

JOSHUA

The Thrill of Victory

Joshua 8:1-29

**“We Have No Right To
Happiness”**

Saturday Evening Post

December 11, 1963







Hebrews 12:1

JOSHUA

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us



Joshua 8:1

JOSHUA

1 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; see, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.”

His Anger Was Satisfied

JOSHUA

**God Does Not Hold Grudges
Against Us.**

**He Does Not Require a
Probationary Period.**

**When the Lord Forgives, He
Forgives Completely.**

The Lord Encourages

JOSHUA

“Do not fear and do not be
dismayed.”

This confirms that the Lord's
anger has been abated, the sin has
been purged from Israel, and the
conquest is back on track.

Joshua 8:2

JOSHUA

2 “You shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king; you shall take only its spoil and its cattle as plunder for yourselves. Set an ambush for the city behind it.”

Notice:

JOSHUA

1. The Israelites are permitted to take spoil from this battle.
 - If only Achan had waited on God...
2. They are instructed to “set an ambush for the city.”
 - The Lord is giving Joshua a battle strategy that will capitalize on the defeat that they suffered in the previous chapter.

Joshua 8:3

JOSHUA

3 So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night.

Joshua 8:4-8

JOSHUA

4 He commanded them, saying, “See, you are going to ambush the city from behind it. 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 when they come out to meet us as at the first, we will flee before them. 6 They will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city, for they will say, ‘They are fleeing before us as at the first.’ So we will flee before them. 7 And you shall rise from your ambush and take possession of the city, for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand. 8 Then it will be when you have seized the city, that you shall set the city on fire. You shall do it according to the word of the Lord. See, I have commanded you.”

Joshua's Instructions

JOSHUA

1. Ambush force will hide “behind” the city, to the west
2. Joshua and the main force will approach in plain sight, to the north
3. The main force will flee at the advance of the enemy army (just as they did in Ch. 7)
4. The ambush force will then seize the city and burn it with fire

Spiritual Elements

JOSHUA

- **v. 7:** “for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand”
- **v. 8:** “You shall do it according to the word of the Lord. See, I have commanded you.”

Joshua 8:9

JOSHUA

9 So Joshua sent them away, and they went to the place of ambush and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua spent that night among the people.

Bethel and Ai

JOSHUA

- **Genesis 12:8** – “From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with *Bethel on the west and Ai on the east*. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.”
- **Joshua 7:2** – “Joshua sent men from Jericho to *Ai*, which is near Beth-aven, *east of Bethel*, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” And the men went up and spied out Ai.”

BIBLICAL SETTING

Shechem ■

HILL COUNTRY

Bethel ■

■ Ai?

Gibeon ■

■ Gibeah

Jericho ■

■ Gilgal?

Jerusalem ■

■ Adam

■ Abel-shittim

A M M O N

M O A



Joshua 8:10

JOSHUA

10 Now Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai.

Notice:

JOSHUA

- These are the same elders who tore their clothing and prayed before the Lord in Chapter 7.
- Even in this chapter, where the battle strategy takes center stage, this endeavor is still a spiritual battle, and the spiritual leaders of Israel take the lead.

Joshua 8:11-13

JOSHUA

11 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. **12** And he took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. **13** So they stationed the people, all the army that was on the north side of the city, and its rear guard on the west side of the city, and Joshua spent that night in the midst of the valley.

Joshua 8:14-15

JOSHUA

14 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. **15** Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.

Joshua 8:16-17

JOSHUA

16 And all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. **17** So not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out after Israel, and they left the city unguarded and pursued Israel.

Identical to Chapter 7

JOSHUA

- 7:5 – The men of Ai “pursued them”
- 8:16 – They “pursued Joshua”
- In Chapter 7, the men of Ai were successful.
- In Chapter 8, the ruse works perfectly, as “not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out after Israel.”

We May Think...

JOSHUA

**This is a foolish move
by the men of Ai.**

**However, consider the
situation.**

A Surprise:

JOSHUA

**Where Did
Bethel Come
From?**

Bethel in the OT:

JOSHUA

- Abraham pitches his tent and offers sacrifice to God there (Gen. 12:8; 13:3)
- Jacob had a dream from God and built an alter there (Gen. 28:10-22); he also moves to Bethel in Gen. 35
- It had been a Canaanite city in the centuries preceding the Conquest



TO JERICHO

DEIR DIBWAN

ASSAULT
FORCE

SITE OF
BATTLE

IRON AGE
VILLAGE

EARLY BRONZE
TEMPLE

AI

SADDLE

AMBUSH
FORCE

AERIAL VIEW OF AI

Joshua 8:18-19

JOSHUA

18 Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.” So Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. **19** The men in ambush rose quickly from their place, and when he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it, and they quickly set the city on fire.

Play on Words

JOSHUA

- Joshua was to stretch out the weapon “in your hand” (*běyadka*) because God was going to give the city “into your hand” (*běyadkā*).
- The weapon itself was not going to win the victory; God was going to give it.

And Just
Like
Jericho

**Ai is
burned.**



Joshua 8:20-23

JOSHUA

20 When the men of Ai turned back and looked, behold, the smoke of the city ascended to the sky, and they had no place to flee this way or that, for the people who had been fleeing to the wilderness turned against the pursuers. **21** When Joshua and all Israel saw that the men in ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and slew the men of Ai. **22** The others came out from the city to encounter them, so that they were trapped in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side; and they slew them until no one was left of those who survived or escaped. **23** But they took alive the king of Ai and brought him to Joshua.

Perfect Execution

JOSHUA

The ambush works as planned, and the men of Ai were caught between the ambush force and the main force who have now turned back to attack:

“they were trapped in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side”

No survivors, no fugitives.

The King of Ai

JOSHUA

8:2 – “You shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king”

The fate of Jericho’s king was not recorded, but we can assume he suffered a similar fate.

By the Way...

JOSHUA

It is safe to assume that this smoke was visible from every direction.

Ai would have been visible from Gibeon, which becomes important in Chapter 9.

Joshua 8:24-25

JOSHUA

24 Now when Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the field in the wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them were fallen by the edge of the sword until they were destroyed, then all Israel returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. **25** All who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000—all the people of Ai.

Just like Jericho

JOSHUA

- Ai is *cherem*, and everyone in the city is destroyed.
- This is the only battle in the book of Joshua where the casualty numbers are recorded; in this case, 12,000 are killed at Ai.
- I think it is recorded as a contrast to the 36 Israelites who were killed in the previous battle.

Once Again...

JOSHUA

We bristle at the execution of women and children (and justifiably so).

But just as Achan's sin infected "all of Israel," the sin of the Canaanites has defiled every living soul in the land.

Joshua 8:26

JOSHUA

26 For Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.



Reminiscent of Exodus 17:8-16

Joshua 8:27

JOSHUA

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.

God Gives the Blessing

JOSHUA

- Contrasted with the disobedience of Achan in Chapter 7, here “Israel took only the cattle and spoil of that city as plunder...according to the word of the Lord which He had commanded Joshua.”
- **A faithful people are an obedient people and are blessed accordingly.**

28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation until this day.

“a heap”

tel (תל)



Joshua:

JOSHUA

“made it a heap
forever, a
desolation until
this day”

Ai (et-Tell), 1933





The heap of stones at Ai. I have added a six-foot stick-man for scale.
Photo from "Les Fouilles de 'Ay (et-Tell)'" by Judith Marquet-Krause.

Turn to:

JOSHUA

Deuteronomy

13:12-18



Et-Tell Early Bronze temple interior

Joshua 8:29

JOSHUA

29 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.

The King is Executed

JOSHUA

- Deuteronomy 21:22 –

“If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree”

This was a common wartime practice, and in chapter 10, the Amorite kings will suffer the same fate.

The Law was Observed

JOSHUA

- Deuteronomy 21:23 –

“his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.”

Full Circle

JOSHUA

- The conflict with Ai began with Israel fleeing from the city gate in 7:5, and it ends with the King of Ai being buried in that very spot under a heap of stones.
- He suffers the same burial as Achan (the language is identical), which again exhibits God's unbending holiness in dealing with sin.

Interestingly Enough...

JOSHUA

The gate at Bethel was
discovered by
archaeologists.

It was buried under a
heap of stones.



From
The
Pilgrim's
Progress



Galatians 3:13

JOSHUA

13 Christ 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”

A.W. Pink,
The Scriptures and Christ



“It is impossible to seriously believe that it was my sins which caused the Son of God to shed His precious blood without my hating them. If Christ groaned under sin, we shall groan, too. And the more sincere those groanings be, the more earnestly shall we seek grace for deliverance from all that displeases, and strength to do all that which pleases our blessed Redeemer.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

JOSHUA

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

JOSHUA