

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
2-8-23

Joshua 8

God Encourages Joshua And Gives Him Instructions – Verses 1-2

¹ Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land. ²You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city.”

8:1 After Israel had been cleansed from Achan’s sin, Joshua prepared to attack Ai again—this time to win. Joshua had learned some lessons that we can follow: (1) Confess your sins when God reveals them to you (7:19-21); (2) when you fail, refocus on God, deal with the problem, and move on (7:22-25; 8:1). God wants the cycle of sin, repentance, and forgiveness to strengthen us, not weaken us. The lessons we learn from our failures should make us better able to handle the same situation the second time around. Because God is eager to give us cleansing, forgiveness, and strength, the only way to lose is to give up. We can tell what kind of people we are by what we do on the second and third attempts.

8:2 Why did God allow the Israelites to keep the plunder and livestock this time? Israel’s laws for handling the spoils of war covered two situations: (1) Cities like Jericho which were under God’s ban (judgment for idolatry) could not be looted (see Deuteronomy 20:16-18). God’s people were to be kept holy and separate from every influence of idolatry. (2) The distribution of captured plunder from cities not under the ban was a normal part of warfare. It provided the army and the nation with the necessary food, flocks, and weapons needed to sustain itself in wartime. Ai was not under the ban. The conquering army needed the food and equipment. Because soldiers were not paid, the plunder was part of their incentive and reward for going to war.

Plans Made For An Ambush Upon Ai – Verses 3-8

³ So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack Ai. He chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night ⁴with these orders: “Listen carefully. You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don’t go very far from it. All of you be on the alert. ⁵I and all those with me will advance on the city, and when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them. ⁶They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say, ‘They are running away from us as they did before.’ So when we flee from them, ⁷you are to rise up from ambush and take the city. The LORD your God will give it into your hand. ⁸When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the LORD has commanded. See to it; you have my orders.”

8:3 Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor: This time Joshua did not send 3,000 men as before (Joshua 7:4). Now he sent 30,000 mighty men of valor. When we need to regain victory, we must use every resource, and the best resources for victory.

8:3 The conquest of Ai was very important to the Israelites. Only 11 miles away from Jericho, Ai was a key stronghold for the Canaanites and a buffer fortress for Bethel (8:12). If the Canaanite kings got wind of an Israelite defeat at Ai, they could unite in a coordinated attack. They did not know that God had restored his power and protection to Joshua's troops. We must depend on God with absolute obedience to be sure of the victory he has promised.

8:7 And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city": Though God had given Joshua the general plan in Joshua 8:2, He left it up to Joshua's experience and sanctified common sense to lay out the specific plan of battle.

Joshua Stays With The People – Verses 9-10

9 Then Joshua sent them off, and they went to the place of ambush and lay in wait between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai—but Joshua spent that night with the people. **10** Early the next morning Joshua mustered his army, and he and the leaders of Israel marched before them to Ai.

8:9 But Joshua lodged that night among the people: Joshua was especially near his people during this crucial time of trying to regain victory. The people needed to know he was near, and they needed to follow his leadership.

8:10 Among the people: If we will regain victory, we must live with and follow Jesus, who is our Joshua. He is always near to us at these crucial times in our Christian life, and always goes first to lead us into battle.

Preparations For Battle – Verses 11-13

11 The entire force that was with him marched up and approached the city and arrived in front of it. They set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and the city. **12** Joshua had taken about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. **13** So the soldiers took up their positions—with the main camp to the north of the city and the ambush to the west of it. That night Joshua went into the valley.

8:11 All the people of war who were with him went up and drew near: If Israel would regain victory, they had to take the offensive. They didn't wait for Ai to bring the battle to them; they brought the battle to Ai.

8:13 Joshua went that night into the midst: We often see the battle against sin in negative terms — about what not to do. But we must take the offensive against the powers of darkness and temptation and be busy doing what the Lord would have us to do.

The Ambush Works; The Fighting Men Of Ai Leave The City – Verses 14-17

14 When the king of Ai saw this, he and all the men of the city hurried out early in the morning to meet Israel in battle at a certain place overlooking the Arabah. But he did not know that an ambush had been set against him behind the city. **15** Joshua and all Israel let themselves be driven back before them, and they fled toward the wilderness. **16** All the men of Ai were called to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city. **17** Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel. They left the city open and went in pursuit of Israel.

8:14 When the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle: The men of Ai tried the exact same strategy against Israel as before. Generally, Satan will stick with a strategy against us until it doesn't work anymore.

8:15-17 And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them: God directed Joshua to use a completely different strategy against Ai. When we see the diversity of God's methods, we remember it is because He is a personal God.

Ai Is Totally Defeated And Burnt To The Ground – Verses 18-19

18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city.” So Joshua held out toward the city the javelin that was in his hand. **19** As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire.

8:18-19 The Lord gave Joshua the city. Yesterday's defeat became today's victory. Once sin is dealt with, forgiveness and victory lie ahead. With God's direction we need not stay discouraged or burdened with guilt. No matter how difficult a setback sin may bring, we must renew our efforts to carry out God's will.

Ai Is Totally Defeated And Burnt To The Ground – Verses 20-29

20 The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising up into the sky, but they had no chance to escape in any direction; the Israelites who had been fleeing toward the wilderness had turned back against their pursuers. **21** For when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that smoke was going up from it, they turned around and attacked the men of Ai. **22** Those in the ambush also came out of the city against them, so that they were caught in the middle, with Israelites on both sides. Israel cut them down, leaving them neither survivors nor fugitives. **23** But they took the king of Ai alive and brought him to Joshua. **24** When Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the wilderness where they had chased them, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in it. **25** Twelve thousand men and women fell that day—all the people of Ai. **26** For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his javelin until he had destroyed all who lived in Ai. **27** But Israel did carry off for themselves the livestock and plunder of this city, as the LORD had instructed Joshua. **28** So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day. **29** He impaled the body of the king of Ai on a pole and left it there until evening. At sunset, Joshua ordered them to take the body from the pole and throw it down at the entrance of the city gate. And they raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day.

8:26 Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of ai: if israel will regain victory, they must show no mercy to their enemy, but crush the enemy completely at every opportunity.

We can summarize the keys for victory from this chapter: Be encouraged - Follow the lord's plan - Use every resource, and the best resources - Live with and look to Jesus - Go on the offensive - Show no mercy to your enemy.

8:27 According to the word of the lord which he had commanded Joshua: so far, Israel's experience is an illustration of their whole history, and the spiritual history of many Christians: Obedience followed by victory - Victory followed by blessing - Blessing followed by pride and disobedience -

Disobedience followed by defeat - Defeat followed by judgment - Judgment followed by repentance - Repentance followed by obedience - Obedience followed by victory, and the cycle continues.

The Covenant Renewed At Mount Ebal – Verses 30-31

³⁰ Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, ³¹ as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses—an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the LORD burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings.

8:30 Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: This is in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 27-28. There, the Lord told Israel when they came to the Promised Land, to come to these mountains, build an altar, sacrifice to the Lord, and read the law.

8:31 And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings: We see an appropriate act of worship, and consecration to God, following a great victory. God always should get the glory. Even when men looked at the altar, they would not see elaborate carvings — though beautiful — drawing attention to man's work (whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool).

8:30-31 The altar was to be built out of whole, uncut stones so it would be holy (see Exodus 20:25). This would prevent the people from worshiping altars like idols, or worshiping the craftsmanship of the workers rather than the great works of God.

Blessings Read From Mount Gerizim, Curses From Mount Ebal – Verses 32-35

³² There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on stones a copy of the law of Moses. ³³ All the Israelites, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing the Levitical priests who carried it. Both the foreigners living among them and the native-born were there. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel. ³⁴ Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses—just as it is written in the Book of the Law. ³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the foreigners who lived among them.

8:32 He wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written: In this act of obedience we see Joshua as a man of the Book, obeying the command of Joshua 1:8. We also see Israel as a people of the Book ordering their lives after God's word.

8:33 Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal: This was a beautiful place to do this, and the whole nation could hear this reading of the Law. The area has a natural amphitheater effect because of the contour of the hills. This event, at this place, shows that Israel controls the middle of Canaan and the highlands. The rest is a matter of taking advantage of this strategic position.