

JOSHUA 7-8

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Joshua chapter 7 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

At this point the children of Israel are in the Promise Land, the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Now, from their base camp in Gilgal, they have gone out and defeated their first enemy, the Amorites in the city of Jericho.

This was a great victory for them. Jericho was a strong fortress, and I am sure that they were excited at what God had done through them in this victory.

But the battles are just beginning. Keep in mind that they fought these enemies in Canaan for seven years, and they have only one victory in the books right now. There still are many to go!

The next battle they will face are the people of Ai, which literally means, “*heap.*”

It was a small town compared to Jericho, located approximately 10 miles northwest of Jericho.

Now by defeating Ai the children of Israel will have control of the “*ridge route*” that ran north to south along the central highlands.

Thus, this was another strategically located city for the nation of Israel to defeat as they made their conquest to the south and the north.

As we begin our study this evening, let me start with these words from Joshua 6:27, as that chapter closed and this is what we were told, “**So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country.**”

That is where we will pick up our study this evening in Joshua chapter 7, starting in verse 1 as the children of Israel have destroyed Jericho and are on a high with that great victory, their fame is spreading, and let's see what lessons the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

JOSHUA 7

VERSE 1

I want you to notice something here that I think is important as we read the Scriptures. When a chapter or verse opens up with the word, "**But**" it is usually not a good thing and the same is true in our own lives.

When it is used in regard to the Lord, it is usually a good thing, but not for us and we see that very clearly here, it is not a good thing that the Lord is going to share with us.

What was the problem?

The problem is simple. Achan took some of the spoils of their victory in Jericho when Joshua told them, "**And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord.**" Joshua 6:18-19.

In other words, the spoils of this victory, the first fruits belonged to the Lord and not Achan. And Achan, by his actions, stole from the Lord!

Why would he do such a thing?

What motivated him to take what the Lord said was His?

Selfishness really is the key to all sin, and I believe that is what we see here and we will see that played out for us as this chapter continues on.

Phillip Keller offers some insight into how Achan could have rationalized his actions, and as you listen to this, be careful, because we can do the same.

He wrote, ***“After all, was he not a man of war? Had he not risked his life in crossing the Jordan? Was he not entitled to the spoils of war now that the city of Jericho had fallen? Didn’t tradition dictate that booty (spoil) was the reward of battle? Why should he necessarily capitulate to Joshua’s command about common people avoiding the accursed belongings of the Amorites?”***

Like I have said, we can rationalize sin so easily, just as Achan did!

Now we might not see this as such a big deal, but when you read about how the Lord feels in regard to this, it is a big deal. It is not only going to affect Achan, but the nation as a whole!

In regard to sin, Wesley Hunt writes, ***“Sin causes the loss of God’s power and presence. Sin shuts off the showers of God’s blessing. Sin stifles and strangles the abundant life promised in Christ. Sin paralyzes and immobilizes the life of the individual believer and the local body. God’s message to Joshua applies also to God’s people today in times of obvious spiritual defeat and decline; namely, deal with sin!”***

And like I have said, some may not see it this way. Some feel that sin only affects the person who is doing it, but that is not what we see here, and it is not what happens in life.

The sin of Achan would affect the entire nation and the same is true in our own lives.

Look at alcoholism, adultery, drug abuse and so on. Yes, it does affect the one doing it, but it reaches farther than that. It touches family and friends, and it is destructive and it can even be deadly!

And this is something to think about. We have seen and will see that the Canaanites couldn't defeat the children of Israel, but the children of Israel could defeat themselves by quenching the work of the Holy Spirit, by quenching the work of God in their lives.

And thus, they will alienate themselves from God's plan and God's power!

And folks, the same is true in the battles we face, we are defeated only when we turn from God!

VERSES 2-3

What we see here is that on the heels of this great victory that God had given to the children of Israel at Jericho, they were very self-confident.

Look at what Joshua does. We see Joshua send out spies to check out Ai. Keep in mind that Ai was a very small city in comparison to Jericho, and thus, this should be an easy battle.

In fact, the spies told Joshua not to bother sending all the men of war in, but just a few. In other words, ***"Why weary everyone when this is such an easy battle!"***

Please understand that this is purely a fleshly outlook on this situation. You don't see any mention of Joshua praying, seeking God's direction in this battle and that is not a good thing.

Paul tells us in Galatians 3:3, **"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"**

In other words, are you going to rely on your own strength or on God?

One writer summed it up like this for us. He wrote, *“This was the first time in the Conquest that Joshua did anything on his own initiative, and it was doomed to failure. It is ominous that nothing is said about Joshua seeking guidance from the Lord. The great victory at Jericho made him overly confident of God’s help.”* (Madvig)

For Joshua, he is going to move out in the flesh instead of continuing what God has begun in the Spirit and he will fail miserably!

Keep in mind that yesterday’s victory does not make a believer immune to being defeated today.

And folks, it is usually the small things, the easy things that cause us to stumble because we try to accomplish in the flesh what must be done in the Spirit.

Those big things we pray, we seek God’s direction because we know we can’t do it on our own and thus, it usually is the little things that cause us to stumble!

We must continually, in all things, depend on the Lord.

It is as Paul said in Ephesians 6:10, **“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”**

May we not forget that!

Now here is something that we need to think about. When we gain a victory of some sin or some problem, when God gives us that victory, we can easily take credit for it, think we now are strong and we can do anything and pride comes into our lives, and that is dangerous.

Remember what we are told in Proverbs 16:18, **“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.”**

I like what Alan Redpath had to say about this. He wrote,

There is no moment so perilous as when, for the first time in his Christian life, the man of God has experienced deliverance from sin. At such times we begin to take pride in ourselves, and to boast that our own arm has saved us. We so easily imagine that because we have achieved victory once, God has imparted to us some new strength which will see us through all our earthly journey.

Alas, how utterly contradictory to the truth that is!

The fact is that, apart from the grace of God and the blood of Jesus, the smallest temptations will be too powerful for us.

The victories we win in fellowship with a risen Christ impart no strength to us. The victory you won yesterday will not bring you power today.

The greatest lesson that the child of God has to learn is the lesson learned by Paul, that ***“in my flesh dwells no good thing,”*** and that ***“when I am weak, then I am strong”***; for the greatest cause of failure in Christian living is just this: imagining that the victory God has given us has imparted strength to us to win every battle, when it has done nothing of the kind.

Remember, fellow Christian, the first reason for failure at Ai was self-confidence.

- Alan Redpath

Something for us to remember and learn from for these lessons are for us to learn from!

VERSES 4-5

Think about this for a minute. What if Joshua sent in 100,000 men, would they have won this battle?

Absolutely not. It did not matter how many men they sent, God was not with them, and they were not going to gain the victory!

Not only that but the men of Ai did not defeat the children of Israel, but the children of Israel defeated themselves.

This may sound ridiculous, but it is true. Even if there was one man in Ai, apart from the Lord they were not going to be victorious!

In this battle we see 3,000 men enter in at Ai and 2964 come home in defeat. We see that 36 men lost their lives and that is 36 more than died in the battle of Jericho, which was a bigger and stronger enemy! In the bigger battle against Jericho, not one soldier lost his life! That can only be the hand of God!

But here, they did not take this battle seriously and from a military standpoint, only losing 36 men in battle is not bad, but 36 men could have been saved and the children of Israel could have been victorious if they would have sought the Lord in this matter.

You see, the sin of one person had consequences on the innocent and because Joshua did not seek the Lord, they were defeated!

Think about it. ***“When God is with us, Jericho is not too strong to be captured; when He is driven from us by our own sin, Ai is not too weak to defeat us.”*** (Maclaren)

And notice that in their failure that fear is now growing in the camp of Israel. If they could not destroy Ai, how in the world could they defeat anyone?

And the reality is for them and for us; we won't be able to defeat anyone apart from the Lord, apart from God's help!

Jesus said in John 15:5, **“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”**

May we understand that truth!

It is as the Lord told Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:6, “**. . . ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the Lord of hosts.**”

VERSES 6-9

Joshua is in mourning, not only for these 36 men and their defeat at Ai, but for the nation in general.

The word, “**Alas**” we might paraphrase and say, “*We’ve had it!*”

And notice how Joshua is blaming God here!

First of all, he tells the Lord, “**Why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all . . . to destroy us?**”

Sounds like what the children of Israel were saying 40 years earlier and now, their leader, Joshua is saying it!

The problem wasn’t with the Lord, but the sin in their camp that was not dealt with. God did not bring them into the Promise Land to destroy them but when a person is in sin, they tend to blame God for their problems, like we see here.

Secondly, “**What shall I say . . . now that Israel has turned to flee before their enemies?**”

In other words, Joshua is speechless; he doesn’t know what to do since Israel was defeated at Ai.

Folks, what about prayer, seeking God, seeking direction from Him instead of blaming God! That is what he needed to do.

And thirdly, **“Then what will you do for your great name?”**

Here Joshua is saying that when the enemies hear of this defeat at Ai, ***Your*** reputation will be destroyed before these pagan nations! And the reality is, at least in the mind of Joshua, is ***“Then what are you going to be able to do about it?”*** and in his mind God will be able to do nothing!

God told them that He would give them these victories and now He has failed to do that as Ai defeated them, this little town! And once word does come out, all the enemies will come down upon them to wipe them out and they will be powerless to stop them. And when that happens, again, what is God going to do?

Folks, if you are blaming God, you have a wrong perspective of the situation. Do a heart check on yourself because it is not His fault, as we will see!

VERSES 10-12

This seems pretty harsh on God’s part, doesn’t it?

How in the world could Joshua have known that there was sin in the camp?

How could he know that Achan took some of the spoils of the victory at Jericho?

Joshua could have known even before the battle of Ai if he prayed, sought direction from God, but he didn’t and thus, the Lord tells Joshua, **“Get up!”**

Why does the Lord say that?

Because instead of laying with his face down begging God to change His heart Joshua needed to face up to the issues before him, that sin was in the camp, and it was Israel that needed to change their heart before God!

The defeat of the children of Israel was not God's fault, but their own fault and God was not going to fight for them *UNTIL* they removed the accursed thing from among them!

Paul, in I Corinthians 5:1-6 speaks of how sin does affect those around the sinner, and here it affects the church. He wrote, **“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”**

You see, pride had now allowed them to welcome sin into the church, a man who was having sexual relations with his father's wife, his stepmother!

The Greek word that is used for **“sexual immorality”** is *PORNEIA* (por-ni'-ah) and it speaks of any kind of extra-marital sex.

And keep in mind that this was not a one-night-stand, as wrong as that was, but this was an affair that continued on and he continued going to church.

First of all, the Old Testament says this is wrong. (Leviticus 18:7-8, 29; Deuteronomy 22:30)

Also, even the unsaved saw this kind of behavior, this kind of relationship as being wrong, Roman law forbid it!

But for the Corinthians, they were proud of their tolerance, their liberty they had in Christ!

And Paul tells them that this letter represents him in regard to this issue. That he need not be there in person to deal with this issue.

As Paul makes this judgment some might be upset and say what Jesus said back in Matthew 7:1-2, **“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”**

I guess that is a way for people to justify their sin, their behavior but that is not what Jesus is speaking of.

Yes, before you confront someone in sin, make sure you come with the right motivation, the right heart attitude before you do.

Secondly, as Warren Wiersbe said, *“While Christians are not to judge one another’s motives or ministries, we are certainly expected to be honest about each other’s conduct.”*

We are to keep each other accountable and when sin is seen, it needs to be dealt with or like a cancer it will permeate the body!

Also, we are to judge doctrine to make sure it lines up with the Word of God.

Now the solution to this problem, Paul tells them, is to excommunicate this man, remove him from their fellowship, and hand him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh!

Why did he say that?

Because there is protection within the body of believers and when someone is excommunicated, they are out there on their own in Satan’s dominion you might say.

The destruction of the flesh can mean the attacks of the enemy against their lives and as he gets beat up, that he would then come to his senses and repent and get right with God, stop the sin he was in.

The idea is not damnation but restoration for God is interested in a person's spirit for all flesh will eventually go back to the dust of the earth.

Of this Warren Wiersbe said, ***“Church discipline is not a group of ‘pious policemen’ out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of broken hearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family.”***

Why doesn't Paul rebuke the woman that was involved?

I believe it is because she was not saved and thus, she is not held to the same standards as those that are saved.

So this man was not only involved in this sexual sin, but he united himself to a woman who was not saved!

These Corinthian believers were proud of their tolerance, but Paul shows them the foolishness of such behavior.

It would be like ignoring a tumor in your body, not getting it treated and boasting about your tolerance towards that cancer.

By doing that it will eventually grow and consume your body, destroying it!

That is what was happening in the Corinthian church and why it needed to be dealt with now!

And that is what was happening in the camp of Israel, and it needed to be dealt with now!

VERSES 13-15

Here is the solution to the problem.

First, they were to consecrate themselves before the Lord or set themselves apart unto the Lord.

Secondly, Joshua may not know the offender, but God does, and He will expose the sinner.

Paul makes that point in Hebrews 4:13, **“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”**

And thirdly, all involved are to be burned with fire.

You see, until the sin was dealt with, the nation would not be blessed!

And the Lord would have shown this to Joshua before the battle of Ai if Joshua had sought direction from the Lord, but he didn't.

For us as Christians, our position before God is secure in Jesus. I do not believe a Christian can lose his salvation, it was a free gift given to him by Christ and the work that Christ has started He will complete and has a place reserved for us in Heaven and thus, we will be there!

I think the real issue is our fellowship with God and that can be broken because of sin.

Paul said in I Thessalonians 5:19, **“Do not quench the Spirit.”**

You see, by disobeying the Lord, by rejecting what He is telling you to do or not do, you can quench the Spirit in your life or the work of the Spirit in your life. It is like throwing water on a fire, it will quench it!

In I John 1:9, John tells us, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**

I believe that John is speaking of our fellowship with God, the sanctification process.

You see, practically speaking we still sin, and sin can break our fellowship with God, it can keep us away from Him.

Yes, positionally our sins are cast away, but practically, they can get in our way with God!

It is as Proverbs 28:13-14 tells us, **“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. Happy is the man who is always reverent, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.”**

Look at the Kings of Judah and Israel and see what happens as they hardened their hearts to God. They ignored their sin. And they moved farther away from God.

Why?

Because the light exposes their darkness and thus, for them to continue in their sin, to ignore their sin, they walk in darkness.

But our God is so gracious; He is so merciful that if we will confess our sin before Him, that fellowship won't be hindered!

The Greek word for **“confess”** is *HOMOLOGEO*, (hom-ol-og-eh'-o) and it is literally telling us that we are to say the same thing, or we are to agree with God regarding sin, to hate sin and not to just hate it, but to avoid it, forsaking sin.

The problem comes when we don't agree with God and then we don't forsake the sin, and we break fellowship with God because of it.

But notice what we need to do.

We need to confess or agree with God regarding sin, forsake it. And God is faithful and just, He will forgive us of our sins.

Not only that, but He will also cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It is speaking of the sanctification process as God is molding and shaping our lives to be like Him!

VERSES 16-18

I'm sure that Achan's sin brought him pleasure for a time, but now that time was quickly coming to an end, as it always does!

And I'm sure he tried to justify his actions, he deserved the spoil of this victory, he fought in the battle and so on.

But now, the process of finding out who committed this sin has started and I'm sure Achan was a little nervous now.

And can you imagine how he was feeling as they went from tribe, to clan, to family and then finally to the man, Achan!

That fear must have overwhelmed him. God exposed the sinner.

And now I wonder if he thinks it was all worth it!

One writer summed it up like this,

Can you imagine what Achan is going through at this moment? Sweat is streaming down this forehead. His palms are clammy. It's getting stuffy and he's outside. His knees are starting to knock.

Judgment is closing in . . . Why in the world does Achan not confess, and throw himself on God's mercies?

But that's the problem with sin it causes you to hide and cover up – and believe you're the exception.

Sin is delusional. You start to think you'll be the first person in the history of the world to get away with it.

- Sandy Adams, Joshua 7

God will expose our sin, not because He hates us but because He loves us and wants us to repent of it, to get right with Him!

VERSES 19-21

Look at how long it took Achan to confess his sin, he waited until it was exposed, that he was the one who brought this reproach upon Israel!

And I don't believe he was truly sorry, that he truly repented for his actions. He is basically saying, "**Yes, I did this.**" No remorse that I see here, only that he got caught.

Think about it, his sin was exposed, what else could he do but tell them what he did.

But he had a choice, he could have repented and got right with God, but he didn't!

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 7:9-10, "**Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.**"

It is more of a sorry that they got caught but like Achan, it was not a sorrow that lead to true repentance!

Look at what he took, this beautiful Babylonian garment, which, “. . . *is very probable that this was the robe of the king of Jericho, for the same word is used, Jonah 3:6, to express the royal robe, of the king of Nineveh, which he laid aside in order to humble himself before God.*” (Clarke)

And here in Joshua 7:21 we see the natural progression of sin. ***“I SAW, I COVETED, I TOOK.”***

It is as John tells us, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh [I saw], the lust of the eyes [I coveted], and the pride of life [I took], is not from the Father but is of the world.”** I John 2:15-16.

And notice the progression of sin, how it starts and where it leads as James tells us, **“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”** James 1:14-15.

VERSES 22-26

Now we can understand why Achan was put to death for his sin, but why was his family?

Some say that the family of Achan was an accomplice to this crime, they knew about it and thus, they too were guilty.

That may be true, but I feel it was just Achan that was stoned and burned and the reason I say that is because of the words we have read in these few verses.

Look at verses 25 and 26 here in Joshua chapter 7. It says, **“you . . . you . . . him . . . him.”**

That is speaking of Achan being stoned and a heap of stones placed over him.

Then, in verses 24 and 25 of Joshua chapter 7 we see the words, “**them . . . them . . . them**” that are used, and this is probably speaking of his possessions, not his children.

It was his animals that they stoned and burned and his possessions that were burned, and I don’t believe it is speaking of his family. No heap of stones placed over his family!

Remember what the Lord said in Ezekiel 18:20, “**The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.**”

Now the name “**Achan**” means, “*trouble*” and I guess that he was. Funny that his parents named him that, but they did.

And the Valley of Achor means, the “*Valley of trouble.*”

But, interestingly enough, in Hosea 2:15 we are told, “**I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there, As in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.**”

What does that mean?

What does it mean that there is a door in the Valley of trouble?

I believe it is a picture of Jesus, that we are in trouble you might say in our sins, dead in sins and yet, there is a door that we can enter through; Jesus is that door where we will find forgiveness of sin. It truly is a door of hope that Hosea talked about!

Paul, in Galatians 5:24-25 reminds us, “**And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.**”

You see, the victory is given to us in Christ but we must crucify the flesh, put it to death on a daily basis if we are going to walk in the victory and that is done as we walk in the Spirit for the Spirit wars against the flesh and if we walk, if we surrender to the Spirit's leading, we will have that victory!

JOSHUA 8

VERSES 1-2

Notice the difference here. This is not Joshua's plan but the Lord's. He is doing the leading and it is the Lord who will give them the victory.

And folks, the ***“Victory in the Christian life is not in the absence of conflict but the presence and protection of God in the midst of conflict.”***

That is what the children of Israel were learning and what we need to learn!

And think about the sin of Achan. If he only waited God was going to bless them but he took the matter into his own hands and he lost everything.

You see, in this battle they were going to get the spoils of this victory at Ai.

How often we do the same and miss out on the blessings God had for us!

VERSES 3-13

The city of Ai had maybe 12,000 people and maybe half were soldiers, fighting men and now Joshua says to send in 30,000 men.

This first group was to be used as an ambush against the city of Ai and they were on the west side, hiding out.

The second group of soldiers, including Joshua camped right in front of the city of Ai, on the north side so they could be seen. They were the decoys you might say to entice the soldiers of Ai to come out of the city after them as they had done previously!

The third group of soldiers, about 5,000, were used to cut off any reinforcements coming to the aid of the people of Ai.

VERSES 14-17

When the king of Ai saw the children of Israel once again, it was like Deja vu to him. So he decided to do what he did before, go out after the children of Israel and send them fleeing for their lives once again. Only this time, as the men of the city left Ai, they also left it open for the children of Israel who were waiting on the west side, to enter in.

Ai was now defenseless!

VERSES 18-29

Notice how they gain this victory, the plan that God gave to them. They were going to trick the men of Ai into battle. An ambush.

As the men of Ai saw the children of Israel coming towards the city, they would go out after them, causing the children of Israel to flee, leading the men of Ai away from the city.

Once they left the city, the children of Israel that were waiting on the other side of the city would enter the defenseless city of Ai and destroy it.

The men of Ai would then see the smoke rising from their city and realize they have been tricked, and then Joshua and his men would come after them.

At that point the men of Ai knew the battle was over, their hearts melted when they saw their city go up in flames.

And Ai was completely destroyed, not by the power of the children of Israel but by the power of God working in and through the children of Israel as they walked in obedience to the Lord.

And in this victory the children of Israel took the spoils of this battle.

For the children of Israel, God was teaching them a lesson. There are consequences for obedience and disobedience and God would bless through their obedience to Him and He would chasten them in their disobedience!

In Joshua 8:18 we see God instruct Joshua to, **“Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.”**

And we see Joshua respond in Joshua 8:26, **“For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.”**

This must have reminded Joshua of an earlier incident, in Exodus 17:8-16, when Joshua and the children of Israel were fighting Amalek, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went up on top of the hill overseeing the battle.

And when the arms of Moses were lifted up, Israel prevailed in battle. And when the arms of Moses came down, Amalek prevailed.

It was symbolic of intercessory prayer, and we see the victory won over Amalek through intercessory prayer.

And now God instructs Joshua to raise his spear, and you can bet that he was in no way going to disobey and let his arms come down, especially after the previous defeat at Ai, until the battle was over.

VERSES 30-32

Remember that Moses had instructed them to take some large stones and whitewash them and then write the words of the Law on them.

Now some say it is speaking of a summation of all that Moses said here in Deuteronomy, which may only be the Ten Commandments, but it could be a summation of what is in that book.

But more than likely, it is the book of Deuteronomy. The reason I say that is because of what they have found.

Archeologists have discovered similar pillars with inscriptions or stelae six to eight feet long in the Middle East.

And the Behistun Inscription in Iran they have one that is three times the length of Deuteronomy, so I don't believe it is just the Ten Commandments, but the words that Moses wrote, the book of Deuteronomy that were written on these stones.

Also, on Mount Ebal they were to set up an altar.

Mount Ebal is about 35 miles north of Jerusalem, in the middle part of the land. This is the area known as Shechem. This is where God wanted the children of Israel to gather once they are in the Land.

And they are now writing His Words on these large stones and setting up an altar for sacrifice.

Today, this area of Shechem including Jericho is known as the West Bank and has been given over to the Palestinians.

Now what is interesting to me about this altar is that it was not to be ornate, but just whole stones and upon the altar sacrifices would be made.

Why is that?

Because God does not want the children of Israel to focus on the altar or even the one who built the altar. He wants them to focus upon the sacrifice.

Today, once again we see ornate churches where you tend to focus on the beauty of the altar you might say or the picturesque view instead of the sacrifice, instead of Jesus Christ!

At this altar there was the burnt offering, spoken of in Leviticus chapter 1, which speaks of dedication.

There was the peace offering, spoken of in Leviticus chapter 3, which spoke of peace, of celebration.

Think about this. They are at Mount Ebal where the cursings were spoken. It is here the altar is at, the sacrifice made, the shedding of the blood.

Sin separates us from God, and we need a sacrifice for our sins. Thus, we apply the blood of Christ to our lives by faith, we then dedicate our lives to Him and out of this we have peace with God, there is great joy, a great celebration, at least there should be!

VERSE 33

After their defeat at Ai that we have read in Joshua chapter 7, the children of Israel repented of their sin, and as we have read in Joshua chapter 8, they fulfilled the words of Moses.

Now keep in mind that it was some 25 miles from Ai to this area by Shechem and it was not easy for a few million people to travel that distance, but they obeyed the Lord no matter how difficult it would be.

Remember that Mount Gerizim was lush, it was fertile; it had springs and was filled with life, with color. This is where the blessings flowed for obedience.

On the other side was Mount Ebal, which was barren, rocky, no life on it. This is where the cursings flowed for disobedience.

These two mountains, if you can call them mountains, rose only some 3,000 feet or so in the air.

And right between them was this valley, and this is where the Levites, the priests were located as six of the twelve tribes were stationed by Mount Gerizim and six by Mount Ebal.

The Tribe of Levi was located on Mount Gerizim, but again, the priests were in the middle.

And this area is like a natural amphitheater, sound traveled far and as the priests called out the cursings, those on Mount Ebal would shout, "**Amen!**"

And then, as the blessings were called out, the people on Mount Gerizim would shout, "**Amen!**"

VERSES 34-35

As the nation stood in the middle part of the Promise Land, Joshua read to them the Words of God from the book of Deuteronomy.

Why did Joshua do that?

Yes, because God instructed Joshua that when they are in the land this is what they were to do.

But I also see that Joshua wanted them to hear God's Word so they may walk accordingly.

That is what the Lord told Joshua back in Joshua 1:8-9, "**This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.**"

And now Joshua wanted the children of Israel to also understand this!

David put it like this regarding the Word of God in Psalm 119:9-11, "**How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.**"

As you saturate yourself with the Word of God it will keep you clean as the Holy Spirit shows you what is right or what is wrong. And if you decide to go down the wrong path, the Holy Spirit will convict you as He quickens the Word of God in your heart. You see, the best defense against sin is a good, strong offense.

Thus, we should do as Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8-9, **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”**

Let the Word of God keep you clean as you saturate yourself in God’s Word and make it part of your life. The Word of God cleanses us!

Also, we live in a world that wants quick fixes. We don’t have the time or patience to wait any longer. Thus, meditation upon the Word of God, spending time with God have become a lost art. Everything must be quick and at our disposal.

But God wants us to wait upon Him. To spend quality time with Him so He can show us the things we need to know.

There are no short cuts and for those who think there are, they will only be disappointed and will soon be looking for another quick fix solution to their problem.

It is as Isaiah 40:31 says, **“But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”**

And think about this as we close this evening.

If Joshua had sought the Lord before the battle at Ai, they would have been victorious like they were that first time against Jericho, instead of losing 36 men in this second battle.

And we are going to see next time, things may seem right, they may seem good, but unless you bring it to the Lord, you are going to be in trouble!

Some things must be spiritually discerned, and that comes from God.

May we bring all things to God and allow Him to speak to our hearts to guide us as we walk with Him and let's see the victories He has given to us come to pass in our life as we walk in obedience to Him!

