people go? The way of blessing? Or the way of cursing? And the same question comes to us.

Which way will you choose? The way of Achan? Or the way of Joshua? Choose the way of blessing. Choose the way of Christ.

[43:00] Because his word never falls to the ground. We can trust him.
Well let me pray. And then we'll sing together to close our service.
Amen. Our Father we thank you that your word is a word of great clarity.
That you do set before us. Two ways. And two ways only. The way of life. Or the way of death. And
so would you help us.
To be a people that respond. In obedience. Glad trust. In all that you promised us. That we would
be a people that live. And walk by faith.
And trust in you. Because your way is the way of life. And you are a good and a gracious God. Who
speaks words of tender reassurance to us.
And how we need those words. So help us to be a people that hear and respond. In glad
obedience. For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.