

## JOSHUS BIBLE STUDIES

### CONQUERING: JOURNEYING WITH JOSHUA

#### LESSON #9 “THE 2<sup>nd</sup> BATTLE FOR AI” OR “BACK ON TRACK”

***“Now the LORD said to Joshua: “Do not be afraid, nor 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.” Joshua 8:1***

The Israelites got off the track in Joshua chapter 7 when sin was committed and they went from glorious victory at Jericho to shameful defeat at Ai. We saw in our last study that it is possible to get off track even while walking on promised land. Recovering lost ground is what chapter 8 is about. Let’s see how the story unfolds as Israel returns to the scene of their recent defeat.

#### A PANORAMIC VIEW OF CHAPTER 8:

##### JEHOVAH COMMUNICATES HIS ORDERS. 8:1-2

The 2<sup>nd</sup> battle for Ai was ordered by God. Left to their own decision one wonders whether the Israeli’s would have launched a 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt to overthrow Ai. Joshua’s prayer in chapter 7 could give the impression that he was confused as what to do next. They had won one and lost one. Many battles were yet ahead if they continued the conquest of Canaan. With defeat staring them in the face God spoke and things came into focus again. Let us analyze God’s words as recorded in 8:1-2:

#### **A. He commenced with an encouragement.** v.1a “do not be afraid, nor be dismayed.”

Ai was Joshua’s first defeat. When the soldiers returned from Ai after the first battle, Joshua was really down – 7:6-9. He said, “what can Israel do....?” God was gracious with His servant. He is the same with us. The chorus says, “When I am down you pick me up; when I am dry you fill my cup, you are my all in all.” God picked up Joshua!

#### **B. He continued with a command.** v.1b “take all the people of war with you.”

Why did the Lord say “take all the people of war with you”? Because when they went up against Ai the first time only a small company of soldiers went and they were defeated. Here is the human reasoning behind the failed mission: “And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.” (7:3,4)

#### **C. He conferred a promise.** v.1c “I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.”

When we proceed on the basis of God’s promises we are assured of victory.

#### **D. He communicated a directive.** v.2a “you shall do to Ai as you did to Jericho”

What did they do to Jericho? “They utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.” (6:21) T

**E. He cancelled a prohibition.** v.2b “its spoil -- take for yourselves.”

At Jericho they were prohibited from taking any spoil for themselves (6:18, 19) At Ai they were permitted to take spoil. God’s prohibitions and permissions are both for His glory and our good and neither is to be disobeyed without suffering the consequences of divine disapproval. Achan is a good example of one who disobeyed. If he had waited, he could have taken spoil at Ai with God’s permission.

**F. He culminated with a plan.** v.2c “Lay an ambush....”

We can’t stereotype God. At Jericho there were circuitous marches, blowing of trumpets and shouting. At Ai there was a different strategy – lay an ambush. No walls came crashing down but the end result was the same. God works in various ways His wonders to perform. His ways are not our ways – let’s learn to do it God’s way!

**JOSHUA CARRIES OUT THE ORDERS. 8:3-29**

A new day has dawned, God has given new orders and Joshua is only too happy to get back on track. He acts immediately and decisively.

**A. The troops were rallied.** 8:3-8

Having received from God explicit instructions, Joshua sets about executing the military strategy that would accomplish the objective. The promise of success by God does not alleviate the need for wise and strategic execution of a battle plan.

**B. The trap is set.** 8:9-13

The ambush was God’s idea. Interesting! After the miraculous, but humanly unorthodox strategy to overcome Jericho, the scheme to destroy Ai seems very tame: 30,000 soldiers hiding behind the city; Joshua in front of the city with 5,000 troops to draw the people out . It is a trap!

**C. The triumph is complete.** 8:14-29

The people in Ai took the bait and charged out of the city to chase Joshua and the 5,000 troops. The 30,000 lying behind the city arose and moved into the city. Then Joshua and his 5,000 turned and the people of Ai were caught in the trap, the city was burned, Ai is destroyed, Israel is back on track.

There were many more battles yet to come in the conquest of Canaan, but the first two, that of Jericho and Ai, would be the most memorable. Word would spread throughout the country that the fortress of Jericho had been overthrown and Ai had fallen. The fear of God was over the entire land. As Rahab had said, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. " (Joshua 2:9-10) Israel was God’s witness nation. In Isaiah 43:10 God said, “You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen....” As they marched throughout Canaan, they were to represent God in the midst of unsurpassed heathenism.

The Church of Jesus Christ is God's witnessing people today. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Our mission is not one of military conquest bent on the death of pagan peoples, but our mission is one of life – life through the saving virtues of Jesus Christ. We have much territory to cover – "to the end of the earth" – Let us keep sin out of our lives and keep our mission in clear focus. Our Joshua – Jesus, leads us forward. Let us follow!

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### PRACTICAL OUT-TAKES FROM CHAPTER 8

What can we take out of chapter 8 that will help us keep on track in our personal lives as we encounter enemies? The 2<sup>nd</sup> battle for Ai is instructive for us in many ways:

1. **God makes a way for us to get out of trouble.** Ai was located on a hilltop (see 7:2 & 8:2 "go up") fifteen miles northwest of Jericho. Chapter 7 begins with Israel up at Ai and ends with them down in the valley – the Valley of Achor. Notice the last verse of chapter 7 - "Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since." (7:26)

Joshua 7 ends with Israel in the Valley of Achor. What does that mean? The valley of Achor is the valley of trouble – "Achor" in Hebrew means "trouble". There may be some of you in trouble. If you are not a Christian, you are in trouble. If you are in God's family but are like the prodigal son or daughter living in the far country, you are in trouble. If you are harboring unconfessed sin in your life, you are in trouble. If your attitude toward your fellow believers is not right, you are in trouble.

There are Christians who live in the Valley of Achor – that is, in the Valley of Trouble all the time. You do not have to live there! You can have victory. There is hope for all who are in trouble. There is a way out of the Valley of Trouble. Listen to what God says in Hosea 2:15 "I will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope." Joshua and Israel met defeat at Ai but God graciously gave Joshua and Israel a door of hope – That is what chapter 8 is about.

2. **If and when you get off track, back track!** Discover why the derailment. Pause and find out the cause. When experiencing set-backs, step back and take time out to find out why the reversal because we have to get back on track exactly where we got off. Joshua 7:1 says, "Israel committed a trespass.." And God said, "Israel has sinned" (7:11) Sin blockades the road to victory. Achan and his family were the culprits but the Israelites were corporately held responsible. Joshua had to deal with the offense against God before launching an offensive against the enemy. So it is with all who would claim territory promised by God. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." (Prov.28:13)
3. **Bow before you battle.** No prayer preceded the first attack on Ai. Consultation should precede confrontation - consulting God before assaulting the enemy is always the wise thing to do. Worship before warfare keeps us "leaning of the everlasting arms."

- 4. Presumption is ruinous to progress.** Self-confidence lost the first battle for Ai. Confidence in God was the secret of victory in battle #2. Ai in Hebrew means “ruin”. It is interesting that Israel was almost ruined at the ruin! Why? They presumed upon the favor of God. They thought, “God was on our side at Jericho. He will be on our side at Ai.” It is not a matter of God being on our side, but are we on God’s side?

An independent spirit will always lead eventually to defeat. Dependence upon God is essential to winning spiritual warfare. Prov. 3:5-7 makes this very clear: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil.”

- 5. Bible battles teach us that we must win God’s way.** The battle at Jericho was won by fighting God’s way. It was lost at Ai because it was not fought God’s way. The Christian life is a warfare. There are enemies “that war against the soul” (I Peter 2:11) and we must ever be on guard, Ephesians chapter 6 is about the Christian warfare and we are challenged to “put on the whole armor of God.” (Eph. 6:11) The only way to win spiritual battles is to “be strong in the Lord and the power of his might.” (Eph.6:10)
- 6. Defeat need not define our lives.** It is often said, “failure need not be final.” Ai did not define the entire life of Joshua for he went on to lead the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan. If you have suffered defeat in your personal life, return to the scene of loss and snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat. As Paul says, “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.” (Heb. 12:12) Go back to your Ai’s with God and battle the 2<sup>nd</sup> time!

Turning defeat into victory is the key to living an overcoming life. All of us experience defeat, discouragement and “down times”. How we handle those times will determine the caliber of Christian we are.

**Illust.** I am reminded of the soldier in Iraq who got a “dear John” letter from his fiancé and she informed him that she had fallen out of love with him and had fallen in love with another. She wanted him to return the picture he had of her.

Initially he was devastated. However, in a few days he accepted her rejection of him. A plan formed in his mind. He called his buddies together and explained to them what had happened. He asked them for a picture of their girl friends. They gave them to him and he took them to the Post Exchange and had them copied. After returning the originals to his buddies he packaged all the copies and sent the package to his former fiancé with this letter: “I received your letter telling me you had fallen in love with another and wanted your picture returned. I am sending you the pictures of all my girlfriends since I do not remember which one you are. Just pick out yours and destroy all the others.” He turned defeat into victory!

**7. God is the God of the Second Opportunity.** The 2<sup>nd</sup> battle for Ai teaches among other lessons, that God is the God of the Second Opportunity. The Book of Jonah has been called “The Gospel of The Second Chance.” Jonah was commissioned to go to Nineveh; he de-commissioned himself by disobeying, but he was re-commissioned and given a 2<sup>nd</sup> opportunity. Jonah 3:1-2 tells us that “the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh....”

The Apostle Peter was given a second opportunity – after he had walked afar off, warmed at the enemies fire, denied his Lord and cursed, he was given a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance. It happened like this: on resurrection morning the women came to the tomb only to find it empty and an angel there who said to the women, “.... “go, tell His disciples--**and Peter...**” (Mark 16:7) He got the message, ran to the tomb and was restored. Aren't you glad that God is the God of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> re-start!? Let us learn to organize victories out of our failures and start over. Every day can be a new beginning.

### CONCLUSION

Chapter 8 records a reversal early on in Israel's conquest of Canaan. There were many more battles to come. It was essential that Joshua and Israel learn at the outset that victory would come only as they consciously, completely and consistently depended upon God. That they depended upon God at Jericho is very evident due to the nature of the miraculous overthrow of that fortress. Ai was a different matter altogether. It was not the fortification that Jericho was but they still had to depend upon God just as much for success. We must rely upon God, not only for the “big” battles in life, but for the “small” battles as well.

We are God's foot-soldiers in our day. We must not make our own battle plans, presume to outsmart the devil or assume that God will always bless whatever we do. We must be careful always to follow our Lord's instructions, depend up the Holy Spirit for power and give God the glory for any and all accomplishments. The song, “Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus” puts the entire matter in clear perspective:

“Stand up, stand up for Jesus, you soldiers of the cross;  
Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss;  
From victory unto victory His army shall He lead,  
Till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in His strength alone;  
The arm of flesh will fail you, you dare not trust your own;  
Put on the Gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer;  
Where duty calls, or danger, be never wanting there.”

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