

Israel's Victory Over Ai

Joshua 8:1-29

Joshua – 8:1-29 - *“Now the LORD said to Joshua: “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. ² And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it.” ³ So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night. ⁴ And he commanded them, saying: “Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. ⁵ Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. ⁶ For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, ‘They are fleeing before us as at the first.’ Therefore, we will flee before them. ⁷ Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. ⁸ And it will be, when you have taken the city, that you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you.”*

⁹ *Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people. ¹⁰ Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. ¹¹ And all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley lay between them and Ai. ¹² So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. ¹³ And when they had set the people, all the army that was on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley. ¹⁴ Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. ¹⁵ And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. ¹⁶ So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. ¹⁷ There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel.*

¹⁸ *Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.” And Joshua stretched out the spear that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹ So those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire. ²⁰ And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers.*

²¹ Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. ²² Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were caught in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape. ²³ But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

²⁴ And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. ²⁵ So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. ²⁶ For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. ²⁷ Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua. ²⁸ So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. ²⁹ And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day.”

Background Notes

In Joshua 6 we learned about Israel’s great victory over Jericho – actually it was the LORD’s great victory over Jericho! Israel never even fired a shot, so to speak. Then in Joshua 7, we read about the defeat of Israel at a little place called Ai. Israel was defeated because they were overconfident, they didn’t consult the Lord for His direction, and furthermore they had sinned. Achan, whose name means “troubler,” stole some of the gold and silver of Jericho. The treasures of Jericho were to go into the treasury of the Lord, so Achan had really robbed God. Thus, Israel was defeated at Ai. It was the only defeat Israel suffered in the entire conquest. At the end of Joshua 7, Israel recognized and confessed the sin, and judged Achan the troubler.

In Joshua 8, God “picked up the pieces” and brought victory in the place of defeat. Verse 2: “*And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it.*” What a promise! Ai, that had defeated Israel, would now be defeated, and the booty that was off limits at Jericho would now be free for the taking.

If only Achan had waited! But he couldn’t wait -- he rushed ahead of God. He robbed God, and he reaped what he had sowed. It’s a great lesson for us as well. Many times, we rush ahead of God when we should wait and follow the Lord’s directions. A lot of sorrow in our lives could be prevented if we could only learn this lesson.

Joshua’s tactics for defeating Ai were to divide his forces into three detachments. First of all, there were the 30,000 mighty men of valor (v3). The “30,000” used here can also be translated “thirty chief men.” If so, thirty commandos were

sent out under the cover of darkness to a position west of Ai in order to set fire to the city when the people were drawn out of the city. Then Joshua moved the rest of the fighting force to a location of the north side of Ai. 5000 men from this contingent were directed to take up a hidden position between Bethel and Ai. This army division would be used, of course, to help trap the army of Ai between the Israeli forces.

The plan worked. The men of Ai thought that Israel had come up as they had previously done, and they were drawn out of the city as Joshua's main force pretended to flee. Little did they know that they would be trapped with no way of escape! Thus Ai was conquered.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The enemy does not have the last laugh.

You've heard the expression, "He who laughs last, laughs best!" The people of Ai probably laughed in derision when they saw Joshua and the Israelites appearing to run away as before -- but little did they know that Israel would have the "last laugh"! The Lord fought for Israel and turned what looked like defeat into victory.

The battles in the book of Joshua illustrate the battles that we face in spiritual warfare. Satan is our enemy and he tries to defeat us in the land of spiritual realities. He doesn't want us enjoying our spiritual blessings in Christ, and he doesn't want us victorious in spiritual battle. Unfortunately, many times Satan is able to trip us up with the "little Ai's" in our lives -- those "everyday" sins like an outburst of anger or wasting valuable time. But the story is not over. The enemy doesn't have the last laugh. God can pick up the pieces in our lives when we are defeated. He can give us victory and continue to make something beautiful out of our lives -- for His glory!

According to Colossians 1:22, we know that ultimately we will be holy and blameless and beyond reproach in heaven forever. The enemy doesn't have the last laugh; God does! In Psalm 2:4, we read *"He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision."* The "them" here includes any of the enemies of God and His people. Satan and his forces may be laughing in derision now, as they are able to trip us up and cause us to be defeated. But God **can** and **will** bring victory in the place of defeat. The enemy doesn't have the last laugh.

2. The enemy does not know the tactics of the Lord.

The pagan Canaanites of Ai were out-foxed by Joshua and the army of Israel. The enemy didn't know that the Lord Himself was directing the tactics of Israel. They thought that they knew what was going on -- but they were wrong!

Satan and his forces don't know the tactics of the Lord. Satan only knows what God has revealed about His plans. Satan

knows the overall strategy of God, but he doesn't know God's tactics until they happen in history. Back in the Garden of Eden, Satan learned that the seed of the woman would crush his head, but he didn't know how. At the cross, Satan really thought that he had triumphed over God when the Son of God was crucified, but Satan didn't know that it was through the very "tactic" of the death of Jesus Christ that he himself would be conquered, and salvation would be offered to mankind. Satan does know that he is a defeated foe.

Revelation 12:12 says that Satan knows that he has only a short time, but he doesn't know all the details of tactics of the Lord until they happen. Don't ever get the idea that Satan is omniscient! He only has a limited knowledge of the future. Satan only can know what God has allowed Him to know. And don't get the idea that Satan can read your mind. He can read your **behavior**, but not your **mind**.

When we're defeated Satan gloats, thinking that there's no way God can bring victory in the lives we have shattered. But God loves to bring victory in the place of defeat! The enemy doesn't know the tactics of the Lord.

Practical Application

Let God give you victory in your place of defeat.

Joshua 8 teaches us that God not only wants to pick up the pieces in our lives when we've suffered defeat, He wants to give us victory in the very place of our defeat. The Valley of Achor, where Israel was judged for their sin, would become a "door of hope" for Israel in the future, according to Hosea 2:15. What a wonderful prophecy, and what a great lesson for us. Let God give you victory in your place of defeat.

Back in my college days, I started to believe in theistic evolution – the idea that life on earth came about through evolution, although God started the process and He guided the process. I was wrong! I was tripped up by the enemy, and I suffered defeat in my Christian life. But God is gracious, and He brought victory in my place of defeat. I've been "deprogrammed" from that "brain-washing" of evolutionary thought – praise the Lord! I'm now a strong creationist. Just as a broken bone, when healed, can actually become stronger, so I believe that God used my defeat in this area of evolution to make me a stronger creationist. The Lord loves to do this! Let God give you victory in your place of defeat.