

Joshua Chapter 8 – John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson "Facing our sins head on". The essential idea of this lesson and this chapter is about how God wants us to handle the sin issues of our lives.
 - a) Before I get to that, first, let's get back to the Israelites. When we last left them, they were dealing with their first defeat in the land. In this lesson, they conquer the same group of people who they lost to in the last chapter.
 - b) What I want you the reader to get out of this lesson is not that the "Israelites are winning again". That is a just a bit of ancient bible history. What I want you and me to get is that God is our source of power to face whatever sinful issue we deal with in our lives.
 - c) When the Israelites conquered Jericho two chapters ago, a "spiritual point" is that God knocked down the walls that separate us from our sins. In Chapters 7 and 8, the Israelites deal with this city of "Ai". The underlying spiritual point is we depend upon God to give us the strength and ability to deal with our sins.
 - d) Dealing with issues that are blocking our relationship with God is often painful to face. It is like facing our worst fears or facing problems that have hung around our lives for a long time. While facing them is often painful, it is usually far more painful to ignore such issues and letting them "wallow". God does not expect perfection, but He does expect us to take on those issues. We have to remember that He is "there" guiding us as we do face those issues head on. We probably won't have victory on "day one", but our lives are now heading in the right direction as we are taking on those sin issues.
 - e) Confused? ☺ Even worse, are you saying you can't relate to this issue? Good, then "hang in there". Sooner or later, if one seeks God on a regular basis, He will (I promise you) make us face some of our own issues in our life.
2. Meanwhile Joshua still has to actually deal with conquering a city called "Ai":
 - a) The first issue of this chapter is that God has to encourage Joshua to move forward and conquer this city. One has to remember that Joshua and the Israelites were discouraged due to their defeat in the last battle.
 - i) Yes, they took care of the sinning person named Achan, but now they need assurance from God that it is time to move on again.
 - ii) The first step of dealing with the sin issues of our lives is we need to have the courage to actually face them, especially after we have gone through a setback. The Israelites had a setback due to the sins of Achan (last chapter) and now God is encouraging Joshua to "go forward" again and take on this city of Ai.
 - b) The next part of the chapter deals with God's plan of attack on Ai.
 - i) The attack involves an ambush. Some of the Israelite soldiers are to hide out in an ambush and the rest of the Israelites are to attack the city head on.
 - ii) This leads to an interesting question: Can God be behind an "ambush"? Let's face it, if "God is God", He could do pick all sorts of ways of winning a battle over Ai. He could simply wipe them all of Ai by Himself if He desired. Further, God could have simply used the same method as last time where Jericho's walls fall down and then the Israelite army came in and wiped out Jericho. Therefore, the question is why would God use this ambush plan?
 - a) One theory is that because the Israelites didn't seek God prior to attacking Ai the first time, now the Israelites have to resort to "ambush" to win. Therefore God designed this plan to teach dependence upon Him.
 - b) My view is God is that this chapter is another example of how God works in our life. If we are willing to attack sin "head on", we can take comfort that God is "watching our back" and is helping us win our battles.

- iii) The Israelites do defeat Ai via this plan. Those Israelites that attack the city straight on pretend to be losing and run back in defeat. Once those Israelites who were hiding out for the ambush go forward, then the rest of the Israelites who were pretending to be losing, go forward and collectively, they wipe out Ai.
 - iv) The text also makes a point of saying the king of Ai was then hung a tree. The text does not state why, but I suspect it is to give confidence to the Israelite army that once they have dealt with sin issues, they can have victories over their enemies.
- 3. I also need to discuss the final part of the chapter, which is an interesting "diversion".
 - a) After this battle is over, the Israelites stop to build a monument to God. This monument is made of uncut rocks. After sacrifices are made on this rock altar, the words of the "law" are then written on other nearby rocks. I don't know if that means just 1) The Ten Commandments or 2) The entire law of God or 3) The book of Deuteronomy. The point is somehow, someway, God's laws are then written out on these rocks.
 - b) Next, Joshua divides up all of Israel into two camps. Remember that there were probably one and one half million Israelites. Half of them go sit on a mountain called "Ebal" and the other half go sit on a mountain called "Gerizim". These mountains were next to each other and Joshua then stood in a valley between these two mountains. Joshua then read the "blessings and the curses" about keeping the laws as listed in Deuteronomy 27 and 28.
 - i) OK, what gives and why is that here? ☺ For one thing, Moses instructed that when the Israelites were in the Promised Land, they were to do this very thing.
 - ii) All right, if it was so important, why do it now, as opposed to doing this prior to attacking Jericho or even prior to the circumcision ritual a few chapters back?
 - iii) The answer is it was done right after the Israelites experienced their first defeat and their first "recovery" of that defeat. In other words, once they understood "by example" the importance of complete obedience to God, it was time for them to perform this ritual as required by Moses.
 - iv) In other words, it would be one thing to explain the promised blessings of obeying the law prior to entering the land and explaining the curses of avoiding the law back "then". It is another thing to understand how serious are God's requirements for our life once we have actually experienced disobedience.
 - c) Which leads us to the issue of Christians and the law. The New Testament makes it very clear that Christians are not under the law. (See Galatians 5:18.) Given that, why should I care about the Israelites being obedient to the law? The answer is to understand that God still requires obedience of believers, even if Christian believers are not under the law.
 - i) In other words, sin is not to be messed around with and taken lightly. Christians have a bad habit of being so focused on God's grace that we tend to forget how seriously God takes sin. The concept of sin is something to be avoided as believers and confessed as soon as one becomes aware of it.
 - ii) On that happy note, ☺ it's time to start the text.
- 4. Chapter 8, Verse 1: Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land.
 - a) At this point in the book of Joshua, the Israelites had still experienced their first defeat in their attempt to conquer the Promised Land. In Chapter 7, the Israelites discovered the reason for their failure was due to the sin of an Israelite soldier named Achan. The later part of chapter 7 had Joshua dealing with Achan and his sin issues.
 - b) Now, here in Chapter 8, God is telling Joshua to not be afraid or discouraged about the city they lost to in the last battle. The point is the judgment is done regarding Achan and now if Joshua will follow God, the victory over Ai is assured.
 - c) The lesson of course is about our guaranteed victory when we follow God.

5. Verse 2: You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city."
- a) The one key difference between the battle over Jericho and the battle over Ai is that God promises the Israelites this time that they may keep whatever spoil they find in Ai after they have defeated this city.
 - b) OK, why is that? Why did the Israelites have to burn everything that was "burnable" when they defeated Jericho and why can the Israelites keep the plunder (valuables) and livestock after they defeat Ai?
 - i) Before I get into the answer, notice how God writes "history in advance". God knew the Israelites would win prior to the battle even being fought and talks about the spoil of victory even before the battle even takes place.
 - ii) The reason for the change in plunder attitude is that God wants them (and us) to learn a principal about giving to Him. He wants us to give Him the first of our earnings and not the leftovers. After that, we are free to spend the rest of our earnings as we see fit. In summary, God is saying in effect, "Give Me the first of your earnings and I promise you (us) that if we are willing to trust in Him in that aspect of our lives then "we can't out give Him!""
 - c) Then God adds a key point in the end of Verse 2: Set an ambush behind the city.
 - i) I discussed this in the opening of this lesson. It seems strange to me that a God that who can do "anything" would require an ambush!
 - ii) Let's face it, if "God were God", He could make the people of "Ai" simply afraid of the Israelites and they could march in and just wipe out the city.
 - iii) So, why an ambush? No reason is given, but there are a number of explanations:
 - a) For starters, there was a city near Ai called Bethel. By placing soldiers between Ai and Bethel would prevent the citizens of Bethel of helping out the citizens of Ai fighting the Israelites.
 - b) Next, understand that God can use our mistakes for His glory. Let's face, the citizens of Ai thought they were "hot stuff" ☺ for the moment as they had the Israelite army on the run in the last battle. This does not excuse the failure of the Israelite army in the last battle. Because God knows all things, include the Israelite failure from before, He can use that failure to draw the citizens of Ai out of the city so they could be ambushed from behind as well as the Israelite army in front of them.
 - c) Finally, if "God is God" He can choose any method He wants for victory in Him. The point is sometimes God will call us to do something that appears to be strange from our perspective, for His glory. The idea of an ambush is only one example. In other words, don't limit God by saying He can or cannot use any particular method in any situation if that is what He wants for us at any given moment.
 - d) Meanwhile, enough analogies. ☺ The literal aspect of the text is that the next time the Israelites are to attack this city, they are to have some men hiding behind the city while the main portion of the army draws the citizens of this city out of the city.
6. Verse 3: So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack Ai. He chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night ⁴ with these orders: "Listen carefully. You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don't go very far from it. All of you be on the alert. ⁵ I and all those with me will advance on the city, and when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them.
- a) Here in Verse 3, we begin the actual attack on this city called Ai. The first order of business was Joshua selected 30,000 men for the ambush on the city. What we are told so far is they are to go behind the city and in effect wait until Joshua says, "go" to attack.
 - b) The rest of the Israelite army will do a frontal attack and pretend to flee.

- c) We will learn in Verse 25 that the size of the entire city of Ai was 12,000 people. Yet here is Joshua sending 30,000 for an ambush and probably a larger size for a frontal attack.
 - d) If Ai is so small, why use an army of this size?
 - i) For starters, it is because God said so. We will also discover that the large size is to keep an adjacent city named "Bethel" from helping those in Ai.
 - ii) The spiritual lesson here is that when God wants us to attack sin, He wants us to use everything we got to eliminate the spiritual forces from our lives. No we can't kill demonic spiritual entities, but we can get them on the run if we trust in God and use His power and "all that is within us" to attack sin and sinful forces.
7. Verse 6: They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say, 'They are running away from us as they did before.' So when we flee from them,⁷ you are to rise up from ambush and take the city. The LORD your God will give it into your hand.⁸ When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the LORD has commanded. See to it; you have my orders."
- a) In these verses, Joshua finishes giving his commands to the troops. The main idea of the attack plan is that those troops doing the "frontal assault" will pretend to flee as they did the last time they attacked in Chapter 7. When they have lured Ai's troops out of the city, then the "ambushers" will rise out of their hiding places, and attack and destroy this city.
 - b) A little geography might be helpful here. The City of Ai was on a hill. The 30,000 Israelite soldiers were to hide in a valley below the city.
 - i) I'm guessing all of this is done at night for cover. Most likely the army that attacks this city "head on" will do so at dawn as so no one can see the hidden army.
 - c) Just like when the Israelites attacked Jericho, the Israelites are to kill everyone and set the city on fire. For those who don't recall from a few chapters back, the reason God wanted everyone dead, has to do with a judgment on the people of this land that was first told to Abraham over 400 years earlier. It is not that the Israelites were to forever kill everyone who did not follow their religion. The orders were only to kill a specific group of people currently living in the land of Israel. It was a judgment on those people and God was using the Israelites to carry out that judgment.
 - d) The spiritual significance of all of this is the idea that the "Promised Land" does not represent heaven, but it represents living the full, rich spiritual life of trusting God with every aspect of our lives. That includes trusting God to eliminate all sin from our lives. The idea of all of this conquest is to show that we don't compromise with sin and we make every effort (either by direct assault or even an ambush) to eliminate our sins.
 - i) So, how do we "ambush" our sins? It may be to organize an effort to stay away from whatever influences that trigger that sin or to eliminate things that trigger it. If a man's weakness is pornography, it may mean making every effort to avoid those things that trigger looking at it. If it is alcohol, it means to avoid places that trigger drinking. The idea is that our willpower is not enough to overcome any particular sin. We must rely on God's strength to overcome sin issues and we must "ambush" those things that trigger those sins to surface.
 - ii) The idea of living the Christian life is to strive to be pleasing to God in every aspect of our life. It means to take sin seriously and to make every effort to eliminate sins from our lives. God does not want any negative thing to block our relationship with Him and that means attacking sin when we encounter it.
 - iii) All of this does lead back to the verses. Notice in Verse 7 it says, "God will give it (Ai) into your hand, to set it on fire". Spiritually speaking, God will make it possible to have victory over any and all sinful influences of our lives. The way to have such victory is to trust in God for every aspect of our lives and to trust in Him to overcome and "burn up" any and all sin issues we have to deal with.

8. Verse 9: Then Joshua sent them off, and they went to the place of ambush and lay in wait between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai--but Joshua spent that night with the people.
- a) Here we have Joshua's last direct encounter with the 30,000 who would ambush Ai.
 - b) The text mentions that the 30,000 are to wait between Ai and Bethel.
 - i) One reason for such a large force to attack Ai is that there was another city nearby called Bethel. Having an army of 30,000 men between the two cities would prevent Bethel from coming to the rescue of Ai.
 - ii) Personally, I have always appreciated that Ai begins with an "A" and Bethel begins with a "B". It makes it easier to keep it straight. Now, if only the next city the Israelites encountered began with a "C", it would be even easier. ☺
 - c) Verse 9 also mentions that Joshua would not be part of the ambush team, but would be part of the main army that attacks the city from front. Why is that?
 - i) Part of the answer is that Joshua did not want Ai to suspect an ambush. As the leader, Joshua would lead the main army in front. If Ai sees the leader (Joshua) leading the army in the main attack, they would be less likely to suspect any sort of ambush on the city.
 - ii) Spiritually speaking, the idea is that we are trust in God to help us "ambush" the sinful influences of our life and we ourselves should focus on "taking it on directly". What God is trying to teach us is that if we are willing to take on whatever sin we face, God is there to surround (ambush) whatever that sinful influence is, so that we can defeat that influence from our lives.
 - iii) Meanwhile, Joshua and the Israelites still have some literal attacking to do.
9. Verse 10: Early the next morning Joshua mustered his men, and he and the leaders of Israel marched before them to Ai. ¹¹ The entire force that was with him marched up and approached the city and arrived in front of it. They set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and the city.
- a) I mentioned earlier that that attack probably occurred at dawn, and here is Verse 10 to verify that fact. The idea was that the ambush would less likely to be seen at that time of the day. One has to remember that this was before the era of electric lights so when it was dark, it would be hard for Ai to spot the ambush on the opposite side.
 - b) Joshua set up camp with the "main army" on a hillside just to the north of Ai. There was a valley located between the city of Ai itself and the Israelite army. The point is those in Ai would be able to see the Israelite army come at them, as the Israelites first have to march down into the valley then up the hill where Ai was located. Most likely there was a city gate in this northerly direction.
 - i) Joshua was hoping to use the arrogance of those in Ai to draw them out of the city to attack Israel head on. Because Ai won the last battle, Joshua thought that Ai would be full of "confidence" and have their gate open and attack Israel head on.
 - ii) This goes back to something I stated in the introduction: Yes, the Israelites should not have attacked Ai the first time, but God still used that mistake for His glory. God used the fact that Israel lost the first time to draw Ai out of their city.
 - iii) As I stated earlier, this does not excuse our mistakes when God "uses them". It just means that God works through us and uses the "circumstances at hand" to help us win our battles for Him if we let Him.
 - c) OK John, other than knowing some ancient history, what is the meaning of all of this?
 - i) The idea is that even if we have lost our battles to sin, once, twice or a thousand times, we can and should face it "head on" knowing that God is working behind the scenes to help us attack and overcome those sin issues. We are personally to tackle the issue "head on" while God's forces are working behind the scenes to help us wipe out whatever issue we face. To sum it up, we can win over any and all obstacles in our lives if we are willing to trust God to lead us to that victory.

10. Verse 12: Joshua had taken about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. ¹³ They had the soldiers take up their positions--all those in the camp to the north of the city and the ambush to the west of it. That night Joshua went into the valley.
- a) I have to admit the numbers are a little confusing here. Back in Verse 3, God told Joshua to send 30,000 men out for this ambush. Yet here in Verse 12 we read of only 5,000 set out for the ambush. What gives? Did 25,000 quit? The answer is no. ☺
 - i) The way I visualize this is that there were 30,000 who set aside for this ambush. Of those 30,000 men, five thousand were the "chosen soldiers" who would lead the ambush. The remaining 25,000 would remain in that position in case the city of Bethel decides to get in the battle.
 - ii) This is the type of lesson that is best demonstrated on a chalk board as opposed to writing it out. Visualize the main army being on a hill to the north of Ai, with a valley between Ai and the main Israelite army. To the west of Ai was the 30,000 "stealth force" of which 5,000 were in front, ready to attack and burn the city.
 - b) The final part of Verse 13 mentions that Joshua was in the valley between the "army to the north" and the city of Ai to the south. The point is Joshua was not hiding in the back of the army, but he was personally leading the main assault team on Ai.
 - c) OK John, I know you're dying to tell us. ☺ How do we apply all of this?
 - i) The idea is that God wants us to "lead the charge" to take on the sins of our lives. We have to trust "God's forces" that are working behind the scenes to "ambush" those sins. In the meantime, God wants us to face those issues "head on".
 - ii) For what it is worth, I am not claiming to be perfect by any means. There are issues that I have to face "head on" and I'm sure there are issues in my life where God is waiting for me to tackle those things "head on". The point is we don't have to be scared to face any and all sins we encounter because God will organize a victory for us if we let Him. God is more than capable of "knocking down the walls" like He did in Jericho for us and He is also more than capable of setting up a "secret army" to wipe out the sinful issues if we are willing to face them.
 - iii) Meanwhile, Joshua and the Israelites still have a battle to fight in Chapter 8.
11. Verse 14: When the king of Ai saw this, he and all the men of the city hurried out early in the morning to meet Israel in battle at a certain place overlooking the Arabah. But he did not know that an ambush had been set against him behind the city.
- a) Here we have the first reference to the king of Ai. In the morning the king (or the king's guards) spotted the main Israelite army to the north of the city. The good news is that the king had no idea about the ambush to the west, as the king was busy focusing on the main Israelite army in the valley below the city of Ai.
 - b) The text says "A certain place that overlooked the Arabah". That word "Arabah" just refers to the valley below Ai and the hillside area opposite the valley.
 - c) One of the points being made in these verses is that "Ai" had confidence in the fact that they won last time and were not afraid to take on the Israelites head on. The weakness of our sins is that they have a big ego. That "ego" can be used against sinful forces or those who don't trust in God because their actions are predictable.
 - i) How did God know that Ai would come out and attack the Israelite army? Well besides the fact "God is God", it is predictable in that the "ego" would entice us to "sin more" and come out to win more battles.
 - d) The "sinful forces" of our life are not on the lookout for a God-organized ambush. Those sinful forces want to approach us directly knowing that they are stronger than we are in terms of "their forces" versus our forces without God. Going back to the "literal", it means that the army of Ai was not afraid of the larger Israelite army as they have beaten them before.

12. Verse 15: Joshua and all Israel let themselves be driven back before them, and they fled toward the desert. ¹⁶ All the men of Ai were called to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city. ¹⁷ Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel. They left the city open and went in pursuit of Israel.
- a) So far, the battle was going as planned. The men of Ai went out the gate of the city as the main Israelite army pretended to be "backtracking" in defeat.
 - b) Notice that Bethel joined in this attack against Israel. Wherever Bethel was located in comparison to Ai, they did not encounter the secret army. What I suspect happened is that Bethel was watching this frontal attack against Ai. When they saw the Israelites (pretending to be) running away, they (Bethel) thought they would join in this "easy victory" and join the attack against the Israelite army.
 - c) Spiritually speaking, when our enemy has us on the run, you can also expect more of the enemy to come and join them. Our sinful desires want to overwhelm us and have victory over us. It is not surprising that the nearby city also joined the attack as it represents other sinful forces joining in "apparent" victory over God's desires for our lives. The point is when we face our sinful issues "head on", we should not be surprised if what we have to face turns out to be even larger than what we first expect.
 - i) The point is no matter what the size of "what we face", even if it turns out to be larger than what we first expect, is still big enough for God to handle. We have to have faith that God's plan to ambush sin will lead us to victory.
 - d) Meanwhile, back in the battle zone, there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel that did not leave their city in pursuit of the main Israel army. Both cities were left defenseless as the men of those cities were on the attack against Israel.
 - i) The spiritual idea is that the source of our sins is left vulnerable to attack so God can wipe them out as we face our issues head on.
13. Verse 18: Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city." So Joshua held out his javelin toward Ai. ¹⁹ As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire.
- a) Apparently the signal to attack the city was Joshua holding a spear in his hand.
 - b) When that signal was given, the "ambush men" burned the city to the ground.
 - i) Don't read that too lightly. It also means the Israelites killed every woman and child living in that city. So, is that cruel of God to kill innocent people?
 - a) God performs "individual judgment" and "group judgment". This nation that included Ai was being judged for at least 400 years of sinful practice. As to how each individual acted among those who were killed, I trust in the fact that a "fair" God will judge each individual fairly.
 - c) I also want you to think about how a city is set on fire. The city walls were made of stone, so those did not burn easily. However, the internal structures were probably made of wood and along with the straw roofs burned fairly easily. The mortar within the walls would eventually burn with the heat of this fire.
 - i) What is implied, but not directly stated is I suspect the men of the ambush not only burned Ai, but Bethel as well. Both cities were now empty of soldiers.
 - ii) We will learn later in this chapter than the Israelites separated "booty" for themselves. This probably referred to the livestock and material objects.
 - iii) The funny thing is if Achan from the last chapter just waited, he would have this.
 - d) The point is when we are ready to attack our sins "head on", God is also ready to help us (if we ask Him) to attack the spiritual forces that are behind those sins. Joshua is the one who gave the signal for the ambush team to get going. That is the idea of us telling God we are ready to deal with our sins and we desire God's help to ambush those sins.

14. Verse 20: The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising against the sky, but they had no chance to escape in any direction, for the Israelites who had been fleeing toward the desert had turned back against their pursuers.
- a) Here is where the battle turns. What I envision was a large army of Israelites running toward the city, then turning around and running away when Ai's army attacked them. Given the large size of the Israelite army and the fact that the whole population of Ai was 12,000, the city of Ai was very much outnumbered. When the men of Ai saw their city on fire, they gave up hope for living. The Israelites then easily attacked their pursuers.
 - i) The men of Ai saw that there was no escape. In front of them was a large Israelite army. Behind them was their city "now dead" and a large group of Israelites plundering that city and burning everything else to the ground.
 - b) OK, back the spiritual significance: The sinful powers that attack us are actually a lot weaker than we suspect. They scare us. Their demonic power is stronger than we are (without God), but are a lot less powerful than God Himself. Once that power that drove us to sin is out in the open with "nowhere to run", it can easily be overcome.
 - i) Again, the key is to not be afraid to face our sin issues head on knowing that God is "covering our back" and wiping out the source of our problems.
15. Verse 21: For when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that smoke was going up from the city, they turned around and attacked the men of Ai. ²² The men of the ambush also came out of the city against them, so that they were caught in the middle, with Israelites on both sides. Israel cut them down, leaving them neither survivors nor fugitives.
- a) At this point the men of Ai were surrounded by the Israelites. I suspect the men of the smaller city of Bethel were also surrounded as well. Since Israel's enemies were now surrounded, those enemies had lost hope. It became an easy route of a victory for the Israelites to win.
 - b) The text makes it a point of saying there were no survivors left in Ai as all of the men of that city were cut down in battle. I have to admit I wonder how the Israelites knew just who was an Israelite and who was a citizen of Ai. Did they have unique clothing or some sort of solid identification? ☺ I don't know the answer to this question.
 - c) The point for us is we can have complete victory over any and all sin issues of our lives if we are willing to trust in God to lead us to that victory. If we (that includes me) are willing to face our sin issues "head on", God will provide the victory and wipe out the sources of our enemy (i.e., the demonic forces) so we can easily wipe them out.
 - i) I understand that our sinful enemies are not necessarily people but things. The point is if we are willing to trust in God, He will give us the strength, the ability and the boldness to face those issues "head on". God will work in the background to wipe out those issues so we can have victory in our lives.
 - ii) I am not promising that we will have victory in "five minutes". I am saying we can have victory over those issues if we are willing to give them to God.
16. Verse 23: But they took the king of Ai alive and brought him to Joshua.
- a) The king is going to be hung and killed in Verse 28. So why make an example out of the king? The text doesn't say, but I suspect it has to do with showing the Israelites (by having them watch his death) that they can be victorious if they are trusting God.
 - b) The spiritual idea is that God will also kill the head person of the spiritual attacks on our life one day. While we will battle sin as long as we live, we also understand that God will have complete victory over sin one day. We will personally experience that victory when we die, assuming that we trust in Jesus' complete payment for our sins and the fact that Jesus is God. At the same time, we understand there is coming a future day where the "king" of all sin (Satan) will personally be destroyed by God and humans will no longer have to worry about having to face sinful forces in our life. (See Revelation 20:10)

17. Verse 24: When Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the desert where they had chased them, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in it.
- a) This verse mentions the fact that every man, woman and child (implied) that lived in Ai were killed. For those of you that haven't read my previous lessons on Joshua, let me quickly explain again why all the women and children were killed in this city:
 - i) Part of the reason for the Israelites conquering the Promised Land is that God used the Israelites as His instruments of judgment on the people living there. God told Abraham over four hundred years earlier that the people living there were going to be judged. (See Genesis 15:14). So what was their sin, and why was it so bad that all of them had to be killed? The text doesn't say directly, but we get clues later in the bible that it had to do with sacrificing their live children to their gods. The Israelites were later guilty of this too. (See Psalm 106:37, Isaiah 57:5 et.al.)
 - ii) One can also read this "spiritually" in that God has no tolerance of sin and wants us to completely destroy any sinful influence over our lives.
 - b) So can God do this same sort of judgment today? I suppose He could, but I wouldn't want to test Him to find out. ☺ Here is where I take comfort in the fact that my sins are covered by the blood of Jesus and I don't have to fear that possibility.
18. Verse 25: Twelve thousand men and women fell that day--all the people of Ai. ²⁶ For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his javelin until he had destroyed all who lived in Ai.
- a) Verse 25 is where we discover the total population of Ai was 12,000.
 - i) It shows that the original 3,000 Israelite soldiers that attacked Ai the first time (in Chapter 7) was insufficient. At the same time, Ai was overwhelmed by the number of Israelite soldiers that attacked them here in Chapter 8.
 - b) So, was it "fair" to overwhelm Ai with the entire Israelite army in Chapter 8? The issue is not fairness. The issue is sin judgment and wiping out those who God called to destroy.
 - c) Again, other than learning ancient history, what does this mean for us? The main thing to get away from this lesson is the idea that God wants a "zero tolerance" policy for sin in our life. God wants any and all sinful influences in our lives to be completely destroyed. That would include using any means necessary to destroy sin and yes, that includes "sneak attacks" on sinful influences.
19. Verse 27: But Israel did carry off for themselves the livestock and plunder of this city, as the LORD had instructed Joshua.
- a) In Verse 27, we read of Israel carrying off the plunder and the livestock of this city.
 - b) This verse makes me feel sorry for "Achan" in Chapter 7. If the guy had just waited until "Chapter 8", he could have had all sorts of "plunder" for himself and not sinned.
 - i) The point here is not that God wants us to kill our enemies and take their stuff. The point is that if we trust in God and are willing to work to make a living, God is going to provide for us and He desires that we trust Him with our money just as we trust in Him with our lives.
 - ii) God does not (for example) call the Israelites today to murder all foreigners living in the land of Israel. God does not call Christians to kill those who do not believe in Jesus and take their "stuff". This judgment was only on a specific race of people and happened at one time in history.
 - c) What about modern warfare? That is a separate issue. Warfare may or may not be God ordained. There may be times when God calls us to literal warfare. One has to get into the political issues and does it justify warfare. I'm not going to go down that road now, other than say, if one studies history, there are times when warfare was the last, but only solution necessary. Warfare has helped bring an end to many tyrants that try to take over the world (or parts thereof).

20. Verse 28: So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day. ²⁹ He hung the king of Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset, Joshua ordered them to take his body from the tree and throw it down at the entrance of the city gate. And they raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day.
- a) In Verse 28, we read of the complete destruction of Ai. Many centuries later, the city was inhabited again. (See Nehemiah 7:32.) Note that the Hebrew word translated here "permanent" actually means "for a very long time" and does not mean "forever".
 - b) In Verse 29, the king's body was hung on a tree. I discussed this a few verses back, so let me quickly recap: I suspect the reason the king was hung on a tree was as a "living witness" to the Israelites to help them understand that their mission was the complete destruction of everything in the Promised Land.
 - i) On another level, one can see the symbolism of Joshua destroying the "earthly king". Remember that Joshua and "Jesus" are the same root name. It could tie to Jesus (The Messiah) being the ultimate destroyer of the "earthly king" (i.e., the devil) that influences sin in this world. (Again, see Revelation 20:10).
 - ii) Next, why was the king's dead body taken down at evening time? There was a law that any body that was hung on a tree must be taken down by nightfall. (See Deuteronomy 21:23). The idea is that "sin is judged by hanging it on a tree" and "tomorrow is a new day". Remember that a new day begins at sundown for a Jewish person. Yes that also ties to Jesus in that "sin was judged by hanging it on a tree" and yes his body was taken down as not to be left there overnight.
 - c) Finally, Verse 29 says that a large pile of rocks was placed there to this day.
 - i) What "day" is that? It was whenever the book of Joshua was completed, probably near the end of his life. It was later in Joshua's life that this rock pile still stood.
 - ii) So why place a big pile of rocks over the body of the dead king of Ai and over the dead city of Ai? It is another illustration of sin being "permanently buried" as to never have it influence our lives again! It is as if to say, "Sin is buried on this spot and it is marked by these rocks as to avoid that spot ever again".
21. Verse 30: Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, ³¹ as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses--an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the LORD burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings.
- a) From Verse 30 to the end of the chapter, we are going to read of a ritual ordained by Moses, where the "law of Moses" was written on a big pile of rocks. Then, the promised blessings of obedience to the law is read out loud as well as the promised curses of disobedience to the law is read out loud. (See Deuteronomy Chapters 27 and 28.)
 - i) In these verses, we will also read of two mountains. One is called "Mount Ebal" and the other is called "Mount Gerizim". Both mountains are about 3,000 feet in height and there is a small valley in between these two mountains.
 - ii) For most people, "three thousand feet" is more of a big hill than a mountain, but they are referred to as mountains in the bible, so just accept that fact.
 - b) With all of that out of my system, I can now focus on Verse 30 itself. It says that Joshua built a monument on "Mount Ebal". It was built as what was required in the law, an altar out of "uncut stones" (see Deuteronomy 27:5-6). The stones were uncut as the altar shows our dependence on God and does not have any work of human hands.
 - c) On this altar they offered burnt sacrifices and fellowship offerings. That means the altar was flat enough to lay animals on top of it. The concept of the "burnt offering" is to offer something completely to God. In other words, the animal was completely burnt up. The idea of a burnt offering is to show our complete commitment to God.
 - i) Christians don't do "burnt offerings" today in that Jesus was our "burnt offering". He gave himself completely and "fully" for our sins.

- ii) Christians only do "burnt offerings" in that God desires that we completely give of ourselves to God. How do we symbolically show that? It is the idea of "giving completely of ourselves (regularly) to God" as taught in Romans, Chapter 12, Verse 1. The idea is "everything we do" is for God's glory. The idea is we live for God and all that we do, we try to do for His glory and out of love for Him.
 - iii) Next comes "fellowship offerings". The idea of this offering is that it is something we "share" with God. Part of the offering is given to God and part of it is to be eaten by the Israelite priests. The closest thing Christians do this is when we have "communion" with God and symbolically share His sacrifice with each other.
 - d) The text mentions the altar and the sacrifice was on "Mount Ebal". For now, keep that in mind, and I'll come back to why that is in discussing the last set of verses.
22. Verse 32: There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written.³³ All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing those who carried it--the priests, who were Levites. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.
- a) Let's start by setting the picture: Joshua wrote on stones the "law of Moses". All the Israelites were sitting around the lower part of these two mountains. The area between these two mountains is a natural amphitheatre. The valley between the two mountains not only had Joshua and his "pile of rocks with the law written on them", but also the "ark of the covenant" along with the leaders of all the Israelites.
 - b) Now for some questions: How did Joshua write all of the law on rocks? Did he write very small? Did it cover thousands of rocks? We don't know. Did Joshua write all of the law, or just say, the 10 commandments? The text does not say.
 - i) What I suspect happened is Joshua wrote summaries of the law and then Joshua stood for a few hours and read all of the laws of Moses. If it was different than that, well then, I am wrong.
 - ii) At this point, we need to review a little more from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses commanded that when the Israelites entered the land, the Israelites were to locate themselves on these two mountains and hear all of the law. Therefore, what we read in Chapter 27 of Deuteronomy is really a "rehearsal" of what is happening at this moment in time in the book of Joshua.
 - c) Let me add the last two verses of the chapter, and then I'll tie all of this together.
23. Verse 34: Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law--the blessings and the curses--just as it is written in the Book of the Law.³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.
- a) Near the end of the book of Deuteronomy is a list of blessings and curses. They say in effect, "These are the blessings you will receive if you keep the law and these are the curses that will fall on you if you fail to keep the law." Joshua read all of those blessings and curses in this natural amphitheater so that all of the Israelites could hear them and agree to them. (Again, Deuteronomy Chapters 27 and 28 refer to this event).
 - i) OK John, I get the general idea. Why should I know this stuff and what does it have to do with the lesson theme?
 - ii) To explain this, I need to explain a little more about the two mountains: God said the Israelites who sat on "Mount Gerizim" were to read the blessings of keeping the laws. Therefore, Mount Gerizim was associated with God's blessings. The other mountain was "Mount Ebal". This mountain was associated with "God's curses". In other words, there was audience participation in Joshua's speech.

- b) OK, so one mountain was for the reading of the "blessings" and the other mountain was for the reading of the "curses". So what? The "what" (pay attention) is the fact that Joshua built the monument to God (where the animal sacrifices took place) on Mount Ebal. This is the mountain associated with God's curses.
 - i) OK John, one more time, what's the big deal? The point is we would think that the mountain associated with worshipping God would be the mountain associated with the blessings of God. Instead, it was the mountain associated with "God's curses" where the monument of "uncut stones" was built to God.
 - a) (It's a little confusing in that the stones where Joshua wrote "God's laws" is a separate pile of stones from the stones where the monument to God was, where the animals were sacrificed".
 - c) Ok, so the mountain of God's curses was the location of the altar. What does that mean? Think of it this way: When do we seek God the most? When things are going well or when things are going wrong? Usually, when things are going wrong!
 - i) Let me put it another way: When are we most grateful to God? When things are going well or when God has "fixed" what has gone wrong? Usually the latter.
 - ii) After the battle with Ai, God has "fixed" what has gone wrong. God restored the Israelites as a power to be feared in the area and God gave them victory.
 - iii) Therefore, the location and "time" associated with Joshua's altar to God is at the location where the curses of disobeying the law were read.
 - iv) Let me put it this way: Since we show our greatest gratitude to God when He has "fixed" what we did wrong, this mountain is associated with that "fixing".
 - d) This leads me back to my theme about "facing our sins head on". What should we do once we have faced them "head on" and God helped us to overcome those sin issues?
 - i) The answer is we give gratitude to God. We give our "all" to God which is symbolized by the "burnt offering" and we spend "time" with God which is symbolized by the "communion offering" mentioned a few verses back.
 - ii) Finally we review what God expects of us. That is why this chapter ends with the Israelites hearing God's laws.
 - e) Think of it this way: In the previous battle (Jericho), God knocks down the walls that spiritually speaking, they separate us from the issues in our life we have to conquer.
 - i) In the next battle, we take on those sins that were separated by "that wall". We lose at first, because we try to take them on without God's help. That is the key point of the previous chapter. In this chapter, we face those issues "head on" with God's help to overcome those issues.
 - ii) After we win, we give thanks to God and spend time with Him. The final step is to review what God expects of us, which is symbolic of the reading of the law.
 - f) Get it? Got it. Good, so let's pray.
24. Let's pray: Father, help us with the issues that we face in our lives. Prepare us so that when the walls are knocked down (that separate us from those sinful issues) that we may take them on. Help us to trust in You to give us the strength and ability to deal with those issues. Further, help us to give You the glory in victory over those sinful issues. Further, keep us close to You through Your word as You give us victories in our life. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.