



A MODEL OF OBEDIENCE • RESTORATION AT AI • JOSHUA 8:1-29 •
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MAIN POINT

God forgives, restores, and uses His people when they listen to His voice and obey His instructions.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When you have to assemble something, do you follow the instructions or just get going and figure it out yourself? Why?

Has it ever gone badly for you when you've tried to figure it out without following the instructions? What happened?

Whether we love or hate following instructions, at some point we all need a second chance to get something right. Work presentations fall flat. Marital arguments take a wrong turn. Crib constructions have left over pieces. For various reasons and to various degrees we often need forgiveness, restoration, and a second chance. In Joshua 8 we find an account of an obedient, disciplined army that won a victory by following the clear instructions of God. However, the battle in chapter 8 was not Israel's first attempt to conquer Ai. Prior to this point they had ignored the Word of the Lord, sinned, and been defeated. They learned that God forgives, restores and uses His people when they listen to His voice and obey His instructions.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Look back at Joshua 7 and the first attack on the city of Ai. Was God's response to Israel's sin just? Why?

Have you ever felt, in a season of sin, that God was disciplining you harshly or unjustly? How did you respond? How did you become convinced that God had been wise and loving?

As imperfect followers of God we are not only prone to need the discipline of God but also to misunderstand it. The perfection of God not only leads Him to discipline His people but justifies any measures He chooses. Thankfully God is not only perfect in sinlessness, He is perfect in love. After the Israelites were disciplined for their sin that led to their defeat at the hands of the army of Ai, they were given a second chance and restored to usefulness and blessing.

HAVE VOLUNTEER READ JOSHUA 8:1-29.

Read verse 1 again. How do you think Joshua felt while hearing this command in light of the result of the last time he had faced Ai?

What characteristics of God are on display in verse 1? Which of these qualities means the most to you right now? Why?

In verse 2 God described to Joshua the powerful result that would follow his obedience. When has God asked you to do something at which you had previously failed?

How did you feel during that situation? What was the result?

God's instructions to the Israelites in this passage were highly detailed. Why is that significant in light of their circumstances?

Following the failure and the discipline for disobedience, Israel needed to know that they could follow the word of the Lord. The opportunity and the willingness to take a second chance at fighting the battle are testaments to the grace of God and His willingness to restore those He loves.

Which of the many phrases in this text that point to God's sovereignty stands out to you the most? Why?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Do you find it easier or harder to trust the sovereignty of God after you have failed? Why?

Some people respond to their failure by questioning God's plans while others respond to failure by recognizing their futility and hoping in His plans. This text reminds us that even if our problems are on the level of conquering a nation, God has the power and the wisdom to lead us well. The question is always will we obey the Word of the Lord?

**What are the general things most likely to keep you from obeying God?
How have you seen Him work in those areas of your life?**

Is there any area in your life right now in which you need restoration or a second chance? What thing, whether emotional, physical, or spiritual, would most likely keep you from obeying God and taking a second chance?

Anytime we see restoration in the Old Testament it is right for us to remember Jesus who, unlike the Israelites, was perfectly obedient at every step. Jesus was obedient not to secure His own restoration, but to secure ours. He followed the plans of the Father not for His own victory but for the victory of His people. We see this beautifully in Philippians 2.

PRAY

Thank God for both His justice and His grace. Thank Him for being sinless and at the same time merciful to us in our sin. Pray for the areas of struggle mentioned by people in your group. Pray for the grace, courage and wisdom to take steps of obedience this week.

COMMENTARY

JOSHUA 8:1-29

8:1. God's words do not be afraid or discouraged recall His first charge to Joshua, where they set the stage for His promise of presence and for the miracles that followed (1:9). With the whole military force, Israel would again be united (unlike 7:3) and thus their victory was more likely. As with the promise about Jericho (6:2), God's instructions to Joshua began with the promise that victory was already assured.

8:2. As with Jericho (6:21), all the people of Ai were to be destroyed. However, here it was possible for Israel to keep the livestock for their own use. The change demonstrates that flexibility in the matter of devoting things to God was possible. The use of an ambush is a strategy known in the ancient Near East and used more than once in Israel's history (Jdg 9; 20). Its deceptive nature recalls the ruse of Rahab in Jos 2:4-5. The references to the king of Ai and the city might suggest that Ai was not a fort. However, as with Jericho, a "king" could be a military leader rather than an independent sovereign (6:2), and the word for "city" refers to any population center, including a fort (2Sam 5:7).

8:3. Joshua sent the army out at night so they would not be detected.

8:4,9. Given the traditional locations of Ai and Bethel (7:2), there is a ravine between them, west of Ai, in which it would be possible for troops to hide and escape notice from either town.

8:8. After capturing Ai, they were to set it on fire as they did to Jericho (6:24). Joshua understood this as the Lord's command, a message he had received directly from God.

8:13. The positions of Joshua's forces were far from the road they would be expected to approach from, southeast of Ai, providing an additional element of surprise.

8:14-17. The ruse worked as Ai was emptied of its inhabitants. The attack took place early in the morning when the advantage would be with Israel's main force because the rising sun would blind the army of Ai as they pursued Joshua's forces eastward.

8:18-19. The sword in Joshua's hand symbolized war so that Joshua's action declared the beginning of the hostilities. The sword is also an offensive weapon, indicating the turning point in the battle. Israel moved from the defensive to the offensive when Ai's army experienced the reverse. The ambush accomplished its task without resistance.

8:20-22. As the main body of Israel turned west toward the pursuing army of Ai, the warriors of the city were driven back. At that point they saw Ai ablaze and found the ambush moving east out of the city and blocking their retreat. Caught between the two forces and despairing at the destruction of their defenses, they were easily defeated and their army was destroyed.

8:23. The capture of the king of Ai was a symbolic act, because he had led the defeat of the earlier Israelite army sent out against him. Now his role as a defeated leader contrasted with the victorious role of Joshua.

8:24-27. The destruction of all the inhabitants of Ai fulfilled God's clear command in verse 2.

8:27. Joshua followed God's command in verse 2 about the cattle.

8:28. The word Ai means "ruin." Like Jericho, this defeated city would be a memorial to Israel's victory.

8:29. The focus on the king of Ai in chapter 8 corresponds to that of Rahab at the destruction of Jericho in chapter 6. Rahab was delivered from death because of her faith, whereas the king of Ai was put to death because of his antagonism toward Israel. The king of Ai also compares to Achan, as both were executed by Israel. The hanging of his body exposed it to shame. In Israel it was forbidden to allow a body to remain overnight so exposed (Dt 21:23; Jn 19:31).

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

Joshua 9:1-27; Exodus 23:20-30