

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 8

The Fall of Ai

And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land. 2 And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it.” 3 So Joshua and all the fighting men arose to go up to Ai. And Joshua chose 30,000 mighty men of valor and sent them out by night. 4 And he commanded them, “Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you remain ready. 5 And I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out against us just as before, we shall flee before them. 6 And they will come out after us, until we have drawn them away from the city. For they will say, ‘They are fleeing from us, just as before.’ So we will flee before them. 7 Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will give it into your hand. 8 And as soon as you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire. You shall do according to the word of the LORD. See, I have commanded you.” 9 So Joshua sent them out. And they went to the place of ambush and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai, but Joshua spent that night among the people. 10 Joshua arose early in the morning and mustered the people and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. 11 And all the fighting men who were with him went up and drew near before the city and encamped on the north side of Ai, with a ravine between them and Ai. 12 He took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. 13 So they stationed the forces, the main encampment that was north of the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. 14 And as soon as the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the men of the city, hurried and went out early to the appointed place toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. 15 And Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness. 16 So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. 17 Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. They left the city open and pursued Israel. 18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.” And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. 19 And the men in the ambush rose quickly out of their place, and as soon as he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it. And they hurried to set the city on fire. 20 So when the men of Ai looked back, behold, the smoke of the city went up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that, for the people who fled to the wilderness turned back against the pursuers. 21 And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city, and that the smoke of the city went up, then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. 22 And the others came out from the city against them, so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side. And Israel struck them down, until there was left none that survived or escaped. 23 But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him near to Joshua. 24 When Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to Ai and struck it down with the edge of the sword. 25 And all who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000, all the people of Ai. 26 But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction. 27 Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as their plunder, according to the word of the LORD that he commanded Joshua. 28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it forever

a heap of ruins, as it is to this day. 29 And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening. And at sunset Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day.

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

8:1 *Do not fear.* 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 *encampment that was north of city.* 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 *to destruction.* 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)

heap of ruins as it is to this day. If the ruins of Ai have been correctly identified, the site shows signs of later occupation only from c. 1200 to 1100 B.C. (CSB)

God's judgment is irreversible. (TLSB)

8:29 *hanged 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. (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)

great heap of stones. A third monument in the land. (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)

Joshua Renews the Covenant

30 At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, 31 just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, “an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.” And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings. 32 And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. 33 And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel. 34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners 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. (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)

8:32 *is written*. 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. (CSB)

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

8:33 *sojourner as well as native born*. 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. (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)

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)