



Joshua 8:1-29
Final Victory

NKJ Joshua 8:1 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.

In Chapter 11 of the book of Revelation we have a scene where the two witnesses symbolizing the church are allowed by God to be cut down by the beast and his forces, they world appears to have triumphed over the Church and we read:

10 And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

The world rejoices whenever she sees the church stumble and fall, and oh we can just imagine the feasting and rejoicing that went on in Ai on the night of their great victory over the people of Israel. There would have been backslapping and exchanges of souvenirs and much merry making for the people who had caused the hearts of the Amorites to melt in fear and who had overthrown mighty Jericho had themselves been routed by a tiny force and already the news of this defeat had spread.

Joshua, in his lament had predicted after the men of Ai had thrashed them: ***"For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth."*** Already that prediction had begun to come true, while it was only the men of Ai who had defeated the Israelite contingent in chapter 7 in verse 17 of chapter 8 we are informed that already the men of the neighboring town of Bethel had joined with the people of Ai and were ready to fight together against Israel the next day.

But God had allowed the army of Israel to be defeated for a specific purpose, that they might know that as it is said in Zec. 4:6 it is not by ***Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.*** And that they can overcome the nations of the land only by faith and obedience to His

commands. If the Lord is with them, they cannot lose, but when he withdraws his presence they cannot win.

Now the sin of Achan and his family that caused their defeat has been purged from their midst, and now Ai, whom God used as a tool in chastening his people to bring them to repentance, are about to be judged for their own sin.

This use by God of the surrounding nations in chastening, his people is a theme repeated throughout the Old Testament, for example God uses Philistia, Assyria, and Babylon to do this, but there is not one of these nations that does not eventually fall under his final judgment. And therein you see a huge difference, God chastens his people, and by His power they repent and rise again. But the judgment of the nations is final, Babylon and Assyria are judged and desolated, never to rise again.

Now in the camp of Israel they haven't been rejoicing. They are probably wary and timid after their defeat. Now our God is a God who shows his love and mercy by stooping to the needs of his people.

After a child learns to ride their bike, sometimes they get cocky, and then they have an accident, they fall over, and they experience road rash for the first time. Their response at that point is often, "I don't want to ride my bike anymore!" The gentle parent doesn't say "TOUGH, YOU GET BACK ON RIGHT NOW!" They say don't worry I will be right here and I'll hold your bike so you won't fall, and the child looking to them timidly gets back on constantly seeking reassurance, "you won't let go, right?" and the parent doesn't and they set off at extra slow speed with the parent giving them confidence and reassurance till the child regains their confidence and says something like "You don't need to hang on anymore", or doesn't even notice when they have let go.

In this case the Lord stoops by not sending them up to Ai in the same manner as before, with a frontal attack. He himself devises their battle plan and includes an ambush force. Also this time there isn't a few thousand soldiers as before, Now the text is slightly confusing on this point (verses 3-12 – Ambush force of 30,000 probably couldn't have gotten into position secretly), but the main force consists of 30,000 *picked men* and the ambush force of 5,000 men. The Ambush is set on the other side of the city, lying in wait for a signal God himself will give. God plans and executes the operation from start to finish. He even says to them, this time, you may keep the spoils of war that you take. One of the saddest things about the covetousness of Achan was that it was unnecessary.

In the morning after the forces are in place, the Israelites make a feigned attack and then run away as if they are going to be beaten again, and all the men of Ai and Bethel pursue them probably thinking another victory is at hand. But then at the Lord's signal Joshua stretches forth his spear towards the city, and the Ambush force rushes into the city and takes it and sets fires to indicate that the city is in their hands.

You can imagine what happened then, one of the men of Ai rushing after the host of Israel happens to look back, perhaps to encourage his friend, and he sees to his horror thick black smoke ascending from the city and they stop. The massive Israelite army seeing the smoke stops also. And you have this scene the tiny army of Ai and Bethel standing before a suddenly very undefeated and very much larger Israelite army and behind them even more men are spilling out of the city. They are wedged in, they cannot retreat to the walls, they are trapped in the valley between two larger forces of picked men. Imagine that moment as they realize they are not victorious as they had thought, but doomed as a sobering picture.

Its like the moment spoken of in Revelation 11:11 *Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.*

The world thought that the church was defeated, weak and cast down, but in fact they suddenly stand up on their feet and they realize that they are the ones who are defeated and facing their doom. Joshua's spear which is held out like the staff of Moses is not withdrawn until all the inhabitants of both Ai and Bethel are entirely destroyed.

There is this final picture of what happened to the king of Ai, that may be difficult to understand. But in order to understand that, we need to remember why the Lord had brought this judgment on the Caananites in the first place. It wasn't simply because he preferred Israel, or because Israel was righteous. God Himself told Israel that:

Deut. 9:4 "Do not think in your heart, after the LORD your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land'; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out from before you.

5 "It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We need to remember that these people are judged because they have offended against the almighty God who gave them ample time, over 4 centuries in fact, to repent and turn to Him. Even up to the day of battle there was yet time to repent.

"Had the people of Ai, like Rahab, reacted to God's great signs with faith leading to conversion they also could have become a part of the Hebrew nation. Instead, they reacted to God's great deeds with stubborn resistance, and, for this reason, are destroyed." – Andrew Bowling

And so symbolizing the sin of the people the King of Ai undergoes the public treatment that God had accorded to those who broke His laws:

Deut 21:22 " If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,

23 "his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

Certainly while the world may think that they will defeat the church and not experience Judgment, they will not.

Matt. 16:18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Final application: Because of Sin – Jesus had to be hung on the tree

*Gal. 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),
14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*