

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JOSHUA 5-8

Two watershed events marked the early history of the nation Israel...

The parting of the Red Sea liberated the Hebrews from slavery. And the rolling back of the Jordan River opened the door to God's blessing. At the Red Sea they said good-bye to *their past*. At the Jordan River they embraced *God's purpose*.

Verse 1 picks up the story immediately after the crossing of the Jordan...

“So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.” When God dammed up the Jordan for His people to cross it scared the living daylights out of the Canaanite kings.

This was not going to be a fair fight. The Hebrews had supernatural help.

In 1887 an archeological discovery confirmed Joshua 5:1. *“The Amarna Letters”* were sent by a coalition of Canaanite kings to the Pharaoh in Egypt requesting military assistance to stave off a powerful group of invaders.

The letters refer to the invaders as the Habirus - or Hebrews. No help was sent. Obviously, the Egyptian Pharaoh already had enough of these Habirus.

Did you hear about the Catholic priest, the Pentecostal preacher, and the Jewish rabbi who all met frequently to discuss theological issues?

Obviously, each of the three clergy believed their way was best. One day they proposed a contest. They would all journey out into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and attempt to convert the bear. The most successful conversion would win.

When they returned to compare results an interesting discussion proceeded...

Father Flannery, with his arm in a sling, was on crutches. He said, "When I found the bear I started reading him the Catechism. He didn't really want to listen, so he started slapping me around. I grabbed some holy water and sprinkled it on him, and as soon as I did it was amazing, that bear became as gentle as a lamb."

Preacher Billy Bob was in a wheelchair, with both his arms and legs in a cast. He said, "When I found my bear, Glory Hallelujah, I preached him my best fire and brimstone sermon. We don't sprinkle, so when I laid hands on him he didn't like it. We wrestled up one mountain and down another... until I threw in him the river. I dunked his hairy soul - praise God - and suddenly he grew as gentle as a lamb."

Rabbi Feinstein was lying in a hospital bed with an IV drip. His whole body was in traction. He was in bad shape. He opens his eyes and says, "Well, looking back on the experience, circumcision may not be the best way to start out with a bear."

But circumcision was exactly the way God started out with His people.

The second generation out of Egypt had never been circumcised. Yet as far back as Abraham, circumcision was the mark God used to identify His people.

In verse 2 we're told, "At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins." I'm sure that became its name after the experience – not before.

Today "the hill of foreskins" is covered with juniper and eucalyptus trees in memorial to the event. It's a joke... *Jew-nipper trees... You-clipped-up trees...*

"And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised.

For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD - to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey." The penalty for unbelief was death in the wilderness.

That's still its penalty today. Even after we're saved we still have to believe...

To live in victory we have to see ourselves in Christ. We have to believe that *we belong to God*... and that His victory and blessing *belongs to us*. Fail to lay claim to God's blessing, and you'll die in a wilderness of defeat and despair.

Verse 7 “Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed.” If you're an adult male, imagine a flint knife - a little out patient surgery with no anesthesia – this would be painful.

Hey, hernia checks are reason enough for me to avoid the doctor. I feel for these Hebrews. We can understand why they had put off being circumcised.

But here's the real problem. Their reluctance created an identity crisis. Though they were children of God, they continued to see themselves as slaves of Egypt.

The Jewish rite of circumcision was an identity forging experience.

Circumcision was the Hebrew ID – the Israeli soldier's dog tags – it was the proof he carried on his body that he belonged to God. It solidified his identity.

A circumcised Jew bore God's mark on his most intimate part. It was a reminder that he was special. He and his offspring belonged to God.

And this is what water baptism does for the Christian. It's a mark of identity. There's no turning back once you're baptized. It labels you as a child of God.

When we share in Jesus' baptism we identify ourselves with Him.

And it also can be painful. Baptism is a humbling act that cuts back my pride. Like circumcision, it peels back the flesh. It's the death to what I am apart from Christ. It identifies me with Jesus, and opens me up to the work of His Spirit.

It's interesting that Jesus was baptized at the very spot the Hebrews crossed the Jordan. John 2:28 tells us John baptized Jesus in *Bethabara* - which means "*house of passage*". It got that name because it was the spot of the crossing.

Verse 9 "Then the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day." "*Gilgal*" means "*rolling*". The stigma the Hebrews carried from their time of slavery in Egypt, and their failure in the wilderness, was rolled away at Gilgal.

Their circumcision at Gilgal marked a new day for Israel.

And a new day begins for us – not just when we're saved, and cross the Red Sea - but when we take hold of the life our salvation entitles us to live. When we cross the Jordan a new identity forms. From a practical standpoint when we see ourselves in Christ that's when old things pass away - all things become new.

At Gilgal or "*rolling*" - that's where the Christian life really

gets *rolling*.

And notice what else happens at Gilgal, “So the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho.” Passover was another identity forging experience. When the Jews ate a Passover meal they connected with their rich, spiritual legacy.

Which is also what happens for the Christian at the communion table - eating the bread and drinking the wine forge a deeper bond and spiritual connection. *Communion with Jesus and community with each other* - gets strengthened.

Passover reminded the Hebrews of the events that made them a nation – *the miracles of the exodus*. Communion reminds us of the event that makes us the people of God – *the cross of Jesus*. As soon as the Hebrews crossed the Jordan God ordered up a circumcision and a Passover to forge the Hebrew’s identity as His people. Likewise, baptism and communion are two Christian faith-builders.

Verse 11 “And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day.

Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.” The miracle manna ceased. Wilderness rations came to an end. It was time for Israel to rise up in faith and possess all God had promised.

Here's a lesson for us. I think God is more prone to work miracles for a younger believer - because He knows their faith is weak and needs tangible support. But the time comes when faith needs to grow up. God stops spoon feeding us, and expects us to feed ourselves on the rich treasures He's given us in His Word.

The end of chapter 5 marks a turning point for Joshua... If I were to ask you who led the children of Israel in the battle of Jericho? You would remember the old spiritual, "Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho", and you'd say, "Joshua" - but you'd be mistaken. *The answer will surprise you!*

Verse 13 "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho..." General Joshua was on a reconnaissance mission. He was scouting out the city.

The walls of Jericho were enormous. There were actually two walls – the first wall was 6' thick and 11' high. The outer wall was 12' thick and 35' high. And the slope of the wall had a 35 degree incline that made it nearly impossible to scale.

Joshua was thinking, "How will we ever conquer these formidable walls?"

That's when "he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand." He was armed and ready to fight. "And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?"

Joshua is fulfilling the role of a good sentry. In essence he confronts the approaching soldier, and shouts, "Who goes

there? Are you friend or foe?"

So He said, "No, (or neither) but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." The Commander answers, whether I'm friend or foe depends on your response. The question is not, "Am I on your side?" But, "Are you on God's side?"

So often we hope God is on our side, but the real question is always, "Am I on God's side?" God calls the shots, not me. God is Commander and Chief, not me.

Joshua is being told here to move over. Heaven has come to help. Joshua is being replaced. God dispatches His Commander to lead the Hebrews into battle.

"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" A humble Joshua is quick to submit. General Joshua recognizes military rank, and respects a higher command.

"Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so." Notice, Joshua receives the same command God gave Moses at the burning bush.

Joshua is meeting God, just as Moses met God on top of Mount Sinai.

What a comfort this must've been to Joshua and Israel. On the eve of their first major battle – up against impenetrable walls – the Commander of the Lord's army comes to take responsibility for the campaign. *And who was this Commander?*

The clue is in how Joshua treats Him – he worships Him.

This precludes him being an angel. Angels are never worshipped. Only God is supposed to receive worship. That's why I believe this Commander was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. *Who fought the battle of Jericho? Jesus did!*

And who fights the battle in the Christian life? Jesus is also our Commander.

Whether it's a crag in the rock on Mt. Sinai, or a lookout under the palm trees near Jericho – God turns ordinary places and ordinary times into holy moments.

When we face a foe God is faithful to meet us and remind us that the battle is not ours, but His... He wants us to acknowledge rank. Bow, obey, and worship.

Several years ago I ran across a humorous list entitled "*The Rules of Combat*".

- 1) If the enemy is in range, so are you.

- 2) Incoming fire always has the right of way.

- 3) The easy way is always mined.

- 4) Try to look unimportant, the enemy may be firing at brass.

- 5) Teamwork is essential; it gives the enemy someone else to shoot at.

- 6) Don't draw fire - it irritates the people around you.

- 7) When the pin is pulled, Mr. Grenade is no longer your friend.

- 8) Five second fuses only last three seconds.

- 9) It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed – You won't be welcome!" And # 10, "If it's stupid but works, it isn't stupid."

Number 10 is how Joshua must've felt after the battle of Jericho.

In chapter 6 the Commander of the LORD's army gives Joshua really strange instructions. Ingenious generals have used unorthodox combat strategies before and since, but none have ever employed a plan of battle quite as bizarre...

“Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in.” With the Israeli army camped outside Jericho's walls the city was on lockdown. **“And the LORD said to Joshua: “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark.”**

But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat.

And the people shall go up every man straight before him.”

For six days the men of Israel are to march around the walls of Jericho. On the 7th day they're to march 7 times around the city. At the end of the 7th revolution the priests are to blow 7 trumpets, and the people are to **“shout with a great shout”**.

This is not your typical West Point plan - or your Pentagon strategy. Can you imagine Joshua at the staff meeting trying to sell this plan to his generals?

Verse 6 “Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." Notice, Commander Jesus tells Joshua to break several Levitical laws in this battle plan. According to the Law of Moses, neither the Ark, nor the priests, went into the battle. At Jericho both led the way.

They also fought on the Sabbath Day. On the seventh day they were suppose to march seven times around the wall. That far exceeded the limits the Sabbath rules placed on Sabbath Day travel. *What's the deal with the discrepancies?*

Remember, Jesus is leading the charge! And I believe the point is being made that victory over sin is never achieved by keeping the Law, but by following Him!

“And (Joshua) said to the people, "Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the LORD." So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them. The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of

your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout." For six days the people conducted a silent march. Imagine the men of Jericho on top of the walls mocking and taunting these crazy Hebrews, but the people remained silent.

Perhaps God was teaching them that “sometimes you speak loudest when you remain silent”: “So (Joshua) had the ark of the LORD circle the city, going around it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp.”

“And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets. And the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. So they did six days.”

Verse 15 “But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times.”

Thirteen times in all Israel marched around Jericho until the walls came down.

I'm sure the Lord was testing their faith... It would've been easy if the walls had fallen after the first pass, but Hebrews 6:12 tells us it takes faith and patience to inherit God's promises. A persevering faith is what wins spiritual victories.

I imagine 13 trips around these colossal walls gave the Hebrews plenty of time to inspect them for breaches and

vulnerability. After 13 passes I'm sure the people had concluded they could never take this city on their own. *There are times when God has to bring us to the same conclusion before He's ready to deliver us.*

“And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: “Shout, for the LORD has given you the city! Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it.

Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things (idols, and good luck charms, and occult paraphernalia), lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.” This is a foreshadowing of trouble yet to come.

“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.”

Verse 20 “So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets.

And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.”

How did the walls of Jericho fall? I don't know, but they did when the people had faith enough to obey God's instructions. The key to victory was their faith.

And guys, sometimes God's instructions to us are just as crazy sounding to our ears as His battle plan was to Joshua. The path Jesus charts appears strange.

His strategy for our spiritual victory is full of paradox and perplexity...

You gain when you lose - you get when you give - you live when you die - you become great when you serve - you end up first when you're willing to be last – you are most honorable when you're mocked - you speak loudest when you remain silent - you become strongest when you admit your weakness...

Here's the challenge to following Jesus... *Do you have faith?*

This is how victories are won in the Christian life? Here's how spiritual enemies are defeated? Fearless faith and ruthless obedience to the commands of Jesus...

How does joy issue from sacrifice? I don't know, but it does!
How does abundant life flow from total surrender? I don't know, but it does!

Following God's battle plan made Israel a laughingstock. And following Jesus will seem foolish to people around you. *Just remember who gets the last laugh!*

Verse 21 **“And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.”**

This was a brutal judgment. But remember these people were steeped in the occult, and witchcraft, and Satanism. This was an irredeemable civilization. They had passed the

point of no return and it was a severe mercy to bring it to an end.

“But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, "Go into the harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her." And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel.” Rahab saved the lives of the two men Joshua had sent in to spy out the land. Now the Hebrews honor their promise to spare the life of Rahab and her family.

“But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.”

Rahab ended up marrying a Hebrew name “Salmon” They had a son named Boaz - who married Ruth – who had a son named Obed – who had a son named Jesse – who had a son named David – who fathered a dynasty that eventually gave rise to an eternal king name Jesus.

Rahab also makes it into the Hall of Faith, Hebrews 11:31. She was richly rewarded for her faith in God... And you will be too, if you trust in Jesus.

Verse 26 tells us, “Then Joshua charged them at that time,

saying, "Cursed be the man before the LORD who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates."

Here's a prophecy that's fulfilled 450 years later. In 950 BC, King Ahab orders a man named Hiel to rebuild Jericho. 1 Kings 16:34 says of Hiel, "He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest son Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the LORD, which He had spoken through Joshua..."

Modern archeological digs at Jericho have unearthed a large house that had encased in the foundation of its walls and in its gates, jars containing the remains of infant children – apparently sacrificed to Baal. This could've actually been the house of Hiel... which would make for an amazing confirmation of the Bible.

Chapter 6 ends with the obvious... Verse 27 "So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country."

After Jericho, Joshua set his sights on further conquests. Joshua's plan was to divide and conquer. He split Canaan in half. He'll conquer the southern coalition of kings first - then defeated the northern kings at Hazor.

Gilgal is his beachhead and base. From Gilgal he sends his troops to battle.

And just west of Jericho – just up the road - was a tiny town with no fortress or walls. After toppling the formidable city of Jericho, Ai would be easy pickings...

Joshua didn't know that the seeds of defeat had been sown at Jericho.

Chapter 7 **“But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.”** And guys, God gets angry with us when we sin.

His anger doesn't cancel His love, but its anger nonetheless.

And here's what angers God most - our sin keeps us from receiving His blessings and fulfilling His purpose. Sin just gets in God's way. He hates it.

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!”**

“Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country.”

So the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.”

So about three thousand men went up there from the

people, but they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down about 36 men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.”

The unthinkable happens. Underdog Ai blitz the Israelis. Thirty-six soldiers die, and the other 2000 tuck tail and run. This is a humiliating defeat. The casualties were disaster enough – but this embarrassing loss demoralizes the Hebrews and energizes the enemy. This kills Israel’s momentum and hardens the resistance.

“Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all - to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!" This is an unusual reaction from a man of faith. Joshua blames God for Israel’s defeat.

Verse 8 “O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

God responds to Joshua in verse 10, “So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I

commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.”

The Hebrew army was sabotaged by secret sin.

I wonder how many Christians - families – churches - business ventures suffer from a similar problem? You’ve been *ache’n* because like *Achan* there’s sinful stuff buried in your tent. You’re holding on to an attitude, or habit, or object that angers God. He refuses to bless you until you clean house. *Are you hiding accursed things?*

From the outside looking in there’s no reason your ministry shouldn’t grow, or your family shouldn’t prosper, or your business shouldn’t be successful – but the Lord knows there’s sin in the camp, and He won’t bless you until it’s gone.

God says in verse 13 “**Get up...**” There are times when we drop to our knees to repent and pray. But if there’s secret sin you can pray until you’re blue in the face and it does no good. It’s not time to *kneel*. It’s time to *deal* and take action.

“Sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you until you cannot stand before your enemies take away the accursed thing from among you."”

'In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes.

And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man. Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel." It was someone's last night on earth.

The next morning the parade began, "So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarahites; and he brought the family of the Zarahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken." 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.

"Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to

the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done:

When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it." Notice the 3 stages of temptation – *he saw, he coveted, he took.*

Remember Genesis 3:6, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate." It starts with a **delight** – then a **desire** – then finally a **deed**.

Hey, you won't do the deed - if you don't cultivate the desire - and you won't grow the desire if you harness your delights. The Psalmist says, "Delight yourself in the Lord." The key to overcoming temptation is to take joy in the Lord.

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD." Hey, here's our mistake - we think we can keep sin a secret.

Oh, I'm not hurting anyone. What I'm doing only affects me. But that's not true.

Secret sin affects the whole camp. God can choose to remove His blessing from a family due to your private

perversions. A church leader with unconfessed skeletons in his closet can hinder what God wants to do in the church.

A gold wedge buried in your tent - or pornographic files on your hard drive - or an inappropriate relationship at work - or bitter thoughts - have the same effect. They'll cause God to remove His blessing from you and the people you love.

In verse 24 Joshua deals... “Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor.” Valley of Achor means *the Valley of Trouble*. “And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.”

So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger.

Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day.” “Achor” means “trouble” - and the sin of Achan was trouble for Israel.

Joshua uses a *pun* to drive home the *punishment*.

Chapter 8 describes the conquest of Ai. Now that the secret sin has been dealt with, God is ready to fight for Israel - and He plans a good old-fashioned ambush.

“Now the LORD said to Joshua: “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you,” This is no longer a small detachment, but the whole army. “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." It's ironic, but Israel is allowed to take plunder from Ai.

Oh, if Achan had just been patient? If he'd obeyed God and trusted Him at Jericho, he would've gotten all that he wanted and more after Ai.

God continues to give orders to Joshua, "Lay an ambush for the city behind it."

So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 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 we 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." It's interesting that God's Jericho battle plan was mysterious and supernatural, while His plan for Ai - though shrewd and cunning - was far more conventional. It points out that God works in different ways at different times.

Don't put God in a box. He has special plans for each situation.

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. 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 5000 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.

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.

Verse 18 “Then the LORD said to Joshua, "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." This must've been the signal.

"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.

Verse 24 "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 12,000 - 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.

So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day.

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.” Deal with the secret sin and victory will resume.

Verse 30 “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." 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.

In the rest of chapter 8 Joshua fulfils God’s instructions to Moses in Deuteronomy 27. Israel journeys to the Valley of Sechem - north of Bethel.

He places the people on the two peaks on either side of the valley. They’re organized by tribes – six tribes on Mount Gerizim and six tribes on Mount Ebal. Then Joshua reads the Law of Moses, and reminds the people of its blessings and curses. If they obey they’ll be blessed. If they disobey they’ll be cursed.

The chapter closes in verse 35, “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.”