

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Joshua and Acts of the Apostles

Linking Theme: Fulfilment

*Passage for weekly reading (week 28):*

*Joshua ch's 7 – 12*

### Taking the Land

7 v.1 sets the scene for the account in this chapter as it unfolds. The Israelites “acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things”. Joshua had made it clear that everything in the City was to be so devoted (6 v.17), which, under the law of Moses, meant utter destruction (Lev.27 v.29). Joshua was ignorant of the failing at this point, and expected an easy victory at Ai, which didn't happen! His prayer shows his anguish (v.'s 7-9). Straightaway the Lord reveals the impediment to him. The principle is stated in v.10: “**That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it**”. Achan is eventually identified as the culprit by a process of elimination, and confesses his guilt when taken. The punishment for himself, his family and his possessions, is final.

Nothing now stands in the way of victory for God's people, and this time the Lord allows them to take “plunder and livestock”(v.'s 2&27). The spoils from Jericho were totally given over to God as a means of giving the firstfruits of the campaign to Him, but after that, Israel could share the booty. Joshua's strategy actually capitalises on the earlier defeat (v.'s 5-7), in that a speedy retreat of his forces will inevitably give the men of Ai false confidence. Having lured them away from the settlement, it can then easily be taken. So it was! The covenant is then renewed at Mt.Ebal, exactly in accordance with the law of Moses (Deut.27 v.'s 4-8).

It's a steep learning curve for Joshua, however, and ch.9 describes another embarrassment. How easily we can rely on human sympathies! This is exactly what the leaders of Israel did here, even swearing an oath of allegiance to the Gibeonites in the name of the God they had not consulted (v.'s 14&15). Just as the Lord made good the first defeat of Israel at Ai, He now makes good the gullibility of Joshua and his leaders in the next part of the campaign. Israel has the opportunity to defeat five kings at once, because of the coalition which comes together against Gibeon. God gives the Israelite army plenty of additional help in winning this one (very large hailstones, as well as needed extra-time – about a day, in fact!). Here, in particular, we see the Amorite peoples being routed and killed in direct fulfilment of the promise to Abraham those centuries ago (Gen.15 v.16). Their opposition to God and to the things of God has hardened over the intervening centuries, and now is the time for judgment to be carried out against them. The death of the five kings, and the manner of it, is indicative of the way in

which the enemies of God's people will perish. Now, it is Joshua who is telling his own men to be strong and courageous (v.25) – the Commander-in-Chief doing his stuff! Following the Gibeon victory, the other southern cities fall like dominoes. The rapidity of it all is breathtaking – a good illustration of the Lord's ability to move any mountain, once His people are in place and the timing is right; also, of His ability to work with imperfection, provided that His people remain teachable (humble) within it all.

The battle now shifts to the north of Canaan, the real power base being at Hazor, the chief city of the region, with its dominant king, Jabin (v.10). The "Waters of Merom" were some distance to the west of Hazor. It seems as if at least 14 kings allied with him in this battle (v.'s 1-3). We know nothing of Joshua's strategy against this mighty foe, other than the fact that his attack was "sudden" (v.7). The One behind the victory is, of course, the Lord Himself (v.8). As in the south of Canaan, the various townships all fall relatively quickly, but we later read that the warfare against other pagan kings actually went on "for a long time" (v.18). V.20 is an important verse – God hardens the hearts of the inhabitants, just as He did in Pharaoh's case prior to the Exodus. When a people have hardened their hearts towards God, time and again, then He finally hardens their hearts irrevocably. The later defeat of the Anakites, who mainly lived in the more mountainous regions, ultimately gave Joshua complete control. Ch.12 sums up the land taken, first under Moses' leadership, east of the Jordan, and then under Joshua in Canaan itself. Rest from war must have come as blessed relief – for now, at least!

### ***Food for thought / discussion / prayer***

1) The victory over Ai was only made possible because the sin was removed and the offenders dealt with. Israel had the military strength to overcome the opposition in this case, but couldn't do it with sin in the camp. Am I failing in my own call under God because of "sin in the camp"? Are you? Let's recall what we read recently in Romans, and make it our mindset, that we "**reckon ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus – for sin shall not be our master, because we are not under law, but under grace**" (Romans 6 v.'s 11&14).

2) We have two instances in this week's reading of the Lord turning around mistakes that were made under Joshua's early leadership. "**All things work together for good**"...etc. is one of the most frequently quoted of scriptures to encourage us when the going is tough (Rom.8 v.28). The essential thing is that we are seeking to outwork our calling within the purposes of God - i.e.- to do His will in our lives. The people under Joshua were certainly trying to do that. Let's recommit to doing that ourselves this week, and be encouraged by the scriptures we have read!

**Next week's passage:** Joshua 13 – 19

