

Let's Worship God

11th-16th December 2017

Joshua

The Book of Joshua

THE PROMISED LAND

BOWNE

The Book of Joshua

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Monday -Joshua 7:16-26 - The Severity of the LORD's Burning Anger

Are you shocked as you read the closing verses of this chapter? It was not only Achan but also his family, livestock and possessions that suffered the extreme punishment (v24, 25). Such severity will disturb some of us, but we need to ask why such a seemingly harsh penalty? Verse 15 contains the answer, especially the second half of the verse: "And he who is taken with the devoted things 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 an outrageous thing in Israel".

What had been done was "an outrageous thing" - or "a disgraceful thing", as some Bibles say. Verse 15 clearly shows that the penalty is so severe because sin is so serious. The severity of the judgment is an indicator of the enormity of the sin. Our problem here is, as sinners, we don't think breaking the LORD's covenant (v15) is that big a deal. We really can't understand God's anger because sin doesn't bother us much. That's why passages like this shock us. That's why we can't understand Jesus when He says we should be willing to go to any extreme to avoid sin (Matt. 5:29, 30). This is baffling to us because we don't share Jesus' alarm over sin.

Joshua 7 declares that we can't treat cancer with vitamin pills. It requires radical surgery. Even if we didn't think the cancer was that big a deal - that doesn't change God's view or what needs to be done.

A heap of stones was set up as a lasting monument to the LORD's burning anger against deliberate rebellion. Just as there had been a monument erected in chapter 4 to God's saving help, now there would be also be a monument to His destroying wrath. Even the name of the place (Achor - v26 - meaning 'trouble') would have reminded them of the name of Achan. This lesson was too important for Israel to forget.

Questions

1. Why was the punishment so severe?
2. What flaw in our understanding of God and His Word means that passages like this shock us?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that you would see sin for the destructive thing it is.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. Joshua 8:34

Praise: Psalm 104:25-31 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Tuesday - Joshua 8:1-9 - The LORD's Generous Gifts

In v1, God says to Joshua and to Israel: "I have given into your hand ..." In v2, He says to them: "... its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves". These words - coming straight after what we have seen in chapter 7 - highlight how completely pointless Achan's covetousness was! Achan saw; and coveted; and took (7:21). If he had only obeyed God, he'd have received just as much and more. When the LORD's priorities are recognised and fulfilled, He then gives to His people. When we do things God's way, He blesses. He never seeks to impoverish His people. "Those who seek the LORD lack no good thing" (Ps. 34:10).

As Achan displayed, it is only as God's people lose sight of His generosity and His provision and His goodness that the cancer of covetousness consumes them. This is the devil's strategy. This is exactly how he tempted Adam and Eve in the garden. He placed all the emphasis on the restriction God had imposed, rather than on the abundant riches God had lavished on them in that garden (Gen. 3:1). The people of God today must still guard against this strategy. Recognising the LORD as the giving God is vital for faithful and obedient living. Contentment with God's goodness can be a remedy against disobedience.

A further generous gift of God is His gentle and gracious encouragement in v1: "Do not fear and do not be dismayed". After the previous chapter, Israel would have been fearful - as well as demoralised and humiliated. They had seen the awfulness of God's burning anger in dealing with sin. But where there is godly sorrow and true repentance there will always be forgiveness. The grace of God says to Joshua and to Israel in these verses of chapter 8: 'Because of sin, you made a mess of conquering Ai. Now go back and do it my way. And I'll give it into your hands'. Sin is always wrong, but when it's dealt with we can resume the battle.

Questions

1. In what ways can we focus more on God's restrictions than His generosity?
2. What do these verses teach us about the right reaction to sin in our lives?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for God's generous gifts.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. Joshua 8:34

Praise: Psalm 105:1-6 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Wednesday - Joshua 8:10-23 - The LORD's Definite Help

Read v18 again: "Then the LORD said to Joshua, 'Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand towards Ai, for I will give it into your hand'".

As we saw in the opening verses of chapter 8, God has reassured His people that they do not need to fear and that He will give Ai into their hands. This reassurance is very similar to what He told them just before their successful siege of Jericho (6:2). The LORD is in such control that He specifies the precise moment for the attack in v18. In fact, this whole 'ambush' battle strategy is not the bright idea of Joshua or Israel. The plan that we see Joshua sharing with the fighting men in v3-9 and that we see them putting into place in v10-17 is all part of the LORD's instruction to them. Verse 2: "Lay an ambush against the city, behind it". This passage of Scripture is showing us that the: "the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Even the cleverness of this tactic is God's!

Bear in mind the timing of the LORD's help. It comes after sin has been dealt with and judgement carried out (chapter 7). Again what an encouragement this must have been to the people of God - to know such help and power from Him so soon after witnessing His burning anger.

Notice also the necessity of the LORD's help. Israel needed God's power, even for little Ai. The report in 7:3 had observed about the inhabitants of Ai that "they are few". Israel was learning in these journeys and these battles that with the power of God the great Jericho could be taken (chapter 6); but without the power of God not even the smallest settlement could be overrun (chapter 7). How utterly dependent God's people are on God's power for any success!

Questions

1. What is significant about the timing of God's help in this passage?
2. What else stands out about the help God gives His people in these verses?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that you would completely depend upon God.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. Joshua 8:34

Praise: Psalm 105:7-12- See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Thursday - Joshua 8:24-29 - The LORD's Solemn Judgement

Verse 29 speaks of the solemn judgement of the LORD: "And [Joshua] hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening. And at sunset Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day".

Modern Bible readers often cringe in the face of descriptions like this. We can sometimes judge the Old Testament to have been a barbaric age (conveniently ignoring the barbarism of our own centuries). However we should not allow emotional reactions blind us to what Scripture is showing as a solemn and significant matter.

The hanging of Ai's king was most likely a follow-up to his death, rather than the actual means of his death. Kings were hung after they were put to death (see 10:26, 27). If you turn back to Deut. 21:22, 23, you'll see that offenders whose crimes were punishable by death could be hung up on a tree or a post afterwards - probably to serve as a warning to others. Deut. 21:23 says: "a hanged man is cursed by God".

The hanging of the king of Ai should probably be viewed in this light. It is a solemn sign that he and his people (and all of Canaan) were under the LORD's judgement and curse because of their wickedness (Lev. 18:24, 25; Deut. 9:4, 5). It seems gruesome to us, but maybe a scene like this is necessary or we might never fear sin. The seriousness of God's judgement of sin should hit us (yet again - as in the previous chapter). And if our hard hearts still don't get the message, God has given another picture in the New Testament: where His own beloved Son hung on a tree, "having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). That certainly is not something we should take lightly.

Questions

1. Why was the king of Ai hanged on a tree?
2. What important message about sin is being reinforced for us?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that you would see the seriousness of sin.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. Joshua 8:34

Praise: Psalm 105:13-18 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Friday - Joshua 8:30-35 - The LORD's Crucial Word

These verses are in stark contrast with recent chapters. We have got used to reading a fairly continuous storyline of strategies and battles. Suddenly it is as if the war movie is cut and we are left looking at a slide of a worship service. We jolt from conquest to covenant. This is like when a special news bulletin interrupts the normal television programming. The news bulletin is considered to have sufficient importance and priority to cut into normal broadcasting. That is what the writer is doing in these verses: underlining that covenant obedience has priority over military victory. Or to put it another way: obeying God's Word is more important than fighting God's war. We are being told that Israel's success is not chiefly about wiping out Canaanites, but in everyone's total submission to the Word of God.

The climax came in Joshua's reading "all the words of the law" (v34, 35). Read v33-35 again - notice the emphasis on the word "all" (used 5 times). All God's Word was for all the people. Sojourners (strangers or foreigners) as well as born-and-bred Israelites; leaders as well as the-average-man-on-the-street; "housewives, kids and hangers-on", as one writer says about the second half of v35 - all were to be ruled by the Word. This is the first priority of the people of God and so their attention is refocused on it again after all the drama of recent events.

Yet we must not ignore the covenant God in all this. Even the location of the ceremony points to the LORD's faithfulness. Mount Ebal (v30) was near Shechem. At Shechem, Abraham had first been promised this land (Gen. 12:6, 7). At Shechem, Abraham's grandson Jacob safely returned to the land he had been promised after being in exile. And now, at Shechem, the descendants of Abraham and the family of Jacob were experiencing the fulfilment of the LORD's promise of the land. God's promises do not expire with time.

Questions

1. What does this incident teach us about what was really important for Israel?
2. What do v33-35 emphasise about who God's Word is relevant for?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for God's faithfulness.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. Joshua 8:34

Praise: Psalm 105:19-24 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

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Saturday - Joshua 9:1-15 - The Lack of the Wisdom of God

Gibeon was six miles north-west of Jerusalem. A delegation showed up at Israel's camp, probably no more than twenty miles away. The Gibeonites seemed to know that the Israelites were under orders to dispossess and exterminate the people of Canaan. The Israelites were not allowed to make treaties with the people of Canaan (Ex. 23:31). However, they were allowed to offer terms of peace to peoples from further away (Deut. 20:10-18). So the strategy of the Gibeonites was to claim they were from "a distant country" and to back this up with their appearance.

The Gibeonites looked the part. They offered a convincing story. They even mixed in some spiritual testimony, claiming to have heard of the mighty acts of Israel's God. How Israel needed wisdom, yet how Israel neglected wisdom. The second half of v14 highlights what went wrong in this incident: "but [they] did not ask counsel from the LORD". The LORD's direction was available but was ignored.

Do we only need God's guidance in the times when we are in doubt? We must be careful if we start thinking: 'There is no need to consult the Lord on this - it's very clear'. We must seek God's direction in all our actions. That doesn't mean we ask about a haircut or the time of a meal! But we must beware of that subtle unbelief in any part of our lives that says: 'I have this under control. I don't need to consult the Lord'. Joshua 9 warns God's people against cocky independence. We need wisdom for all the circumstances we face in life. That wisdom is available from a giving God, if we will ask for it (James 1:5). Our need is no different from Israel's. We don't only need the power of God to overwhelm our obvious enemies but also the wisdom of God to detect our subtle enemies. Sadly, the church too often craves God's power while it ignores God's wisdom.

Questions

1. What was Israel's error in this incident?
2. Can you think of areas of your life where you are not seeking God's wisdom?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the preaching and hearing of God's Word tomorrow.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. Joshua 8:34

Praise: Psalm 105:25-31 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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