

The Sanctified People of God

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[0 : 00] Well, let's take our Bibles and open them to Joshua and find Joshua chapter 8.

! We have some unfinished business. In fact, earlier this week I was diving seriously into my study of chapter 9, forgetting that I had a few verses left over from chapter 8.

Now, how many of you remembered that? Don't, don't, I shouldn't, shouldn't cause you to lie. So we want to finish that, and I'll read the text here in just a minute, but just a little bit of review, not a lot of review.

I'm not going to re-preach or re-teach what I already taught concerning the, I guess, the first 29 verses of this chapter. There are three major points of revelation in chapter 8.

Now, they go together. It's not that they're separate little stories, separate little vignettes or something. They're part of the story here about AI and the eventual conquering of AI, but there are three points of revelation.

[1 : 19] We've looked at the first two. Did so, what, a couple weeks ago? And the first one is the sovereign promise of God. That's the first thing we looked at, and it's very clear from the very first verse.

Verse 1, take all the people of war with you. This is what God said to Joshua. Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to AI. And here's the promise.

See, he said, I have given into your hand the king of AI, his people, his city, and his land. This is clearly a promise, isn't it?

And a very timely one, very encouraging for Joshua. He was, you know, kind of in the doldrums at this point, after this terrible thing that had happened in the previous chapter.

Not only the defeat of AI, but the cause of the defeat, Achan and his sin. And so this is a promise, a sovereign promise. See, I have given into your hand AI.

[2 : 22] It's a done deal. Victory is sure. So sure that as if the battle had already been fought and won. And in the mind of God, it really had been, because the battle was his, and the victory is won.

Second, we saw the strategic plan of God. It's kind of another kind of movement in the story. First comes the promise, a sovereign promise of God. And then God lays before Joshua his plan, his strategy, for the conquest of AI.

And it kind of comes to us in two parts, because there's a two-part strategy here. One involves God's people and the conquering of AI.

So there's a plan for victory here, very clearly. And it's quite interesting to see how the strategy was to unfold. And they're very, very intelligent.

Of course, God is perfectly intelligent. And so you see the plan for victory. But there is another part of the strategy here.

[3 : 30] And it is solely God's plan to judge. There's a plan of judgment for judgment, the judgment of AI. In fact, remember, we kind of encompass all of the victories that Israel would win in the Promised Land would be also a part of God's judgment upon a wicked pagan people.

And God brought that about. And so judgment upon the people of wicked AI was his plan, and specifically judgment upon their king.

Then there's one last movement in the story. And I saved that one from last week for this week, because it's very special. And this last part, though it may be somewhat confusing, maybe just at a glance, first reading.

It certainly can be a little confusing if you do not bring into play other passages of Scripture in Deuteronomy that are directly connected with what's taking place here in the latter part of chapter 8.

And so the third part is what I want to call the sanctified people of God. We have here, front and center, God's people, God's special people, God's chosen people, His sanctified people, set-apart

people for Himself.

[4 : 57] And the reality of that relationship, a covenant relationship, is what we have here in these final four or five verses.

So let's go ahead and read it. Verses 30, starting with verse 30, and through to the end of the chapter. Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal.

Now this comes immediately after the defeat and the judgment of Ai's king. So here immediately, Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal.

As Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the Law of Moses, specifically Deuteronomy, and we'll get to that, an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool.

And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings. And there in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the Law of Moses which he had written.

[6 : 11] Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the stranger as well as he who was born among them.

Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim, and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

And afterward he read all the words of the Law, the blessings and the curses, according to all that is written in the book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded, which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

All right, now this is a very special part of the entire story of the book of Joshua. You might remember way back several weeks, when we were back there, you know, in the first few chapters, you might remember that the battles, before the battles of Jericho and Ai took place, before Jericho, certainly, and subsequently Ai, Israel took some time at Gilgal.

At Gilgal. First of all, to memorialize the crossing of the Jordan River. Do you remember that? Back in chapter 4. The stones that were set up in the midst of the sea, not the sea, the Jordan River, and the stones that were set up in the midst of the camp there at Gilgal.

[7 : 50] That was to memorialize the crossing of the Jordan River, so that everyone who would look upon those stones would remember what God had done that day in delivering His people and bringing them across the Jordan into the Promised Land.

But second, it was to observe certain rituals of purification. They were symbolic of purification before God. That's chapter 5.

Specifically, circumcision. And so we looked at those passages. Now, this was before Jericho and Ai. And now, after these victories, and one dismal defeat sandwiched in between, Israel then takes some time at another place, specifically, or specified here in the text, Mount Ebal and Gerizim.

A few mountains that are quite close to one another. And they were to take some time there to do what really amounted to a reaffirmation of their covenant with God.

Now, this is what God had commanded that they do, commanded that they do this through Moses sometime before, quite a number of years before. And so they were going to reaffirm, renew their covenant with Yahweh God to reaffirm that they actually belong to God.

[9 : 13] Now, this wasn't something that God needed to be reminded about. God was not reaffirming His commitment to them. It was Israel reaffirming their commitment to the covenant that they had with God, Yahweh God.

All right, so then, they suffered then, we put all this together, they suffered a demoralizing defeat at Ai because of sin. That's chapter 6. Then, the cause of their sin, the cause of their defeat, is removed.

That's chapter 7. Then, their victory over Ai comes next, chapter 8 of the first 29 verses of chapter 8. And now, finally, a reaffirmation, a renewal of their covenant with God.

Specifically, their covenant obligations. Their obligations to the covenant. That's what was needed at this time. And so, you see, they're still God's chosen nation and they needed to be reminded of that.

You say, how could they forget it? Well, they forgot it a number of times. They needed to be reminded of that. They were still God's chosen people, God's covenant people. A covenant that

they had violated back in chapter 7.

[10:28] Chapter 7, verse 11. Israel has sinned. This is what God said. Israel has sinned. And they have also transgressed my covenant, which I commanded them.

And we know that that was done through Achan's sin. Him hiding, taking, and concealing the things that were under the ban there in Jericho and hiding them in his tent under his stuff.

And we study that passage. But possibly what we fail to understand, it's difficult for us to understand, is that Achan's violation of the covenant, his sin, was the nation's violation of the covenant.

It was the nation's sin. And so, it will be reaffirmed here at the close of the chapter. That is, their covenant with him. Now, it's interesting.

I think that Joshua, if we just kind of read this and we've just finished chapter, the first part of chapter 8 and this great victory over Ai, and it's interesting that Joshua then led God's people, immediately led them to travel some distance from Ai, by the way, it's quite a distance, about 30 miles, to lead them that distance to make this reaffirmation of the covenant and to do that at this particular time.

[11:49] It seems a little interesting. He traveled 30 miles. to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim or in a valley between the feet of these two mountains. And I think that would seem to be unwise from a military standpoint, don't you think?

I mean, after this great defeat at Ai, and it seems, you know, that the next city, by the way, would be Shechem. and it just seems very logical that right after this great victory over Ai, and you know, they've got this momentum going and they kind of had a stumble in the road before Ai, but they got back in track, on track with God, and now, let's just full steam ahead and go for Shechem and go on from there.

It would seem logical to us, humanly speaking, militarily speaking, to do that, but that was not God's plan, as we shall see. Now, before I get too far ahead of myself, let's just kind of walk through these verses, starting with verse 30.

We'll just take this a step at a time, no three points in a poem. We're just going to, you know, follow the verses throughout this latter part of this chapter. Verse 30 says, Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in or on Mount Ebal.

That's how it begins. So this is the first step. The first thing he does, of course, this, you know, skipping this little journey, 30 miles, and you can imagine with, you know, two, two and a half, maybe three million people with all their cattle and everything, this would be quite a march, quite a journey.

[13:35] And so the first thing he does, and this is why they're going to this place, is to build an altar. All right, so immediately after the victory, Joshua leads the entire people of Israel.

You get this scene. All the men, all the women, all the children, all the cattle, all the sheep and goats and their tents and possessions and everything.

You know, they just load up everything, house and all. And for 30 miles, they travel to the mountains of Ebal. That's what we have here in verse 30. A little bit later in verse 33, we'll also hear about the Mount Gerizim.

So to these two mountains, which, by the way, according to chapter 17, are at, it says kind of at or near, Shechem. So Shechem's another city right there.

All right, so this is a march, again, of about 30 miles. And the Israelites, I think, we could just speculate, did face some possible confrontations along the way, possibly from Shechem.

[14:38] They would have passed very near Shechem on their way to this kind of valley between the feet of these two mountains. They could have possibly had a confrontation with Shechem, which was, by the way, a fortress city guarding the entrance to this valley between these two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim.

And it's also possible that the Shechemites could have come out and confronted them. And, by the way, it's also possible that they did. Even though we don't have any record of it.

The Bible doesn't, Joshua doesn't chronicle every single conquest. So it could be that Shechem was defeated on the way to this place where they're going to renew and reaffirm their covenant. It could also be that the Shechemites were doing like the Jerichoites. And they had closed up the gates and they were staying in, hunkering down, and no one coming in, no one going out as Israel passes by, possibly because of fear, because they had heard about Jericho and they had heard

about Ai.

We don't really know. But they go to this valley between these two mountains and the question is, why this exact location?

[16:00] Why was this exact location chosen? Well, in the first place, well, first and foremost, because God had commanded this. And we don't read anything about that here in Joshua.

Well, we do actually because there's a reference to it here in this verse. But it's a reference to what Moses had commanded. Of course, God is commanding it through Moses, what he had commanded in Deuteronomy.

And we have a little quote of it here in verse 31. As Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the children of Israel as it is written in the book of the law of Moses. It doesn't mention Deuteronomy, but that's where it is.

An altar, quote, an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool. So just a small little quotation of the entire passage here.

And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings. Now, where did Moses command this specifically?

[16:57] Well, I want to read it to you. Deuteronomy chapter 11 and starting with verse 26. You can turn to that and look at that. I'm going to read through to the end of that chapter.

This is where Moses commanded that what Joshua was leading the people to do at this particular point is where Moses commanded that this be done. Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.

A blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today. And the curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God. But turn aside from the way which I command you today to go after other gods which you have not known.

Now it shall be when the Lord your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.

Now this will make more sense as we go along here. Are they not on the other side of the Jordan toward the setting sun in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal beside the terebinth trees of Moreh?

[18:10] For you will cross over the Jordan and go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you and you will possess it and dwell in it and you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.

Then there's also another reference and we'll not read it now but I'll read portions of it a little bit later in Deuteronomy chapter 27. So here is where in these two places where Moses had commanded the people, Joshua to lead the people to this place for a specific purpose and it's going to have to have something to do with curses and blessings and specifically have something to do with God's law which is, you know, the proof of His covenant between them.

All right, so we'll get back to some of those verses as we go along. Now, that's why this was the place for them to go and build this altar and sacrifice these sacrifices.

But added to this, I think, these mountains are located geographically in the center of the promised land and that's significant.

And they're mountains so they're at a high elevation, I think some 3,000 feet above sea level, not huge mountains but in that region, pretty good sized mountains.

[19:37] The valley in between them where they would build these altars and so forth, what's going to come next in these verses, about 1,000 feet above sea level.

But from that vantage point you could see the greater part of all of the promised land. So that, I think, was symbolic to bring them to that very place so that they could look out and see the land that God had promised to them.

This was a place that represented then all the promised land. And there may have been another practical reason as some have thought of.

Let me just quote James Boyce on this and also F.B. Meyer, two preachers who lived in two different times. But let me quote them.

First of all, Boyce said, the mountains which are about 3,000 feet above sea level or 1,000 feet above the valley between them are quite barren. The valley is often green and at one place where the mountains come close together there is a natural amphitheater.

[20 : 43] So you can kind of picture that. Two mountains that their peaks may be quite a distance apart but at the foot in one part of them they come together and make kind of a natural amphitheater with both sides of the mountain coming together at this one place.

F.B. Meyer further describes it he said, as a place where the mountains are hollowed out and the limestone stratum is broken into succession of ledges so as to present the appearance of a series of regular benches kind of bleachers if you will.

It is a natural amphitheater capable of containing a vast audience of people. So you can imagine what kind of place this was that God had selected for them.

Now think about it. This place would have outstanding acoustical benefits because of the shape of it the amphitheater type of shape.

One person standing on one side of the e-ball for example would have no problem hearing the shouts or the voice of someone standing on the opposite side on the side of Gerizim.

[22 : 00] and one person standing in the middle in the valley between the two would have no trouble being heard by those masses of people seated or standing on each side one on each side on the sides of these mountains.

So it was a perfect place for God to select for the people to do what He has led them there to do as we shall find out. Now follow this very closely because on Mount Ebal we understand from Scripture that two altars were built.

You say well I only see one but really there were two and when we read it it sounds like there's just one but according to Deuteronomy 11 there are really two in Deuteronomy 27.

The first altar was for sacrificial offerings and that's what we read about here in verse 31 an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool so they didn't go in there with you know with pitchforks and chisels and hammers and you know fashion some stones to make you know this beautiful looking altar like we might you know use to brick the sides of our houses.

These were stones rough stones that were not cut by man and so they were to be brought together and offer on this altar to offer on it burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrifice peace offerings or fellowship offerings so you have two kinds of sacrifices being made one is a burnt offering for sin clearly for sin where the animal is sacrificed and burned and completely burned up and so it was to atone for the nation's sin.

[23 : 48] The other type of offering was called a peace offering and where the animal would be burned but it could be eaten by those who were serving Israel the Levites and priests and this was a fellowship offering it was to reaffirm Israel's relationship with God that's one altar the first one we read about in verse 31 the second altar was for the inscription of the word of God or God's law and that's what we see in verse 32 look at it there in the presence of the children of Israel he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses which he had written and this then could have been the ten commandments that he wrote on it it could have been the entire contents of the law given in Deuteronomy chapters 5 through 26 that would be a lot to write it would have taken a long time

I don't really know scholars differ on which it is but he wrote the law of God on this altar that was made and this is likely a separate altar and because of the way Deuteronomy 27 and you can turn to that Deuteronomy 27 starting with verse 1 seems to indicate now Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people saying keep all the commandments which I command you today and it shall be on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God is giving you that you shall set up for yourselves large stones and whitewash them with lime you shall write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over that you may enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you a land flowing with milk and honey just as the Lord God of your fathers promised you therefore it shall be when you have crossed over the Jordan that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones which I command you today and you shall whitewash them with lime and there you shall build an altar for the Lord your God an altar of stones you shall not use an iron tool on them this is a second altar now it's reversed order in the account here in Joshua but first we have the putting together of stones and whitewash really kind of a plaster so that you can make a smooth surface upon which

Joshua would write the law inscribe the law of God and then this other altar is the one where stones are erected that have not been tooled in any way by man and upon these the offerings will be done and the sacrificial the burnt offerings and the peace offerings or fellowship offerings so this is a second altar an additional altar or it could be some have supposed and kind of get into the workings of the grammar and so forth they say it could be pointing to an altar that was built from the stones of

the first altar that the stones were then moved or kept there after the sacrifice had been made then those stones would be set up in such a way and plastered so that the law could be written upon them regardless of where the stones came from there were two stones two altars rather one for burnt offerings the other eventually for the inscription of God's word

God's law then what happened well verse 33 then all Israel with their elders and officers and judges stood on either side of the ark before the priests the Levites who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord the stranger as well as he who was born among them so there were those who converted and were followers of Yahweh God and there were those who were born since they came into the land half of them that is half of the of Israel six of the tribes were in front of Mount Gerizim I want you to try to picture this and half of them in front of Mount Ebal so the two mountains side by side in a sense or at least at one point small valley and then the sides of each mountain so half of the tribes were to be standing on one side and the other half on the other side as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before that they should bless the people of Israel and we have it in Deuteronomy that they were to do just this and afterward he read all the words of the law the blessings and the cursings according to all that is written in the book of the law that is the blessings if you obey it the curses if you disobey it he read all of those there was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel so they were there a long time okay you thought this morning was a long time this was a long time he read not one word did he leave out and for the assembly before the assembly of Israel with the women the little ones and the strangers who were living among them all right now can you imagine this you really have to bring in what God had commanded in through Moses in Deuteronomy bring that into play because not all of that is described here in

[29 : 50] Joshua but all of it was done just exactly as God had commanded in Deuteronomy but just imagine half of the people six tribes were positioned on the slopes of Mount Gerizim according to Deuteronomy 27 and verse 12 there these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people pay attention to that to bless the people when you have crossed over the Jordan and then he names them Simeon so it's not that they just Joshua came up with some kind of random program here God had already prescribed which of the tribes were to be on the side of Mount Gerizim there's Simeon Levi Judah Issachar then he names Joseph and Benjamin right off your thinking was Joseph one of the tribes well Levi is in this list and so

Levi is numbered here with the twelve so that to have six here to make it balanced what God was doing was combining Ephraim and Manasseh under the name Joseph because they came out of Joseph and so then you have six groups of people even though two of the tribes are lumped together under the name Joseph so that's half of them and then half of the people again the other six tribes would be positioned on the slopes of Mount Ebal according to Deuteronomy 27 and verse 13 and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse there's a little difference there isn't it on Mount Gerizim it is to bless so Mount Gerizim is the mount of blessing on Ebal it is to curse so Mount Ebal signifies the mount of cursing and then he names the tribes Reuben Gad

Asher Zebulun Dan and Naphtali so those would be on that side now this isn't any any doesn't have any connection to the tribes per se that you know six of them are curses and six of them are blessings that's not the point the point is going to come here in just a minute so as the curses then alright so they're in position now picture this several million cut in half half on one side half on the other and the ark of the covenant is in the middle and the altar that has inscribed on it the law of God in the middle Joshua reading it and so as the curses of the law are read one by one we understand from Deuteronomy 27 as the curses are read one by one the tribes on Mount Ebal respond in unison out loud amen agreeing with the curses what are the curses well if you disobey God's law in his law he has given certain curses for disobedience to his law this is what's going to happen to you and so they're reading the curses and with each curse that is read you can go to Deuteronomy and see this they'll speak out one and all the people say amen out loud and you can imagine how that would reverberate in that valley with the mountains on each side and so they go through all the curses one by one and the tribes on Mount Ebal respond in unison amen and then the blessings the blessings of the law read one by one what are the blessings God says this is how I will bless you if you obey my law and so they're read one by one and the tribes of Mount Gerizim then those that are on the side of Mount Gerizim respond also one by one after each one they respond in unison amen just imagine that this huge natural amphitheater that would make it possible for the people to hear every single word and so the curses of the law if obeyed and they're

saying we agree this is by our covenant the blessings of the law if obeyed amen we agree and so this event then between the two mountains formed then a huge object lesson for the people so there's not just this event taking place and the you know the immediate significance for God's people where God is is having them reaffirm their covenant with him he's reaffirming it they're reaffirming it amen signified by the the commands of the law so it's not just that it's an object lesson a huge one and what would happen now what would happen then to the

[35 : 11] Israelites in the promised land what would happen to them was going to be dependent upon where they lived spiritually or symbolically either mount ebal in disobedience and under the curses or on mount gerizim in obedience and under god's blessings that would that would then dictate what what would happen to them as they are conquering the land and moving forward even after they have completely possessed the land and so the truth of this huge object lesson is so clear when you look at and really it's already been demonstrated to Israel here's where god explains it but it's already been demonstrated in their life just in recent months where how about jericho the victory at jericho they obeyed god blessed and how about the defeated ai they disobeyed and god cursed and then the subsequent victory at ai of course they obeyed then and god blessed god blessed and so when there was obedience to the law of god there was victory and when there was disobedience to the law of god it resulted in defeat and we see this object lesson really playing out for israel all throughout their history you know blessings and curses and blessings and curses they would affirm their covenant with god and obey his law and they would have victory and then they would very shortly disobey his law and then would come curses and so it played out in their life and we see it on the pages of scripture all throughout the old test and we even see it in our own day to day there's another object lesson here though that may not and surely probably was not evident to the people of that day it may have been but this object lesson is one of grace there's an object lesson on grace we've talked about you know the people seated on each side we've talked about the law and

Joshua reading every word of the law and not leaving one word out but let's think about the altar! the altar of burnt offering burnt sacrifice for atonement what happens first in the ceremony before the writing and reading of the law the altar of sacrifice that happens first here then we have the altar built and the law written and the law read and the people affirming it amen amen but first comes the altar of sacrifice an altar remember made of uncut stones not by works but grace that altar was erected for the purpose of burnt offerings sacrificed peace offerings sacrifices by the way which point to the person and work of

Christ where was it erected on ebal the mount of curses that sacrifice points to Jesus and so Jesus of course is God's gracious solution to the curse of the law the only solution his substitutionary atonement upon the cross what a marvelous object lesson and not the only one we have in the old testament we have object lessons of the cross and symbols of the cross and foreshadows of the cross all throughout the old testament that's why Jesus could say to the Pharisees you read the scriptures and in them you think you have eternal life but it is those very scriptures that speak of me and here's one really good one God's covenant people and who are we we are God's covenant people