

# The Conquest of Ai

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – The Israelites destroy the city of Ai and then renew the covenant at Shechem
2. aim – To cause us to see the parallel in our weekly worship of our own covenant renewal
3. passage – Joshua 8:1-35

### b. outline

1. The Plans Against Ai (Joshua 8:1-9)
2. The Attack Against Ai (Joshua 8:10-29)
3. The Covenant Renewal After Ai (Joshua 8:30-35)

### c. opening

1. an **overview** of the book (up to this point; through **11** sermons)
  - a. **chap. 1:** Joshua prepares the people to cross the Jordan; Reuben and Gad are reminded of their promise to join the military force on the W side
  - b. **chap. 2:** Joshua sends spies into Jericho to size up the city; Rahab hides the spies and is promised to be saved when the city is destroyed
  - c. **chaps. 3-4:** the people cross the Jordan and a *memorial* is established at the river to remind them of God's power in bringing them across this "water barrier" (**a new phase begins**)
  - d. **chap. 5:** the new generation is circumcised; the Passover is celebrated in the promised land for the first time; Joshua meets the commander of the Lord's army
  - e. **chap. 6:** Joshua leads the people to take and destroy the city of Jericho; Rahab and her family are saved from the invasion; the city is cursed as a *perpetual memorial* to the power of God
  - f. **chap. 7:** Joshua sends a force to take the city of Ai, but defeated; the cause of the defeat is Achan taking some of the spoils of Jericho; he is executed, and *another memorial* is established
2. an **introduction** to this chapter
  - a. the *initial* destruction of Jericho (as a *seeming* success) is overshadowed by *disobedience*
    1. **i.e.** the *attempt* against Ai (the next city) fails because of this disobedience
    2. so, once the disobedience has been taken care of, **the process can continue**
  - b. the taking of Ai (initially attempted by Joshua) is now *resumed*, but (**this time!**) under the permission of Yahweh (**i.e.** not as just another "city" to capture, but as a part of *his overarching* plan to judge the native peoples and **settle his people in the land**)
  - c. thus, **chap. 8** *continues* the narrative of **7:1-5** = the sin of Achan is an interruption in the **process**
  - d. and, **chap. 8** *completes* the narrative of the people's **arrival** in the land – the renewal of the covenant at Shechem (**vv. 30-35; see below**) demonstrates that they are now officially "here"
  - e. so, we will **summarize** the main elements of both parts (**i.e. 2 pericopes joined**)

## I. The Plans Against Ai (Joshua 8:1-9)

### Content

#### a. the instructions of the Lord (vv. 1-2)

1. **once again:** like **1:1-9; 3:7-13; 4:1-3; 5:2; 6:2-5; 7:10-15**, the Lord instructs Joshua on his next steps
  - a. **i.e.** every incident, *except* the spies sent by Joshua into Jericho, begins with a word from the Lord
2. the instructions that the Lord gives to Joshua (in "logical" order):
  - a. "*do not be dismayed*" = the reasons for your *previous* defeat at Ai have been resolved
  - b. "*I have given ...*" = you are being sent to destroy this city (too!) and I will give it to you
  - c. "*lay an ambush*" = you are to use a *militaristic* approach, taking advantage of the previous attack
  - d. "*you shall do to Ai ... as you did to Jericho*" = you are to *destroy* the city and kill everyone in it
  - e. "*only its spoil ... take as plunder*" = ITC, you are free to take from the city anything you desire
    1. **question:** why would God allow the Israelites to plunder *this* city when he *expressly* forbade it in Jericho (**i.e.** doesn't this seem like he's "giving in" to the "impulses" of the people)?
    2. **answer:** the two cities have a (somewhat!) different *purpose* in being destroyed, and a different *method* will be used to take them (and this will continue through the Conquest going forward)
      - a. the purpose of destroying Jericho was to show the power of God over the "*sin of the Amorites*" – God *announced* his judgment coming into the land through that city
        1. he *miraculously* destroyed the city walls – announcing *his* judgment over the Canaanites

2. and, the spoils of the city were “devoted to destruction” – the spoils were given to *him*
- b. however, destroying Ai would *continue* the judgment of the natives, but its *primary* purpose *now* was to give the land to the Israelites to occupy
  1. the city would be destroyed through a standard *militaristic* method
  2. and, the spoils of the city (coming from the land itself) would now belong to the Israelites
3. **IOW:** Jericho had a *unique purpose*, but now the Lord switches to his primary purpose of the Conquest: to give the *promised* land *and all that it produced* to his people

#### b. the instructions of Joshua (vv. 3-9)

1. the instructions that Joshua gives to his forces (to obey the instructions of the Lord):
  - a. 30,000 “mighty men” (*i.e.* his best forces) will go out – about 10x the size of before (**cf. 7:4**)
    1. they are to go out “by night” so that they can get close to the city without detection
  - b. about 5,000 of those men will lie in ambush to the W (towards the city of Bethel; **see v. 12**)
  - c. he will then lead the remaining 25,000 into direct frontal attack against the city
    1. later (**v. 11**): Joshua will lead his troops in towards Ai from the N, with the rear flank to the W
  - d. when the army of Ai comes out to meet them, the forces with Joshua will “flee before them”
    1. they will “fake” a retreat, causing the *entire force* of Ai to pursue them away from the city
    2. **note:** the forces of *Bethel* will join Ai in the pursuit (**see v. 17**), although the city of Bethel does not appear to be destroyed (the next reference to Bethel is in **12:9** where the king of Bethel is included in the kings defeated by the Israelites; *i.e.* maybe he died in this battle)
  - e. so, when the fighting men come out of Ai, the ambush forces will enter the city and set it on fire
    1. later (**v. 19**): Joshua will signal the ambush by holding his javelin out towards Ai
    2. later (**v. 21**): the smoke coming up from the city will be the signal that the forces with Joshua can turn “back” from their retreat and overtake the forces of Ai
    3. since the men of Ai have been drawn away from the city into open territory, Joshua’s forces should easily overtake them (by sheer numbers: 30,000 Israelites vs. 12,000 of Ai; **see v. 25**)
2. **IOW:** the plan is clearly more “thought out” than what happened in **chap. 7**
3. the **ordinary means** of a human general stationing his troops and planning his attack becomes, *in the hands of God*, an act of **providence** = God’s sovereign decree worked out in time and space

## II. The Attack Against Ai (Joshua 8:10-29)

### Content

#### a. the substance of the attack (vv. 10-23)

1. this section narrates the attack, as given per the instructions above
  - a. so ... it is not necessary to *review* each verse – however, there is a detail to notice here:
2. the Lord *specifically* instructs Joshua to “stretch out” his javelin towards Ai (**v. 18**)
  - a. it is a *signal* to the ambush forces to rush the city now that the armed men have left it (**see above**)
  - b. it is also a *sign* that “mimics” a similar effect in the defeat of the Amalekites at Rephidim
    1. *i.e.* in **Exodus 17:9** where Moses holds up the staff of God above the fray (being helped by Aaron and Hur); as long as he held up his arms, the Israelites prevailed
    2. **note v. 26:** Joshua *continues* to hold up his javelin until the city is *completely* destroyed
  - c. the sign is to the promise of God (**v. 1**) = Yahweh has given the city into the hands of the Israelites

#### b. the results of the attack (vv. 24-29)

1. once the armed forces of Ai are all killed in the wilderness, the people destroy the city:
  - a. (**again, like Jericho**) every living *person* is killed – the **collective guilt** of the people is judged
  - b. **ITC:** the Israelites take all the livestock and spoil as plunder (*i.e.* it belongs to them now)
  - c. Joshua hangs the king of Ai on a tree until evening (*i.e.* as a reminder of the gravity of sin)
    1. but, in accordance with **Deuteronomy 21:22f**, the body is taken down at sunset
    2. the king’s body is thrown at the city gate and buried under a great heap of stones (*i.e.* another *memorial* commemorating *both* the awfulness of sin and the victory of the people)
2. **reality: the destruction of Ai is the final “gateway” for the people to possess the land – crossing the Jordan, devoting Jericho to the Lord, and (now) taking the possessions of Ai represents an “already-but-not-yet” sense of a 600-year-old promise (see next)**

## III. The Covenant Renewal After Ai (Joshua 8:30-35)

### Content

#### a. the ceremony of renewal at Shechem

1. Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim are located **~20 mi.** N of Ai, near Shechem

- a. **Genesis 12:6f**: Shechem is where Yahweh first met with Abraham and promised him the land
  - b. **i.e.** the Israelites do not overthrow Shechem because of a *long-standing* relationship with the city
  - 2. Joshua leads a **covenant renewal ceremony**, obeying the command of Moses in **Deuteronomy 27**
    - a. the two mountains are only about 3 miles apart (N-S) in the center of Canaan
    - b. Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali gather at Mount Ebal (N)
    - c. Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin at Mount Gerizim (S)
    - d. Joshua builds an altar of uncut stones on Mount Ebal, and writes upon them (covered with plaster) the words of the law – he positions the ark *between* the two mountains in the valley
    - e. the two groups (then) shout the blessings and the curses of the law across the valley to each other
    - f. Joshua (then) reads all of the words of the law to the people, including its blessings and curses
  - 3. the ceremony is designed to *complete* the *initial entry* of the people into Canaan – they renew their commitment to the covenant establishing them **as the rightful owners of this land**
    - a. **i.e.** the covenant made with Abraham re: the land belongs *only* to those who are included in *this* covenant made his descendants – thus, the people *remind themselves* of this connection
- b. the importance of renewal**
- 1. **question**: have you noticed how much of our worship services are centered around Scripture (**e.g.** call to worship, responsive reading, song lyrics, chapter reading, sermon text, benediction)?
    - a. **IOW**: we take very seriously the centrality of **the gospel of Jesus Christ** revealed to us in the pages of the Bible – it is (for us!) a *constant reminder* of the **new covenant** that *we belong to*
    - b. **thus ... our worship services are (every week!) a covenant renewal ceremony, as we gather to proclaim that we belong to this new covenant by faith in and obedience to Christ**
      - 1. **true**: we don't build an altar or offer sacrifices – our priest and sacrifice now sits at the right hand of the Father, having *already* made a perfect and eternal atonement for our sin
      - 2. but: we *are* proclaiming (through song, prayer, meditation on Scripture, giving, etc.) that we *belong* to this covenant, and that the “land” (**i.e.** the kingdom) belongs to us
      - 3. **we gather each week to proclaim that “already-but-not-yet” sense of this covenant – we are part of a 2,000-year-old promise in Christ, we have taken the initial steps into it, but are still awaiting its consummation**