

Transcription of 17ID3008

Joshua 8-9

"Learning A Lesson The Hard Way"

April 19, 2017

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Joshua 8 as we continue our study verse-by-verse through this book of Joshua. We've told you a couple of times the book itself only covers twenty-five years, and most of it is written in the first seven and a half years of Joshua's oversight, if you will. The conquest of the land, and really victory over the enemy, is the subject of the book. It's a book of occupation. It is premised upon the promises of God that He was going to give His people a place of rest, a place of victory, a place wherever they put their feet they were going to gain. It's a book of faith, where you have to obey the LORD - that the victory doesn't come in the numbers that you have or the skills that you possess but comes from the hand of God upon lives that are submitted to Him.

I think we mentioned to you a few weeks ago that in the conquest of the land there really are only three movements. There is the gathering together as they crossed over at Jericho and then at Ai and then this issue with the Gibeonites (that we'll look at tonight). But then in quick succession the LORD covers all of the other battles in about three chapters, and they're groups that come from the north that gather together to fight. It's groups that gather from the south to fight, and the LORD gives them victory so that, after seven and a half years, as they came into the land and into the middle of the country, the LORD is able to say to Joshua, "You're pretty old now, and you're not going to be leading the people into battle. But I will now divide the land amongst the people that I've promised it to," and they're in a position now where they can clear out or clean up the area that God gives them. All of the major threats have been disposed of, but those battles are not very well laid out for us. They're there, but the lessons are kind of here at the beginning, and then the outworking of that kind of relays itself back to the lessons that you learn early on in the book. And then we'll look at both the dividing of the land and the work that God did in establishing the people before we head up in the book of Judges.

So the early chapters of the book of Joshua were really the account of the children of Israel entering in under Joshua's leadership. And we've studied the lessons there and gone through them. If you haven't been with us, all of those are online. They are in the book store. Wherever you can find them, we have them, probably, there. But then the last couple of weeks we've looked at the battle of

Jericho, which was a really good outline on how you can have victory in the Lord - overcoming impossible challenges and following God's direction even if it seems, to the natural mind, kind of foolish. And then we looked last time at the defeat that they suffered at Ai in chapter 7, and we learned that Ai was a place of tremendous defeat for the people because they were very self-confident. They said, "Well, we don't have to send a lot of people - couple, two, three thousand. It's a small town. I'm sure we're going to do really well." They developed, quickly, this independent spirit though the LORD had given them complete victory there at Jericho. They were presumptuous. There was sin in the camp, and they didn't know it; and the reason they didn't know it was they hadn't been praying. Their main failure was they didn't pray, they didn't seek the LORD. And sin became this inside job. Right? God was doing something in the lives of the people, but there was something going on within their attitude and outlook, and the deception came, and God was nowhere to be found. And when Joshua finally went to speak to the LORD, then it was the complaints of, "What'd you bring us out here for, to die?" And the LORD basically said to Joshua, "Get up, man. Quit your complaining. You're doing it wrong, and you need to learn." So we looked at a week of real lessons on victory and then a week on defeat.

Well, tonight we're going to look at chapters 8 and 9. They should be studied together, I think, in light of chapters 6 and 7. We have called these two chapters, "Learning A Lesson The Hard Way." So this is going to be fun, isn't it? But after the failure (in chapter 7) to seek the LORD as how to defeat this smaller enemy of Ai, we find that the prayerlessness that led to defeat (in chapter 7) can find God's blessings in chapter 8. This is how it should have been done had the LORD been sought early on. And then in chapter 9 we get to go back (to chapter 7) and learn it all over again. It's kind of interesting, isn't it? So this lesson of seeking the LORD first is reinforced (at the end of chapter 8) by the commitment of the people to go, "Hey, let's read the word of God, and let's do what God says. We're going to obey," and they walk out, and they go, "Yeah, we're not going to do any of that." So chapter 9 becomes the failure - not of the people, though I guess you can blame the people - but it really is the failure of Joshua and the leaders and his cabinet of leaders to seek the LORD at all. And you find the same foolishness in chapter 9 that you find in chapter 7, which would say to you sometimes the lesson you learn you don't learn it really as quickly as you think you do. "Oh, I know that already." Do you? Well, they didn't. It takes more than one time sometimes to get it into your heart.

So chapter 8 is where we begin. Now the tragedy at Ai had certainly done something to Joshua that the LORD had sought to address early on. You might remember, in the first couple of chapters, that Joshua was really unsure of his calling; not that he wasn't supposed to be there, but would the LORD use him as He used Moses? Would God's hand be upon him? Would the people respect him? Would they follow him? And four or five times in the first couple of chapters, you hear the LORD addressing that with him. "From this day forward, you're going to see My hand upon you. You're going to be the guy that I'm going to use." And yet, now this defeat in chapter 7 had kind of put Joshua back on his heels. He was fearful and discouraged, and maybe he was saying to himself, "I knew they wouldn't follow me. This is only the second town we've come to, and already we're getting beat up, and thirty-six people have died, and nearly three thousand others were running for their lives, and now we don't know what to do! We're stuck!" And around him were tens of thousands of, I'm sure, equally discouraged and frustrated people, and there was gloom. But God hadn't forsaken them. But they did need to learn that God had to go with them. And so He now (the LORD) steps in to speak to Joshua and to say to the people the basic lesson of the Bible - but specifically of these lessons in Joshua - and that is your strength is in obedience. If God goes with you, you're all right. You'll be in good shape. If He doesn't go with you - if somehow you run ahead or you leave Him out of the equation - then the blessings are gone, and the trouble that you seek to avoid by trying to go it alone is the very trouble that you invite into your own life.

So notice in verse 1 that, "The LORD said to Joshua: 'Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it.'" So the LORD speaks to Joshua (which is a good sign because He wasn't speaking to him before) and says, "Don't worry. Don't be afraid. Let's do this My way." And then the first words out of His mouth are, "Take everybody with you." Remember what the advice had been in the last chapter? "Just take a few." But the LORD didn't want a few. He wasn't worried about the numbers; He was worried about the people learning that He was the One involved. He wasn't needing ten thousand; He just wanted the millions to know who He was. And so, "Look, you're not going with just a few. You're not assessing this from a human standpoint. You're going to take everyone with you so that they might learn that I'm with you." And notice that His promise is that they could win here as they had in Jericho. The only difference

was they were going to have to participate this time in a fighting way; and, as a result, they would get the spoils of their labors as opposed to what they had done in Jericho (but the LORD said, "It's all Mine because I'm doing all the work. You're just walking around and yelling and blowing trumpets"). Achan got a little ahead of himself, wanting the fruit too much for himself. And he defied the LORD, and we read what happened to Achan. Right? He was achin'.

So God wants the first fruits, but after that the rest belongs to you. So here's His counsel, here's His comfort, and then here's His direction, "Lay a trap for the people. Put an ambush behind the city, and use all of the men of war, and I will give you victory. In fact, it's assured." God doesn't always work the same way. You know that, don't you? I'm always amazed when people hear that the Lord has done something, that people would like to recreate the situation. "And what time did you pray, at 9:30? Okay, we'll pray at 9:30. Which hand did you raise, the left or the right hand? Okay. Were your eyes closed, or were they open? I want to pray just like you did because apparently God listens to you." Well, God works in different ways. He's a God of variety. He changes methods. The key is to know Him and then stick with His direction. There's more than one way to skin a cat. There's more than one way for the Lord to lead a saint. So, here's His direction. "Lay an ambush."

Verse 3, "So Joshua arose, and all the people of war," (he's ready to obey the LORD again, now) "to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night. And he commanded them, saying: 'Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. For they will come out after us till you have drawn them from the city, for they will say, "They are fleeing before us as at the first." Therefore we will flee before them. Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. And it will be, when you have taken the city, that you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you.' " And so here's the strategy. Now the first strategy was just walk around and blow trumpets, right? And yell. Quietly. Seven times that last day. But this time, the men of Israel had to engage themselves in a battle. God had the strategy, God gave them the direction, and it was pretty clear. "Hide behind the place. We'll draw them out. They'll think we're running again. They're going to get

pulled away. When they go away, you go in, and set the place on fire, and God will work." "This is what His commandment" (notice verse 8) "to us has been."

By the way, it works like this with the LORD, it seems to me, more often than not. You do your part as you understand it; God'll do the other. But there's really no getting off the hook of you have a part to play. I'm always worried about those guys who think faith means doing nothing or literally being irresponsible; that the Lord tells them to go out and get work, and they go, "Oh, if the Lord wants me to have a job, someone'll call me." No. They'll never call you because you're lazy, and you should be out knocking on doors. Go knock on some doors. Then the Lord can lead. It's hard to steer a boat that's docked. You bounce around, but you're really not going anywhere. Right? And more often than not, the greatest miracle to me is that God will provide victory to an obedient heart that is far weaker than the circumstances in which it finds itself. That's the miracle. God will work, but we have to cooperate. And you will find in the Scriptures, by example after example, that it is those who are willing to run the course God sets that find the hand of God at work at the end of it; as opposed to those who just want to redefine faith as being, "I have nothing to do, no responsibility to take, and so I just sit back. I'm just going to pray." Hey, there's a time to pray, there's a time to move. I just always remember the LORD saying to Moses, as they got stuck at the Red Sea, and the people were complaining, and the Egyptians were chariot racing down on them ("Let's go get 'em"), that the LORD said to Moses (Exodus 14), "This is not a good time to pray. You should probably get up and start movin'. They're catchin' up with you." There's a time to pray, and then there's a time to move.

So, they did what the LORD said, and they obeyed it. Though it was less defying of logic than the battle was at Jericho, certainly, this could be understandable in terms of military strategy. The lesson is the same. God directs, we follow, He blesses. God directs, we don't follow, He doesn't. So all of the men of war - everyone took their place - Joshua picked an army to be the ambush army and then took a bunch of others to go and fight from the front door, if you will, and draw them out.

We read in verse 9, "Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people." So the army went out, the laying-in-wait army, if you will. "Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. And all

the people of war who were with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley lay between them and Ai. So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. And when they had set the people, all the army that was on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley." So you're getting the whole layout of the battlefield. "Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel." Now, part of this is kind of frightening. If you're Joshua, you're going, "I don't want to be with your group, I want to be with the other group. I don't want men that are angry - from two cities - chasing me." But the lesson is obvious. When you do it His way, victory is certain. When you do it your way, defeat is absolutely certain as well. And so they followed the LORD's guidance to the tee. Right? That's the key. They followed God's direction. And no one argued with it, or no one came up with a better plan. It's the LORD's plan.

"Then the LORD said to Joshua," in verse 18, "'Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.' And Joshua stretched out the spear that was in his hand toward the city. So those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire. And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers. Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were caught in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape. But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the

Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand - all the people of Ai. 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. Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua." And so traps disposed of, and you read the account, and I know if you're new at reading the Old Testament, you immediately say to yourself, "It's so brutal. It seems so merciless that no one would be spared out of nearly twelve thousand people on that day." And even verse 27 tells us that what the LORD said they did; they kept what God said they could keep, they destroyed what God said needed to be destroyed. In fact, when we get to verse 29, we read, "And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day."

Now the LORD had said to Israel, in many places, that His time of judgment for the Canaanites had come. In fact, we will read that a lot - especially these seven nations that dwelt in the proper of the land that Israel went to first; that these were folks that sacrificed their children in the fires, that lived the kinds of abominable lifestyles that destroy men's character and his moral base, that it was a place of tremendous horror, if you will, and that, if you were on the other side of it reading, you might say, "Well, why did the LORD let that go so long?" But God's grace is long, and He is patient. But His patience was up in terms of the nations themselves. In those nations, the people that repented often survived - like Rahab, right? She was part of an accursed group, but her willingness to cry out to the LORD brought life to her and to her family. But yet the judgment of God is without mercy when judgment is to come. Until then, mercy is always available. So the lesson, obviously, is very simple. God found a people that were willing to do what He said. And in response, He blessed them completely and used them as the arm of judgment against a people whose time, if you will, had come.

Verse 30 tells us (down through the end of the chapter), "Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: 'an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool.' " In other words, not a decorative place; just a place that was a place of worship that didn't draw attention away from the LORD. "And they offered on it burnt

offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them." So, in the middle of the land - and by the way, this is in the middle of the land; the land got cut in two, at least the land proper of Israel or what we know it to be so today - God had given them (back in Deuteronomy 27) an order through Moses. And the order was pretty straightforward, and the order was fairly clear, and it was, "I want you to go and stand upon these two mountain tops, in which there is a valley in between, and I want you to declare the blessings and the cursings of God upon His people as they now take the land." And so, if you read Deuteronomy 27 and then chapter 28 (27 is mostly the curses, chapter 28 is mostly the blessings), no one was about to leave anything out now. I think Achan was still on their minds freshly. And so the people had this public ceremony together. They'd won at Jericho. They'd been just whooped at Ai. They'd learned their lesson well enough to come back now and do things God's way. And the day ended, not only with the city in ruin but the people blessed by God, and they ended up with a public commitment of faith in God's way. So the people stand.

Mount Gerizim, by the way, which is mentioned in verse 33, is today a place called Nablus. You've probably heard it in reports of the land. It used to be called Shechem. It certainly is not a place you can probably visit today on your own. It's held by the Palestinians. It's not a safe place for you to go. We were able to go there twenty years ago, but unless you go on your own, we probably won't take you there. It is where Jacob's well is. It is also the place where Jesus sat at the well with the woman of Samaria, there in John 4. But it is a place that the Jews during Jesus' day avoided because the Samaritans - those in the north - had been corrupted after the Assyrian overthrow, where they had brought in religions from a lot of different people and it had gotten mixed in with the Jews. And so Jesus went there with great love, but the Jews avoided it. They saw them as mixtures of

Jews and heathens. It would be the place that Philip would be sent, though, and have a revival break out.

So they stood on these mountains as the people passed through the valley. They got to hear - yelled at them by the priests and by six of the tribe representatives and then six of the others - the blessings of God and the cursings of God and the Word of God. "This is what we need to know. Don't forget this." Joshua wrote out the entire law upon the stones there. He took it, and he presented it to the people. Know God's Word. That's where life can be found.

So you read through this chapter, and you go, "Oh, after chapter 7, praise the LORD that they wised up, and thirty-six deaths caused them to pay attention. Now they're going to do things the LORD's way. And they ended their day with a demonstrative Bible study." So you would get to chapter 9, and you would say to yourself, "Well, it's going to be good now. These guys have learned their lesson." And you'd hear, "Aaaaahhhh!" (Pastor Jack makes a buzzer sound) because they haven't. Right? And it's an interesting development, especially on the heel of the defeat at Ai where they were supposed to learn never to just presume upon the LORD but seek the LORD - where thirty-six had died and three thousand had run for their lives. You would think that you would read of tremendous growth. And maybe you've had that in your own life. "Oh, Lord, I'll never do it again. Man, I learned my lesson this time." Aaaaahhhh! (Pastor Jack makes a buzzer sound). Not maybe so much. And so they ended the day with a memorial service of worship and reading and declaring God's Word, celebrating His goodness. And then you get to chapter 9, and you would think it would be a chapter filled with praying and staying close to the LORD. You would expect it to be so.

But, in reality, here's the discouraging fact. You don't always learn things so quickly. Right? If they're going to become a part of my walk, sometimes I need to go through them three or four or eight times. I used to have a teacher - I went to Catholic school at St. John Bosco in Bellflower - and we had a teacher named Mr. LaTorque. In fact, Mark and I had the same guy, didn't we? But Mr. LaTorque had a paddle in his hand (and Mark and I went to the same school 100 years ago), and he would pull out this paddle, and it was called "Radar." So he'd write on the board, and he was kind of like this Irish guy, and he would say, "Mr. Abeelen" (Pastor Jack speaks with an Irish brogue) "you won't havin' me grandmother be suckin' eggs, would ya?" Which I think meant, "You're makin' fun of me." I think that's what it meant. I'm not sure. I didn't have a thesaurus or anything. And then he'd get you

up there, and he'd whack you on the hand with this "Mr. Radar" who figured out it was me messin' around, and twice it broke on my hand. And then he'd come back with a taped up "Mr. Radar 2" - new and improved. He just beat ya, you know? These were the days when you could get beat by your teacher. I'm pretty sure they can't even raise their voices at you now. But, in any event, they just and then he said this to me (and three or four of my buddies who were always getting in trouble), "You guys are nothin' but LCBs." And we'd say, "What is that?" And he'd say, "You have less than a cow's brain." He said, "The cows, they hit the electrified fence, and then they go, 'I'll never do it again.' One time, the cow learns. You, Mr. Abeelen, LCB." (Laughing) (Pastor Jack makes the sound of "Mr. Radar" hitting his hand) To this day, I don't think I can use this hand as properly as the other one.

Well these guys were LCBs. This is less than a cow's brain. These are the LCBs right here. They should have known better. You would expect them to pray. They don't. They don't at all. They suffer the consequences. It doesn't matter. The effects, this time, would be more pronounced and long-lasting. They couldn't get rid of them as easy. Oh, God would still cover them, but they had to live with the consequences of this last presumption. And they didn't listen. When the LORD sent them into the land, the children of Israel were given very specific instructions to follow as they came into the land, and they came to worship the LORD. And one of the things that the LORD said to them (in Deuteronomy 20) was, "When you go into the land and a city comes out to fight against you, offer them peace. And if they'll sign a peace treaty with you, then you then take the people in, let them pay taxes to you, tribute. If they don't make peace with you, then wipe them out." However, of these six nations in the land - and then He gives them all of these ites (the Hivites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites) - these folks that were living in the proximity of that land of Israel between the Mediterranean, in particular, and the Jordan, those seven nations who God had called for judgment now were not allowed to have any deal with them at all. In fact, you can go read Deuteronomy 20 (also chapter 7) where the LORD points out these main Canaanite groups - seven of them in particular - who were not allowed to have any deals made. The LORD wanted them wiped out. They'd gone too far, they'd crossed the line, they'd had enough time. They were villainous and vile kinds of folks, and the LORD was very clear, "Just wipe them out." It was time for judgment. He had given them plenty of time, if you will, to repent. And yet they had not repented; they hadn't turned from their wicked ways. I think Genesis (way back in chapter 15) the LORD said to Abraham, "In the fourth generation, I

will come in and judge the Amorites. Their sinfulness is not yet full." And it would be 430 years forward from Genesis 15 before this invasion took place. God gave them 430 years as people to repent. The destruction that they brought was God's wrath. And He even said to the people (in Exodus 34), "I'm going to drive out these seven 'ites' - nations - from before you, and don't make a covenant with them, and don't allow them to dwell in your midst. Don't let them be near you. Their idols will ensnare you. Wipe out their altars. Wipe out their sacred pillars. Cut down their wooden images. Have nothing to do with them. They're toxic, and they've got to be destroyed." So, there were seven nations marked by the LORD for destruction. But the LORD, for the rest of the land, said, "If people want to make peace, that's good. But you're ruling, they're serving. And that's just the way it'll have to be." That was the LORD's direction to them as they went forward. But the rest of them were to be destroyed because of the filth that was there.

Now I mentioned to you before, but the LORD has, in many places in the Bible, used nations to carry out judgments against other nations. In fact, when Israel turned out to not be listening and allowed a lot of these groups to survive, and they began to chase after idolatry, God sent the Assyrians into the northern kingdom and just literally wiped them out, subjugated them in 722 B.C. And the Assyrians were a horrible people, but He didn't want His people going down that road. So He put an end to it. In 606 B.C., when the southern kingdom was falling for the same thing, it was the Babylonians who came in and subjugated the people. A lot of people died - took them into captivity for seventy years. And one of the things that you'll notice for Israel when they came out of Babylon is they never worshipped idols again. That was fixed. They had a lot of other problems, but idolatry was not one of them. They would not, and they did not, tolerate it in their midst. So, you have to learn lessons either the hard way or the easy way, but that's the big discussion between God's people in the land and those they allowed to exist around them who would either have to be destroyed or they would affect them for evil, which is exactly what, unfortunately, by the time you get to the book of Judges, took place.

So, seven and a half years, the big thirty-one kings that were the most powerful in the land were defeated by Joshua. The people were sent into the land different places. "Clean up the area." And most of them did not. And because of that the idolatry began, and the ungodliness began, and the LORD had to deal with His people. Well, for now, He has sent them in to destroy. So Jericho has fallen. Ai took them down a notch - taught them about prayer and dependency. And the very

nations of the people slated for destruction now gather (in chapter 9) as allies together to fight against God and His people led by Joshua.

So we read in verse 1 (chapter 9), "And it came to pass when all the kings who were on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon - the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite - heard about it, that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord." So here they come. "But when the inhabitants of Gibeon" (Gibeon was a city of the Hivites, you can read that in verse 7) "heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal," and then they made their pitch to him and to the children of Israel there. Now, from the first couple of verses we know that the Hivites (verse 1) were part of the nation (not only slated for destruction) that signed on to the war pact with the others to defeat God's people. The city of Gibeon, like I said, verse 7 will tell us that it is a Hivite city. The people decided, "We don't really want to go fight because we think we're going to get whooped," and there was an awareness, at least amongst the people in that one city, that it might be better to try to make peace with their foe than to be destroyed by them as these others had done.

Now, they were absolutely aware of God's order, which is interesting. From what they say here in a minute, we can only presume that they were well aware of God's order to wipe out the seven nations; but that there could be peace made outside of that group when the children of Israel got there. And the question becomes - how did they know? Was there a traitor in their midst? Maybe somebody had been spying out the declarations of the folks at Mount Ebal and Gerizim, which would have declared in those things the need for judgment. They knew the specifics of God's demands. We will read that in verse 24, in fact. They said, "We clearly know what God told you to do." So these folks, the enemy, were very much aware of God's Word, and, interestingly enough to me, they took it to heart far quicker than the children of Israel did. They went, "Well, if that's what they're gonna do, we'd better make plans." So, verse 4, they come with deceit. They work craftily, they pretend to be ambassadors, and they made it look like they'd been traveling from a long way away. They wanted to be sure that they left the impression that, "We're not part of those seven people groups; that we are far away, and we want to make

peace with the invading children of God." They were motivated (according to verse 3) just by what they'd heard had happened in Ai and at Jericho. They were greatly afraid. They were pretty wise in this, right? I mean, as far as natural wisdom, pretty smart. You have to give them credit. Unfortunately they didn't know the heart of God because they could have just turned in faith to Him. But that wasn't something that they were willing to do. So, however many people they sent there to Joshua, notice they were at Gilgal (verse 6). That's the place that they entered into the land, camped; it was the center of operation for quite some time, until the land was overthrown, if you will. By the way, there's no way to determine where Gilgal is today. It was very close to the Jordan, it was very close to Jericho. But there's no real spot that anyone has been able to point to. So we just kind of know the general area. But notice in verse 6 that as they came, this little downtrodden group that looked like they'd been traveling through the desert for months, they said to Joshua, there at Gilgal - they walked right into the headquarters of the children of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us. We'd like to make a deal."

Verse 7, "Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites," (remember, we told you where they were from) " 'Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you? But they said to Joshua, 'We are your servants.' And Joshua said to them, 'Who are you, and where do you come from?' So they said to him: 'From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt.' " Now notice they were smart enough to leave out Ai and Jericho. "We just heard about Egypt," which was a long time ago - forty-five years earlier. Verse 10, " 'and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan - to Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth. Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We are your servants; now therefore make a covenant with us." This bread of ours we took hot for our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy. And these wineskins which we filled were new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey.' " Now, understand that God had said very clearly (Deuteronomy 20, Exodus 34), "Don't make a deal with anyone in the land. No agreements, no peace treaties." And notice that Joshua was a bit suspicious. He said, "How do we know that's where you're from?" And then they go into their big spiel about, "Look how we look." But that little inner small voice that was

warning Joshua, he didn't heed it very well. He went by external evidence. In other words, he reduced his relationship with God to what he could see and understand. Or he discounted the wisdom of God that was with him, and he put himself on the same level as the people that were his enemies. His advantage is gone. Right? And his advantage is gone because he hasn't turned to the LORD for help. He looked at the outward evidence that they pointed to very clearly, "Look at my shoes, look at my bread, look at the mold, look at the dust, look at my clothing." And they determined that, certainly, things were as obvious as they appeared. They were as obvious as they appeared. "Why do I need to pray or bother God with this? It is obvious these guys have come from a long way away." In every way (as chapter 7), it reflects and reveals the same presumption that was made two chapters earlier. "Let's not send the whole army. It's just a small town. I don't want to wipe everybody out. Just let them go. We can take care of it ourselves." And you remember what happened. It's the same lesson here. Right? They are absolutely wrong. You have to depend upon the Lord and not only your own wisdom; not that you should set your wisdom aside but you have to supplement it with what you have that no one else has - God's wisdom. If you're going to do well, and you're going to serve the Lord, you're going to have to mix what God has given you - your discernment, your wisdom, your outlook, your experience - and then lay it at His feet and go, "Lord, help me. Add to me what I can't add to myself. I don't know what's going on here. I don't understand what they seem to be up to."

And so this time Joshua makes a decision based solely on the evidence which verified their claims. Like I said, in verse 3 these guys are smart enough to not mention recent victories. They talk about Egypt. They even talk about the victory that happened on the other side of the land in the year before they entered into the land. But they don't mention anything about Jericho, nothing about Ai, because that would have given them away. "Oh, I thought you came from a far land. How did you.....what'd you do, watch CNN?" You see, they wouldn't have been able to know a thing. So they leave it out. They're pretty smart guys. And they're pretty plausible, and apparently they're pretty good actors.

Now what would have prevented you or Joshua to say to them, "All right. Where do you live? Okay, just go home. When we get there, we'll remember that we met with you, and we'll sign the deal there." Right? If you're not sure..... "We'll be at your house there in a couple months, and then we'll sign the deal. Glad you came. What's your name again? We'll write it down, and we'll see you there." Even that, to me, would have been a smarter way to go. They could have promised mercy.

But, instead, verse 14 says this, "Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD. So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them." So they looked at their provision, they took note of their provisions. They even took some of them in exchange, but they did not seek the counsel of the LORD. That's the problem, isn't it?

Things aren't always what they seem. You know that. And it is certainly true, from a spiritual growth standpoint, that there's a temptation (that all of us fall under) of figuring things out on our own. We like to think we're smart. I think verse 14 (at least the last part) is something you should underline and highlight and circle. Mark in your Bible. Highlight in your heart. Because you can make a lot of errors simply by relying on your wisdom and excluding the great benefit you have in your relationship with God. Look, I know you're at Bible study tonight, but you know what a benefit that is to your life? How much you can take away from what God says in a way that can spare you the hassle that the world will put you through? Because you have God's Word on it. You have His promises. You have direction from His Spirit.

So we can have, in our relationship with God who loves us, plenty of wisdom to live this life in a way that we're not taken out or taken advantage of. But the lesson is very clear - you've got to pray. You've got to pray about everything. It requires lots of prayer. They didn't do it. Verse 14 is a death stamp, I think. They didn't take counsel of the LORD, though they took whatever the guys had left to hand them that wasn't all worn out. "Here, we'd like to give you these as a gift." "Okay, yeah, we'll take those. But we don't need to pray." And, as a result, Joshua signs a peace treaty with them, and he absolutely violates what the LORD wanted. These were of a horrible tribe of folks that didn't and shouldn't have deserved to go by. And now he's given his word as the leader of the people in the name of the LORD.

Well then we read in verse 16, "And it happened at the end of three days," (sometimes our stupid takes a lot longer to be clear, but here's three days) "after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them. Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim. But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers. Then all the rulers said to all the

congregation, 'We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them. This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them.' And the rulers said to them, 'Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them.' " And to be honest with you, as you keep reading, these guys are pretty happy. So, three days later (ironically), "Uh oh. We are idiots." And I want you to notice something - in all of the attacks of the people against Israel leadership and against Moses, it was never justified; here, it's pretty justified. They were furious! "Hey, we're just startin' to move. God's startin' to bless. What're you guys doin'?" "Yeah, we swore an oath." "What're you doin'? You're the big guys. You're the deal makers. You're the guys that are on the front lines!" No one was ever angry at Moses for doing the wrong thing. Joshua was catching it for not seeking the LORD and doing the absolute wrong thing. "What kind of leader are you? You've embarrassed us!" And the leaders, with Joshua, have to live up to their foolish decision. In fact, that's commendable. "We don't want to make it worse. Two wrongs don't make a right. We don't want to have the LORD angry with us because we swore an oath, and now we back out on that." But, look, they obviously violated God's Word to begin with because they didn't pray; which should have been something they learned in chapter 7 and certainly they learned in chapter 8. "Let them be woodcutters. Let them be water carriers. Let them become slaves."

"Then Joshua called for them," verse 22, "and he spoke to them, saying, 'Why have you deceived us, saying, "We are very far from you," when you dwell near us? Now therefore, you are cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves - woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.' So they answered Joshua and said, 'Because you servants were clearly told that the LORD your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; therefore we were very much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us.' So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, in the place which He would choose, even to this day." So, at least the response from the folks was, "Good! We're alive. We saved our people. We did the right thing." Right? They knew of God's anger, they heard of God's judgment, they heard that Moses had said so, and they

were happy. And they'd get put in a place where they've got to hang around the presence of God all the time, which is kind of interesting to me.

So God was going to honor His covenant with them because His name was on it. And I think it is in chapter 10 that, because of this, all of the different kings who had originally planned to come against Joshua now decide that they're just going to gather together from the south, and they're going to come up against Gibeon; and Gibeon's going to say to Joshua, "Help!" And God will use this situation to destroy all these kings in the south. He literally will gather them all together because they're so mad at the Gibeonites. It doesn't mean they did the right thing. But it does tell you that God has a way of turning everything together for good.

So, what do you walk away with when it comes to what God has to say to us about Joshua's actions? The plot against him was successful because Joshua and the leadership - godly people, supposed to be - set aside their strength and their advantage as believers and reduced themselves to being no different than the people in the world who didn't know the LORD. In fact, I would say the Gibeonites acted more wisely, at that point, than God's people did because they were unwilling to listen. When you read in Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding," I think there's a lot of wisdom to that because so often we set about trying to prove how smart we are. But the smartest thing you can do is pray. Don't put your mind on a shelf. Don't stop thinking things through. Don't stop asking questions. Be as diligent as you can. But, look, let's face it. That's not enough. Right? There's always someone smarter than you. Until the Lord's with you. Then there's no one really smarter than you. So, Proverbs 3, you just write it in the margin. I cannot live a successful life independent of God. I think that's biblically correct. You would have thought Joshua learned the lesson. He did not. I have found in my own life that I can teach much better than learn. I'm really good at teachin' it. But learnin' it is harder. Doin' this, easy. Doin' this, not so much fun. And it does take a while. How come we end up in ungodly alliances? Because Satan has a way to deceive us, and, like Joshua, we don't pray. So we determine to do things on our own, and Satan can make things look pretty attractive. I'm sure Joshua went he tried to prove himself after that chapter 7 debacle, and then he just went, "Well, I'm Joshua. The LORD's with me. Let me just show you what I know. Yeah, they've been traveling a long time. Those guys are worn out. Yeah, okay. Deal. High five." Slapped himself right in the head.

So, Satan can even twist the Scriptures to help you to do the wrong thing. "Jump, and angels will catch you" (Luke 4:9-11). There's a verse in 2 Corinthians 6 that says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (verse 14), and I have to tell you it's one of those verses (for a pastor) that just will give you gray hair. Because most of the people in church don't believe it. You'll tell them about, "Make sure you surround yourself with Christians." I know we need to be in the world and be friends with those that are lost, but your fellowship should be amongst the church. Your ministry can be out there, but your fellowship has to be here. Don't be unequally yoked. If you have more unbelieving friends than you have Christian friends, they're going to take you out. They're going to win the battle; you're going to lose. "Oh, not me." Oh yeah, you. "No, not me. I'm like Joshua and the Gibeonites." Yes, you are. You're gonna go down. We see it in people that begin to date, and they're dating unbelievers. They're trying to make excuses for them. I talked to a guy just a couple of weeks ago, and he said, "Hey, I want you to meet my girlfriend." I said, "Is she a Christian?" He goes, "Oh, she goes to church." Really bad. "Oh, she goes to church." "Great! Is she saved?" "Well, I think she really wants to love the Lord." "Well, knock it off. What're you doin'? You're just settin' yourself up." "Oh, but I love her, and God brought her to me. I just know He did." "He didn't! Or it's god brought her to you, and it's the god with the little "g" - but not God." You see it in people that go into business with unbelievers, and they end up in litigation or conflict because they don't share the same worldview as their partners, and businesses fall apart. And, "Well, that's not going to happen to me." Oh, it'll happen to you, too. There's just no way away from it. They argue. "They're different, they're so nice, she's so sweet, I believe God is in this." One verse - 2 Corinthians 6:14 - "Don't be unequally yoked together." You could write a book of what people decide they don't really believe.

So, man oh man, don't be too hard on Joshua. We still have lots of Joshuas with us today. There's an old Jewish proverb, and one of our tour guides in Israel told me years ago. He said, "It's better to ask the way ten times than to be wrong on the road once." Just ask ten times. "Lord, where should I go?" Presumption is the problem. And the solution is obvious. Don't presume. Get the mind of Christ. And if people say to you, "I need a decision right now," you say, "If I don't have time to pray about it, the answer is no. The answer is no." So remember verse 14. "He did not ask counsel from the LORD." He got popular with a group of people, he looked very leadership-driven in his decision process, he got some loot out of the deal, and then he got the complaints from the people. Ungodly alliances weaken your spiritual life. And that certainly is the explanation for the next book we'll get into

when the people of the land are all following the gods of the land and forsaking the LORD who brought them in. So, here's my encouragement to you. Just pray. And then when you've done that, pray some more. All you have to ask is for wisdom. Ask the Lord. "He upbraideth not" (James 1:5). He wants to give you wisdom. But you don't always have it. And I know we're proud of, "I'm so smart. I saw right through that." No you're not so smart. You're Joshua.

Well there are three oppositions (and we'll pray now) to Israel in facing the land. And they're very interesting because Jericho, because of the walk of the Christian by faith, is really representative of the world in the sense that you can only overcome the world by faith. You have nothing in your possession to overcome the world except to just obey the commands of the Lord, and then the walls fall. The world falls, if you will, before you. Ai is kind of the representation of your flesh. Your flesh has a way of saying, "I can do this, I can handle this, I got this figured out, I don't need anybody's help, I'm as strong as can be." There's the world, but then there's Ai. There's that confidence in my flesh, and, boy, you need to learn that your flesh is going to lose. And then there's Gibeon, which represents the devil. The devil just wants to lie to you. He wants to deceive you with words and pictures that fool even the most diligent. You've got to be on guard. So there's the world and the flesh and the devil. They're all laid out for you as you watch the children of Israel go to walk Spirit-filled into a Land of Promise.

The solution's pretty simple. James wrote (4:6-7), "He gives more grace. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." That's really the solution. Humble yourself. You're not that smart. Submit to the Lord. Find out what He wants. Resist the enemy's temptations, and he's not going to be around because he's not very patient. That's not one of his virtues. He'll come back a lot. He's persistent. But not very patient. Submit to God. Resist the devil and he'll flee. In that order. Submit to God, resist the devil, he'll flee. Make sense?

Well, next week we are going to pick up a great story. I hope you're reading ahead each week as we journey with them ever further into the Land of Promise.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
April 24, 2017