

Victory At Ai.

Joshua 8:1-29

Sunday evening, January 31, 2010.

- I. Two striking differences between the campaigns at Jericho and Ai.
 - A. At Jericho the Lord had supernaturally brought down the walls of the city, no doubt killing most of the defenders on those walls. He handed it over to Israel for utter destruction. The Lord Himself had provided Israel with a precise strategy as to how to take the city. (Walk around it for seven days; blow the trumpets etc.) At Ai Joshua was to devise a strategy for taking the city, and the people were to do battle against an enemy that came out to attack them.
 - B. The city of Jericho was in its entirety given over to the Lord as a sacrifice as it were. Nothing was to be taken by the people. All the spoils of war were given to the people at the city of Ai. Only its inhabitants were utterly destroyed.

- II. The campaign against Ai.
 - A. The terrain around Ai.
 1. About 2.5mi. WNW was the city of Bethel which was much smaller than Ai. The people of Bethel seem to have sought refuge in the city of Ai. Vs. 17.
 2. The terrain between Bethel and Ai is mountainous, so it was easy for Joshua to hide 5000 men on the west side of the city. They were positioned near the city, yet totally out of sight. Joshua did so under the cover of night.
 3. To the North of Ai is a valley at the bottom of which runs a wadi (a streambed that is normally dry, and carries water only after heavy rains.) The valley and its wadi run East toward the Jordan river where the wadi empties out.
 - B. Joshua's strategy.
 1. Having hid the 5000 men on the west side of Ai under the cover of darkness, Joshua positions his main force on the North side of Ai at the edge of the valley. They would be in plain sight once the sun rose over the landscape.
 2. Joshua was making a virtue out of a vice here as he was counting on the men of Ai to be over-confident as a result of their last victory over Israel. They would come out of their city; battle and defeat the Israelites in the valley as they had done the first time.
 3. Israel would pretend defeat and flee Eastward, through the valley, and toward the Jordan River. The men of Ai would pursue them away from the city.
 4. Joshua would give a sign and the men hidden on the West side of the city would quickly take the city and set it on fire, at which time Joshua and his men would stop fleeing and join the battle. The 5000 men would come out of the city and attack the men of Ai from behind.
 5. The king of Ai was taken alive and taken to Joshua. He was hung on a tree, thus receiving a greater judgment than the common folks of Ai, as he was more responsible before the Lord, being the leader of His people. Death by hanging was considered particularly dis-honorable. "He who is hanged is accursed of God." Deut. 21:22,23. As such he was taken down before

nightfall, and buried at the entrance of his city under a great heap of stones, which in the understanding of the people of that day constituted a "monument of disgrace." Joshua 7:26.

C. The hidden hand of God.

1. The hand of God, that had been so openly at work in the fall of the city of Jericho, was much more hidden at the fall of Ai. Yet we are reminded in this account over and over again that it was the good pleasure of the Lord that gave Ai into the hands of Israel. It was the Lord who blinded the men of Ai to the possibility of an ambush on the west side of the city. It was the Lord who made them over-confident, and it was the Lord who taught the hand of Israel to fight and prevail. See vs. 1,7,8, 18.
2. Note in vs.18 that as Moses had stretched out his shepherd staff so many times for the protection and provision of the Lord's people, so now Joshua stretches out his warrior's spear and will not put it down until all the inhabitants of Ai were destroyed.
By the staff and the spear the callings of these two men are beautifully illustrated and set before us.

III. Some lessons to learn for us.

- A. The campaign against Ai teaches us not to become overly dependant on God's supernatural provisions in our lives.
1. The Lord was pleased to add His blessing to the ordinary efforts of ordinary people. This is the way the Lord ordinarily works in history.
 2. There is in this use of ordinary means a temptation that we begin to think of ourselves more highly than we ought, and to boast in our own accomplishments. Let us always remember that it is the invisible hand of God that adds or withholds His blessing to, or from, our humble efforts.
 3. Let each of us learn from Joshua and from Moses to hold our "shepherd staff or our spear" lifted up toward heaven, looking to the Lord of heaven and earth to add his blessings to our humble efforts.
- B. Let us learn from the events at Jericho and Ai that in the process of leading us into our Canaan, the Lord gives us some victories freely as He did with Jericho. Let us also observe that all other victories come in the process of struggle, strategy, and battle.
1. These battles must be *faced*. Israel might not have wanted to face this battle after their defeat the first time around. But the Lord did not leave them without encouragement. We may not want to face our battles either; we may want the Lord to win them supernaturally for us, but the Lord has not left us without encouragement either as He calls us to face the battle.
 2. The battles must be *fought*. Not in the energy of the flesh, but by prayer, by patience, by the Word of truth, by acts of kindness, by love, and by seeking the eternal good of those around us. James 3:14-18.
 3. The battles must be fought and faced by *faith*. Faith that the Lord is with His people; that He is not absent from our struggles, but that He is at work in the midst of them, and that in due time, in His own way He will add His blessing to them for His glory and for our good. Do you believe that?