

Old Testament Survey - Part 27

by Dick Woodward

The book of Joshua is a survey of faith, illustrating different aspects of faith and its importance in the life of a believer.

Duration: 27:31

Scripture: Joshua 6:20

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Spiritual Conquest"

Description

This sermon delves into the book of Joshua, contrasting faith with unbelief as illustrated through the conquest of Jericho and the defeat at Ai due to sin. It emphasizes the practicality of faith, the importance of seeking God's will, discerning spiritual obstacles, and fully conquering our 'spiritual Canaan' by addressing sin. The sermon concludes with a call to take a firm position of faith, following Joshua's example to serve the Lord wholeheartedly.

Transcript

Continuing our survey of the Old Testament history books, we come for the third time now to the history book of Joshua, the first of the history books in the Old Testament. As we have seen in our first two sessions, the book of Joshua is one great big illustration of faith. The book of Joshua is the counterpart, really, the antithesis of the book of Numbers.

The book of Numbers is one great big illustration of unbelief. The book of Joshua is a continuous illustration of belief or faith. As we move through the book of Joshua, we have different pictures of faith, and as we complete this panorama of faith that we see in the book of Joshua, we end up with a pretty good insight, a pretty good understanding of what faith is really all about.

We have seen so far that faith is very practical. At the end of chapter 5, we saw the prescription for faith when Joshua was given the battle plan for Jericho. This battle plan was a great test of his faith because as a military leader and a military genius, he was probably anxious to demonstrate his gifts in that area, and he was given by God a perfectly ridiculous military plan, but it did conquer Jericho because it was God's plan and it was Joshua's faith.

The book of Hebrews says, the walls of Jericho fell on by faith, and that's the meaning of that story in Joshua chapter 6. We call Joshua chapter 6 the practice of faith, having been given the prescription for that battle, God's battle plan. In chapter 6, that plan was carried out to the letter, and it did work and it did

win after Joshua and all the people walked around Jericho 13 times in obedience to God. So we said, as we looked at Joshua and the battle of Jericho, that faith is very practical, it walks.

But the faith that walks is the faith that works, and that's the faith that wins. That's the practice of faith. Now, in chapter 7 in the book of Joshua, we read what we might call a story about the perversion of faith.

Right after Jericho is so miraculously conquered, they go up to the city of Ai, which is a relatively small city, and they send just a small detachment of soldiers up there to take that city, and these Israeli soldiers flee before their enemies. The men of Ai come out of the city of Ai, and they chase and slaughter the Hebrew soldiers that go up there to conquer the city of Ai. Now, when this happens, Joshua falls flat on his face.

Now, why does Joshua fall on his face when he hears that his army has been defeated at the city of Ai? Well, the significance was this. They won the battle of Jericho because God was with them, and they were doing everything God told them to do. The only hope these people ever had was that God was with them, and they knew that.

Because God was with them, they won at Jericho. If they lost at Ai, it was because God wasn't with them, or God wasn't blessing them. And so Joshua knew that this was a spiritual problem, not a military problem.

Someone has said if the bank fails or General Motors fails, that's bad news and that's very unfortunate, but that isn't cause for a prayer meeting. But if the work of God fails because it doesn't have funds or because of one reason or another, there seems to be evidence of the fact that God has removed his hand of blessing from a work of God, and the leaders of that work of God should be on their faces before God. Because the only hope we have is the fact that God is with us.

And when we see these confirmations or affirmations, these evidences of the fact that God is with us, that confirms our faith and encourages us to move on in faith. We all need these miracle milestones that encourage us. But when we have the opposite, when it's obvious that God isn't with us, we should be on our faces until we find out why.

Now the reason comes out in chapter 7. When they conquered the city of Jericho, since it was the first city in the land of Canaan, all the spoils were to be given to God. They were to be given to the priests, and they were to be in the treasury of the servants of God. You see, this is the law of the tithe.

The word tithe, as we saw in Deuteronomy, not only means tenth, it means the first tenth. The first tenth of everything is God's. The purpose of tithing, according to Deuteronomy, was to teach the people of God to always put God first.

So when they conquered the first city, God said, But none of the spoils are yours, they're all mine. Now, a little man named Achan, when they were in the thick of the battle of Jericho, apparently saw a Babylonish garment, and that garment, or those threads that he saw there, must have really been attractive to him, and he saw some gold and some silver. And the familiar pattern is, I saw, I coveted, I took.

Now, that was a sin, because they were explicitly instructed not to take any of the spoils, but he did. He stole, he lied, he deceived, and that's why they were defeated at the battle of Ai, the first battle of Ai. Now, Joshua's on his face before God, and we learn something here.

In this story, and in the story of Moses back at the Red Sea, we learn that there is a time when the will of God is so obvious, it's actually immoral to pray. These are two places in the Old Testament where God rebukes great leaders for praying. When the armies of Egypt were bearing down upon the children of Israel and their backs were to the Red Sea, Moses was flat on his face, and God said to Moses, Why are you crying out to me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward.

God was saying to Moses, remember we saw it in the book of Exodus, My will should be so obvious to you that it's immoral for you to pray. Tell them to go forward, which means tell them to start walking on the water. God thought that was so obvious, and should have been so obvious to Moses, that it was immoral for Moses to be praying about the will of God, the will of God was so obvious.

Now, here again, Joshua is flat on his face, and the Lord said to Joshua, Stand up, what are you doing down on your face? You see, he's rebuking this man for praying. There's a time when it's immoral to have a prayer meeting. The will of God is so obvious, it's a time for action, not a time for prayer.

God said to Joshua, Israel has sinned. They have violated my covenant, they have taken some of the devoted things, they have stolen, they have lied. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies.

I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction, meaning your spiritual destruction. At this point, Joshua has a review of the troops. He sets up a reviewing stand, and he marches the tribes by, and God the Holy Spirit says, It's that tribe.

Then he marches that tribe by, by clans, and God says, It's that clan. And he marches the clans by, by families, and God says, It's that family. And he marches the families by, by households, and God says, It's that household.

And he marches the men of that household by, one by one, and God says, There he is. His name is Achan. Now, I'm sure Achan knew that God was with Joshua for him to be ferreted out among all those people, and Joshua didn't have to do much to get him to confess.

He said to Achan, Why have you sinned against God? And Achan gave that familiar pattern of confession. I saw, I coveted, I took. Now, Achan is destroyed, and all his are destroyed with him.

And then, God says, Now go back to Ai, and I will be with you. You see, the lesson here is obvious, again, as we make the devotional application, which is what we always want to do in this survey of the Bible. What's the devotional application here? The devotional application is, God will not be with us if there is willful sin in our life.

The scripture tells us in many places that sin short-circuits our relationship with God. Just as they could not even enter the land of Canaan until all those males were circumcised, just as they could not expect the blessing of God to be upon them unless they were obedient to him and walking with him in obedient fellowship to him, we can't expect God's blessing to be upon us as we attempt to do the work of God if we have sin in our life. The word for confess is a compound word which is made up of the words for speaking and the words for sameness.

To speak sameness or to say the same thing, that's confession. When you confess your sin by application here, you should parade your sin, have a little review, and parade your sins before yourself until God lays his finger upon the sin in your life. And when he lays his finger upon the sin in your life, in the words of the

Apostle Paul in Colossians, you are to mortify or put to death that sin that is in your life so that the blessing of God might return to your life.

Now this, of course, is illustrated negatively through the purging of Achan, but then you have the positive illustration when they go back to Ai for the second time. The second battle of Ai, as we said in our last session, is where Joshua illustrates the fact that he was a military genius. If you like military strategy, you might enjoy the story of the battle of Ai, the second battle of Ai, we should call it.

It goes like this. The city of Ai is over here, and the battle plan, and apparently this comes from Joshua as the great military leader, the battle plan is that his troops will attack the city head-on like they did the first time. Whenever they attack the city head-on, the men of Ai will say, and they'll come out of the city, and then the men of Israel are to turn and flee, and so they flee with the men of Ai in pursuit.

But the night before this attack, Joshua had 30,000 men planted back here behind the city, so that when the men of Ai fell for this and chased the men of Israel and even left the gates of the city open, these 30,000 men came in and took over the city and set fire to the city. Now, there was a city over here called Bethel, and just in case they had tried to send help to the city of Ai, Joshua, early in the morning, sent 5,000 men to be camped just over the hill from Bethel to intercept any help that might have come from Bethel. When these men came in and set fire to the city, the men chasing Joshua and his force, when they saw the smoke of the city, realized that they had been deceived, and so they realized also that they were trapped, because Joshua and his army then turned around and began to fight them, and these 30,000 men came out of the city of Ai and came in from the rear, and then these men came over from the side, and the people of Ai were completely trapped and they were completely annihilated, they were completely slaughtered.

Now, of course, this battle plan shows that Joshua was a military genius, he was a very good military strategist, and he certainly could have implemented that kind of military strategy at the Battle of Jericho if he had wanted to. But I think the battles of Jericho and Ai show us that sometimes God may give you that ridiculous plan, but that plan that is his, just to test your faith, but that's not typical, that's not the rule, that's the exception when that happens. The rule is, God is a God of order, and God is a God of design, and so you can usually expect God, and the man of God, to have a plan.

There was a time when I thought, as an immature young Christian, that it was very spiritual to be unorganized, and when I was undisciplined and unorganized, I would say, well, I'm just otherworldly, and I'm sorry about that, but I'm just deeply spiritual, that's why I'm undisciplined and unorganized. And one morning I was teaching a men's breakfast, and I was saying to them that there are three kinds of people in this world, there are the let-it-happen people, and the make-it-happen people, and the don't-know-what's-happening people, and I said, frankly, I'm a let-it-happen person, I don't have any plan, I just do whatever God shows me to do day by day, but I have no plan. Well, the next morning in my quiet time, I was reading in the Living Bible, in the Proverbs, and I came upon this verse, a wise man thinks ahead, a fool doesn't, and he even brags about it.

And I really felt that that was a word from the Lord. If you're one of these people that has no plan, you don't know where you've come from, and you don't know where you're going, and you don't know where you are, and you're just otherworldly, don't blame that on the Lord, because the Lord is a God of order, He is a God of design, and He usually has a plan. And we see that illustrated at the second battle of Ai, and that's more typical than the battle of Jericho.

The battle of Jericho was the exception. Now, in chapter 9, you have another illustration of faith, or at least you have another factor that makes up the composite of faith. I call it the perception of faith.

One of the most important aspects of faith is discernment. In order to live a life of faith, you need to know the will of God. Perhaps the one question that is asked of a pastor more than any other is, Pastor, how can I know what God wants me to do? When people discover that God does have a plan, God has a will, the big question becomes, how can I possibly know what that plan is, what that will is? In order to know the will of God, you need to have the Holy Spirit, because you need to have spiritual discernment.

The stratagem of Satan is to deceive and counterfeit and imitate everything that's of God. Satan is an angel of light. If you think of Satan as a character with a red suit, you know, with the pitchfork tail and the fangs, then you're just about where he wants you.

He wants you to think of him that way. He wants you to think of him as a mythological character or something. The power of Satan is very real.

The power of evil is very real. In the spiritual dimension, you have the power of God and the power of evil. Everything that's spiritual is not the Holy Spirit.

That's why Moses warns so emphatically about sorcery and spiritism and so many of these things that deal with the spiritual dimension, but not the good part of the spiritual dimension. Now, in chapter 9, there are some people called Gibeonites. They realize that the people of Israel are systematically moving through Canaan, liquidating everybody, and they know they're going to be liquidated.

And so they take their shoes and their clothing and they take bread and let it get moldy, and they rub their shoes on rocks until they look as if they've been worn for a hundred years and they make their clothes look like they've been worn for years and years. They're actually just from over the next hill. But when they go up to the people of Israel, they give the impression they've come from a very distant land.

And the sad commentary about this story is they didn't check with the Lord. They did not consult with the Lord. They just entered into a treaty with these people.

These people begged them, Make a treaty with us. We're not from the land of Canaan. We're from far, far away.

Now, the sad commentary again is they didn't consult with the Lord. They just made the decision and entered into a treaty with these people. Then they found out that they were not indeed from a far-off land, that they were actually from the land of Canaan.

But they were so uncivilized in those days, they kept their treaties. Since they'd made a treaty with them, they couldn't kill them, and so they made them servants. Nowadays, I guess it was Lenin who said, Treaties are like pie crusts made to be broken.

We're so civilized today, we don't think anything about breaking treaties. But in those days, when we consider people to have been barbarians, they took treaties very seriously. So they didn't liquidate the Gibeonites.

But these people, the Gibeonites, kind of flesh out a pattern that you have here in the book of Joshua, a pattern which demonstrates to us the enemies or the obstacles to faith. The first one is illustrated by

Jericho. Many feel that Jericho is a picture of the world because the world appeals to us, just like it did to Achan.

We see, we covet, we take of this world's things, and we become earth dwellers, and we become distracted by the things of this world. So Jericho, many say, is a picture of the world, and that's a great enemy to faith. And then Ai, since they underestimated the city of Ai, Ai is a representation, many feel, of the flesh, our nature to sin, our disposition to sin.

The spirit is willing, Jesus said, but the flesh is very weak. Now this is what the scripture calls the flesh. Many feel that the whole episode there at Ai is a good picture of that obstacle to faith, that hurdle to faith, which is called the flesh.

When it was underestimated, they were conquered by Ai. But when they really had a realistic view of what the issues were that were involved in that city of Ai and its conquest, then they were able to overcome. So the spirit can overcome the flesh if we get it in right perspective, but the tendency is to underestimate the flesh.

Never underestimate the flesh or the capacity of the flesh to be your spiritual undoing. Now the Gibeonites who come along and make this treaty, many feel that this is a picture of the devil himself because that's the way he operates. I will be like the Most High God.

He is an angel of light. The devil does not undo us by approaching us in some hideous form and tempting us to do something hideous. He usually comes to us in the form of something very lovely, something very beautiful, and his stratagem is usually this.

Don't do the best, do the good. If God's calling you to be a medical missionary, the devil won't tempt you to go out and rob banks. He'll just tempt you to be a good medical doctor in this country.

We need good medical doctors right here. That's a good thing. But if God wants you to be a foreign missionary in a medical sense, that's the best thing.

The stratagem of Satan is to get us to do the good thing and not the best thing. That's why some say the greatest enemy of the best is the good. So those Gibeonites who were deceivers, many say they picture the devil.

So that in Joshua 6 and then 7 and 8 and 9, you have a picture of the three obstacles to faith. In chapter 6, it's the world. In chapter 7 and 8, it's Ai, which is a picture of the flesh.

And in chapter 9, it's the Gibeonites, who are a picture of Satan. Now, in the rest of the book of Joshua, you have these illustrations about faith. First of all, you have what we might call the perspective of faith positive.

One of the great faith characters of the Bible is Caleb. Abraham is the great character of faith, of course, in the Old Testament. But so is this little man named Caleb.

This was that other spy who brought back a favorable report along with Joshua. And Caleb never lost his perspective. The whole time they were in the wilderness wandering, he just kept thinking about those grapes up there in the city of Hebron.

Other people were complaining and murmuring and drying up and dying of thirst. And Caleb never lost the vision. They would always say to him, Caleb, what are you thinking about? And he'd say, I'm just thinking about those grapes up there in the city of Hebron.

He never lost the vision for Hebron. The others were experts in giantology, as we said when we looked at this back in the book of Numbers. But like the spiritual says, others saw the giants, Caleb saw the Lord.

Caleb saw the giants, he saw the obstacles, but he had a God who was bigger. So when they get into the land of Canaan, he does conquer and possess the city of Hebron, which was a city that was promised to him by Moses. He goes into the presence of Joshua and claims this city, and he's given permission to go up and conquer it.

That's a beautiful illustration of the perspective of faith positive. And then there's the perspective of faith negative in the book of Joshua, and this is along about chapter 14 through 23 that these things are found. It says several times in this part of the book of Joshua that they failed to drive out the peoples in the land of Canaan.

God had ordered wars of extermination, and if they had carried out wars of extermination against those nations in Canaan, they would not have been enslaved seven times in the book of Judges. But we read several times in the book of Joshua things like this. The tribe of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites who lived in the city of Jerusalem, so the Jebusites lived there among the people of Judah to this day.

The Canaanites were not able to be driven out, so they still live as slaves among the people of Ephraim. But since the descendants of Manasseh could not drive out the people who lived in those cities, the Canaanites remained. You hear that again and again in this part of the book of Joshua, which means they never really completely conquered Canaan.

And several years later, and you'll read about it in the next book in the history books, the book of Judges, those same nations conquered them and enslaved them. Now, this has a devotional application. People make reference to conquering the unconquered Canaan in their life.

Do you know what they mean by that? When people say, I still have a lot of Canaan to conquer, what they're saying is the devotional application that you find here in the book of Joshua is this. God tells us to enter the land of Canaan. He tells us to enter our spiritual Canaan and conquer it, all of it, and have a complete victory of our spiritual Canaan.

Now, many of us are delivered from our spiritual Egypt and never enter Canaan at all. Many enter Canaan, but they don't conquer very much of it, maybe one or two cities, and then that's about as far as they get. My pastor went to be with God through a malignancy, and when I met with him very soon after he learned that he was going to go to be with the Lord, as we talked about the fact that his life here on earth was ending and his life in the eternal dimension was about to commence for all eternity, he had a regret, and he said his regret was he had a lot of Canaan to conquer.

And I misunderstood him. I thought he was referring to the ministry he had had, and he had had a very fruitful ministry, and so I began to recite to him some of the wonderful things God had done through him as a minister and said, what more could you ask for? You conquered so much Canaan in terms of ministry, but he wasn't thinking about that. He said, no, I wasn't thinking about ministry.

I was thinking about my disposition, and I was thinking about the sin in my own life, that kind of Canaan. I had so much more Canaan to conquer. When he met a very devout oncologist who was going to lead him through radiation and chemotherapy, the first thing he said to this believing oncologist was, he said, I want to preach right up to the very end.

And the oncologist said, you've got the wrong disease. It isn't going to be like that. And then my pastor said to his oncologist, who became like a pastor to him, he said, you know, I had so much Canaan to conquer, so much spiritual Canaan, and I'd wanted to conquer that Canaan before I went to be with the Lord.

And the oncologist said, you've got the right disease. By the time God takes you home, he's going to use this suffering to burn out of you everything contrary to his nature, so that when you go to be with him, it's just going to be spirit with spirit. You are going to conquer the Canaan in the months that God is going to leave you here.

Suffering can have that effect on us. Now, that's the devotional application that people make to this part of the book of Joshua. Have you conquered your spiritual Canaan? Now, this raises the question, of course, of wars of extermination.

This is a great problem to many people. How could the God that we know today as a God of love have possibly ordered a war of extermination? I believe I'll answer that question in our next session, because it's a lengthy question and we'll need more time to do it. But at the end of the book of Joshua, in chapter 24, the last illustration, the 16th illustration now of faith that we find in the book of Joshua is described here.

It might be called the position of faith. The people of God, at the end of the book of Joshua, are challenged to take a position of faith. Joshua, their leader, challenges them to take a position of faith.

In setting the example, he says, here's my position. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua takes his position of faith when he says that.

Whatever goes for me goes for my house. And for me and my house, I'm saying, here's our position. God's first.

We're going to serve God. Then he challenges the people to take a position. And they take a position.

And they say, we choose to serve God and put Him first. And Joshua goes on record. He says, God bear witness to this and you bear witness to this.

You took a position that you're putting God first and you want to choose to serve God. And he challenges them at the end of the book of Joshua, just as Moses did at the end of Deuteronomy and at the end of Leviticus, to choose to serve God. To choose to implement and apply and appropriate the faith that's illustrated 16 different ways in the book of Joshua.

That's the way the book of Joshua ends. The position of faith. That's a good way for you and I to think about faith as we come to the end of this book of faith.

Have you taken a position of faith?

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