

THE VICTORY AT AI

Joshua 8:1-29

In **Joshua 8**, God gives the children of **Israel** a second chance, this time to do things *His way* in the taking of the city of **Ai**. The momentum **Israel** had achieved by the *miraculous crossing of the Jordan* and the *supernatural victory over Jericho* was stopped by their *defeat at Ai*. But one must always remember that **Israel** was defeated...not because they were *out manned*...they were defeated because of *sin*. As a result of their defeat, despair permeated, not only among all those in the camp, but also within the heart of **Joshua** (**Joshua 7:5**).

Now with **Achan's** sin judged, God's favor toward **Israel** was restored (**Galatians 6:1**) and He reassured **Joshua** that He had not forsaken him or His people. When **Joshua** heard God's words of encouragement (**Joshua 8:1**), his heart quickened, for these were the same words that he had heard several times before, "*Do not fear or be dismayed (discouraged).*" **Moses** has spoken these same words at **Kadesh Barnea** when he sent out the *twelve spies* (**Deuteronomy 1:21**). **Moses** also spoke these words to **Joshua** *forty years* later when he was turning over the reins of leadership to him (**Deuteronomy 31:8**). **Joshua** again heard these words when God spoke to him just after the death of **Moses** (**Joshua 1:9**). Now at this crucial time in **Joshua's** life, it was good to be reminded and reassured that God was ready to lead if he and the nation of **Israel** were ready to *hear* and *obey* Him...which they were.

Teachable Moment: Right after we disciplined our boys, we would let them cry. But as soon as they finished, we would go in and use that moment as a teachable moment:

- *Teach them what they did to deserve the punishment was wrong.*
- *Teach them that we loved them...unconditionally.*

One must remember though, the second time you have to do something, it will always be more difficult. Do it right the first time, otherwise it will always take *more effort, more energy, and it will cost you more*. This principle was especially true with **Joshua** and **Israel**. This time God's plan involved using all the fighting men of **Israel**.

I. THE SETTING: (vs. 1-2)

Now the Lord said to **Joshua**, "**Do not fear or be dismayed. Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to Ai**" (**vs. 1a**)... God's plan now was to involve all the *fighting men* of **Israel**.

Though the *primary cause* of defeat the first time around was *sin*...a *secondary cause* was *underestimating* the enemy (**Joshua 7:3-4**).

I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land (**vs. 1b**)...The *defeat* of **Ai** has been *assured*. God promised to turn the *place of defeat* into a *place of victory*.

You shall take only its spoil and its cattle as plunder for yourselves (**vs. 2b**)...Before the actual battle plan was revealed to **Joshua** he was told that the *spoil* of **Ai**, along with its *livestock*, could be taken. **Jericho** had been placed *under the ban*...**Ai was not**.

What an irony. If only **Achan** hadn't been so *greedy* and *selfish* and had *obeyed* God...and had just *waited* on God...he would have had all his heart would have desired...and he would have had God's blessing also.

II. THE STRATEGY: (vs. 3-8)

The strategy for **Ai** was completely different from that at **Jericho**. At **Ai**, **Israel** had to conquer the city through *normal combat operations*. It seems that God never work's the same way twice.

Don't try and copy what you observe God doing somewhere else and expect Him to work the same way again. (**Rick Warren: 40 Days of Purpose**). Observe and learn the *principles* and *truth*...but don't try and duplicate. (**Israel: Consecrate yourselves...renew your worship** vs. *march around Jericho once a day for six days and on the seventh day march around it seven times, blow the trumpets, and shout*).

The strategy for the capture and defeat of **Ai** was ingenious. The plan involved **three groups or contingents of soldiers**. It involved placing an **ambush** behind (*west* of) the city, and for these men to go in and destroy the city after **Joshua** and the *second* group would lure the military forces out of **Ai**. The *third* group of men would be positioned between **Ai** and **Bethel** to prevent any support coming from **Bethel** to help **Ai**.

III. THE SEIZE: (vs. 9-22)

The seize involved **three contingents of soldiers**.

- The **first** (**vs. 3-9**)...a group of **30,000** soldiers sent by night to hide just *west* of the city. Their assignment was to rush into the city and burn it after its defenders had left to pursue **Joshua** and

his army. **Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night. He commanded them, saying, “See, you are going to ambush the city from behind it” (vs. 3b-4a).**

- The **second (vs. 10-11)**...this was the main army which **Joshua** led. They walked the *15 miles* from **Gilgal** early the next morning and camped in plain view on the **north side of Ai**. Their primary assignment was to be *a diversionary force* to lure **Ai’s defenders** out of the city. **Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai. Then all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near and arrived in front of the city, and camped on the north side of Ai. Now there was a valley between him and Ai (vs. 10-11).**
- The **third (vs. 12-13)**...this was another **ambush** contingent of **5,000 men** who were positioned between **Bethel** and **Ai** to cut off the possibility of reinforcements from **Bethel** coming to the aid of the men of **Ai**. While **Joshua** was in the valley **north** of **Ai**... which was a deep ravine in the hills...these men were on the **west** side over-looking the valley. **And he took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city (vs. 12).**

There are times when God works in a *supernatural way*...like he did at **Jericho**. Other times, He works through what would be considered *normal means*...like He did here at **Ai**. Regardless of how God chooses to work...He is the one who is *sovereign*...He is the one *present in the midst of what’s going on*...**He is God**...and it’s all to **His glory!** (Sometimes God *supernaturally heals*...sometimes He chooses to use *doctors and medicine*. In both, He is the *great physician*...He is **Jehovah Rapha**...He is the *God that heals us*).

Here, the plan worked to perfection. **It came about when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose up early and went out to meet Israel in battle, he and all his people at the appointed place before the desert plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city (vs. 14)**... When the king of **Ai** saw **Israel’s** army he took the bait. Pursuing the **Israelites** who pretended to run in defeat, the city of **Ai** was left unguarded. At **Joshua’s** signal, the troops that were set behind **Ai** waiting to **ambush** the city, **quickly** entered and set the city on fire.

The consternation of the men of **Ai** was complete as they witnessed the flames and **smoke** rising into the sky. Before they could recover, they were caught in the grasp of the **Israelite** soldiers and were destroyed.

IV. **THEIR SUCCESS: (vs. 23-26, 28-29)**

After killing all **Ai’s** soldiers, **Israel’s** army reentered the city and killed all its inhabitants. The dead soldiers and citizens totaled **12,000**.

So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation until this day. He hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; and at sunset Joshua gave command and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the city gate, and raised over it a great heap of stones that stands to this day (vs. 28-29)...

The city was made a heap of ruins.

Ai’s king, previously spared, was then hanged on a tree till evening and then was buried beneath a pile of stones similar to the way **Achan** was buried (**Joshua 7:26**). The king’s body was taken off the tree at sunset because of God’s command (**Deuteronomy 21:22-23**); **Joshua 10:27**).

Thus **Israel**, having been restored to God’s favor, won a great victory. *After failure came a second chance*. One defeat or failure doesn’t signal the end of a believer’s usefulness with God.

V. **THE SPOIL: (vs. 27)**

Israel took only the cattle and the spoil of that city as plunder for themselves, according to the word of the Lord which He had commanded Joshua (vs. 27)...

Plunder was taken from the city by **Israel’s** soldiers as God had said they could do (**vs. 2**).

There are times when God rewards us here on earth for our faithfulness and obedience. But there are other times when we receive nothing for our faithfulness...until we get to heaven!

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- **God doesn’t work the same way twice**. Every situation brings a unique opportunity to see God at work. That’s why we should never try and duplicate how we observe God at work in other places or in

other people's lives and expect Him to work the same way again. That's why it is essential to keep a *vertical* view instead of a *horizontal* view. Look to heaven...not man.

- **Obedience and faith will always bring God's blessing (victory).**
- **Israel's failure led to repentance...after which came a second chance.** One defeat or failure doesn't signal the end of a believer's usefulness with God.