

**Message #15****Joshua 8:1-29**

Many years ago in our first ministry we had a terrible sin situation arise that demanded excommunication. We had done everything humanly possible to try to resolve it, but one individual not only refused our help, but actually pursued the sin more aggressively. So we believed we needed to handle this in a Sunday morning service and we set a date for the disciplinary action.

The Sunday morning that we decided to do this, we looked out in the sanctuary and there were three new visiting families. They had never been to our church before and there they sat. We had decided that the action needed to be handled, so with three new visiting families sitting in the auditorium, at the close of the service, we publicly requested that fellowship be cut off from this specific person.

In the next two months, all three of those families joined our church. When we went to interview them for membership, every one of them said that it was our commitment to the Word of God at such a serious level that made them want to join. It taught me a great lesson—**face things in accordance to God's Word and God's way and you will have victory, even if what you are doing is very serious and very negative.** That is the lesson to learn from Joshua 8.

Joshua 8 is the story of what happened in the aftermath of Israel getting the sin out of the camp. The end result was a great victory at Ai. The city that had been used by God to bring Israel a terrible defeat was now the same city used by God to bring Israel to a great celebration. There is a very important lesson for us to learn here:

**EVEN WHEN WE HAVE EXPERIENCED A TERRIBLE SETBACK OR DEFEAT, IF GOD'S PEOPLE WILL FACE THE SIN AND DEAL WITH THE SIN THEY CAN MOVE FORWARD AND EXPECT GOD WILL GIVE GREAT VICTORY AND BLESSING.**

The road to victory is not smooth sailing. There are moments of triumph and defeats. There will be times when in your spiritual life you will feel like a loser. There will be times when you will fail and not do what God wants you to do. When that happens, God may permit us to be defeated and suffer a loss.

However, if we will face up to the sin, confess the sin, turn from the sin, we can move forward expecting God's care and God's blessings. That is the lesson we learn from Joshua 8. Now there are three main historical observations we want to make from the first 29 verses:

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #1 – God gives instruction to take Ai. 8:1-2**

You could not help but be a little gun shy about going to war with Ai again because it had been a real downfall place. It would be like us having to go back to a place where we had really blown it and face the same group all over again. Typically this would be the last thing you would ever feel like doing.

But carefully observe from **verse 1** that now Joshua is waiting for God to speak before he moves forward. So really, if you are following the Word of God, there is nothing to worry about.

Now that God is leading, there is no cause for Joshua or Israel to be afraid or dismayed. Let's face it; Achan's sin had shattered the great momentum of spiritual victory. However, Israel had dealt with things properly. She had got rid of the sin and God was with her again. God came to Joshua and said get the warriors together because I am going to give you victory in Ai. **The verb "I have given" (v. 1) is a prophetic perfect, meaning the action is guaranteed.**

One commentator observed there is no need for discouragement if the battle first goes against us. God may appear to give success to the enemy to bring us to the place where we deal with things and when we do deal with them, we can expect victory the next time.

Now the determining factor for victory was not in the numbers, it was in God. "All" the people of war needed to carry out their tasks with Joshua. We may recall that only 2000 or 3000 were told to go in the defeat (7:3), but God says I want all involved. There could be no neutral soldiers sitting on the sidelines, all were to be involved; but it would be God who would give the victory.

There is a personal application we may all make from this. Victory in our own personal lives will not come until "all" or the "whole" is willing to go to war. When we come to the place where our entire person wants God to give us victory in our own warfare, we will see God do some amazing things.

Now in **verse 2**, God tells Joshua that Israel can take the spoil of this city and its cattle. Biblical historians have observed that perhaps one physical reason why God permitted Joshua and Israel to take the spoils of Ai and not take the spoils of Jericho was because there were terrible social diseases in Jericho, which could have corrupted the nation.

Whatever God's reason for permission here, the thing that is so sad is that if Achan would have just waited, if he had just suppressed his selfish desires and would have obeyed God in Jericho, he would have received everything he wanted in Ai.

Listen, God wants the best for us. We have selfish, fleshly desires that do not realize this. But if we are willing to suppress our own fleshly desires and obey God, we will discover that just around the corner, God will give us even more than we ever dreamed.

**Whenever we disobey God we settle for second best.** Many years ago, a young lady who loved the Lord in our church fell for a guy that was a spiritual dud. I advised her to get away from him, but she did not listen. She gave up her ministry and ended up in a mess. Many months later, she came to me and said, "Pastor, I have made a terrible mistake; I should have listened to what you said." Now it wasn't me saying it, it was that I told her the Word of God. Had she waited she could have experienced God's best.

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #2 – Joshua forms a plan to take Ai. 8:3-13**

Now to get this victory all needed to be involved. As near as I can determine, Joshua formed three different groups to take Ai:

**Group #1 - The warrior group. 8:3-9**

Now Joshua chose 30,000 warriors who were top notch military men. Their job was to go out at night and sneak behind the city, which would be to sneak to the west side of the city and hide out close to it.

What Joshua was going to do was to present a decoy that looked like Israel was afraid. When the people of Ai would chase them, primarily from west to east, then these soldiers could rise up from their western ambush position and take the city from the rear.

**Verse 9** informs us that the 30,000 left Joshua and went to the west side of the city and stayed between Bethel and Ai, a distance of 3-4 miles, with hill country in between.

John Garstang, who spent considerable time in this area, says any way these men would have gone would not have been an easy walk. It was steep, rocky, and the footing was not good. There are some tough climbs and some steep inclines. He said this is a tough walk during the day, and it would be a very difficult walk during the night. He says there is no way you could expect to travel any faster than one mile per hour in this country (*Joshua-Judges*, p. 156). This would not have been an easy assignment.

God does not always give us easy assignments; but if we are faithful to carry out our assignment what He will do is give us victory. Some people may have easier tasks than others. But that is God's business, not ours. Our job is to faithfully carry out the task God gives us, no matter how tough or lonely.

Obviously, this is a very different kind of warfare than Jericho. There is no public march around the city. No blowing trumpets and no shouting. This was tough stuff. God does not win all battles the same way. In Jericho it was one way, but in Ai it was different.

**Group #2 - The decoy group. 8:10-11**

As was Joshua's custom, he got up early in the morning the next day and he got the people and the elders and he moved right to the north of Ai where all the people could see him.

He had the people set up a camp on the north side of Ai and there was a valley between the camp and the city. John Garstang said you can descend into the valley in approximately six minutes; however, to go back up to where the camp was takes a considerable amount of time.

I used to elk hunt in a place in Idaho that took me 1 ½ hours to hike to the top; but I could get down off that mountain in 35 minutes. That is the way it was here. Joshua wants the people of Ai to think we are coming at you one way, when in fact it was a decoy.

It reminds me of our first war with Iraq. General Norman Schwarzkopf used a Joshua-type strategy. He made the enemy think it was going to be a sea attack, when in all reality it was a left flank attack. It is the mark of wisdom to not tip your hand to the enemy. Sometimes things should be done out in the open, like Jericho, but other times they should not, like Ai.

### **Group #3** - The ambush group. **8:12-13**

About 5000 more men were taken and hidden for ambush between Bethel and Ai, again on the west side of the city. So what we have are the people and all of the army on the north side and the 30,000 man army on the west side plus this 5000 on the west side.

This 5000 man army could specifically protect the 30,000 man army from the Bethelites, who might try to come in behind them (**8:17**).

God's people were protected from every angle. God protects all those who do His will. God's will here requires careful consideration and calculation. Everything was ready. Joshua spent the night in the valley and was prepared to fight and carry out the will of God.

Two points worth considering:

- 1) Victory requires careful preparation, consideration and calculation.
- 2) Victory demands that we are willing to go to war.

### **HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #3 – God gives victory over Ai. **8:14-29****

When the king saw Joshua and the Israelites out in the valley early the next morning, he gathered "all" of his people to go fight Israel (**8:14**). According to **verse 15**, Joshua and all of Israel they could see pretended to be afraid and they started to run northeast toward the wilderness. According to **verses 16-17**, all the people of Ai chased after them.

But at this point God told Joshua to stop and stretch out his javelin, like long a curved sword, toward Ai. So Joshua did exactly what God told him to do (**verse 18**). Now when Joshua did that, there were five specific actions that occurred:

- Action #1** - The ambush group ran into the city, captured it and started burning it. **8:19**
- Action #2** - The men of Ai realized they were in the middle of a trap. **8:20**
- Action #3** - The decoy group with Joshua turned back to kill the men of Ai. **8:21**
- Action #4** - The warrior group of Israel came from the rear to kill the people of Ai. **8:22**
- Action #5** - The king of Ai, who had led the attack against Israel, was captured. **8:23**

Israel is back in business. Because Israel had obeyed God, there were five results:

**(Result #1)** - All of the people of Ai, some 12,000 were killed. **8:24-26**

In all reality this was a small number compared to Jericho; but it is often small things that can trip us up. We need to stay on top of small things in life so we don't get tripped up.

**(Result #2)** - Israel took the spoils of the city for themselves. **8:27**

God allows us to enjoy certain things in this world, especially when we are totally and completely dedicated to doing His will. God lets His people enjoy things in this life. He gave these spoils to Israel.

**(Result #3)** - Joshua burned Ai and it remains a desolate spot. **8:28**

This is exactly what God told Joshua to do to this city **(8:8)**. Here is one of the great evidences of the reliability of God's Word. This is literally true to this day. In fact, Ai has so disappeared that historians argue over the precise location of the city.

**(Result #4)** - Joshua hung the king of Ai. **8:29a**

Enemies need to be destroyed. The king was hung and he stayed out in the public until evening. This was perfectly legal in view of the O.T. law (Deut. 21:22-23).

**(Result #5)** - Joshua constructed a heap of stones. **8:29b**

**This memorial reminds all of us that God blesses us when we obey Him, but we suffer great loss when we don't.** It is not the memorial that reminds us of the facts of the story; it is the facts of the story that cause the memorial to be built.

These Canaanite enemies hated God and hated Israel. There was no Rahab-type movement from anyone to get right with God or Israel. In fact, when given the choice, the people of Ai went on the offensive in an attempt to destroy Israel. But in the end, God destroyed her.

**What is so interesting is the exact place of a defeat in chapter 7 is the exact place of victory in chapter 8.** Sometimes God will take us right back to the place of failure, to show us we now have victory.

There is a Jewish proverb that says there are three types of men who never get victory:

- 1) Unsecured creditor—always worried about what he has loaned.
- 2) Hen-pecked husband—never is man enough to take the lead.
- 3) Man who will not try again—when he fails, he does not get up and try again.

**Key Steps to Victory:**

**Step #1** - Face the sin—ask God to pinpoint your sin and face it honestly.

**Step #2** - Use your whole being to wage a war against the flesh—no closets, come clean.

**Step #3** - Realize we cannot be victorious and be foolish—must walk according to God’s Word.

**Step #4** - Realize the very place of horrible failure can become the place of honorable victory.