

Joshua 8

The momentum Israel had achieved by the miraculous crossing of the Jordan and the supernatural victory over Jericho was stopped by the defeat at Ai. Gloom and despair permeated not only all those in the camp but also the heart of Joshua.

What is the significance of God's opening statement of v. 1a? With Achan's crime judged, God's favor toward Israel was restored and He reassured Joshua that He had not forsaken him or the people.

At this crucial time in Joshua's life, it was good to be reminded and reassured that God was ready to lead if Joshua were ready to listen to *His* plan, which he was.¹

What was God's strategic plan that He revealed to Joshua (vv. 1b-2)? Once again, go back into battle against Ai but take the entire army with you this time. I guarantee you will be victorious. Kill all the people.

What was different about the battle plan this time (v. 2)? Plunder was allowed. Before the actual plan of battle was revealed to Joshua, he was told that the spoils of Ai, including its livestock, could be taken by Israel. Jericho had been placed under the ban but Ai was not.²

What was the strategy for the capture of Ai that Joshua passed to his fighting men (vv. 3-4)? The outworking of this plan involved three contingents of soldiers. The first contingent was a group of 30,000 warriors. They were sent by night as a future ambush to hide behind the city of Ai.

Who made up the second contingent and what was their strategy to be (vv. 5-8)? The second contingent consisted of Joshua and the rest of the soldiers. They would approach Ai from its front—where the main gate was. When the soldiers of Ai came out of the city to attack the Israelites, Joshua and his force would retreat before them and draw them away from Ai. Then, when the men had deserted the city to pursue Joshua, the 30,000 Israelite warriors who were hiding in ambush were to take possession of the city and set it on fire as the Lord had commanded.

Who made up the third contingent (v. 12)? It was apparently another ambush party numbering 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.³

How did the King of Ai respond (v. 14)? The plan worked to perfection. When the king of Ai saw Israel's army, he took the bait. Hurrying out with all the men of Ai to engage the Israelites in battle, they knew nothing of the ambush that had been set by Joshua,

What move did Joshua make next (v. 15)? He pretended to be retreating, a show of apparent weakness and fear.

How did the men of Ai respond (vv. 16-17)? Every man left his duties in the city in pursuit of Joshua.

Evidently the fighting men from Bethel, Ai's neighbor, joined with the soldiers of Ai to repulse Israel. These two cities had apparently made a treaty for mutual defense, or at least had agreed to help one another on this occasion. This left Ai unguarded as well as Bethel.⁴

What did the Lord direct Joshua to do (v. 18)? Hold out toward Ai the javelin he was carrying and God would deliver the cities into his hands. This was apparently the trigger that mobilized the ambush.

When Joshua held out the javelin, what happened next (v. 19)? At Joshua's signal the 30,000 troops quickly entered and captured the city and set it on fire.

What did the men of Ai see and realize (v. 20)? The dismay of the men of Ai was complete as they witnessed the billows of flame and smoke rising into the sky.

What did Joshua and his men do at that time (v. 21)? They quit retreating, turned around and attacked their pursuers.

What was the end result in the battle (vv. 22)? Before the men of Ai could gather their wits they were caught in a pincer movement of Israelite soldiers and were destroyed.

What happened to the king of Ai (v. 23)? He was captured and brought before Joshua.

When Joshua and his men had killed all the men of Ai, what did they do next (vv. 25-28)? After killing all of Ai's soldiers, Joshua continued to hold out his javelin until Israel's army reentered the city and killed all its inhabitants. The dead soldiers and citizens totaled 12,000. Plunder was taken from the city by Israel's soldiers as God had said they could do (v. 2). The city was made a heap of ruins.

Thus Israel, restored to God's favor, won a great victory. After initial failure came a second chance. One defeat or failure does not signal the end of a believer's usefulness for God.⁵

What did Joshua do to the king of Ai (v. 29)? Ai's king, previously spared, was hanged on a tree till evening and then was buried beneath a pile of stones (cf. Achan's similar burial, 7:26). The king's body was taken off the tree at sunset because of God's command (Deuteronomy 21:22-23; cf. Joshua 10:27).

Instead of continuing his conquest of Canaanite strongholds, what did Joshua do next (vv. 30-31)? After the victory of Ai, Joshua led the Israelites on a spiritual pilgrimage in order to carry out God's instructions for the renewal of the Mosaic Covenant in the land (Deuteronomy 27:2-8).

What were the three major components of their covenant-renewing ceremony (vv. 31-35)?

v. 31. First, an altar of uncut stones was erected on Mount Ebal and sacrifices (consisting of burnt offerings and fellowship offerings; cf. Leviticus. 1 & 3) were offered to the LORD. Jericho and Ai, in which the false gods of the Canaanites were worshiped, had fallen. Israel now publicly worshiped and proclaimed her faith in the one true God.⁶

v. 32. Second, Joshua set up some large stones. On their surfaces he wrote a copy of the Law of Moses. How much of the Law was inscribed is not stated. Some suggest only the Ten Commandments were written, while others think the stone inscription included the contents of at least Deuteronomy 5-26.⁷

vv. 33-35. Third, In obedience to the Word of God (Deuteronomy 27:2-6), Joshua read all the words of the Book of the Law of Moses to the people....including the blessings and the curses. Half of the people were positioned on the slopes of Mount Gerizim to the south, the other half were on the slopes of Mount Ebal to the north, and Joshua and the Ark of the Covenant, surrounded by priests, were in the valley between.⁸

¹ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 346.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Joshua, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 79.

⁵ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 347.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.