

# The Book Of JOSHUA

## JOSHUA AND ISRAEL DEFEAT AI *Joshua 8:1-35*

### Overcoming Defeat

#### **Joshua 8:1-2**

*Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid, nor 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. And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it."*

### Words Of Discouragement

#### In The Shadow Of Defeat

The nation of Israel and its commander, Joshua

- Had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Ai and its army
- The national moral was at a low
- Joshua's approval rating had (no doubt) taken a hit

While the source of the defeat was the sin of Achan

- Joshua was not exempt from culpability
- If only he had sought the Lord, then the sin would have been exposed prior to an attack being made
- Joshua's failure to seek God resulted in the death of 36 men

### Escaping the Shadow Of Defeat

**Question:** Who has never faced defeat and discouragement in their life?

**Question:** Who has never been humiliated and afraid?

**Question:** Who has never felt guilt and been demoralised?

**Question:** What is the right response in the face of such feelings?

- It is not to wallow and continually think over your mistakes
- It is not to give up and reckon it a bad idea in the first place

Both of which were Joshua's kneejerk reactions:

**Wallow**            *So the Lord said to Joshua, "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?" **Joshua 7:10***

**Give up**            *"Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!" **Joshua 7:7***

The right response to such feelings, is:

- To repent of any unconfessed sin
- To spend time in the presence of the Lord
- We need to have victory in the Lord (over our feelings)
- Before we can have victory in life (over our circumstances)

### Illustration

Friend living in defeat

### Words Of Restoration

In **Joshua 8:1**, we read:

*Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid, nor dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai."*

### Joshua & The Lord

Joshua was clearly spending time with the Lord to be able to hear His voice

- How sweet it must have been to hear the voice of the Lord
- Especially after such a crashing defeat

**Question:** And what does the Lord say?  
**Answer:** *Do not be afraid, nor dismayed;*  
These are words of restoration (something we all need to hear)

## Moses & The Lord

### **Exodus 33:7-11**

- Tent of Meeting
- Erected outside the camp of Israel
- Where Moses would talk with the Lord
- Joshua did not depart from there

## You & The Lord

We all need to have a tent of meeting

- A place we can be alone with the Lord
- A place where we can be fed, encouraged, restored and built up with the Lord

The bedrock of your faith

- Should not be church, teaching, fellowship, worship
- Should be the time spent alone with the Lord

It is there God will

- Speak to you, like no man can speak
- Equip you, like no sermon can equip you
- Impress on you His character, to make you like Him

It is from the overflow of the time you spend with the Lord

- That your ministry will flow

## Words Of Direction

### Encouragement & Direction

From the presence of the Lord, Joshua received

- Words of encouragement
- Words of direction, *“take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai.”*

Time spent with the Lord will always result in

- Encouragement and direction

### Illustration

Guidance for the fellowship

## Victory & Direction

- Not only were words of direction given
- Words of victory accompanied them

### **Joshua 8:1b-2a**

*See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king.*

The Lord promised a victory to Joshua and Israel

- Victory was not dependent solely on the word of God's promise
- That word needed to be mingled with faith to become effective

### **Hebrews 4:2**

*For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.*

There are precious promises available for all to claim in Scripture

- Promises of victory, promises of reward
- They can only be claimed if they are received with / mingled with faith

## Strategy & Direction

When Joshua and Israel attacked Jericho

- The Lord gave a very clear strategy
- The Lord does the same again with Ai

### **Joshua 8:2c**

*Lay an ambush for the city behind it.*

It was to be a two-pronged attack

- A frontal assault (to draw the men Ai out)
- An ambush from behind (to cut them off and surround them)

The Lord has a new and different battle strategy with Ai and opposed to Jericho

- In every fresh battle we face in our walk with the Lord
- We need to have God's strategy instead of relying on yesterday's strategy

Jericho began with an open marche in daylight

- Ai began with a covert operation at night

Jericho involved a united army

- Ai involved a divided army

Jericho ended with a supernatural miracle

- Ai ended with a natural act of might

## Reward & Direction

### **Joshua 2:b**

*Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves.*

Again, in contrast to Jericho, the spoils of war could be claimed at Ai

At Jericho, the spoils of war were to "consecrated to the Lord" **Joshua 6:19**

The first fruits always belong to the Lord

- This is because the Lord is always to have the best
- We are to honour the Lord before we look to ourselves

If only Achan had waited for Ai

- He could have had all the riches his arms could hold
- He would not have had to hide or it or forfeit his life

Sometimes we have to forfeit what we want

- To acknowledge the Lord's place and authority in our life
- Then He will grant us what we desire once our hearts are truly yielded

## Military Campaign

### **Joshua 8:3-8**

*So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valour and sent them away by night. And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, "They are fleeing before us as at the first." Therefore we will flee before them. Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand. And it will be, when you have taken the city that you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the Lord you shall do. See I have commanded you.*

## The Army Is Commanded

The Lord gave Joshua the basic military strategy

- Joshua, being a seasoned commander, was well able to plan the specifics

- He mustered a force of 30,000 mighty men of valour (10 times the previous fighting force)
- He began by splitting the army into two military units

Ambush Division (led by Caleb?)

- 5,000 mighty men of valour (crack squad, SAS of Israel)
- They are to go on night manoeuvres to the far side of the city
- There they were to lie in wait, on the west side between Ai and Bethel

Decoy Division (led by Joshua)

- 25,000 mighty men of valour
- They would position themselves to the north of Ai
- The plan is to draw out the emboldened army of Ai from the city to fight
- The decoy division would then flee, giving the effect of defeat like last time
- This would draw the armies of Ai further from the city as they pursued
- Leaving the city open, abandoned and vulnerable

Ambush Division

- At the appropriate moment, Joshua would raise a signal to the 5,000 mighty men
- At which point they would rise from their hiding place, seize the city and set it on fire
- After which the armies of Ai would have no place to flee and could be totally routed

**Matthew Henry** observes

*What Joshua did in the stratagem is applicable to our Lord Jesus, of whom he was a type. Joshua conquered by yielding, as if he had himself been conquered; so our Lord Jesus, when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost, seemed as if death and triumphed over him, and as if he and all his interests had been routed and ruined; but in his resurrection he rallied again and gave the powers of darkness a total defeat; he broke the serpent's head, by suffering him to bruise his heel. A glorious stratagem!*

## The Army Is Divided

**Joshua 8:9**

*Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, in the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people.*

The Ambush division has been despatched

- They are lying in wait, sleeping in the open
- Joshua spends the night in Gilgal with the camp of Israel

**Joshua 8:10-11**

*Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the leaders of Israel, before the people to Ai. And all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now there was a valley between them and Ai.*

Early morning Joshua musters his army

- They travel to the north of Ai and set up camp, in full view of Ai
- There is natural defence between them, namely a valley

**Joshua 8:12-13**

*So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. And when they had placed the people, all the army that was on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.*

This is further clarification/summarisation of the action Joshua took

- It's from here we learn that the Ambush Division amounts to 5,000 men
- Whilst the majority of the army were stationed north of Ai.

With the troops in position, that evening Joshua explores the valley that separates Israel and Ai

- This appears to be a pattern of Joshua's behaviour
- He explored the ground outside Jericho before commencing that campaign
- That is when He had encountered the Commander of the Lord's Armies

Why Joshua does this is not clear

- Perhaps he is familiarising himself with the geography of the land before battle
- Perhaps he is clearing his head, replaying the battle strategy in his head
- Like a chess player contemplating eight moves ahead
- Maybe he is taking time to be alone with the Lord one more time

## The Army Is Pursued

### **Joshua 8:14-17**

*Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hastened and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel.*

The King of Ai is no doubt energised by his initial victory over Israel

- So, he does not hesitate to launch a second attack against the Hebrew aggressors
- His confidence and enthusiasm blind him to the hidden threat

If he had the poise that Joshua had

- Taken the time the night before to walk the land and consider his stratagem
- If he had sent out scouts to make a report of the threat
- The ambush division may well have been uncovered

### **2 Corinthians 4:4**

- Just as the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who are perishing
- So the mind of the King of Ai was blinded so that he would be among those perishing

Upon seeing the army of Ai emerge, Joshua and company make as if defeated and flee

- This only encourages the people of Ai to pursue
- Much in the same way Pharaoh and his armies were encouraged to pursue Israel through the Red Sea
- Like Egypt before, Ai will be routed as a result

It is now that it becomes clear that a confederacy existed between Ai and Bethel

- The army of Bethel joins in the pursuit of Israel
- However, Joshua is not deterred from his strategy
- Nor is he distracted into taking Bethel as well
- He maintains the goal of taking Ai alone

Often times the enemy will multiply his forces against you

- To distract and deter you
- We need to remain focussed on the battle the Lord has put before us

Ai is left open and exposed

- Not a single man is remains to defend the city

## The Army Is Transformed

### **Joshua 8:18-19**

*Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Stretch out the spear that is in your hand towards Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand towards the city. So those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hastened to set the city on fire.*

Within this conflict it is easy to start to think Joshua is the mastermind behind everything

- That is not the case, the Lord is in charge
- It is the Lord who now speaks to Joshua and tells him to send the signal to the Ambush Division
- Dutifully Joshua raises his spear; the agreed sign the ambush is to begin

### **Psalms 37:23**

*The steps of a warrior are ordered by the Lord*

The 5,000 mighty men of valour in hiding rise quickly

- They storm the city of Ai (meeting no resistance)
- Set it on fire, and smoke began to rise

### **Joshua 8:20-22**

*And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned on the pursuers. Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were caught in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape.*

The rising smoke was soon seen by both Israel and Ai

- For one it spelled victory
- For the other it spelled defeat

For the men of Ai

- As swiftly as their heads turned to see their home ablaze
- So their hearts turned to a place of utter failure and loss of power
- It's as if they stopped in their tracks, realising they had been fooled
- Knowing in a split-second all hope was gone

For the men of Israel

- Their hearts remained steadfast, having been fortified by the Lord
- Their army turned from running east to face west and begin to rout Ai
- What's more the Ambush Division left the city and closed in from the west
- The men of Ai were trapped with Israel either side
- Every last man was struck down, nobody escaped

## **The Army Is Victorious**

### **Joshua 8:23-29**

*But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand – all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the Lord which he commanded Joshua. So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day.*

## **The Fate Of The People**

Once all the men in field had been routed

- Israel returned to the city and wiped out all the inhabitants
- 12,000 souls perished that day

It would appear that when Joshua raised aloft his spear

- Marking the signal for the ambush to commence
- He continued to keep the spear aloft as a sign to keep fighting until he withdrew it
- The thing is he did not withdraw the spear, so the fighting continued until everyone was dead

This is reminiscent of Israel's battle with the Amalekites under Moses leadership

- Moses, Aaron and Hur scaled a hill to overlook the battle
- Moses held aloft the rod of God
- All the while the rod was held up Israel prevailed, but when Moses' arms weakened Amalek prevailed
- So Aaron and Hur helped keep Moses arms upright so Israel secured victory
- In that battle, Joshua was fighting for Israel

It would be easy to think on this blood bath

- And say it is revenge for the 36 Israelites who had been slain (disproportionate as that would be)
- However, that would be wrong – this is the judgement of God on a wicked people

- The people of Ai had time to repent, but they did not

### **Matthew Henry**

*God, the righteous Judge, had passed this sentence upon them for their wickedness, so that the Israelites were only the ministers of his justice and the executioners of his doom.*

Some look on hell as a disproportionate judgement on unbelievers

- But it is not, those who are cast into the lake fire do so at their own hand
- Everyone has an opportunity to repent and turn to the Lord and escape judgement
- It's fallen man's lack of appreciation of the holiness of God and the depravity of sin that misleads their perception of God's justice on this point

### **The Fate Of The King**

The king of Ai is taken alive and brought before Joshua

- We are not told how he was executed, perhaps stoning, perhaps by the sword
- That he was hanged on a tree is not to infer his means of death
- This is act of obedience to the Law of God

### **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, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.*

Even in the death of the enemies of God

- There was to respect and dignity given to the body
- This set Israel apart from the foreign nations that surrounded them
- Who would leave the dead to eaten by scavengers and to rot on stakes, etc.

So the children of Israel

- Took the livestock and the possession of Ai as booty ("*according to the word of the Lord*")
- The obedience and faithfulness of Israel brought reward
- We as the children of God will be rewarded for our obedience and faithfulness too

### **The Fate Of Bethel**

You may legitimate ask, what of Bethel?

- They were confederate with Ai and joined them for the battle
- We assume their army were defeated with that of Ai
- But the city would have been conquered sometime later

**Joshua 12** issues a list of the kings of Canaan that were conquered

**Vs 9** the king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is beside Bethel, one;

**Vs 16** the king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one;

Bethel had its defeating awaiting them

## **Rededication Of Israel**

The closing events of this chapter occurred sometime after the victory at Ai

- Joshua led the children of Israel some 30 miles north to Shechem
- To the valley that lies between Mount Gerizim and Ebal
- Here Israel is rededicated to the Lord

### **Joshua 8:30-32**

*Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had 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 has wielded any iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.*

## **Offerings of Rededication**

It is glorious thing to be in a place of victory

- However, if you have won that victory in the shadow of recent defeat
- You are move acutely aware that it is the Lord that has given you that victory

As such, the humble heart, wants to acknowledge the Lord's hand

- So it is that Joshua builds an altar on the nearby Mount Ebal (in accordance to Moses' instruction)
- There he offers both burnt offerings and peace offerings

## Burnt Offering

The first burnt offering in Scripture was on Mount Moriah

- When Abraham followed God's instruction to sacrifice his son, Isaac
- The Lord intervened at the crucial moment and provided a ram
- A foreshadowing of the Father sacrificing His Son Jesus

The burnt offering was later codified in the Mosaic Law in **Leviticus 1**

- The offering had to be of a male animal
- The entire animal would be consumed by fire
- It was the most common of sacrifices in Israel
- Sometimes offered at a time of cleansing
- Offered to make atonement for people's sin

The burnt offering is

- A sacrifice for sin
- A sacrifice of cleansing

## Peace Offering

Was codified in **Leviticus 3**

- The sacrifice could be of a male or female animal
- This sacrifice was only partly burnt before the Lord
- Part of the flesh of the animal was given to the person to eat
- As such it is seen as a meal between the individual and the Lord where they both participate

Some translations call it the fellowship offering

- Which is an appropriate title as it signifies fellowship with the Lord

It was an offering made by way of thanksgiving or by way of vow

- It was largely voluntary
- It illustrated a heart devoted to the Lord
- There was no obligation to make the offering

As Joshua offers these sacrifices on Mount Ebal

- It is a time of rededication to God for him and the whole nation of Israel
- It is acknowledging that the victory was due to the Lord (not themselves)
- It is atoning for their sin, but also a time of fellowship with the Lord

## Declarations of Rededication

### Writing the Law

Joshua also wrote out a copy of the Law of Moses on stone

- This is not chipping out the words with hammer and chisel
- Rather wet clay tablets and the words indented
- The clay would set, perhaps even be burnt, the words would be set in stone

This is an interesting act

- Each new king of Israel was obligated by the law to write out a copy of the law after their coronation
- It is an act of devotion and dedication, undertaken at a time of new beginnings

It's as if Joshua is saying

- We broke you law through Achan's sin
- Now we rededicated ourselves to you, Lord, this is a new beginning

## Reading the Law

### **Joshua 8:33**

*Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterwards he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.*

This action is in obedience to the command given by Moses in **Deuteronomy 27 and 28**

- Joshua would read the entire Law of Moses
- These are the statutes of the covenant relationship between God and Israel

Half the nation stood on Mount Gerizim

- Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin
- They declared the blessings for obedience to the covenant law

Half nation would stand on Mount Ebal

- Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali
- They declared the cursings for disobedience to the covenant law

Typically, when a covenant was cut between two parties

- An animal was divided in two
- Those making the covenant would declare the terms of the covenant
- Then the parties would walk through the divided animal

In this instance

- It is the nation that is divided
- The terms of the covenant are read

The curses that would fall on Israel would come in five cycles

- A cycle of discipline would fall on Israel for not observing the terms of the covenant
- If this discipline did not lead to repentance, a second cycle would be initiated by God
- The fifth cycle would see Israel cast out of the land and dispersed among the nations
- When Israel was invaded and expelled into captivity by Babylon
- When Israel was invaded by Rome and then expelled from the land
- This was in fulfilment of the covenant terms laid down on this day

## Promise of Restoration

There is a final promise given in **Deuteronomy 30:1-3**

*Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey his voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.*

It is hugely significant that Israel returned to the land in 1948

- A return to the land indicates a return to the Lord
- There is a rising number of Jewish people who are putting their faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour
- The Jewish people being back in the land is one of the prerequisites for the return of Jesus Christ
- Jesus is coming soon

The Lord God always desires restoration of fellowship with His people

- You may well have sinned like Achan and brought destruction on yourself
- But the Lord wants to be restored to you
- For you to put your sin behind you
- To look to the sacrifice of Jesus
- To be rededicated to Him