

LESSON 8



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

AUGUST 19 2023

first things first

Scripture Story: Joshua 8.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or, *Beginning of the End*), chapter 46.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

What we do after our successes is as much a test of our character as how we respond to our failures. Indeed, success may be even more devastating in that it tends to give one a false sense of security. Such was the dilemma that faced the Israelites as they stood on a plain facing Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

They had been summoned there by Joshua immediately following their (God's) conquest of Ai. If we are to be quite candid, not many of us would have been ready for a worship service following the defeat of a puny enemy who got the best of us before. We would probably be plundering their riches, dancing all over their carcasses, and enjoying a massive celebration. But this was not how Joshua chose to spend the first few moments of his triumph. No, the partying would wait, the celebrations would be placed on hold.

Instead, Joshua 8:30-35 recounts the awesome spectacle of an entire nation—men, women, children, aliens—gathered before two mountains to honor their God, and to get their marching orders before fully possessing the Promised Land. Joshua never forgot the dying words of Moses to him (Deuteronomy 27:1-7). Joshua was to remind the people of the blessings that would attend their obedience to God, and the curses that would haunt them should they disobey. Joshua did not fail Moses. He read all the words of the law to them, and did not miss one.

As Ellen White notes, God intended for His people to get explicit direction on His expectations that they might avoid the snares of Satan in their new home.

This story demonstrates in stark relief the love of God for His people. Not only is He willing to deliver from physical peril; He is equally willing to save His people from spiritual ruin. God always gives us the knowledge and power to overcome. It is up to us, as it was the Israelites, to listen and obey.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Know that God keeps every promise that He makes to His people.
- Experience the joy of returning love to God through faithfulness to His covenant. (*Feel*)
- Be encouraged to make positive choices to serve God in every facet of their lives. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

The Great Controversy, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 8

“All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the global flood, as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1-11. Observed

by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation. (Gen. 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9.)”

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Booker T. Washington in his book *Up From Slavery* tells the story about meeting an ex-slave from Virginia. Two or three years before the Emancipation Proclamation, this slave had told his master that he wanted to buy his freedom. If he could labor wherever he wanted, he promised he would pay his master something each year until he was free. Because the wages were better, he went to Ohio to work. When the slaves were emancipated, he still owed three hundred dollars to his master.

He knew that under the Emancipation Proclamation he no longer had to pay for his freedom, but he walked back to Virginia to pay the last dollar he owed, with interest.

He had given his word and agreed to pay for his freedom and it was important that he keep his word. He knew that he would never enjoy his freedom if he did not keep the promise he had made.

If one would honor a promise made under the duress of slavery, how much more should we honor our promises to God?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Blessings are what we tend to wish one another in

the normal course of life. We wish others well when they are sick, when they are down, when they’ve achieved a great honor, etc. No one ever goes around raining down curses on people. Some try it, but usually they incur the wrath of society and soon become outcasts.

In Joshua 8 God bucks the human trend to desire blessings and hate curses. He is clear about His expectations of all who claim His name, enjoy His blessings, and bask in His love. He is equally clear about the curses we face for disobedience. Quite often, the curses that bedevil those who disobey are simply the consequences of their own choices. God wishes us to live with no regret.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- What specific things did God do to help Israel win their battle with Ai? Ask the students if they think it’s fair for God to help one side and not the other.
- Why did God encourage Israel to utterly destroy Ai, except for its plunder and livestock (Joshua 8:1, 2, 8)? (See the note in last week’s *Sharing and Context* on Joshua 6:21-24.)
- There were no doubt women and children among those killed at Ai. What do we say to those who point to this episode as proof that the Christian God is not a God of love? (It’s a difficult question. But even though we don’t always understand His ways, God *is* love, and we can trust His character and His perfect judgment. Also, because of Christ’s death on the cross, we allow God to separate the “wheat from the tares” when He returns.) In Joshua 8:18 the Lord tells Joshua to “hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city” (NIV). Why did God ask Joshua to do this? What lesson might God have been trying to convey to Joshua? What did this act say to the Israelites about Joshua as leader? In this narrative we must remember that the shadow of Moses still loomed large over the nation of Israel.
- Joshua is careful to follow all of Moses’ directions concerning the covenant renewal ceremony. Why is he so concerned that every detail be right? How did this show respect for God

and for his mentor, Moses? What does this say to us about how we should respect those who have served God faithfully in the past?

- How do you think the Israelites felt as they stood listening to Joshua? Could the children and youth in the Israelite congregation appreciate this ceremony? After all, it lacked all the things that seemed to appeal to young people today. Would youth today enjoy such a ceremony? Explain.

Use the following teachable passage to deepen the understanding of what Joshua read in the Israelites' hearing: Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Ahead of time, select specific passages from these chapters to be read responsively or in rounds by the students.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. **Superpower blues.** When Israel finally reached the Promised Land of Canaan, they were a budding superpower. Everyone feared them, and this sense of invincibility went to their heads. Joshua 7:1-5 should be a lesson to all who forget God and tolerate sin. They went up to Ai with a token force and they were routed and chased all the way back home. Verse 1 tells us why they failed: "But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the

LORD's anger burned against Israel" (NIV).

2. **Only one way.** The Mosaic law, which God gave Moses to guide the day-to-day lives of the Jewish nation, was never meant to be a works-oriented means to salvation. The sacrificial services were meant to show that only the spilled blood of an innocent victim could pay the price for sin. The sanctuary service pointed to the day when Christ would come and lay down His life for the sins of the world (John 3:16). Sometimes we have a tendency to think that if we obey everything God says that ought to be enough to get us to the kingdom. Not! We will always need Jesus, for only His righteousness pays the price.
3. **The big ten.** Some erroneously claim that it was the Ten Commandments that were abolished at the death of Jesus, along with the sacrificial system. Such a view begs the question: Are we now free to have false gods, murder, steal, commit adultery, dishonor our parents, etc? The answer, of course, is no. Here's the truth from God's Word: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

- **Further Insight**

Ask them how the quote in Further Insight conveys the point of the story in this lesson.



Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

I Promise

Ask a guest to come and share with the class an episode from their life when they made a promise and kept it, or made a serious promise and broke it. You may also have such a story to share.

Often students will respond much more positively to a guest who comes to share a personal testimony that embodies the lesson for the day, perhaps someone who is not from the youth ministry of the church or in their general orbit. This person might also share their testimony in lieu of the provided illustration.

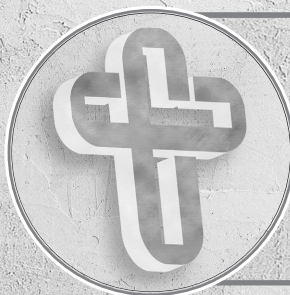
be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19, NIV).

4. **Amen corner.** *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* notes that the spot where Israel assembled for the renewal of the covenant was the same place where Abraham erected his first altar in the Land of Promise. “Here the people now congregated, six of the tribes on one side and six on the other—the six on Mt. Gerizim to respond with an Amen after each blessing was read and the six on Mt. Ebal as each curse was read” (vol. 2, p. 215).

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.



Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 46.

RABBI 101

Give each student an index card and a pencil. Ask the students to choose one blessing from Deuteronomy 28 or 29 that they would like to experience in their lives this week. Ask them to write one sentence detailing what they plan to do to fulfill the conditions to receive this blessing from God.

Offer a prayer of dedication to God, asking Him to send His power and grace to each student in their attempts to obey His commands this week.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God loves us. The creation shouts it, in spite of how sin has ravished it. Our own bodies tout it, in spite of what we do to them. God loves humanity. How much? Enough to send Jesus to die for us. After all that God has done for us, is our obedience too high a price to pay for His grace?

The question of our response to God’s goodness is at the heart of Joshua 8. Joshua 7 taught us that disobedience has consequences, but so does obeying God. There is no obedience that doesn’t flow from a heart of love. It was love that drove Joshua and the Israelites to assemble for this solemn covenant renewal ceremony. They had journeyed long, endured much. This was not the time to forsake the God who only hours earlier had handed them a decisive victory over Ai.

No, this was the time to declare one’s willingness to live for God, to live by His rules as a demonstration of the love they felt for Him. With great joy God must have watched this scene. He knew even then that some would forget this day, would fall back into old habits and old ways. But God still took joy in the effort of His very human subjects to please Him.

We too may be weak, we may fall, our promises may not be worth the paper they’re written on, but because of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can obey God.



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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Joshua 8.

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first things first



Photo by Bairn Von Foregger

flashlight

"Satan is ever at work endeavoring to pervert what God has spoken, to blind the mind and darken the understanding, and thus lead men into sin. This is why the Lord is so explicit, making His requirements so very plain that none need err. God is constantly seeking to draw men close under His protection, that Satan may not practice his cruel, deceptive power upon them" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 503).

key text

"There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on stones a copy of the law of Moses. All the Israelites, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing the Levitical priests who carried it."

(Joshua 8:32, 33, NIV)

what do you think?

When was the last time that you sang your national anthem or repeated a national pledge of allegiance? Did you do it individually or did you do it with a group of other people? Finish the following statement by choosing from the list below: The reason why I sing my nation's national anthem and repeat its pledge is to:

- Prove that I know it, so my parents and teachers will not hassle me.
- Practice for the day when I join the military.
- Show my patriotism and my allegiance to laws and values of my nation.
- Show my government's leadership that I am willing to do anything they want me to do.

Does God have an anthem or pledge that He'd like us to recite? Briefly write what you think should be included in God's pledge:

did you know?

Joshua assembled the people of God in front of two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim. They each had a very unique layout and terrain. The name Ebal means rocky, and this description is accurate. Gerizim, unlike Ebal, is lush and beautiful. Both had a significant role to play on the day that Joshua called the people to the mountains. Ebal represented the curses that would follow Israel if they forsook God, and Gerizim demonstrated the blessings that would attend God's people if they remained faithful.



INTO THE STORY

formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.

“Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses—just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the foreigners who lived among them.”

(Joshua 8:30-35, NIV)

“Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites.

“He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses—an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the LORD burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings. There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on stones a copy of the law of Moses. All the Israelites, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing the Levitical priests who carried it. . . . Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had



OUT OF THE STORY

What huge battle took place prior to the assembly at Ebal and Gerizim? (See Joshua 8:1-29.)

What was especially significant about this battle?

Underline the verses of the passage printed here that show how much Joshua cared about God's laws.

What role is Moses playing in this ceremony? What is his unique contribution?

Circle all the people assembled on the mountain.

Why do you think God wanted all the children to be a part of this ceremony?

Does God still tell His people what blessings and curses will follow them depending on their choices? If so, how? Can you locate verses in the Bible that substantiate your answer?

Draw a *rectangle* around the sentence or sentences that are the core of this narrative.

punch lines

“**He himself bore** our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed’ ” (1 Peter 2:24, NIV).

“**Those who belong** to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24, NIV).

“**The Lord will fight** for you; you need only to be still” (Exodus 14:14, NIV).

“**I have told you** these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).

“**To the one who is victorious,** I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21, NIV).

“**Now if you obey** me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine” (Exodus 19:5, NIV).

further insight

“Let us place ourselves in right relation to Him who has loved us with amazing love. Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness.”

—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 22.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Joshua 8:32.

In the *What Do You Think?* exercise you were asked to write what you thought might be included in a pledge given by God to us, or an anthem that He would want us to sing. Why was Joshua so keen on getting all the words of the law written down?

We are told that Joshua called this holy assembly immediately after Israel conquered Ai. Why didn't Joshua let the people relax a bit before enshrining the law in stone? How important are God's commands in your life? Why not write a pledge of obedience to God right now?

Sunday

Read Joshua 8:30-35.

The Israelites were divided into two groups, each standing on one side of the ark and the priests who carried it. Why was the ark placed in the center, between the two groups of Israelites? The ark held God's law, the Ten Commandments.

What place do the Ten Commandments occupy in your life? When was the last time you read them?

Monday

Read Deuteronomy 27:1-8.

Look at this week's *Key Text*. It tells us that Joshua copied the law of Moses on tablets of stone as the people watched. Can you imagine how long this might have taken? We do not know all of the logistics surrounding Joshua's writing of the law, but Deuteronomy 27:1-8 tells us a little. Below, write what Joshua had to do to obey Moses' directive.

What do you think would have happened if

Joshua had decided to cut corners, to create the monument as cheaply and quickly as possible? What should be our attitude when we do things for God?

Tuesday

Read Deuteronomy 28.

Read this week's *Flashlight* section to shine a light on Satan and his schemes. Ellen White is careful to note that God is clear about His commands because Satan thrives when we either do not know what God expects of us and/or fail to obey God. Punishment is not God's objective in giving us commands. God is really out to save our lives.

God spoke through Moses and Joshua to warn His people about curses that would follow sin, and blessings that would come as a result of obedience. List four blessings and three curses God promised His people in today's reading.

Blessings for Obedience

Curses for Disobedience

Wednesday

Check out this week's *Punch Lines*. Focus on Galatians 5:24: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (NIV). In your own words, write what you think it means to "crucify the sinful nature with its passions and desires":

Read the other *Punch Lines* texts. What role does Jesus play in our struggle to obey God, to crucify the flesh? What role does God play? Finally, what can you do to cooperate with God's plan to save you?

Thursday

Read 2 Timothy 1:8.

Living among the Israelites who crossed the Jordan were aliens, people who joined them on their journey to the Promised Land. Notice that they were not excused from the big gathering in front of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. The blessings and curses applied to them also.

How do you share your faith with friends who do not know God? Do you hide it or let it shine?

Friday

Read Psalm 95:6.

Worship. Everyone does it, whether they attend a church or not, listen to a preacher or not, pay tithe or not, eat the right foods or not, etc. It happens in ballparks, during elections, in bars and clubs, in the movies, in small towns and big cities—everywhere. Everyone worships someone or something. God wants it, and so does Satan.

Have you ever stopped to think of the reason why you worship God? Reflect on these questions today: Why do I worship God? Is it because I'm scared of Him? Is it because I like the stuff He gives me? Is it because I love Him? And if I love Him, does He know it?

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 46.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.