

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Joshua: God's Faithful Giving Of The Promised Land To Israel

Part II: God's Giving Israel Victory Over The Canaanites, Joshua 5:13-12:24

D. Rebounding From Unsettling Spiritual Defeat

(Joshua 8:1-29)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

At times we can face spiritual defeat around us or even in ourselves, and we need insight on rebounding well:

(1) We face spiritual defeat in the world around us: Stephen Moore wrote the op-ed, "President Obama, Are You Listening?" (The Wall Street Journal, May 2-3, 2015, p. A11) on the "D. C. Opportunity Scholarship Program" signed into law by President George W. Bush that funds "private-school tuition for nearly 5,000 students, 95% of whom are African-American," and "parents and students" involved laud the "extraordinary benefits" of this program.

Yet, for "the seventh straight year, President Obama has proposed eliminating this relatively tiny scholarship fund" from the "federal budget" as the "teachers union sees the program as taking away from union jobs," Ibid. Thus, spiritual defeat both in society in general and in business in particular plagues some of our biggest cities.

(2) We can also face unsettling spiritual defeat at the local church level: the July-September 2013 issue of Answers magazine that we get as a Church ran Ken Ham's disconcerting article, "Beware the Roaring Lion" (Ibid., p. 33-35) warning of "a vocal group in the homeschool movement" that wants "textbooks to promote . . . evolution and millions of years . . . that contradicts God's Word . . ." Ibid., p. 33. Homeschoolers are usually very conservative, desiring to avoid errant ideology that is taught in public schools, but enough parents in even this group have been swayed by their exposure to theistic evolution that they want evolutionary thought put into their children's textbooks!

(3) We can face spiritual defeat in ourselves: when I first entered the pastorate, I recommended "professional counseling" for "needy" people. However, I then read works like Martin and Deidre Bobgan's book, PsychoHeresy (1987, pp. 259) with a Foreword by Dave Hunt, where on pages 30-31 they cited Psychiatrist Lee Coleman, The Reign of Error, 1984, p. xv, who reported: "I have testified in over one hundred and thirty criminal and civil trials around the country, countering the authority of psychiatrists or psychologists hired by one side or the other. In each case I try to educate the judge or jury about why the opinions produced by these professionals have no scientific merit." Then, I studied Psalm 1:1-6, Isaiah 9:6 and Revelation 19:11-16 and found them together teaching that the believer's reliance on Scripture brings him under the all-sufficient care of their Wonderful Counselor, Jesus Christ.

So, after decades of studying Scripture and reading critiques on counseling and being disillusioned with my own exposure to "professional counseling" including the "Christian" kind, I now endorse Scripture, not "professional counseling," but it has been a difficult pilgrimage! We thus need God's help if we reel from spiritual defeat within!

Need: *So we ask, "How can I rebound from unsettling spiritual defeat all around or even from within me?!"*

- I. **Joshua 8 opens with Joshua and Israel in a state of shock, grief and waning faith after spiritual defeat:**
 - A. The man Achan in Israel had stolen goods that belonged to God and hidden them with his family's consent among his own things, so God had withdrawn His help so that Israel had been defeated at Ai, Joshua 7:1-5a.
 - B. Stunned by this failure in battle, everyone in Israel had lost their courage to wage holy war (Jos. 7:5b), and Joshua and the elders had seen their own faith in God severely weakened as they echoed the unbelief of the generation that had died in the wilderness in wishing they had not entered Canaan, Joshua 7:6-9; Num. 14:1-3.
 - C. Consequently, God had directed Joshua to discern by divine lot the guilty party and to execute Achan and his co-conspirators, the members of his family, a shocking event for the whole nation, Joshua 7:10-26.
 - D. Thus, Israel and Joshua were left spiritually numb after their defeat at Ai, weakened in faith and morale!
- II. **However, God graciously ministered to lead Israel to rebound from this spiritual defeat, Joshua 8:1-29:**
 - A. First, the Lord repeated His initial encouraging remarks given at Joshua's leadership installation (Jos. 1:9b) not to fear or be dismayed, for now that Israel had dealt with the sin in her midst, she could defeat Ai, Joshua 8:1a.
 - B. Second, the Lord had Israel counter her former self-reliance by learning anew to trust in Him, Joshua 8:1b:
 1. Israel had initially sent only 3,000 men to fight Ai in her tragic defeat there (Joshua 7:4), that smaller number being selected out due to unbelief in the Lord and a reliance on human might, Joshua 7:3.
 2. Accordingly, God had Joshua take **all** of Israel's warriors **opposite just 3,000** as they **ALL** needed to grow in their **faith in GOD**, and with the total force everyone needed to face Ai again for victory, Joshua 8:1b.
 - C. Third, God promised that the victory Israel had experienced at Jericho she would also have over Ai, but that Israel could now keep the spoils of the city of Ai versus putting them into God's treasury, Joshua 8:2a.

- D. Fourth, God had Israel use a battle plan that left her facing her fear so as to overcome it by faith, Jos. 8:2b-8:
1. The Lord ordered Joshua to set an ambush behind the city of Ai, Joshua 8:2b.
 2. This order led Joshua to send 30,000 commandos by night to hide west of Ai while Joshua with the main army approached Ai in full view from a hill to the north with a valley between them and Ai, Joshua 8:3-5a.
 3. The objective was to lure the men of Ai away from their city so that they and their city could be destroyed.
 4. To achieve this goal, Israel's main army would pretend to flee down the valley to the east as they had previously done to lure Ai's men out their city to pursue Israel's army so that the 30,000 commandos might invade Ai and set it on fire, demoralizing and trapping Ai's men out in the open in the valley, Jos. 8:5b-8.
 5. However, this plan involved the painful exercise of Israel's men having to repeat their initial flight from Ai only then to turn around and face their pursuers in combat in faith that God would now give them victory!
- E. Fifth, in the course of the battle, God led Joshua in perfect timing to produce a great victory, Joshua 8:9-29:
1. Joshua stationed a force of 5,000 men near Bethel, likely a rear guard for the 30,000 commandos lest the men of Bethel attack the commandos from the rear, Jos. 8:12; Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, 1978, fn. to Jos. 8:12.
 2. Yet, this guard was unneeded, for the initial plan worked so well: the men of Ai and Bethel chased Israel's main army down into the valley, leaving Israel's 35,000 men up on the ridge free to enter Ai, Jos. 8:9-17.
 3. At the right instant, God had Joshua turn and hold up his javelin toward Ai, the signal for the 35,000 to enter Ai and quickly set it on fire while also leading Israel's army to turn and face their foes, Joshua 8:18.
 4. Israel's 35,000 men then quickly set the city ablaze to the dismay of the Canaanites chasing Israel's army (Joshua 8:19-21), and Israel's army turned to face the Canaanites caught between them in the valley and the 35,000 men of Israel who were then descending against them from having quickly lit Ai, trapping the distraught Canaanites of Ai and Bethel between Israel's two forces for complete elimination, Joshua 8:22.
 5. Israel then destroyed all the remaining Canaanites in Ai (and possibly in Bethel) and spoiled the city(s) before burning Ai, executing its king and hanging him on a tree until evening and then burying him under a great pile of rocks at Ai's city gate, Joshua 8:23-29.

Lesson: *When facing shock, grief and a decline in their faith due to the defeat at Ai, Israel was led by the Lord to rebound in His grace (1) by God's encouraging Joshua with His past promise to help Him if he obeyed God, (2) by God's promising Joshua victory over Ai now that the sin in Israel's midst had been punished, (3) by God's leading Israel to re-learn to trust Him (4) specifically in facing her past fear and overcoming it by faith (5) in God's timing to the spiritual rebound of the nation.*

Application: *If we face shock, grief and a weakened faith in the Lord due to spiritual defeat either around or in us, (1) may we trust in Christ to be saved, John 3:16. (2) If facing spiritual defeat as believers, may we (a) confess our sin if personal sin has led to God's withdrawal of His blessing (1 John 1:9), and (b) rely on Scripture truth and/or promises of God's rebounding help especially if we need to face inhibiting fears, (c) being careful to follow God's circumstantial timing in life's events (cf. Joshua 8:18) to see Him give us the victory.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

Not only did ancient Israel face initial defeat at Ai only to overcome it by a repeat battle, a similar challenge involving this same city has affected conservative Christians in our era. "For many years, archaeologists excavated a site called 'et-Tell,' which they claimed was the Ai of Joshua" only to find the "evidence from the site does not line up well with the Bible, so they concluded the biblical account was in error." (Henry Smith, "Getting Archaeology Right at Ai," Answers, Ibid., July-Sept., 2013, p. 36) This alleged "problem" with Scripture regarding Ai has thus been used by advocates of Liberal Theology to undermine the faith of some in the inspiration of Scripture.

However, relentlessly holding the Bible to be God's true Word, Dr. Bryant Wood in the last ten years has led an Associates of Biblical Research team to face the problem of Ai again much as ancient Israel had to face Ai again and identify "an alternate site 9 miles . . . north of Jerusalem called Khirbet el-Maqtar. The geography fit the biblical account very well, and so ABR began archaeological excavations there in 1995 . . . After excavating for over ten seasons, they have revealed persuasive reasons to believe they have uncovered the lost city of Ai . . . Khirbet el-Maqtar fits every single requirement demanded by the biblical text," Ibid., p. 37.

"These . . . discoveries affirm what the serious Christian already knows: the Bible can be trusted in every detail it records because it is the Word of the living God," Ibid., p. 38.

If we have experienced spiritual defeat in some realm of life, may we overcome it by facing that realm and our fears in it with Scripture truth, that we BELIEVE God's truth so as to REBOUND for His glory!