

# Receiving Your Inheritance

## Messages from the Book of Joshua

### Message 8

#### *Ungodly Compromise*

Joshua 8:1-9:27

Read Joshua 8:1-8

#### ***Introduction***

Israel had won a spectacular victory against Jericho. An ill-equipped, inexperienced, untrained army had totally annihilated the powerful city of Jericho. Except for Rahab, who helped the spies, and her family, there were no survivors. But the exuberance of this wonderful success was short-lived – for Israel’s next excursion against the city of Ai was a dismal failure. Again a small army defeated a much larger force, but this time it was Israel who was on the losing end of battle. It was distressing to lose the battle. It was grievous to lose 36 men. It was frightening to try again. And it was humiliating, in the face of God’s promise of success. But it was not difficult to understand. God had cursed Jericho, and He had promised to curse Israel also if they took any of the spoils of war for themselves. Achan gave in to temptation and stole some valuables, so God gave Israel defeat in their next battle. Although it must have been a very painful thing to do, Joshua led Israel in executing Achan for his disobedience.

#### ***Victory over Ai***

Sin was purged from the nation, but the whole experience surely took its toll. So God spoke to Joshua. “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed.” Over and over, again and again God reminds Joshua. There is nothing to fear. “I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.” This time Israel will win – not because they are stronger or wiser, or even because they learned from their mistakes (although I hope they did) – but because God will fight for them. Notice God did not say, “You will defeat them,” but “I have given them.” God is the subject. He is the center of the action. Everything depends on what He will do. In this case, He will royally whip the Aites. And He will use Israel to do so.

There is one big difference in this campaign, however. This time God instructed the Israelites to take the spoils of war for themselves. They were supposed to plunder Ai and carry off its valuables: gold and silver, cattle and sheep, iron and bronze. Every family in Israel will increase their wealth – every one except Achan. Achan lusted after the riches of Jericho. He couldn’t wait until Ai – and he paid for his wicked impatience with his life.

God continued by giving Joshua a plan to defeat the city. This time instead of a ceremonial march, God instructed Joshua to use an ambush. This chapter continues by describing the ambush and the battle. And of course everything went exactly as God said. The ambush was a fabulous success. Every inhabitant of Ai was killed, and all the loot was collected by the Israelites. Once again, God’s promises were fulfilled to the letter.

#### ***Renewing the Covenant***

Then Joshua did something extremely important. (Read 8:30-35) He remembered that Moses had commanded them to stand between the twin peaks of Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim and read God’s law. You can read the original instructions in Deuteronomy 27. As it says here, they were supposed to build an altar and offer sacrifices on it. Then they were supposed to write the ten commandments on stones. Finally, they were supposed to divide up, half of Israel on the side near Mt. Gerizim and half on the side near Mt. Ebal. One group would read the blessings God promised to them when they obeyed Him, and the other group would read the curses God promised when they disobeyed Him. Verse 35 reports that Joshua did exactly as

God commanded – to the letter.

We should pause here to reflect briefly on the nature of God’s relationship with the Israelites. All through the Old Testament this relationship has been described as a covenant. When God first called Abraham He made a covenant with him. This is explicitly described in Genesis 15, where in verse 18 we read, “On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram.” This is not the place to do an extensive study of covenant, but the gist of it is that a covenant is a solemn agreement. The Westminster Catechism says that a covenant is an agreement between two or more persons. This is true, but it doesn’t describe the full meaning of covenant. A better quick definition of Biblical covenants is to say that a covenant is a treaty. With the exception of marriage and other covenants between equals, covenants are usually imposed by force and enforced by arms. The covenants of the Bible are virtually identical to the treaties used by the kings of the ancient Near East, and have certain identifiable characteristics. There were five parts to an ancient Near Eastern treaty. First, the conquering king would be identified in glowing terms. Then his magnificent exploits would be recounted, especially his deliverance of the captive nation (i.e. from some other predatory power). Third, the terms of the treaty would be posted. These were the laws the conquered people were required to obey, and included tribute owed and service in the king’s army. Fourth were the sanctions – the blessings and curses. The conquering king would promise to protect and assist the land if they kept his laws. But he also promised to come and destroy them if they rebelled. Finally there were provisions for the perpetuation of the covenant into future generations.

These five parts are found more or less in all covenants among the ancient Near Eastern peoples, and they are likewise found in the covenants of the Bible. The huge difference between Biblical covenants and other ancient covenants is that while the ancient kings made war and imposed treaties for their own selfish ends, God made covenants with people for their own good. You see, God visited Abraham and commanded him to leave his home. If he would do so, there would be a blessing, and it would last for many generations. In the desert God made war against His rebellious people, and subdued them. He declared that He was the great and awesome God, who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He gave them His law, and issued promises and warnings for obedience and disobedience. He promised to carry these into future generations. And now we see this being fulfilled. This is the next generation standing between the two mountains. They have been obedient, and God has blessed them. Now they are pledging their continued obedience to God’s covenant.

There is a profound misunderstanding among some Christians about the way God treats His people. As recently as last week someone, a campus worker, was telling me about God’s “unconditional love”. He has this idea that God always blesses His people, even when they stray. No, folks! This is just wrong. There comes a time when God does not bless, but curses His people. This happened at Ai, remember? Achan sinned, and God brought the curse of Jericho upon Israel. You see, God’s love is not revealed in His tolerance of sin among His people. No, His love is revealed in His intolerance of sin. Remember what we said last week? Sin kills. And if sin remains in Israel, the whole nation will perish.

God does not unconditionally bless His people. He lives by covenant. God shows His love by sticking to the covenant. A selfish king would enact the curses of the covenant to get revenge for rebellion or to recoup back tribute from his subject people. But God enacts the curses on His people to purify, to restore His people. That is what happened at Ai. That is why God’s covenant includes both blessings and curses.

All this is true of the New Covenant in Christ. Our life as Christians is regulated by the New Covenant God established in Christ. The most profound curses were poured out on Christ as He hung on the

cross. But God will still discipline us to bring us to obedience to His word. Another time we will look at how the covenant operates under Christ. For now, we want to see the vital importance of obedience to God's word – a principle which was immediately tested

Read 9:1-7

***The Deception***

The Gibeonites shamefully tricked Israel into making a treaty with them. We immediately despise them for their cowardice. Yet what choice did they have? If they stood and fought, they would be killed. Isn't it better to live as a servant than to die? All true Americans must now rise to the latter. After all, the great Virginia patriot concluded his most stirring speech by saying, "Give me liberty or give me death!" And the motto of New Hampshire is "Live free or die!" These statements accurately capture the American revolutionary spirit. But while they are brilliant rhetoric, they do not reflect Biblical values. Even those pastors and theologians who support war do so on a limited basis. St. Augustine first outlined the principles by which Christians may rightly go to war. These principles have come down to us as the Just War theory. One of these principles is first exhausting all other means of solving the problem, and another is the likelihood of victory. In other words, Christians have believed for 1500 years that in a dispute between nations there must first be an attempt to establish peace by a treaty. If that does not work, and if victory seems possible, a nation may then go to war. But if victory is not achievable, war should be avoided.

Now judging by these criteria, the Gibeonites seem to have followed St. Augustine's Just War theory! They judged victory to be impossible, so they sought a treaty. Furthermore, they knew that Israel was forbidden to offer them a treaty, so they had no other choice but trickery. Right?

What about Israel? Were the Israelites a bunch of idiots to be so easily duped? Or was the disguise so masterful that no one would have detected a plot? What would you have done if you had been an Israelite?

The Israelites were not entirely gullible. The passage says they did in fact consider a plot by near neighbors. They closely questioned the envoys. They carefully examined the evidence. In the end they found no reason to doubt the messengers. So what could they do? Say, "No, we won't make a treaty with you because we don't like your looks."?

The essential problem here is revealed in verse 14, the second half. It says, "But they did not ask counsel of the LORD. The Israelites exercised all the wisdom they possessed. They were entirely responsible. But they made one critical mistake. They did not seek God's help. They tried to do it on their own.

Does this ever describe you? Do you ever set out on a task, maybe even a ministry activity, and neglect to ask God's help? A couple of weeks ago some of us went to

Israel's response  
covenant

Seeking God - Prov. 3:5-6

Resolution  
Ps 15  
curse

Result - salvation for all

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