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This week at MRC we reached another thorny chapter in Joshua as the nation defeated Ai (on the second time of asking), it was however a story of re-commitment as 1) the people listen to God again and hence see success but also 2) as they re-establish their commitment to the covenant. It was another chapter where we are confronted with a stark encounter of the holiness of God. Fundamentally we said it was a chapter of hope as their sin from last week (through Achan) has been dealt with, Gods anger has been removed and now they are back on track. We noted that the chapter splits into two subject halves - from v1-29 dealing with conquest and from v30-35 dealing with covenant.

#### + v1-29: conquest

In one sense this section of chapter 8 continues on from chapter 7. It's a different chapter from what's gone on before (eg in chapter 3-4 at the Jordan or 5 at Jericho) as the Ark is not mentioned (though the battle is still won by the Lord). It's also very different from the previous attempt to defeat Ai as there is planning this time and they hear clearly from the Lord.

The tactic to defeat them is a clever one. Last week where the soldiers from Ai chased and cornered Israels army, this week they are to lure them out of the city and then corner them as the Israelite army divides and catches them from behind. The town is to be destroyed and the king is to be impaled probably because this is a kind of royal city whereby these actions reveal who the true king is.

We noted again that this is a hard concept for our ears but were reminded that God is just, we are sinful (as are the inhabitants of Ai) and that the ages of sin is death. We did note though (as per in ch 6) that there may be a sense of military rhetoric employed in some of the descriptions of what happened and how many died etc

#### + v30-35: covenant

The pace changes somewhat in these final 5 verses as a covenant renewal ceremony happens (in contrast to covenant breaking last week). We noted that it happens up these mountains in part because its a central and high location whereby the land can be viewed. We also said though that it happens here because of what Moses said in Deuteronomy 11:26 onwards and then fleshed out in chs 27-28. Here Moses urges his people, as they enter the land without him, to reiterate and remember the Law - standing on Mount Ebal and Gerizim and pronouncing blessings and curses upon themselves. God's people in Gods land will live Gods way and in living Gods way will enjoy real life and blessing. Life as it was meant to be lived. This law is not a hypothetical thing for them, but rather a personal thing.

We said it was striking that as part of the binding covenant renewal ceremony an altar is constructed - not simply to ratify the law, but, through sacrifices to bring reconciliation when the law is not kept. God both requires obedience and faithfulness, but also provides altars for when they are not obedient or faithful.

We looked ahead to Hebrews 10 from v11 onwards thankful for the sacrifice of Jesus who both provides a sufficient sacrifice for the sin of his people through all eternity, but who's death also inaugurated a new covenant that gives us new hearts where Gods law is internalised and so Gods people can grow in obedience.

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As always feel free to tweak these questions. They're just starters...

How have you found this series in Joshua so far? Why?

Why do you think chapter 8 is a hopeful chapter? What does it teach us when we disobey God (like Achan in chapter 7)?

What do you make of Israels encounter at Ai? Why do they treat the king in this way?

Why does the covenant renewal happen here? What's it for? Why is the altar so key?

What does this passage teach us about God?