

# Joshua

## The LORD is Salvation

### Chapter 8:1-29 A New Beginning: Ai is Destroyed

**8:1-2** Now that the Israelites were properly prepared, through their completion of the purification rituals <sup>Joshua 7:13</sup> and the purging of Achan's sin against the LORD <sup>Joshua 7:15</sup>, God instructed Joshua that he must (1) "not be afraid" <sup>Genesis 26:24, Deuteronomy 31:6</sup> nor "discouraged" <sup>Joshua 1:6,7,9</sup>, (2) take the whole army <sup>Joshua 10:7</sup> to Ai, (3) set an ambush behind the city <sup>2 Chronicles 13:13</sup>, and (4) when the LORD was finished delivering Ai <sup>Deuteronomy 1:21, Joshua 1:3</sup>, remove the plunder and livestock for themselves <sup>Deuteronomy 20:14</sup> (not as "devoted things" for the LORD <sup>Joshua 6:18</sup>).

**8:3-9** Following God's commands, Joshua took the "whole army" and advanced toward the small town of Ai (15 miles from Jericho). During the night, he instructed 30,000 of his best fighting men to go to the west of Ai ("behind" Ai: between Ai & Bethel) to prepare an ambush <sup>Judges 9:43</sup>. The next morning, Joshua would approach Ai from the north <sup>v.11</sup> with the much larger force, but when resisted, he and the large army would flee to the east, as the Israelite soldiers had done before <sup>Joshua 7:4-5</sup>. When the men of Ai pursued Joshua and his army, the soldiers who were in position to ambush from the west would attack and destroy the unguarded city.

The battle plan was designed to take advantage of the overconfident men of Ai <sup>Joshua 7</sup>.

The number of the "whole army" under Joshua at that time (~570,000) was the total number of military age men counted earlier (~600,000 <sup>Numbers 26:51</sup>) minus half of the military men from the tribes of Reuben & Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh who chose land on the east side of the Jordan for their inheritance (~68,500 <sup>Numbers 26:7,18,34</sup>) plus the military men from those tribes who crossed over the Jordan with the rest of the tribes (~40,000 <sup>Joshua 4:13</sup>).

Note that Joshua stayed with his troops on their way to victory, while much later, David's staying behind when his troops went out into battle led to his greatest defeat <sup>2 Samuel 11</sup>.

**8:10-13** Joshua and the army positioned themselves according to the plan. After setting up camp, Joshua chose "about five thousand men" to be "set in ambush between Bethel and Ai".

Note the continuing theme of Joshua's actions occurring in "early morning" <sup>Joshua 3:1, 6:12, 7:16</sup>.

The relationship between the "about five thousand men" and the "thirty thousand" <sup>v.3</sup> that Joshua had sent earlier to "set an ambush" is not clear. One suggestion is this second set of

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troops was deployed in case the men of Bethel became involved by either coming to Ai's aid after the battle started or agreeing to guard Ai while their army fought the battle.

**8:14-17** When the king of Ai saw the Israelite army, he and his men attacked early in the morning. Their over-confidence resulted from the ease of their previous victory (remember the principle from chapter 7: fear makes an enemy look bigger, pride makes an enemy look smaller), but the army they were facing was more than a hundred times larger than the previous one <sup>Joshua 7:4</sup>. The battle was unfolding just as planned, in fact, not only the men of Ai pursued the Israelites, but all of the men of Bethel were also involved – and all were drawn away from Ai <sup>Judges 20:31</sup>.

If Joshua sent the extra 5,000 men because Bethel might become involved, he was right.

“Arabah” <sup>Deuteronomy 3:17</sup>: a region around the Jordan River (between the Dead Sea & Galilee).

**8:18-19** The LORD was still leading the battle by telling Joshua to hold up his spear as a sign of trust in God <sup>Exodus 4:1-3, Psalm 35:3</sup> resulting in encouragement and strength <sup>Exodus 17:8-13</sup> for the battle. The javelin was also a signal to the 30,000+ troops west of Ai to begin the ambush of the city. These warriors quickly entered the city of Ai, captured it and set the city on fire.

These verses stress how critical it is to always properly prepare <sup>Joshua 7:13, Ephesians 6:10-18</sup>, be completely obedient to His plans <sup>Deuteronomy 11:13-15, John 14:23</sup> and allow Him to lead <sup>Psalm 31:3</sup>, because when believers follow this Biblical pattern, Jesus will provide victory <sup>1 Corinthians 15:57</sup>.

**8:20-26** In the midst of their confident attack on the Israelite army, the men of Ai looked back to see their city on fire <sup>Judges 20:40-41</sup>. Immediately, the men of Ai and Bethel realized what was happening, but it was too late – they were being attacked from two directions by both the “men of the ambush” and the Israelite soldiers who had been retreating. As instructed by God, the Israelite army killed all 12,000 citizens of Ai (the men, women & children <sup>Deuteronomy 7:1-2, 20:16-18</sup>) with the sword, but the king of Ai was brought to Joshua .

The pride and overconfidence of the men of Ai & Bethel changed in an instant (back) to fear.

Note the mention in the battle about the men of Bethel, but no mention of them being killed.

**8:27-28** The Israelites gladly did as the LORD instructed by taking the livestock and anything else of value from the city <sup>v.2</sup>. Joshua completely destroyed Ai <sup>Numbers 21:2, Jeremiah 49:3</sup> by burning it, as they had done to Jericho <sup>Joshua 6:24</sup> and will later do to Hazor <sup>Joshua 11:11</sup>. Because of their faithfulness, Ai was made desolate forever <sup>Deuteronomy 13:16b</sup>.

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**8:29** Joshua hung the king of Ai on a tree, indicating a curse on Ai <sup>Deuteronomy 21:22-23</sup>, but he was removed that night, because leaving him there would be considered as a desecration on the land <sup>Deuteronomy 21:23</sup>. A 4<sup>th</sup> pile of rocks <sup>Joshua 4:9,20, 7:26</sup> was constructed as a lasting reminder.

### Chapter 8:30-35 *The Covenant with the LORD is Renewed*

**8:30-32** Following the central campaign <sup>Joshua 6:1-8:29</sup>, Joshua built on Mt. Ebal an altar (made of uncut stones <sup>Exodus 20:25, Deuteronomy 27:5</sup>) to “the LORD, the God of Israel” to praise Him for the past (Jericho and Ai) and future victories. The ceremony discussed here <sup>v. 30-35</sup> took place in obedience to the commands of Moses and the elders of Israel <sup>Deuteronomy 27:1-8</sup>. They offered burnt and fellowship offerings <sup>Exodus 20:24, Deuteronomy 27:6-7</sup>, and Joshua built the 5<sup>th</sup> stone memorial and wrote the Law of Moses on the rocks that were covered in plaster <sup>Deuteronomy 27:2-4</sup>.

God demanded the altar be made with “uncut stones”, because God’s workmanship would be “defiled” if the altar was made with “dressed stones” <sup>Exodus 20:25</sup> (man’s workmanship).

Joshua’s altar was very near the altar Abram built when he first arrived in Canaan <sup>Genesis 12:8</sup>, where Jacob built an altar <sup>Genesis 33:20</sup> and where Jesus met the Samaritan woman <sup>John 4:4-26</sup>.

The stone memorial described here represented a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant <sup>Exodus 19:3-6</sup> and is the fourth public (commemorative) stone monument in Joshua. The first three were: at Gilgal (crossing) <sup>Joshua 4:20</sup>, in the Valley of Achor (judgement of sin) <sup>Joshua 7:26</sup> and at the entrance of the city gates of Ai (victory upon repentance) <sup>Joshua 8:29</sup>.

**8:33** Continuing to be obedient to Moses’ instructions <sup>Deuteronomy 11:26-29</sup>, Joshua had the Levites carry the ark of the covenant to the middle of the valley between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal. Joshua then had six of the tribes place themselves at the base of each of the two mountains.

Prophesied earlier by Moses <sup>Deuteronomy 27:12-13</sup>, the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin (sons of Rachael and Leah) stood on Mt. Gerizim (Mount of Blessings) to bless the people and the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali (sons of Zilpah and Bilhah, the handmaids, except for Reuben and Zebulun, who were sons of Leah) stood on Mt. Ebal (Mount of Curses) to pronounce curses on the people <sup>Deuteronomy 27:13</sup>.

**8:34-35** Joshua finished the prescribed ceremony by reading the blessings <sup>Deuteronomy 28:1-14</sup> and the cursings <sup>Deuteronomy 27:15-26</sup> to all of the people: men, women, children and aliens <sup>Exodus 12:38</sup>.

Note the process order: the Law could not be read until the altar was built on Mt. Ebal (the Mount of Cursings), so that the offerings could be made for anyone failing to keep the Law. Also, the Ark of the Covenant is not mentioned again in Joshua after the Law was read.

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