

STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

them in the earth, which could hardly have been done so secretly that his sons and daughters knew nothing of it. By doing this he had made his family participators in his theft. They, therefore, fell under the ban along with him, together with his tent, his cattle, and the rest of his property, which were all involved in the consequences of his crime.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 7

1. What town did Israel attack after destroying Jericho?
2. What was the name of the man who sinned?
3. Of what tribe was the man who sinned?
4. How many men had Joshua sent against Ai?
5. How many men of Israel were smitten in the battle?
6. What items had been stolen from the spoils?
7. Where had these stolen items been hidden?
8. What name was given to the place where the sinner was punished?
9. Were the sinner's wife and family destroyed with him?
10. Were the sinner's oxen, sheep, asses, and tent destroyed with him?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 8

Vv. 1- 8 *Plans for attacking Ai again.* After God encouraged Joshua, he laid plans for attacking Ai a second time. On this occasion he decided to use ambushes behind the city. The main attacking force was instructed to retire from before the city expecting that the men of Ai would come out to chase them. When the men of Ai were out of the city, those who had been set in ambush would be able to go in and take the city.

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Vv. 9-29 *The conquest of Ai.* Joshua's strategy worked very effectively. He set a second ambush to make sure that there would be a sufficient force to take the city after the main attacking force had withdrawn. In this way the city was completely destroyed.

Vv. 30-35 *The altar erected on Mount Ebal.* In keeping with the instructions Moses had given, the people of Israel went to the center of Canaan and erected an altar. Joshua served the Lord. He led the people to worship God in an acceptable way.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Trust and obey.* The song which is sung so often in church by this title carries a lot of meaning with it. There is no other way to be happy with God but to trust and obey. Joshua found this out as he made his second expedition against Ai. When the people had failed to obey God, they were defeated. When they purged the sin from the camp, God said to Joshua, "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed . . . I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land" (8:1). When Joshua obeyed God, he was able to capture the city.
2. *To fight against God is to lose.* This lesson was learned by the men of Ai and Bethel as they went out to fight against the armies of Israel. They did not even take the precaution of leaving a guard in the city. We read, "There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel . . . : and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel" (8:17). Since they had won the first battle, they thought ultimate victory would surely be theirs. This is true in

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the spiritual realm as well as in the area of military engagements. Gamaliel had the wisdom to advise his colleagues to be careful, "lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:39).

3. *To God belongs the glory.* After the people had successfully attacked Ai, Joshua led them to Mount Ebal where they built an altar, wrote on it the Law of Moses, offered thereon burnt offerings unto the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. Moses had commanded them to do this before he died, and Joshua kept faith with Moses. It was the natural thing for them to do after God had given them such complete victories at Jericho and Ai. Every Christian ought to give God thanks whenever a victory is won in the name of Christ.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Plans for Attacking Ai Again 8:1-8

And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land:

2 And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee 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 out thirty thousand mighty men of valor, and sent them away by night.

4 And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready:

5 And I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when

they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them,

6 (For they will come out after us) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them.

7 Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand.

8 And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of the Lord shall ye do. See, I have commanded you.

1. *Why did God reassure Joshua? 8:1, 2*

God had given encouragement to Joshua when he first commissioned him soon after the death of Moses. He had also given him instructions and encouragement as Israel made the first attack against Jericho. Since they had entered into an ill-fated campaign against Ai at first and were utterly routed, Joshua might have fallen into deep discouragement. As a matter of fact, we know he fell to the earth upon his face and rent his clothes in deep sorrow over the defeat which Israel had suffered. It was, therefore, good for God to encourage Joshua to make this second attack.

2. *Why were the people of Israel allowed to take spoil from Ai? 8:2*

God had prohibited them from taking any spoils of war from the city of Jericho. When they made the attack against Ai, He said, "Only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves" (verse 2). The firstfruits of the land belonged to the Lord. The firstborn of man and beast belonged to God. It appears that God took the spoils of war from the first city, Jericho; but He allowed the Israelites to keep the spoils from the other cities for themselves.

3. *How many men went out against Ai the second time?*
8:3

Probably some two hundred thousand men were sent against Ai in the second campaign. As only one third of the two and one-half tribes crossed Jordan, probably about one third of the other men were required to go out to battle. From these Joshua selected thirty thousand brave men and sent them forth in the night with instructions to station themselves as an ambush behind the town and not far from it. Since the distance from Gilgal to Ai was about fifteen miles and the road runs almost straight in a northwesterly direction from Jericho through Wady Faran, the detachment sent out might easily accomplish the distance in a night and arrive on the western side of Ai before the break of day.

4. *Where were the thirty thousand men to hide?* 8:3

In a very specific way God directed the campaign against Ai. He told Joshua, "Lay thee an ambush for the city behind it" (verse 2). The spot for hiding the men must have been on the west side of the city. This would have been behind the city from the location of Joshua's camp to the east. The road that goes by Ai and leads to Bethel dips out of sight just west of Ai. The roadway is hidden from view by a ridge of broken rocks. The rocks would enable an ambush to conceal itself and yet it would not be very far from the city. If these men were hidden at the spot, they would be at an excellent position to rush into the city after the main force fled toward the Jordan Valley, and were pursued by the soldiers of Bethel and Ai.

5. *How many people did Joshua take with him?* 8:5

Joshua evidently stayed with the main force of the Israelite army. If he sent some thirty thousand for the major ambush and then later sent another five thousand (verse 12), he probably took some one hundred and sixty-five thousand men with him. This calculation is based

on the supposition that he did not demand more than a third of the total number of men available to him to take part in the campaign. This would leave four hundred thousand men to handle the military provisions and to care for the women and children.

6. *In what way was burning the city according to the commandment of God? 8:8*

God had strictly warned the people against leaving any of the idolatrous objects of worship in the land of Canaan. The people were instructed to tear down their high places, break up the images, and destroy the altars of these people. Their campaign was to be one of utter destruction. For that reason, Joshua could say that they were to set the city on fire according to the commandment of the Lord. Furthermore, God had carefully instructed them on this occasion to set an ambush behind the city. His directions with regard to the attack on Ai were quite specific, and Joshua very properly referred to his instructions for their razing the city as being according to the commandment of the Lord.

The Conquest of Ai 8:9-29

9 Joshua therefore sent them forth; and they went to lie in ambush, and abode behind Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people.

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

11 And all the people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now there was a valley between them and Ai.

12 And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

13 And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

14 And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in 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 And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city.

17 And there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.

18 And the Lord said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city.

19 And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand: and they entered into the city, and took it, and hasted and 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 up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that way: and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers.

21 And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai.

22 And the other issued out of the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and

some on that side: and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape.

23 And 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 wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword.

25 And so it was, that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai.

26 For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

27 Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of the Lord which he commanded Joshua.

28 And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it a heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day.

29 And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcass down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, that remaineth unto this day.

7. *Why did Joshua number the people?* 8:10

After Joshua had sent forth the thirty thousand men to lie in ambush on the west side of Ai, he stayed with the main army himself through the night. Early in the morning he rose up and prepared his soldiers for battle. In this preparation he numbered them and evidently set them in groups and battalions so that they might wage an orderly

battle. At this time Joshua must have decided how many men he would take with him in the main force. The others would be left behind to protect the women, children, and supplies of the Israelites.

8. *Who were the elders of the people?* 8:10

The elders of Israel are not military tribunes who were called elders because of their superiority in military affairs; but, as in every other case, the heads of the people who accompanied Joshua as counselors. Neither were these elders to be compared with the officers of the New Testament church. They were the people who had reached an age in life where their experience and wisdom fitted them for places of leadership. It was to these that the younger men looked for their guidance and counsel.

9. *Was a second ambush sent out?* 8:12

Joshua evidently sent out two different groups to besiege the city and take it by surprise. After he had placed the troops on the northwest to come in behind the city opposite the direction of the attack of the main body of the Israelite army, he evidently foresaw a need for another group to cut off any possible assistance from Bethel and sent them to take up their positions southwest of Ai. Some commentators believe that a scribal error has been made here, but without sufficient grounds.

10. *Did the men of Bethel help the men of Ai?* 8:12

It is evident from verse twelve and other references that the inhabitants of Bethel, which was a very short journey from Ai, took part in the battle. Probably this was in consequence of a treaty which the king of Ai had made with them in the expectation of a renewed and still stronger attack on the part of the Israelites. Later on the kings in the South banded together in what has been called the southern coalition. At least five kings were in this league. Still later the kings in the North grouped themselves together under the leadership of Jabin, king of

Hazor. Once again several kings entered into this league. It is not unusual to find these kinds of coalitions, and it was a very natural thing for Bethel and Ai to enter in to this kind of an agreement.

11. *Where did Joshua station himself?* 8:13

Joshua evidently exposed his army in a valley which lay to the east of Ai. He must have placed himself on some promontory where his signal could be seen by those who were in the ambush. It is quite possible that he had stationed other lookouts who could pass along the signal; but wherever the army was, it must have been in a place which encouraged the king of Ai to attack.

12. *Why did the Israelites flee?* 8:15

The king of Ai was anxious to enter into the second battle with Israel. Their position was not strategically advantageous to them, and so the king felt he could win another victory. Moreover, he had defeated these men in the first skirmish, and he was not at all hesitant to join battle with them again. Joshua and the Israelites pretended they were being beaten again. They fled back toward the Jordan Valley and the wilderness from which they had come.

13. *Why did the Canaanites leave Ai unprotected?* 8:17

The first battle between the men of Ai and the Israelites had been won by the Canaanites. In the second engagement it appeared the victory was also going to be won by the king of Ai. For that reason, he mustered all his men to pursue after them. He wanted the second victory to be complete. In doing this he drew out all his men both from Ai and from Bethel. There was not a single soldier left to guard the city.

14. *How could the ambush see Joshua?* 8:19

The raising of the javelin would probably be visible at considerable distance. It may have been provided with a small flag, as both earlier and later commentators assume.

Joshua himself would hardly be in the midst of the flying Israelites, but would take his station as commander upon some height on one side. The men in ambush would have scouts posted to watch for the signal, which had certainly been arranged beforehand. They would relay the information to the others.

15. *Why were the men of Ai without power?* 8:20

The original language used the word "hands" for "power." When the ambush went into Ai and set it on fire, the sight of the city burning left the men of Ai without strength. They were so surprised and shocked that they were thrown into confusion. They did not know which way to turn. There were Israelites behind them and Israelites in front of them. Others were probably guarding the routes of escape on either side. The victory was complete for the Israelites. The sight of the city burning had a different effect upon the men of Israel. This was a signal to them to begin the slaughter of the Canaanites. As a result, the Israelites did not let any of the men of Ai escape.

16. *What was done with the king of Ai?* 8:23

The king of Ai was taken alive as a prisoner of war. The soldiers brought him to Joshua. Joshua was in the midst of the engagement and did not want to take time to give an order with regard to the disposition of the king at that time. Later on we read that the king of Ai was hanged (verse 29). His body was left there until evening. It was then taken down and buried. The law had been given in Deuteronomy 21:22, 23 with regard to such matters. The king of Ai was hanged upon a tree and then his body may have been suspended on a stake (see Numbers 25:4) until the evening. At sunset Joshua had him taken down and thrown at the entrance of the town gate. A heap of stones was piled upon him.

17. *How many men of Ai were killed?* 8:25

The total casualty list of the men of Ai numbered twelve thousand both of men and of women. These were all the inhabitants of the city. Joshua's campaign was a campaign of total annihilation, and he followed the commandment of the Lord completely. There is never any evidence that he enjoyed the bloody conquest which he waged, but it was the only way to eradicate this festering sore from the face of the earth. The cup of iniquity of the Canaanites was full, and God's vengeance fell upon them.

The Altar Erected on Mount Ebal 8:30-35

30 Then Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in mount Ebal,

31 As Moses the servant of the Lord commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings.

32 And he wrote thereupon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.

33 And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

18. *When had Joshua been commanded to build the altar at Ebal?* 8:31

Joshua was instructed of Moses in Deuteronomy 27, that, after the crossing of the Jordan, he was to build an altar upon Mount Ebal for establishing the covenant. The fulfillment of these instructions came in this solemn act. The symbolical setting up of the law of the Lord to be the invariable rule of life to the people of Israel in the land of Canaan was a practical expression of thanksgiving on the part of the nation for its entrance into this land through the almighty assistance of God. It was also a practical acknowledgement that in the overthrow of the Canaanites thus far the nation had received a strong pledge of the conquest of the foes that still remained. The capture of the whole of the Promised Land would follow if they persevered in faithfulness to the Lord.

19. *What is the meaning of ". . . he wrote in the presence"?* 8:32

The law was probably written on or in the plaster with which these pillars were coated. This could easily be done, and such writing was common in ancient times. Archaeologists have seen numerous specimens of it certainly more than two thousand years old. Some are still as distinct as when they were first inscribed on the plaster. The investigation of the Egyptian monuments has shown that it was an ancient Egyptian custom first to plaster the stone walls of buildings, and also monumental stones that were to be painted with figures and hieroglyphics with a plaster of lime and gypsum into which the figures were worked. Thus it was possible in Egypt to engrave on the walls the

most extensive pieces of writing. In this manner Deuteronomy 27:4-8 must be understood, and in this manner it was accomplished by Joshua.

20. *How were the people arranged?* 8:33

We read that Joshua arranged "half of them over against mount Gerizim." These were those who had sprung from the lawful wives of Jacob—Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin (Deuteronomy 27:12). He also stationed "half of them over against mount Ebal." These were Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali (Deuteronomy 27:13). Five of these had sprung from the handmaids of Leah and Rachel, to whom Reuben is added, probably on account of his great sin (Genesis 35:22, cf. Genesis 49:3, 4).

21. *What were ". . . blessings and cursings"?* 8:34

In Deuteronomy 27 a list of curses were brought out by Moses. They were these:

- a. Idolatry (Deuteronomy 27:15)
- b. Contempt of parents (v. 16)
- c. Removing a neighbor's landmark (v. 17)
- d. Inhumanity towards the blind, strangers, orphans, widows (vs. 18,19)
- e. Incest and unnatural crimes (vs. 20-23)
- f. Murder (vs. 24, 25)
- g. In general, against the transgression of the Law (v. 26)

There were also the following blessings in Deuteronomy 28

- a. In the city and on the field (Deuteronomy v. 3)
- b. On all births (v. 4)
- c. On the basket and on the kneading-trough (v. 5)
- d. On going out and coming in (v. 6)
- e. On the arms of Israel in contest with their enemies (v. 7)
- f. On their position among the nations (v. 9-14)

As Joshua read the words of the Law, the people had a

visual presentation of the way in which some of them would keep the commandments of God and be blessed while others would disobey God's laws and be cursed. Not everyone who begins the Christian life will be faithful unto death and be saved. Many are called, but few are chosen. Some go in the broad way to destruction, but only a few go in the narrow gate to life. So was it in the camp of Israel. Some stood to represent the blessed; others, the cursed.

22. *Could all the people hear?* 8:35

It is impossible to conceive a spot more admirably adapted for the purpose than this one. It was in the very center of the newly acquired land. None could more exactly fulfill all the required conditions. Imagine the chiefs and the priests gathered in the center of the valley. The tribes were stretching out as they stood in compact masses. The men of war and the heads of families, half on the north and half on the south, were crowding the slopes on either side. The mixed multitude was also there with the women and the children extending along in front until they spread into the plain beyond. There is no difficulty, much less impossibility, in the problem. A single voice could be heard by many thousands, the sound being shut in and conveyed up and down by the enclosing hills. People in such mountainous countries are able, from long practice, to pitch their voices so as to be heard distinctly at distances almost incredible. They talk with persons across enormous wadies, and give the most minute directions, which are perfectly understood. In doing this they seem to speak very little louder than their usual tone of conversation.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 8

1. Was Israel allowed to take spoil of war from Ai?
2. How many men did Joshua put in the first ambush?

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3. How many men did Joshua put in the second ambush?
4. From what city did soldiers come to help the men of Ai?
5. What weapon of war did Joshua hold in his hand as a signal?
6. How many people of Ai fell in the battle?
7. By what means was the king of Ai killed?
8. Where did Joshua lead the people to erect an altar?
9. What did Joshua write on the stones of the altar?
10. Before what other mountain did half the people stand?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 9

- Vv. 1-2 *The league of kings against Israel.* Moses had led the people in fighting against the kings east of the Jordan. Joshua had successfully fought against the king of Jericho and the kings of Ai and Bethel. The rest of the kings who were west of the Jordan gathered themselves together to form a league to fight against Joshua and Israel.
- Vv. 3-15 *Deceit of the Gibeonites.* One group of the Hivites, the Gibeonites, knew the only hope they had for survival was to make peace with Joshua. These people and Rahab are the only ones we find throughout the entire length and breadth of the land who made an effort to save themselves from the destruction which was coming upon them. Although these men deceived Joshua and the leaders of Israel, they are commended inasmuch as they realized the futility of opposing the wrath of God. Joshua and the elders acted very ill-advisedly in not asking the Lord's will in the matter. They were impressed with the false evidence which