**Joshua**

Chapter 8

*Ai Destroyed*

**Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land. 2 You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city.” 3 So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack Ai. He chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night 4 with these orders: “Listen carefully. You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don’t go very far from it. All of you be on the alert. 5 I and all those with me will advance on the city, and when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them. 6 They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say, ‘They are running away from us as they did before.’ So when we flee from them, 7 you are to rise up from ambush and take the city. The Lord your God will give it into your hand. 8 When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the Lord has commanded. See to it; you have my orders.” 9 Then Joshua sent them off, and they went to the place of ambush and lay in wait between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai—but Joshua spent that night with the people. 10 Early the next morning Joshua mustered his men, and he and the leaders of Israel marched before them to Ai. 11 The entire force that was with him marched up and approached the city and arrived in front of it. They set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and the city. 12 Joshua had taken about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. 13 They had the soldiers take up their positions—all those in the camp to the north of the city and the ambush to the west of it. That night Joshua went into the valley. 14 When the king of Ai saw this, he and all the men of the city hurried out early in the morning to meet Israel in battle at a certain place overlooking the Arabah. But he did not know that an ambush had been set against him behind the city. 15 Joshua and all Israel let themselves be driven back before them, and they fled toward the desert. 16 All the men of Ai were called to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city. 17 Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel. They left the city open and went in pursuit of Israel. 18 Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city.” So Joshua held out his javelin toward Ai. 19 As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire. 20 The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising against the sky, but they had no chance to escape in any direction, for the Israelites who had been fleeing toward the desert had turned back against their pursuers. 21 For when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that smoke was going up from the city, they turned around and attacked the men of Ai. 22 The men of the ambush also came out of the city against them, so that they were caught in the middle, with Israelites on both sides. Israel cut them down, leaving them neither survivors nor fugitives. 23 But they took the king of Ai alive and brought him to Joshua. 24 When Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the desert where they had chased them, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in it. 25 Twelve thousand men and women fell that day—all the people of Ai. 26 For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his javelin until he had destroyed all who lived in Ai. 27 But Israel did carry off for themselves the livestock and plunder of this city, as the Lord had instructed Joshua. 28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day. 29 He hung the king of Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset, Joshua ordered them to take his body from the tree and throw it down at the entrance of the city gate. And they raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day.**

**8:1–29** Renewal of the conquest and the taking of Ai. (CSB)

**8:1** *Do not be afraid.* Now that Israel is purged, the Lord reassures Joshua once more (see 1:3–5; 3:11–13; 6:2–5). (CSB)

Having met the Lord’s conditions (1:6), there is no reason for fear or dismay, for God is with them. (TLSB)

*all the fighting men*. The whole army gathered to Joshua (c 160,000–200,000 men), as opposed to the advice of the spies 7:3). (TLSB)

**8:2** *you may carry off their plunder.* The Lord now assigns the wealth of Canaan to his troops who fight his battles. (CSB)

Jericho’s spoils were for the Lord, who gives the spoils of Ai to Israel. (TLSB)

*Set an ambush.* Still in command, the Lord directs the attack. (CSB)

*behind it*. Ambush takes place on the back side of the city, from the west (cf v 9). (TLSB)

**8:3–8** Joshua divides his army. The first portion will draw Ai’s army out of the city moving eastward; then the remainder of Joshua’s army will enter the city, capture it, and burn it. After this, they will leave the city heading eastward, and the two armies will smash the army of Ai and Bethel between them. (TLSB)

**8:3** *out by night*. This was the expected second wave that would swarm in behind the army of Ai as it left in pursuit of Joshua to the east. (TLSB)

**8:7** *God will give*. Even the cities of Israel’s enemies are God’s to keep or to give. (TLSB)

**8:8** *set the city on fire*. The buildings of Ai were to be completely destroyed—as Jericho had been—along with all the people. (TLSB)

*according to the word of the Lord*. Cf vv 1–2. (TLSB)

**8:9** *between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai*. Area provided large rocks and the like, which made good cover. (TLSB)

**8:10** *elders of Israel*. By going, the elders demonstrated faithfulness to Joshua as the Lord’s chosen leader. (TLSB)

**8:11** *with a ravine between them and Ai*. Ai could see Israel’s camp but not easily attack it. (TLSB)

**8:12** *five thousand.* Verse 3 speaks of a contingent of 30,000 assigned to the ambush. Perhaps Joshua assigned two different units to the task to assure success. Or from the original 30,000 a unit of 5,000 may have been designated to attack Ai itself while the remaining 25,000 served as a covering force to block the threat from Bethel (see v. 17). (CSB)

The 5,000 were to capture and destroy the city, while the 30,000 would ambush the men pursuing Joshua and his army. (TLSB)

**8:13** *the camp to the north.* In full visibility Joshua’s main force moved north of the city, then pretended to flee to the east, drawing out the entire army of defenders. (CSB)

*rear guard*. The 30,000 who would come behind them to crush the army of Ai. (TLSB)

**8:14** *appointed place*. Appointed by the Lord for Ai’s defeat. *Arabah*. (TLSB)

**8:16** *all the people*. All the fighting men. (TLSB)

**8:17** *Ai or Bethel.* Their joint action indicates that the two cities were closely allied, though each is said to have had a king (12:9, 16). (CSB)

Perhaps as a result of a treaty, the fighting men of Bethel joined Ai in pursuit of Israel. (TLSB)

*left the city open*. Unprotected and vulnerable to attack. (TLSB)

**8:18** *javelin*. Cf Ex 7:19; 8:16; 14:26 for similar gestures of Moses. True power for victory comes from the Lord. Cf v 26. (TLSB)

**8:20** *no power to flee*. Lit, “no hands in them,” referring to an awareness of their helplessness. (TLSB)

**8:22** *some on this side, and some on that side*. Refers to the ambush of the men who came from behind, westward out of the city, as Joshua came from the east. (TLSB)

**8:24** *killing all the inhabitants*. These deaths come at God’s command; they are His judgment against evil. (TLSB)

**8:26** *he had destroyed.* For the second time Joshua ordered the holy ban on the inhabitants of a Canaanite city (see NIV text note). (CSB)

**8:26** Joshua literally does what the Lord told him, until what the Lord commanded is completed; cf Ex 17:11–13. (TLSB)

**8:28** *burned Ai.* As he had Jericho (6:24) and would later do to Hazor (11:11). (CSB)

*desolate place to this day.* If the ruins of Ai have been correctly identified (see note on 7:2), the site shows signs of later occupation only from c. 1200 to 1100 b.c. (CSB)

God’s judgment is irreversible. (TLSB)

**8:29** *hung the king of Ai on a tree.* The Israelites did not execute by hanging. “Tree” may refer to a pole on which the king’s body was impaled after execution (see note on Dt 21:22). (CSB)

Standard practice for public humiliation and demonstration of victory. (TLSB)

*gate*. Main gate. (TLSB)

*until evening.* According to Mosaic instructions (see Dt 21:22–23). (CSB)

*large pile of rocks.* A third monument in the land (see note on 7:26). (CSB)

Visible reminder of what becomes of all who are evil, no matter how great. (TLSB)

**8:1–29** After the sin of Achan has been punished and Joshua does all that the Lord commanded, Israel successfully destroys the city of Ai. This is an example of God’s judgment and sentence against all sin and sinners. Thanks be to God, He judges us “not guilty” in Christ. • Lord, preserve us from sin and judgment, and give us repentant hearts that find refuge in Christ alone. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Covenant Renewed at Mount Ebal*

**30 Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, 31 as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses—an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the Lord burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings. 32 There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written. 33 All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, facing those who carried it—the priests, who were Levites. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel. 34 Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses—just as it is written in the Book of the Law. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.**

**8:30–35** The renewal of the covenant with the Lord as Moses had ordered (Dt 11:26–30; 27:1–8) concludes the account of the initial battles (see Introduction: Outline). The conquest of Canaan has already been put into rich theological perspective. This final event (see also Joshua’s final official act, ch. 24) underscores Israel’s servant relationship to the Lord. In conquest and occupation she must faithfully acknowledge her one identity as the people of the kingdom of God, subject to his commission and rule (see note on 5:14). (CSB)

Testimony that possession of the Promised Land depended on the people’s faithfulness to God’s covenant. (TLSB)

How Israel could assemble peacefully between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim without further conquest is a worrisome question—and has led to some radical reconstructions of Israel’s history. It must be noted, however, that Biblical narrators at times followed a thematic rather than a strictly chronological order of events. That may be the case here, since it is clear that the story of the Gibeonite deception and submission (ch. 9) is included in the thematic development of how Israel came into possession of the rest of Canaan (see the author’s introduction in 9:1–2). The Shechemites (Shechem was a major city lying between the two mountains mentioned) were Hivites (or were under Hivite domination; see Ge 34:2) and thus were related to the people of the Gibeonite cities (9:7; 11:19). Also, there was no important town between Gibeon and Shechem (Bethel and Ai had been subdued). Perhaps the treaty of submission established between Israel and the Gibeonites (ch. 9) applied also to the Hivites of Shechem, and the covenant renewal ceremony that concludes ch. 8 (and the previous narrative section) actually took place chronologically after the events narrated in ch. 9. If this suggestion is correct, the Gibeonites or their representatives would have been among the “aliens” who participated with Israel in the covenant event (vv. 33, 35). (CSB)

**8:30** *built an altar*. A way of laying claim to the land the Lord had promised. (TLSB)

*Mount Ebal.* At the foot of this peak was the fortress city of Shechem, where Abraham had built an altar (Ge 12:6–7). (CSB)

At Shechem, between Ebal and Gerizim, Abraham had also built an altar (Gn 12:6–7). Archaeologists have uncovered what may be an Israelite shrine on this site. (TLSB)

**8:31** *uncut stones*. Not hewn or cut by people. (TLSB)

*burnt offerings.* See Lev 1:1–17. (CSB)

*fellowship offerings.* See Lev 3:1–17; 7:11–18. (CSB)

**8:32** *copied on stones.* Moses had ordered the people first to plaster the stones, then to inscribe on them the words of the law (Dt 27:2–4). These stones are the fourth monument in the land (see note on v. 29). (CSB)

Could have been the Ten Commandments and/or the curses and blessings (Dt 27–28). (TLSB)

**8:33** *aliens and citizens alike.* Israel now included the “other people” (Ex 12:38) who had come out of Egypt, plus others who had associated with them during the desert wanderings (see note on vv. 30–35). (CSB)

Those who had come out of Egypt (Ex 12:38, 48–49) and those who had joined Israel during the wanderings (cf Nu 25; 31). (TLSB)

*elders* … *officers* … *judges*. Leaders of every rank, emphasizing all were gathered. (TLSB)

*opposite sides of the ark*. Those facing Gerizim to the south pronounced blessings, and those facing Ebal to the north pronounced curses, as described in Dt 27–28. (TLSB)

*ark of the covenant*. Sacred symbol of the Lord’s presence with the people. (TLSB)

**8:34** *he read*. Joshua’s position on the mountain made it possible for all to hear. (TLSB)

*the blessings and the curses.* See Dt 27–28 and notes. (CSB)

**8:35** *little ones*. Children were in attendance. (TLSB)

**8:30–35** This event rededicates the people to the covenant and announces to those in the Promised Land that God had come to claim the land. The Law is written in stone to remind the people that it has not gone away. The Word was given by God in Christ, the Rock of Ages, so forgiveness and life might be written on our hearts. • Dear Lord, etch Your Word more deeply into my heart and life, so that I might live in Jesus Christ—the Word who is life. Amen. (TLSB)