

THE VICTORY AT AI

BIBLE TEXT : Joshua 8:1-29

LESSON 173 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Joshua 8:1-29

¹ And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land:

² And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it.

³ So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night.

⁴ And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, *even* behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready:

⁵ And I, and all the people that *are* with me, will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them,

⁶ (For they will come out after us) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them.

⁷ Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand.

⁸ And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, *that* ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of the Lord shall ye

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Divine Stratagem

1 God commanded Israel to take all the men of war against Ai, in contrast with the few who went before, Joshua 8:1;

Joshua 7:2-4

² And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.

³ And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; *and* make not all the people to labour thither; for they *are but* few.

⁴ So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.

2 God promised victory at Ai similar to the victory at Jericho, Joshua 8:2; 6:2;

Daniel 2:21

²¹ And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

Daniel 4:35

³⁵ And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Psalms 44:1-7

¹ We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, *what* work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.

² *How* thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; *how* thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out.

³ For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.

⁴ Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.

⁵ Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.

⁶ For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.

⁷ But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us.

3 The plan of attack was given Joshua by the Lord, Joshua 8:3-8;

Judges 20:28-48

²⁸ And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

²⁹ And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah.

³⁰ And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.

³¹ And the children of Benjamin went out against the

do. See, I have commanded you.

⁹ Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people.

¹⁰ And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai.

¹¹ And all the people, *even the people* of war that *were* with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now *there was* a valley between them and Ai.

¹² And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

¹³ And when they had set the people, *even* all the host that *was* on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

¹⁴ And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw *it*, that they hastened and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that *there were* liers in ambush against him behind the city.

¹⁵ And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.

¹⁶ And all the people that *were* in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city.

¹⁷ And there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.

¹⁸ And the Lord said unto Joshua,

people, *and* were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, *and* kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

³² And the children of Benjamin said, They *are* smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways.

³³ And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baaltamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, *even* out of the meadows of Gibeah.

³⁴ And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil *was* near them.

³⁵ And the Lord smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.

³⁶ So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.

³⁷ And the liers in wait hastened, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew *themselves* along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.

³⁸ Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.

³⁹ And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite *and* kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as *in* the first battle.

⁴⁰ But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven.

⁴¹ And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them.

⁴² Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which *came* out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them.

⁴³ *Thus* they inclosed the Benjamites round about, *and* chased them, *and* trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising.

⁴⁴ And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these *were* men of valour.

⁴⁵ And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them.

⁴⁶ So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these *were* men of valour.

⁴⁷ But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.

⁴⁸ And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of *every* city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

Proverbs 21:30-31

³⁰ *There is* no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.

³¹ The horse *is* prepared against the day of battle: but safety *is* of the Lord.

Stretch out the spear that *is* in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that *he had* in his hand toward the city.

¹⁹ And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand: and they entered into the city, and took it, and hastened and set the city on fire.

²⁰ And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and, behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that way: and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers.

²¹ And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai.

²² And the other issued out of the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side: and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape.

²³ And the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

²⁴ And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword.

²⁵ And *so* it was, *that* all that fell that day, both of men and women, *were* twelve thousand, *even* all the men of Ai.

²⁶ For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

²⁷ Only the cattle and the spoil of

1 Samuel 14:6-10

⁶ And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for *there is* no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.

⁷ And his armourbearer said unto him, Do all that *is* in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I *am* with thee according to thy heart.

⁸ Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto *these* men, and we will discover ourselves unto them.

⁹ If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them.

¹⁰ But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for the Lord hath delivered them into our hand: and this *shall be* a sign unto us.

II Divine Victory

1 God's plan of attack gave Israel victory over Ai, Joshua 8:9-29;

Judges 20:28-48

²⁸ And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

²⁹ And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah.

³⁰ And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.

³¹ And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, *and* were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, *and* kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.

³² And the children of Benjamin said, They *are* smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways.

³³ And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baaltamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, *even* out of the meadows of Gibeah.

³⁴ And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that *evil was* near them.

³⁵ And the Lord smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.

³⁶ So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.

³⁷ And the liers in wait hastened, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew *themselves* along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.

³⁸ Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.

³⁹ And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite *and* kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as *in* the first battle.

⁴⁰ But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven.

that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of the Lord which he commanded Joshua.

²⁸ And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, *even* a desolation unto this day.

²⁹ And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, *that remaineth* unto this day.

⁴¹ And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them.

⁴² Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which *came* out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them.

⁴³ *Thus* they inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising.

⁴⁴ And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these *were* men of valour.

⁴⁵ And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them.

⁴⁶ So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these *were* men of valour.

⁴⁷ But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.

⁴⁸ And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of *every* city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

2 Kings 3:9-25

⁹ So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them.

¹⁰ And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!

¹¹ But Jehoshaphat said, *Is there* not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

¹² And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

¹³ And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.

¹⁴ And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

¹⁵ But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.

¹⁶ And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches.

¹⁷ For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.

¹⁸ And this is *but* a light thing in the sight of the Lord: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.

¹⁹ And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.

²⁰ And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.

²¹ And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were

come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border.

²² And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side *as red as blood*:

²³ And they said, This *is* blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.

²⁴ And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in *their* country.

²⁵ And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees: only in Kirharaseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about *it*, and smote it.

Proverbs 20:18

¹⁸ *Every* purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.

Proverbs 24:6

⁶ For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors *there is* safety.

2 The loot of Jericho was to be consecrated as the firstfruits unto the Lord, but the spoils of Ai were Israel's, Joshua 8:2, 27;

Joshua 6:18-19

¹⁸ And ye, in any wise keep *yourselves* from the accursed thing, lest ye make *yourselves* accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.

¹⁹ But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, *are* consecrated unto the Lord: they shall come into the treasury of the Lord.

Joshua 6:24

²⁴ And they burnt the city with fire, and all that *was* therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.

Exodus 22:29

²⁹ Thou shalt not delay *to offer* the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me.

NOTES:

Promise of Victory

The Scripture declares: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee" (Psalm 84:5). And Israel's strength was in their true devotion and worship of the living God. Israel had been ignominiously defeated at Ai because one of the Israelites had partaken of the accursed thing, and thereby brought the curse of God upon them.

Joshua, by the guidance of God, had searched through all Israel until the one guilty of sin was revealed. The camp of Israel had been purged of their guilt by destroying Achan, who was the transgressor against God. Now God was again ready to bless Israel as He had at Jericho.

"Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land:

"Aid thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves': lay thee an ambush for the city behind it" (Joshua 8:1, 2).

With such words God spoke to Joshua and encouraged him to take the men of war and again attack Ai. God also told Joshua how to proceed to take the city. The history of ancient wars has proved that the attack of a walled city has often been unsuccessful. Modern textbooks on warfare declare that the attacking party against a fortified position should outnumber the defenders at least three to one. In ancient days when walled cities were successfully conquered the city usually was taken by guile or subterfuge and not by military might alone.

The citizens of Ai, like all the Canaanites, were well acquainted with war and the shedding of blood, and may have been well able to hold out against Israel for a long time, outnumbered though they were.

Israel had no formally trained generals or military men, for it was a nation of herdsmen. Their military success did not come from their own ability or genius but from the purposeful intervention of the Lord, who overthrew the heathen nations in behalf of His people.

The heathen nations that resisted Israel had refused for many generations to admit or consider the homage and duty they owed to the Lord, the Creator of the earth and all that is therein. Now because of that resistance they were suffering attack by God's people, and God had ordained their defeat because of their sin.

Plan of Attack

The Lord knew Israel had no machines of war to breach the walls of Ai to enable them to capture the city. At Jericho God had supernaturally caused the walls of Jericho to fall down, so that Israel was able to enter the city without great difficulty. God could have easily repeated the miracle of Jericho, but He chose to do otherwise.

Perhaps Israel had shown too much self-confidence when they so hastily went up to attack Ai with but a few men. We read of no consultation with God as to the advisability of such action, and the results seem to have proved that their hastiness was not ordered by the Lord. Achan caused the curse of God to come upon the camp of Israel, and Israel found themselves without power against their enemies, and were shamefully defeated.

Now God's plan was to take all the men of war against Ai. The generalship of God has never been matched, nor indeed ever will be. The Angel of God who met Joshua preceding the siege of Jericho informed Joshua He had come as the Captain of the host of the Lord. That Captain has proved His leadership many times over, for we believe He is no other than the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Joshua needed to have no fear of defeat when the Lord was at the command position in battle

God gave Joshua a plan of strategy to lure the inhabitants of Ai out into the open where they would be outnumbered by the Israelites many times over. How easily are the wicked defeated when God is permitted to plan the battle for their defeat!

Victory at Ai

Joshua placed some of his men of war behind Ai in ambush. Then the next morning, approaching the city with the rest of the soldiers, the Israelites lured the men of Ai out of their city to attack them. The Israelites retreated, acting as though they were being defeated. The men of Ai at once

thought they were victorious, and had all their citizens leave the city to pursue Israel. Whereupon those Israelites behind the city rushed into the then-undefended city, and set it on fire. When the people of Ai saw their city on fire, they attempted to retreat but found themselves surrounded, and so were destroyed. All the men and women of Ai, numbering about twelve thousand, were destroyed; and so God gave Israel victory over Ai.

It can be said that the men of Ai were victims of their own self-confidence, for they had low regard for the ability of the God of Israel to give the Israelites victory. "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong" (Job 5:12, 13). Such seems to have been the fate of the people of Ai.

Victory Through Obedience

"To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (I Samuel 15:22). The Israelites finally won the victory at Ai because they were obedient to the voice of God. Humiliated because of disobedience in their midst, they obeyed God and sought out the one who was troubling Israel. And when they had cleansed their camp from all defilement, God was again with them to give them victory over their enemies.

The citizens of Ai would have had no quarrel with the God of Israel had they obeyed His voice in the years preceding this conquest. It was stubborn refusal to heed the commands of God that caused God to use Israel as an instrument of judgment that Ai, as also the rest of Canaan, might be judged for sin.

Israel was told by the Lord that it was not for any righteousness of their own that they were given victory over their enemies. "Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff necked people" (Deuteronomy 9:5, 6).

We have read that later on Israel became disobedient to the point that they were dispersed throughout all the world, and also destroyed as a nation. For hundreds of years Israel had no seat of government, because -of their disobedience, and only recently have they again come into recognition as a political nation. Israel's individuality has been kept in existence by divine command. This has not been so in the case 'of other nations. The nation that will not serve God and will not honor Him, eventually goes into extinction. History is full of the names of great nations which do not exist at the present time because they had no time for the honor of God. This is also the case with individuals. Achan was guilty of such a misdemeanor; he troubled Israel, and was destroyed. The citizens of Ai had no time for the service and honor of God, and therefore they suffered destruction at the hands of those who did honor and serve Him.

Reigning with Christ

The saints of God shall in the end rule the world, because God has ordained that they who love Him shall rule and reign with Him. All sinners *shall* be cast into the lake of everlasting fire.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe the plan of attack Israel used to capture Ai.
- 2 Who was the author of this plan of attack?
- 3 Why did God help Israel to defeat the people of Ai?
- 4 Why did God want Joshua to take all the men of war with him to attack Ai?
- 5 What happened to Israel because they were disobedient to God?
- 6 Who was the leader of Israel's armies?