

Joshua 8:1-29

The ambush at Ai is a significant turning point in the history of Israel's conquest of the promised land. The story of Ai's eventual conquest recounts events that entail both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. As Israel dutifully followed God's word, the Lord used his power in conjunction with their planning and activity to achieve His purpose and He gave the city into their hands.

Summary

In Joshua 8:1-29, Israel's failed first attempt to overthrow the city of Ai turns to a complete victory for the Lord's people, through the guidance of God and the use of effective military tactics.

1. Assuring Promise vv. 1-2

The forward movement of Israel's troops and subsequent victory began with a message from God (**Josh 8:1**).

The specific instructions for taking the city contained three distinct elements: **First**, Israel was to devote Ai to destruction just like Jericho (**Josh 8:2**). **Secondly**, whilst Israel was not allowed to take anything from Jericho, here the spoil and livestock could be taken a plunder for the people. **Thirdly**, the Lord gave specific instructions for the method by which they were to take the city - an ambush (**8:2**). With the call to courage, the confidence God gave through his promise, and the conquest he guaranteed by Israel's strategic use of an ambush, he combined the elements of divine sovereignty and human responsibility from the beginning and gave his people the assurance they needed to persevere.

2. Strategic Overview vv. 3-9

Joshua immediately set out to obey the Lord and developed a simple plan of attack (**Josh 8:3-8**). The summary of Israel's strategy once again clearly combines God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. The Lord was at work, but none of his actions absolved Israel from making its plans and situating its troops to secure the best possible advantage for victory.

After Joshua completed his instructions, he sent the troops out by night and they went to the place where they were to lie in ambush and stayed there. Joshua, himself, slept among the people because he was a part of the decoy troops. This kind of dedication should remind us of our greater Joshua who not only sleeps among his people and is with them in the toughest battles, but who has promised to be with them even to the end of the age (**Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5**)

3. Complete Destruction vv. 10-29

The battle proceeded according to plan (**Josh 8:10-17**).

With the soldiers drawn from the city, the Lord commanded Joshua to stretch out his javelin toward Ai for the city had been given into Israel's hand (**Josh 8:18**).

Joshua resembled Moses who stretched out his staff to perform miracles in Egypt, to part the Red Sea, and to fight with Amalek. Both Moses and Joshua resembled the Lord who redeems his people with a stretched-out arm (**Exod. 6:6; 7:5; 15:12**).

When the Israelite soldiers lying in ambush received the sign, they rose quickly, ran into the city, captured it, and set it on fire (**Josh 8:19**). When the men who had pursued Israel in the direction of the wilderness looked back, they saw smoke rising from the fires of Ai and realized they had been tricked! Left without strength to turn one way or the other, they found themselves trapped between the burning city and the Joshua's forces who then turned on them (**8:20-23**). Death and destruction were inevitable and inescapable. This serves as a forewarning sign of God's coming final judgment which is also inevitable and inescapable. When he turns to bring down his condemnation, no one will have the strength to flee (**Rev. 20:11-15**).

The final verses of the chapter describe the complete destruction of the city itself (**8:24-27**). Joshua's concluding acts at Ai delineate the final scenes of total warfare. He burned the city, made it a heap of ruins (**8:28**), and executed its king (**8:29**).

4. Important Lessons

The account of the conquest of Ai highlights both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Within these truths are a number of other lessons:

First, God will accomplish his purposes in spite of man's sin.

Secondly, belief in the sovereignty of God does not mean, however, that our obedience or disobedience is inconsequential.

Thirdly, the ultimate victory of the Israelites at Ai also demonstrates to that God is a God of renewed opportunities.

Fourthly, God does not always work the same way to accomplish His goals.

Though God works in different and often mysterious ways throughout history, in the end, his kingdom will triumph.

The promise of **Josh 8:1**, reminds us of the promise of Jesus to his disciples (**Luke 12:32**).

We might well wonder, given all the wickedness we see in the world around us and the remaining sin we find within us, if we will lie defeated like the soldiers who first attacked Ai or be victorious like Joshua and his ambush unit

The answer lies in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Since Jesus has triumphed over all sin through his death and resurrection, and since he will fully manifest his kingdom when he returns in glory, we need not fear.

He who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion on that great and final day (**Phil. 1:6**).