

THE VICTORY AT AI

BIBLE TEXT : Joshua 8:1-35

LESSON 173 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life" (Revelation 22:14).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Joshua 8:1-35

¹ 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 valour, 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.

⁹ Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between 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,

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Victory Through Obedience

Israel had been taught a good lesson through the defeat they had suffered at Ai. God showed them that they must obey Him if they wanted His help.

God did not change His plan for the Israelites to conquer the city of Ai. He wanted to give victory to His people; and when the sin was confessed, and the sinner destroyed, God was willing to lead again into battle — this time with triumph assured. God promised that this city would be destroyed just as Jericho had been when they besieged it according to His command.

Sometimes people who have started to serve God, disobey Him, and backslide. He had blessed them so long as they obeyed Him; but when sin crept in, the Lord left them. A person in that condition is not hopelessly condemned to be lost. If he will willingly confess his sin and be sorry for it, Jesus will forgive and will restore him to favor.

Perhaps God had given that person a work to do which he failed to do; and that failure became sin. When he repented, that work was still there and must be done.

Firstfruits

We have learned that the firstfruits of the harvest and of the increase of the flocks and herds of the Israelites belonged to God. Thus the spoil of battle which was taken at Jericho belonged to God as the first- fruits, because it was the first city taken in Canaan. Of course, the riches of Jericho must have looked very bright to the Israelites who had never seen such things during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. But if Achan had waited a little while God would have given him all he wanted of the spoils.

When God gave instructions to Joshua for the overthrow of Ai, He told him that the people could take everything they wanted: the gold and silver, the clothing, the cattle. Imagine how much they would enjoy helping themselves to all that wealth! The Israelites who waited until God told them they could have it, enjoyed all the riches; but Achan died for his lack of patience.

We, too, can learn a lesson in patience from this text. God sees what we have need of, and has promised to supply according to His riches in Glory. We have no right to try to go ahead and help ourselves because we think the blessings are too long in coming. David said: "I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope" (Psalm 130:5). And David enjoyed such great favor with. God that he became Israel's greatest king. We only get into trouble by trying to help ourselves.

God's Plan

God had the plan whereby the Israelites could conquer Ai. He was the Commander-in-Chief, and Joshua was His five-star general. The general was obedient to the plan.

First, Joshua sent 30,000 brave men on a secret mission. In the dark, they stole quietly to the west side of Ai, where they hid in ambush. Early the next morning Joshua took the rest of the soldiers and built an encampment north of Ai. That night he advanced with a small army into the valley that lay between them and the city.

The King's Overconfidence

The king of Ai perhaps thought that he had so thoroughly

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

routed the Israelites that they would never come back again. He may have laughed when he saw Joshua and his little company in the valley, daring to come up against his strong city. He arose early the next morning, and with his army set out to chase away those troublesome Israelites who were pestering him.

But the king had a surprise. He did not know about all the reinforcements Joshua had on the hill to the north, nor the thirty thousand soldiers lying in ambush near the west gates of his city. All he saw was Joshua and that little band in the valley. The king took all his soldiers along to enjoy the defeat of the Israelites. Even the soldiers of Bethel, a small town to the west, came out to help disgrace the soldiers of Israel.

Sinners often become presumptuous, or overconfident, and do not remember that God is taking care of His children. We read of King Nebuchadnezzar who commanded everyone in his kingdom to bow down to the image he had set up. He flew into a rage when he heard that the three Hebrew children would not bow down. He ordered them cast into the fire, and said: "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:15). God showed him! The fire which was so hot that it burned the guards who threw in the captives, could do no harm to God's children. Besides, the Lord Himself came down and walked with them in the fire. And when they were brought out of the furnace, there was not even a smell of smoke on their clothes.

David said he had seen the wicked in great power, "spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not.... Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace" (Psalm 37:35-37).

Joshua's Strategy

Joshua and his men turned and ran, just as the king thought they would. And all the army of Ai ran after them, until they were 'way out in the wilderness, far from their city. Then God told Joshua to lift up his spear as a signal to the soldiers in ambush to rise and take the city. The sun gleaming on the steel blade could be seen at a great distance. Up jumped the hidden bands! They ran into the city and took everything they wanted from the stores and the houses and the barns, and then they set fire to Ai.

Imagine the surprise of the soldiers of Ai and their king when they looked around and saw the great billows of smoke rising from their city. They were too far away to do anything about it; and the Israelite soldiers were coming at them from all directions, closing in for the victory. Joshua's army that day killed 12,000 people; and the city of Ai was left a heap of rubbish.

The army of Israel had taken the king prisoner, and brought him to Joshua. Joshua hanged him on a tree until evening, and then buried him near the gate of the wrecked city. A heap of stones was piled upon him to remind the people who saw it what would happen to the man who tried to fight against God and His people.

Thanks for Victory

The Israelites returned to their camp singing the victory song. They were loaded down with the prizes they had picked up in Ai. How happy they were that God had given them the victory! How happy we are when we obey God and He brings us forth conquerors!

Joshua remembered to give thanks to God for the victory. He built an altar unto God on Mount Ebal, just as Moses had been commanded. Upon this altar were offered sacrifices of praise unto God for peace.

And upon the sides of the altar Joshua wrote the Ten Commandments in sight of all the people. They were to be reminded daily that they must obey all the Word of God. Victory would come to them only as they obeyed God. Joshua read to them the blessings they

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 an 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 carcase 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.

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.

would receive for obedience; and also the curses that would come for disobedience.

Today we have the Bible with all the Law of God in it. We can know, if we want to, just what God wants us to do. And if we do not do it, we shall stand speechless before the Lord when He rises up in judgment.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Who planned the siege against Ai?
- 2 Describe the plan of attack.
- 3 What were the Israelites to receive as a prize for the battle?
- 4 What happened after the soldiers of Ai left their city?
- 5 Who won the victory? Why?
- 6 What happened to the people of Ai?
- 7 What happened to their city?
- 8 What did Joshua do after they returned to Israel's camp? 9 How may we gain victory over Satan?

³² And he wrote there upon 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.