

Into the Promise: A Journey Through Joshua
Lesson Five: “Do Not Fear”
Joshua 7-8

The most deadly sins do not leap upon us; they creep upon us.
~ Stephen Olford

Israel’s journey of stepping *Into the Promise* of the land of Canaan mirrors our Christian experience. The abundant life of Christ is ours by birthright. But just as the children of Israel had to fight the enemies who dwelt in the land, we must engage in spiritual warfare to possess our Canaan. The Christian life is not lived aboard a cruise ship; it is more like a storm-tossed voyage on board a battleship. And this I know, on the authority of God’s Word and from personal experience! Franklin D. Roosevelt is credited with this quote, “A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor,” meaning that true skill and resilience are developed by facing challenges and overcoming difficulties, not by experiencing only easy situations. And all God’s people said, “Amen and amen.”

The land of Canaan was promised to Israel through God’s covenant with Abraham. God revealed to Abraham (then known as Abram) the coming 400-year enslavement of His people in Egypt and the Exodus when “they will come out with many possessions (Genesis 15:14). God continued, “Then in the fourth generation they will return here [to Canaan] for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). During the intervening period of time, the Promised Land had been inhabited by the enemies of Israel who were thoroughly entrenched, living in fortified cities designed to avoid surrendering the land they had claimed. That is, until God led Israel, now 2-3 million strong, across the Jordan. And now, it is on! It is so on!

I. The Holiness of God (Joshua 7:1-15)

Joshua and all of Israel are riding high after the unmitigated victory at Jericho. As Kenneth Gangel writes,

What a victory. And everything happened just the way God said it would. Israel was on a spiritual, emotional, and military high. Taking the Promised Land was going to be a piece of cake. A little marching, blowing trumpets, some shouting – and every city in Canaan would be theirs. ¹

A quick aside, sisters. The victory at Jericho, Israel’s first military venture in the Promised Land, was stunning to say the least. Moving ahead, the last thing Israel expects is defeat. Most of us, in the early days of our Christian lives, had the same expectations and thought, “Life is gonna be so easy now that I belong to Jesus.” We were blissfully unaware of the enemy. When the devil shows his hand, we are forced to make a decision that will basically determine the course of our Christian life. In light of how difficult this life pursuing personal holiness and practical righteousness is proving to be, will we scurry back to the wilderness and content ourselves with carnal Christianity? Or will we put on the whole armor of God, and “stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11), taking up the shield of faith and wielding the sword of the Spirit? We must decide. So beloved, choose well! Now, back to our story.

Warren Wiersbe prepares us for what is to come:

The ominous word *but* that introduces Joshua 7 is a signal that things are going to change; for Joshua is about to descend from the mountaintop of victory at Jericho to the valley of defeat at Ai.²

Notice that God is holding all the children of Israel guilty of acting “unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban” (Joshua 7:1). As we read this week:

Israel (and the entire ancient Near East) was a collectivist culture. This kind of culture stands in stark contrast to the individualistic culture of our western mindset. In ancient Israel, a person’s identity was linked directly to their people group, and the people as a whole were viewed as one unit. Morality was a community concern: When one person sinned, the group shared responsibility.³

The next stop on the march to move *Into the Promise* of the land flowing with milk and honey, is Ai. It is a small fortress city located about two miles from Jericho. As Israel prepares for the battle, Joshua does not know that God is angry with Israel because of the sin of one man, Achan.

Joshua dispatches two spies to Ai. Their report of the insignificant numbers of inhabitants seems to be the reason Joshua does not consult the Lord before engaging in battle and sends a much smaller contingent of fighting men. As a result, the people of Ai rout the downsized army of Israel and kill 36 men. And “the hearts of the people melted and became as water” (Joshua 7:5). The words are reminiscent of Rahab’s as she describes the rampant fear of Israel’s God in Jericho (Joshua 2:9; 11; 24). Only these words now describe Israel instead of her enemies!

Joshua, unaware of Achan’s deception, is shattered by the catastrophe at Ai. He falls on his face before the Lord and tears his garments in anguish. God says, “Rise up...Israel has sinned” (Joshua 7:10-11). God reveals the reason behind their defeat and promises, “I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst” (Joshua 7:12).

God tells Joshua to rise up and *consecrate* the people as He did before He led them across the Jordan. In the morning, God will deal with the man responsible for transgressing the covenant of the Lord. God extends grace, giving time and space for the guilty party to repent, but he does not step forward to confess. The next day, the people are gathered by tribes. The lot is cast. While the Lord could have revealed the guilty party with a word, this process causes all of Israel to search their hearts and learn from this tragedy. All the children of Israel hold their collective breath as they watch this slow, deliberate, and agonizing course of action unfold until Achan is identified.

Achan admits what he has done, but his confession does not show evidence of repentance, and it is coerced, not voluntary. True repentance goes beyond admission of the transgression. It acknowledges guilt and shows genuine remorse. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Achan and his entire family, as well as all he possessed are stoned to death and then burned with fire. The consequence of Achan’s rebellion wipes out his whole family, assuring no trace of his sin remains.

This chapter details the tragic story of Achan and reminds us of the consequences of sin. It has well been said, “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you

want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”⁴ The first thought of the enticement to sin seems almost insignificant as Satan whispers in our ear, “Has God said...?” We often rationalize, “What difference will it make? What could it hurt?” If only we could see the end result (James 1:14-15) of our sin and realize that the full impact on others in our sphere of influence.

The sin of one man, Achan, has contaminated the nation of Israel. Lest we think this danger is limited to the Old Testament, in 1 Corinthians 5:6 Paul writes, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” Sin spreads and corrupts what it touches. This is often referred to as “the perniciousness of sin.” The word pernicious means “harmful, damaging, destructive.”⁵ Sin not only causes immediate negative consequences, but it can also have a lingering, harmful effect on a person’s life, often leading to further sin.

Beloved, may we be careful to walk worthy of the high calling of Christ, choosing to “walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of [our] time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

II. The God of Second Chances (Joshua 8:1-35)

Once Israel has judged the sin that defiled their camp, God speaks to Joshua and gives him directions to take Ai. In Joshua 8:1 we read, “Now the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Do not fear or be dismayed.’” God is fortifying Joshua’s faith at his point of weakness: fear. Instead of berating His child for his recurring shortcoming, God reinforces Joshua’s courage by assuring him of His presence and His victory. How kind of the Lord! And in what can only be a descriptor of God’s amazing grace and abundant provision, He says, “You shall take only its spoil and its battles as plunder for yourselves” (Joshua 8:2). If only Achan had waited!

After their humiliating defeat at Ai, Joshua and his men are careful to obey the Lord’s commands, which ensures a resounding victory. At God’s direction, they slay the inhabitants of Ai but save the king alive and bring him to Joshua. Joshua kills the king of Ai and hangs him on a tree until sunset. Joshua then has the corpse removed and thrown at the city gate where a great heap of stones is raised over it.

It is important to keep the annihilation of the people of Ai in context. This is not the slaughter of innocent people, but the judgment of God on an evil society that has long resisted God’s grace. They had been given the same revelation Rahab had, but her acceptance led to saving faith while their rejection led to their destruction (Romans 1-3). Roger Ellsworth provides helpful commentary:

Some are troubled by the destruction of the city of Ai, but this destruction came about only after these people, along with the other Canaanites, lived without regard for God. Their disregard for God followed the example of their forefathers who had done the same for centuries. During all those years, the Canaanites committed the most horrific sins imaginable, including child sacrifice (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). After giving them hundreds of years in which to repent, God finally visited judgement upon them.⁶

At a later date, Joshua interrupts their military campaign and leads the people some 30 miles north to Shechem, which lies in the valley between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim for a time of spiritual renewal and commitment. At Mt. Ebal, Joshua builds an altar to the Lord where they offer sacrifices and where Joshua writes a copy of the law of Moses. Half of the people are positioned in front of Mt. Gerizim and half in front of Mt. Ebal while Joshua read “all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law” (Joshua 8:34).

In all, four stone monuments have been built. The first at Gilgal commemorated Israel's passage through the Jordan. The second, built in the Valley of Achor, stood as a reminder of Achan's sin and God's judgment. The third, at the entrance of Ai, was a memorial of God's faithfulness to help His people. Then, the one on Mt. Ebal was to remind Israel that their success lay only in their obedience to God's Law.

Beloved, the God we serve knows all, sees all, and controls all. This magnanimous truth comforts us as believers as we walk in the flow of the Spirit, with our sins confessed up to date, our wills surrendered, and our hearts and minds devoted to Him. But this same truth should strike fear into His wayward child and certainly for those outside a personal relationship with Christ. God invites us to step *Into the Promise* of all that Christ has purchased for us, both here on our pilgrims' path and in eternity when we see Him face to face! So press on, my beloved sister in Christ. Press on to live in the fullness of Christ!

¹ Gangel, K.O. (2002). *Joshua*. M. Anders, Ed.; p. 118. B&H Publishing Group.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong*, p. 82. Victor Books.

³ *Into the Promise*, p. 133.

⁴ Adrian Rogers

⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary*

⁶ Ellsworth, R. (2008). *Opening up Joshua*, pp. 81-82. Day One Publication.