

After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, ² summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: “I am old and well advanced in years. ³ You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. ⁴ Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

⁶ “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. ⁷ Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. ⁸ But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

⁹ “The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. ¹⁰ One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. ¹¹ So be very careful to love the LORD your God. (NIV 84)

Theme: A Peaceful Vacation

1. Is won for you by the Lord.
2. Is found in his Word

Vacations are great for many different reasons. It's nice to get a way for awhile, to get a change of pace, switch gears. You get to see family members or different places or do things you wouldn't normally do. One of the best things about vacations is the rest and relaxation it offers. Vacations allow you to get away from it all, let your mind think about something else, and simply to recharge the batteries.

But what happens when your soul needs some rest and relaxation? Today we see that we can turn to the Lord, for he has won peace for you. And that peace is found in his Word.

Joshua was the leader of the Israelites when they entered Canaan. He led them during that first battle of Jericho. You may remember that battle. It wasn't much of a battle. The Israelites marched around the city walls once for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day. After that seventh time they blew some horns and shouted. At that the walls crumbled. They ran into the city and killed all the survivors. If there is one thing that is abundantly clear from that battle, it is this: the Israelites didn't do anything to defeat the city of Jericho. It is impossible for a fortified city to crumble at the sound of some horns and the shouts of men. God did that. He won for them that victory. If that wasn't clear enough for the Israelites, it certainly wouldn't have been when they went against the small town of Ai. On paper, this village stood no chance against the Israelites. But a man named Achan had gone against God's command and kept some of the plunder of Jericho for himself. So God wasn't with the Israelites when they first went against the town of Ai. And they were routed. Later, when God was once again with the Israelites they easily defeated Ai. The Israelites had no room to brag about themselves. It was clear that they were powerless against their enemies without God.

God would go with them throughout the conquest of Canaan. He led them in victory over victory. They took down many large countries. They destroyed many fortified cities. At the end of his life, Joshua reminds the people of what God had done for them. **You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you...The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised.**

It didn't take long for the Israelites to conquer Canaan. In six years the Israelites destroyed their enemies and subdued the nations around them. And now they enjoyed something that they didn't have for a long time—peace and rest from their enemies. No more slavery, no more wars. They could settle down in the Promised Land and start

their lives in their new country. God had given them rest from all their hard work. Because God was on their side their enemies couldn't touch them. Their enemies were powerless against them.

This reminds us of what God has done for us. We can't defeat our enemies on our own—just like the Israelites at Ai. Think of Adam and Eve. When Satan came to tempt them, they both failed miserably. They trusted the devil and doubted God's love for them. Satan destroyed them by bringing sin into the world—and death through sin. Since then we've been powerless against sin, death, and the devil. So God came to Adam and Eve and promised them a Savior. One of their descendants would crush Satan's head for them. God would reiterate this promise to his people again and again—from Abraham to David.

And then the time fully came. About 1400 years after Joshua spoke this words God sent his Son. Jesus would live on this earth for more than 30 years. And not once did he sin against God. He never committed any crime. And yet he was sentenced to death on a cross. Jesus went there willingly. So that he could pay for our sins. And so that he could give us his perfect life.

At the cross Satan thought that he had finally won. Jesus died. He once again deceived man. He led them to kill Jesus—the Son of God. Satan thought he had hit the knock-out blow. God himself was dead. But Jesus didn't remain in the grave. Three days after his death Jesus rose from the dead. He defeated death and crushed Satan's head. Satan's blow was just a strike on the heel, while Jesus fatally wounded our enemy.

We were powerless against our enemy, the devil. But Jesus wasn't, so he gave us the ultimate victory—over sin, death, and the devil. Paul talks about this in Romans 5. **At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.** And so now we have peace. Now we have rest. Rest from fighting battles we can't win. Rest from the attacks of Satan. Rest from our sins. We have God on our side. When the world presses in on us, when we are tempted by our sinful nature, when the devil tries to deceive us, we know that God is there to protect us. He has given us the victory over these enemies. So now we have peace and rest from all our adversaries.

Christ offers this rest to all. It is received by faith and found in his word. So we turn to his Word whenever we become weary.

After reminding the Israelites of the victories that God had won for them, Joshua told them what their reaction should be. **Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.** The Lord's faithfulness in keeping his promises was the Israelites' motivation to be faithful to God in keeping his Word. And they were to keep all of it. Not just the laws that they wanted to keep. They didn't get to pick and choose. It didn't matter if they liked the command, agreed with it, caused them to be persecuted, or what have you. It was a command of God, and so they obeyed his will.

One specific command of God for the Israelites was that they do not join together with the wicked world around them. **Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them.** Although God gave the Israelites victory after victory, they failed to drive out or kill all of their enemies. There were still some in the area. And they worshiped false gods. And worship of some of these false gods included detestable practices such as orgies and child sacrifice. So God wanted the Israelites to have nothing to do with them. He didn't want them to be led astray. He didn't want them to be enticed by the ways of the world.

But that is exactly what happened. The Israelites didn't listen to God's command. Soon after Joshua's death, many forgot about God. They didn't listen to his Word. Many even failed to worship him. And they began to mingle with the unbelieving countries around them. Soon they intermarried with them. And just as God warned them not to do, they began to worship their false gods. Soon the Israelites, God's chosen nation—his children, were bowing down to false gods and offering sacrifices to idols instead the Lord. They practiced in their ritual orgies of gods like Baal and Asherah. Some even sacrificed their children to gods like Molech.

All of that didn't bring peace. It may have been fun for them. It may have been what they have wanted. But joining with their enemies instead of destroying them as they were commanded caused them many problems. Battles and wars, sin and conflict—they were all a

result of failing to obey God's commands. They had no peace because they failed to obey God's commands.

The Writer to the Hebrews warns at the end of our second lesson don't **fall by following their example of disobedience.** God's commands—his moral law, which is for all people of all time, still stands for us. And he still commands us to keep away from those who teach things that are contrary to the truth. He still tells us, **Do not love the world or anything in the world.** But like the Israelites, we often stray from God as we are enticed away from the world. You see how they live their lives—the fun they have, the things they enjoy, the possessions they buy with their money, and you want that. You want to follow Christ, but you also want to live like the rest of the world. You become so inundated by what the world says is true, acceptable, or noble that you lose sight of what God says. You have good intentions—but you are just so busy. You have so many things going on each and every day, so the first thing you drop is your Bible Study. Or you still do it, but read through you devotion as fast as you can—not retaining much and learning nothing. And so your knowledge of God's Word and his will for you becomes a little fuzzy. And doubt about creation, homosexuality, and the like pop up in your head. You begin to follow the example of the world and your priorities get out of whack. Work, your children's activities, sleep, fun, your hobbies—they become more important than God and his Word. You may not bow down and worship false gods like the Israelites, or sacrifice your children in a fire to them. But you bow down to the pressures of the world, you worship at the altar of wealth and power, you sacrifice your children's spiritual lives in to fires of a host of activities. And as a result you have no peace—no rest. We get so busy that you don't have time to rest. The way of the world leads to strife. You have problems at work, money issues, health problems. There are argument with neighbors, commitments to make, and deadlines to meet. Stress is a constant in your life. You look at your life and you're not really satisfied. You have no peace of mind. But worst of all, the busy lifestyle of the world offers no rest for your soul. So there is something that is always weighing down on you.

It's only found in the gospel. So we cling to God and his Word. For it is in his Word that you receive rest. Rest for your mind when you hear

of his love for you. And that he watches over you and protects you. And that he was won the ultimate victory for you. Rest knowing that your sins will not be counted against you. That Christ has paid your debt. And he has removed your sins—never to return to condemn you. Best of all, in his Word you find rest for your soul. Eternal rest for your soul in heaven forever through faith in him. Rest from your enemies. The devil cannot touch you. Rest from sin. And rest from the effects of sin. No deadlines, appointments, commitments. No worries, no stress.

Getting some rest on vacation is great. But even greater is finding rest for your soul in God's Word. He won it by defeating sin, death, and the devil. Through his Word you find rest for your weary soul. So cling to the Word, and don't let the ways of the world get in the way. For through it you will find eternal rest. Amen.