

Joshua 8

Written by K B Napier
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Here we see God's word in action. The text is really a summary of how Christians should view God and life. When we obey we live and are blessed; when we disobey we die and lose blessings and are cursed. This is very plain.

The text also shows us that it is God Whose might beats the enemy, not us or our clever arguments or laws. When we obey, God shows us how to live and how to defeat the enemy, if that is His will. Sometimes it is not, at least in the timeframe we expect... God works in His own time, not ours.

Verses 1&2

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.

God does not hold grudges, nor does He extend suffering for the sake of it. When there is repentance, God grasps our hand immediately showing us His incredible mercy and grace. What we see in verse one is the situation today, when so many believers are at their wits' end worrying about all kinds of problems and about the encroaching armies of wicked people who want them gone.

The same answer is for us today, as it was for Joshua and Israel: *"Fear not, neither be thou dismayed..."* God is with us,

Joshua 8

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though to the human eye all is lost! God is in control and nothing happens except it is by His fiat. Even those things we personally see as a disaster... God is in control and whatever happens to His children is within His will. How we measure success and good must be in God's language not our own. The main ingredient is not to fear or to worry about what is going to happen. It is all in His hands... even when we refuse to accept it and become depressed or anxious!

God can defeat an enemy without any human means, or He will do it with one or two. Remember how the young David and Jonathan ran down the hillside at night into the Philistine camp, who then proceeded to kill each other? The courage of the two friends was given by God, and they took it as granted that God was with them. And so the victory by just two young men who trusted God.

However, in this case God used all the Israelite army to reverse an earlier defeat brought about by nonchalance and pride in the enemy, and the hidden sin of just one man in Israel. In our day, will God bring about a reversal of the wicked enemies' successes through a mass movement? Or, will He use just one man, a kind of super-hero? It is my view that He will use neither, but will bring about the defeat of the wicked on His own, by direct Heavenly command.

At the same time He requires all who claim to be His to make their mark, to stand firm, and not to show fear to evil enemies and situations. This will not bring about the Heavenly success, but will simply confirm and show it. It will all be of God! Therefore, do not be 'dismayed' (disappointed) but march onward, taking the high ground, for God is with us. Any discomfort is temporary, to test our faith and inward strength. God punished Israel for the sin of Achan, but now, with repentance, comes His recovery plan.

And so God tells Joshua to gather together his army, to again march against the men of Ai, who, by now, were luxuriating in supposed victory, sure they could beat Israel again. It is probable they were plotting just such a final attack, to rid the land of God's people... just as God's enemies plot against believers in modern days, so the unbelievers can rule the earth with violence and great evils. But, it is not to be!

God assures Joshua that the king of Ai and everything he ruled was now doomed. They would fall at the hand of Joshua's (God's) army, and everything owned by the king would then belong to Israel. Even as homosexuals, Muslims and countless others of Satan are planning how to divide up the earth, so God laughs at them, for His will is already in action and they will be

Joshua 8

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finished. We will see much heartache before that, but it WILL happen. So, do not envy what these powerful enemies currently have – it will all be gone in an instant.

The end of Ai would be like that of Jericho – utter devastation. This time, however, the Israelites could take the spoils of war and livestock for themselves. God's army would do it by stealth, by laying an ambush for the over-confident men of Ai, hiding thousands of Israelite soldiers behind the fortress city.

Verses 3-8

1.

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.

2.

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:

3.

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,

4.

(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.

5.

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

6.

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 do. See, I have commanded you.

Joshua 8

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So, Joshua and the army made ready to go to war again, just days after winning against Jericho and then losing to Ai. Joshua divided up the army, sending 30,000 men out at night. These men would approach in silence, hidden in darkness, and would hide behind the city until the time came to attack. It is obvious from the text that the men of Ai did not detect this huge movement of soldiers.

The rest of the soldiers would approach the city by day, giving the notion they wanted to fight. Then, when the men of Ai hit back, the Israelites would turn as they did before and run, giving the impression they were again to be beaten. The idea was simple – the men of Ai would mistakenly think the Israelites were already beaten, so all the men of the city would come out to chase them. When the men of Ai left the city unguarded the men behind the city would enter and set it on fire. This was Joshua's command and tactic.

Very often the answer to evil is bold and on a great scale. But, it is also given to some to beat the odds individually. It all depends on how God wishes to proceed... and we will KNOW which route He will take. The important factor is not to fear, but to go on boldly, for God is our shield. In our own strength we will fail.

Verses 9-12

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

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.

Joshua 8

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4.

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.

The secret 30,000 went their way as the rest of Israel slept. Next morning Joshua got together the rest of his army and all the males of fighting age, plus the elders of each tribe. They reached Ai over difficult mountainous terrain, and camped to the north of the city, in a valley which was about 8 miles north-east of Jericho, between Ai and Bethel (formerly Luz); both were not far apart.

There is also a valley to the west of Ai, but Joshua chose the north sided valley. Here, Joshua picked 5000 men to lay an ambush on the western side. He would ensure the men of Ai rushed after his army westward, straight into the arms of the 5000. The enemies of God are, too, unaware that God has laid a snare for them, one that will bring them to an abrupt end, even today. Any salvation of His people is always well in hand even before it is needed.

Verses 13-15

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

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

Joshua 8

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Everything was set for the termination of Ai... 30,000 soldiers hidden to the north east, 5000 to the west, and the rest to the north. When all was ready, Joshua and his men went into the centre of the valley close to Ai, at night. Soon, the men of Ai saw them, and told the king, who mustered his men early in the morning. Plans were made and at a certain time the king ordered his men to attack the Israelites in the valley to the west, not knowing 5000 men lay in wait. Joshua and his men ran away westward, as if again afraid to stand and fight. The trap was now set.

Verses 16-20

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

And the LORD said unto Joshua, 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.

4.

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 hasted and set the city on fire.

5.

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.

Joshua 8

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So excited were the soldiers of Ai, they all ran out of the city, throwing caution to the wind, sure of once again defeating the intruders. Also note that they were joined by the men of Bethel, all of whom raced after the supposedly fleeing Israelites.

When all the enemy were running, God instructed Joshua to hold out his spear so that it pointed to Ai. This was God's promise – to give Ai to Joshua. As soon as he did that, the 30,000 men rose up from their hiding places to the north and entered the unguarded city. They immediately set it on fire, and the men of Ai looked back to see the smoke of destruction wafting high into the sky. Only then did they realise they had been deceived, but by that time they were trapped, as the Israelites turned to attack. The men of Ai knew their time of defeat had come.

Verses 21-24

1.

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

2.

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.

3.

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

4.

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.

Joshua's men completed the task and killed every one of the pursuing army, with the 30,000 coming back out of the city to help them. None of the Amorites survived. To me, this should be

Joshua 8

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the model for current treatment of pagan terrorists, who should be similarly put to instant death.

The king of Ai was taken alive to Joshua. The Israelites continued in their slaying of the soldiers, and then they entered Ai to slay the inhabitants still there. We can assume that the same thing happened to Bethel. In this way many Amorites were slain, but there were more still alive, elsewhere in Canaan.

Verses 25-29

1.

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

2.

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

3.

Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of the LORD which he commanded Joshua.

4.

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

5.

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 carcass 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.

The number from Ai who died on that day was 12,000, including women. The destruction

Joshua 8

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Tuesday, 08 August 2017 09:51

continued so long as Joshua held out the spear, which was a symbol of God's wrath against the pagan Canaanites. The triumphant soldiers took the spoils and cattle for themselves, and Joshua made sure that Ai was burnt to ash, to be known by future generations as the ones God destroyed.

The king of Ai did not escape his fate, for he was hanged from a tree until night fell. Then, Joshua commanded that his body be taken down and thrown into the gateway of the now destroyed city. A huge number of large stones was then dumped on top, as a warning and memorial. Christians can be assured that while terrorists and wicked sexualists now rule, they will not do so for much longer, for God has already planned a 'Joshua trap', and our enemies will at last be vanquished.

Verses 30-35

1.

Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal,

2.

As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

3.

And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.

4.

And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

5.

And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that

Joshua 8

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is written in the book of the law.

6.

There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

Following this victory, Joshua had an altar built on the bare Mount Ebal as a memorial to God's greatness and a sign of His cursing of pagan societies. Ebal was opposite Mount Gerizim, with Shechem in between. The location was north of Jerusalem and north-west of Jericho.



Ebal represented curses from God, and Gerizim represented His blessings. Joshua did this because it was commanded by Moses previously – to take ‘whole stones’ or **shalem** (perfect; large; unworked) as a memorial. The stones may have contained iron but the iron was not extracted. OR, the stones were likened to iron because of their hardness. The priests then offered up a burnt and a peace offering to God. Joshua then – either himself or by the priests - wrote the Decalogue on the stones, as the tribes watched.

The people – many thousands – then stood either in front of Mount Ebal or in front of Mount Gerizim with the Ark. The people included ‘strangers’ – those not born as Hebrews but allowed certain concessions as aliens. Thus, half stood before one mountain and half before the other, maybe about half a million or more in each group. Thus, reminded of the blessings and curses of God, the people were blessed in this very graphic way.

When this was done, Joshua read out the law – every word of it, plus all the curses and blessings of God, until the whole of the law was given to the people. How could such a large number possibly hear Joshua speak? Either God used the mountains as sounding boards, or the message was passed on by scribes and priests and elders.

Joshua 8

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In this way the people were again reminded that God, not their own prowess, wins the day, and that God blesses them when they obey, but curses them when they do not. The taking of Jericho, Bethel and Ai were proof of this. As believers today it is well to remember this stark sombre fact.

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