

Joshua 8 Commentary

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LAND ALLOTMENTS

Click charts to enlarge Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission

JOSHUA

**A BOOK ON SPIRITUAL WARFARE and REST
HOW TO POSSESS YOUR POSSESSIONS**

CONQUEST OF THE PROMISED LAND		DIVISION OF THE PROMISED LAND		CLOSE OF JOSHUA'S LIFE
ACTION		ALLOCATION		APPEAL
Josh 1:1-5:15	Josh 6:1-12:24	Joshua 13:1-21:45		Josh 22:1-24:33
WARLORDS IN CANAAN		LANDLORDS IN CANAAN		
ENTERING CANAAN	CONQUERING CANAAN	DIVIDING CANAAN		
SECURING THE LAND		SETTLING THE LAND		
Preparation	Conquest	Possession		Consecration
ca. 1 Month	ca 7 Years	ca. 18 Years		

[See also more detailed Chart by Charles R Swindoll](#)

Joshua 8:1 Now the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear or be dismayed. **Take** all the people of war with you and **arise, go up** to Ai; see, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.

- **Fear:** Jos 1:9 7:6,7,9 De 1:21 7:18 31:8 Ps 27:1 46:11 Isa 12:2 41:10-16 Isa 43:2 Jer 46:27 Mt 8:26
- **I have:** Jos 6:2 Ps 44:3 Da 2:21,37,38 4:25,35
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 1:21 (SAME WORDS TO MOSES WHEN HE SENT OUT 12 SPIES) 'See, the LORD your God has placed the land before you; go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has spoken to you. **Do not fear or be dismayed**'

Deuteronomy 31:8 (SAME WORDS TO JOSHUA BEFORE MOSES PASSED THE BATON) "The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. **Do not fear or be dismayed.**"

Joshua 1:9 (YAHWEH'S WORDS DIRECTLY TO JOSHUA BEFORE ENTERING THE LAND) "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! **Do not tremble or be dismayed**, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

DIVINE GUIDANCE FOR THE SECOND ATTACK ON AI

Now - This marks a new day. Sin is purged from the camp which allows Joshua to communicate with the Captain of the Lord's host.

THOUGHT - The principle is clear - deal with sin before you attempt to engage in spiritual warfare with the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#). And seek the Lord for His presence and power against the strong supernatural forces.

The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear or be dismayed"- This encouragement was clearly needed after their hearts had melted in Joshua 7:5. Joshua needed a divine reminder.

Utley - YHWH renews His encouragement and assurances from Joshua 1:9+.

Blaikie - It is most interesting to mark how the Bible is studded with "fear nots," from Genesis to Revelation; from that early word to Abraham - "Fear not, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" - to that most comforting assurance to the beloved disciple, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen; and have the

keys of hades and of death." If only God's children could hear Him uttering that one word, from how much anxiety and misery would it set them free! ([The Capture of Ai](#))

Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to Ai; see, There are 4 commands from the LORD and He reverses the former strategy of taking only 3000.

Utley - "Take all the people of war with you" The phrase "all the people of war" (cf. Joshua 8:3; 10:7; 11:7, 18, 19, 20), can refer to less than the total number. Compare Joshua 1:14–15 with Joshua 3:12–13; for the same type of example, also see Josh 8:16 as compared to Josh 8:19.

I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land- God's voice had been silent prior to the first attack on Ai. But now again just as before the battle of Jericho, God gives the promise in the **past tense** (see Josh 6:1+), indicating all Israel had to do was obey Him and the victory was theirs for the taking!

Stephen Grant - The account of the battle of Ai is the first and most detailed account of a battle in the book of Joshua. The conquest of Jericho was accomplished by direct intervention from the Lord and required no military strategy; at Ai the means were different but the help and presence of the Lord was equally essential. It was more difficult to take Ai at the second attempt than it would have been without the trespass of the people at Jericho. This is the cost of failure, since a road littered with diversions is a harder road to negotiate. There are some difficulties with the numbers of men (Josh 8:3, 12) that are mentioned and the chronology of events in this chapter. This has been the subject of much debate amongst commentators. (**ED: I FIND THE VARIOUS COMMENTARIES VERY DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW REGARDING THE NUMBER OF MEN AND EVEN THE NUMBER OF AMBUSHES**). ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Irving Jensen - Restoration is simply returning. When fellowship with God is broken by sin, restoration of that fellowship comes by returning to the place of separation, confessing the sin, and renewing the walk with God from there. In the case of the Israelites, Achan's sin, though committed at Jericho, took its toll at Ai, since Jericho fell before the sin. So the place of renewed walk would be at Ai. Thus God's instructions to Joshua were "Go up to Ai." It was a journey of about fifteen miles from Gilgal, an ascent of 3,200 feet, and the journey would recall all the intimidating pictures of the recent flight from Ai. But Ai was the place for Israel to regain her momentum. In fact, God promised to restore the pre-Ai momentum to Israel by assuring her of victory as at Jericho

Alan Redpath - May the Holy Spirit write it with power on your hearts: lost ground in Christian living is very hard to recover. This is the essential background on which this chapter is based. The people of God experienced at Ai the difficulty of recovering lost ground, and what happened immediately afterward was to be expected. No sooner had they slipped up and been beaten, and recovered ground, than there was written on their minds the principles by which they might possess all that God had for them in the land of Canaan. Here was the secret of insuring that the same disaster might not happen again.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary - Verses 1-2. When we have faithfully put away sin, that accursed thing which separates between us and God, then, and not till then, we may look to hear from God to our comfort; and God's directing us how to go on in our Christian work and warfare, is a good evidence of his being reconciled to us. God encouraged Joshua to proceed. At Ai the spoil was not to be destroyed as at Jericho, therefore there was no danger of the people's committing such a trespass. Achan, who caught at forbidden spoil, lost that, and life, and all; but the rest of the people, who kept themselves from the accursed thing, were quickly rewarded for their obedience. The way to have the comfort of what God allows us, is, to keep from what he forbids us. No man shall lose by self-denial.

Alan Carr - It is interesting that the Lord called them to return to the place of their greatest defeat. God knew that they needed to overcome the defeat at Ai before they could move on in the conquest of Canaan. Folks, it's the same for you and me this morning. How many times have we lost the battle to the flesh? How many times have we been defeated by this old sinful nature's lust for the forbidden? How many times have we fallen and wonder if we will ever get back to where we were before. I think the Lord has a word for that this morning! Notice what He told Joshua, "Fear not!" I think that is the Lord's word to us this morning! To those who have fallen and have lost a battle to the flesh, God says, "Fear not! I am giving you the victory!" I think it is a blessing to know that I do not have to live in defeat as a Christian! I think it is a blessing to know that I am no longer a slave to sin, the flesh and the devil, Rom. 6:14! I am thankful that God has promised the victory in this area to His children—1 Cor. 15:57.) I will remind you once again that the Lord did not save your soul to leave you defeated and beaten by the flesh. He saved you to walk in the victory that He can give to those who will walk in His ways and not in their own ways or in the ways of the world.) ([Joshua 8:1-35 How To Ambush Your Ai](#))

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

1. Fear not, neither be thou dismayed. The sin of Achan and its consequences had probably weighed deeply on the spirits of Joshua, grieving and discouraging him, so as to render this renewed exhortation peculiarly seasonable at this time. When we have faithfully put away the sin that separated between God and us, we may confidently expect the light of his countenance to be restored

to us, and that he will animate us with such encouragements as shall banish the fear of our most formidable enemies.

Take all the people of war with thee. This can hardly be understood of the whole number of men of war in the congregation, which amounted to upwards of six hundred thousand. It is more probable that by 'all the people of war' is to be understood the thirty thousand men mentioned Joshua 8:3, the choicest part, the flower of the host, those who were most experienced in warlike affairs. The main body of the soldiery remained in the camp at Gilgal.

I have given. I have purposed to give. The event is certain, that they shall be delivered into your power.

And his land. That is, the territory immediately adjoining the city, and under the jurisdiction of the king.

Alan Carr applies the teaching on **Ai** - Before we move into these verses this morning, I want to tell you that Ai, in the Bible, is a type of the flesh. The word "Ai" means "a heap of ruins." That is a good way to describe this flesh in which we live. The first mention of this city is found in the book of Genesis in connection with the life of Abraham, Gen. 12:8; 13:3. The Bible tells us that Abraham pitched his tent "between Bethel and Hai." Now, the name "Bethel" means, "The house of God." Isn't it interesting that many saints have pitched their tents somewhere between the house of God and a heap of ruins? Do you see the connection? You can either live in a place of victory and blessing, or you can live in a place of defeat and misery. You can either have a Bethel kind of life or an Ai experience, which is up to you! Just like Israel, we often lose battles to our Ai, (this flesh), but through the Lord, we can learn how to ambush our Ai and walk away with the victory in our lives. I don't know the battles that you are fighting with your flesh, but I do know that you can win the victory. These verses tell us how. ([Joshua 8:1-35 How To Ambush Your Ai](#))

Stephen Grant addresses the somewhat difficult to understand Chronology and numbers in Joshua 8 -

On the face of the narrative, there appears to be a complicated and contradictory account of the ambush that Joshua put in place prior to the assault on Ai. The difficulty arises from Joshua sending out a force of 30,000 men (v. 3), "and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai" (v. 9). He then sent out a force of 5,000 men to the same place (v. 12) to lie in ambush. Were there two large groups of men lying in wait? What happened to the 30,000 men since there is no mention of them being involved in the battle?

There are two main schools of thought regarding this apparent textual problem. Some commentators take the view that there was one ambush force of either 30,000 or 5,000 men, with the more likely figure being 5,000. They attribute the different numbers to a copyist error, albeit "it is a drastic measure to postulate an emendation with no manuscript support, but it seems the best solution to a difficult problem" (David M. Howard Jr., The New American Commentary). In contrast, other commentators take the view that there were two separate forces of 30,000 and 5,000 men. "The narrative makes it quite plain that they were a separate force which was now assigned to a different position. Joshua's design therein was evident, for his project served a twofold purpose: it cut off Bethel sending any reinforcements to Ai, and it prevented the forces of Ai escaping in that direction" (A. W. Pink).

The narrative is structured in a similar fashion to the account of the crossing of the river Jordan (ch 3), where the verses are not necessarily in chronological order, but are set out in a manner to emphasise certain aspects of the events that unfolded. There is repetition and gradual revelation within the structure of these verses. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Here is Donald Campbell's description in which he sees three contingents of Israelites-

Joshua 8:3–9. The strategy for the capture of Ai was ingenious. It involved placing an ambush behind (west of) the city. God Himself had told Joshua to do this (vv. 2, 8). **The outworking of this plan involved three contingents of soldiers.**

The first was a group of valiant warriors who were sent by night to hide just west of the city of Ai. Their assignment was to rush into the city and burn it after its defenders had deserted it to pursue Joshua and his army. This unit numbered 30,000, and while this seems like an excessively large number of soldiers to hide near the city, the presence of large rocks in the region made it possible for all these men to remain hidden.

Joshua 8:10–11. **The second contingent** was the main army which walked the 15 miles from Gilgal early the next morning and camped in plain view on the north side of Ai. No doubt this entire force included many thousands of soldiers. Led by Joshua, this army was a diversionary force to decoy the defenders of Ai out of the city.

Joshua 8:12–13. **The third contingent** was another ambush numbering 5,000 men who were positioned between Bethel and Ai to cut off the possibility of reinforcements from Bethel aiding the men of Ai. Joshua was in the valley north of Ai, a deep ravine in the hills. ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Joshua 8:2 "You shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king; you shall take only its spoil and its cattle as plunder for yourselves. Set an ambush for the city behind it."

- **do to Ai:** Jos 8:24,28,29, Jos 6:21 10:1,28 De 3:2
- **spoil:** Jos 8:27 De 20:14 Job 27:16,17 Ps 39:6 Pr 13:22 28:20 Jer 17:11 Lu 12:20,21
- **Set an ambush:** Jos 8:7,9,12,14,19 Jdg 20:29-33 2Ch 13:13 20:22 Jer 51:12
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD ALLOWS ISRAEL TO TAKE SPOILS OF AI

You shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king- In other words they were to utterly destroy all in Ai as described in Joshua 6:21 where "They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword." We see this instruction from Yahweh completely fulfilled in Joshua 8:24,28,29.

you shall take only its spoil ([shalal](#)) and its cattle as plunder ([bāzaz](#)) for yourselves - The treasures of Jericho were Yahweh's but here He allows Israel to take the treasures for themselves. Had **Achan** only waited, he would have been allowed to take of the spoils! Greed and disobedience short circuited God's plan to bless him (had he not sinned in Jericho)!

THOUGHT - Trust and obey for there is no better way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey!

Alan Carr - What a lesson for you and me this morning! We are guilty of the same kind of foolishness aren't we? If we could just learn to wait on God and let Him lead and bring into our lives the things that need to be there, we would be far better off. Unfortunately, this flesh wants what it wants and it wants it now! It doesn't want to wait. Regardless of the arena you name, you are far better off to wait on the Lord to bring those things into your life that He knows are best for you, (i.e. Mate, sexuality, finances, ministry, etc.), than you are to run ahead of God and mess things up really bad and then expect Him to bail you out! When we can learn to wait on the Lord, we are well on our way to victory in the Christian life, Rom. 12:7; Psa. 130:5; Psa. 37:34.)
([Joshua 8:1-35 How To Ambush Your Ai](#))

Set an ambush for the city behind it- Bush comments "That is, on the west side of the city, as the Israelites, at the time of receiving this command, were on the east side of it, and the orientals, in designating the relative position of places, were always supposed to face the east. This stratagem is to be justified on the ground that God commanded it, and it is obvious that if it was right for them to overpower their enemies, it was equally right to out-wit them, if they could do it. 'No treaties, were violated, no oaths broken, no falsehoods uttered; and it cannot be requisite to inform our enemies of our intentions and purposes, however they may be deceived by appearances. But perjuries, lies, and infractions of treaties cannot, in any war or in any case, be allowable or excusable.' scott."

Utley - **set an ambush for the city behind it**" YHWH gives the battle strategy (BDB 962, KB 1321, Qal IMPERATIVE). There seems to be some confusion as to how to relate the two ambushes mentioned in vv. 3 and 12. There has been much speculation, but no consensus.

Spoil ([07998](#)) **shalal** is a masculine noun which means spoils, plunder, booty, all referring to what is taken by force or violence usually in the context of war and taking spoils was sometimes one of the principle motivations for going to war. Military raids were sometimes ill-disguised plundering expeditions, such as the ill-fated Amalekite raid against Ziklag described in 1 Samuel 30:16, 19, 20, 22, 26. Sometimes shalal was seized as an act of political aggression (Esther 3:13; 8:11). Taking plunder or spoil was an act of aggression by the wicked on the weak or righteous (Pr 1:13).

Plunder (take booty, seize) ([0962](#)) **bāzaz** verb meaning to loot, to plunder, to spoil, to rob. The word describes this destructive activity taken against cities or places (Gen. 34:27; 2 Kgs. 7:16), people and cattle (Num. 31:9; Isa. 10:2; 11:14). Its passive uses are similar with the meaning of be plundered (Isa. 24:3) or taken as spoil (Jer. 50:37). If Israel were obedient to God she would triumph over her enemies and would despoil them. This had been her experience during the latter part of the wilderness period and during the conquest of Canaan (Num 31:9, 32, 53; Josh 8:2, 27; etc.). God was pleased to give the spoil to them, only reserving to himself that which was designated ḥerem, devoted to God.

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

2. Thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king. That is, in general, in the main, not in every particular. Ai was to be overcome and destroyed, and in this respect its fate was to resemble that of Jericho. But the precise manner

of its destruction was not the same; the king of Ai was not to be put to death by the sword, as the king of Jericho had been, nor was a curse denounced against him that should rebuild Ai, as was the case in regard to Jericho.

Only the spoil thereof—shall ye take to yourselves. This was the grand point of difference in the prescribed manner 'of treating the two cities. In the one case, the spoil was granted to the people; in the other not. There was, therefore, no danger of their committing the same trespass here that they had there. 'Observe how Achan, who caught at forbidden spoil, lost that, and life, and all; but the rest of the people, who had conscientiously refrained from the accursed thing, were quickly recompensed for their obedience with the spoil of Ai. The way to have the comfort of what God allows, is, to forbear what he forbids us. No man shall lose by his self-denial.' Henry.

Joshua 8:3 So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night.

- **night:** Mt 24:39,50 25:6 1Th 5:2 2Pe 3:10
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

JOSHUA BEGINS TO LAY THE TRAP

Jensen - The measure of courage is in the test. God assured Joshua that he would take Ai, but there would not be the ease of watching its walls fall as at Jericho. Instead, the manner assigned was by military ambush, which meant danger, suspense, precaution, and alertness. This was Israel's test of courage, and Joshua and the warriors rose to the challenge (8:3).

So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai- All the people signify the major component which would be perceived by the King of Ai as essentially the entire Israelite army.

And Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night- These skilled warriors would be sent out under the cover of darkness. Commentaries differ in how they explain this large number of men, some suggesting it was actually smaller, so the reader is encouraged to be a Berean on the comments.

Utley - "**valiant warriors**" This phrase is a construct relationship between "mighty" and "strength". It is often used of military persons (cf. Josh 1:14; 6:2; 8:3; 10:7; Jdg 6:12; 11:1; 1 Sam. 9:1; 16:18; 1 Kgs. 11:28; 2 Kgs. 5:1; 15:20; 24:14, 16). It can be used of an army (cf. Exod. 14:4, 9, 17, 28; 15:4; 1 Sam. 17:20; 2 Sam. 8:9; 2 Kgs. 6:4, 15; 25:1, 5, 10). This was an elite fighting force!

Campbell - The outworking of this plan involved three contingents of soldiers. The first was a group of valiant warriors who were sent by night to hide just west of the city of Ai (Joshua 8:3). Their assignment was to rush into the city and burn it after its defenders had deserted it to pursue Joshua and his army. This unit numbered 30,000, and while this seems like an excessively large number of soldiers to hide near the city, the presence of large rocks in the region made it possible for all these men to remain hidden. The second contingent was the main army which walked the 15 miles from Gilgal early the next morning and camped in plain view on the north side of Ai. (see Josh 8:10-11)....The third contingent was another ambush numbering 5,000 men who were positioned between Bethel and Ai to cut off the possibility of reinforcements from Bethel aiding the men of Ai. Joshua was in the valley north of Ai, a deep ravine in the hills. (Josh 8:12-13) ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Jensen on 30,000 - The size of this group is indicated by the text as 30,000 men, which appears to be an unusually large contingent for such a secret maneuver as ambush close to the city. One plausible answer to the problem is that the text should read "thirty officers." This suggestion is made by R.E.D. Clark, who points out that the Hebrew word 'elep, translated "thousand," can also be translated as "chief" or "officer," as it is translated in other passages (cf. 1 Chron. 12:23-27; 2 Chron. 13:3, 17; 17:14-19). If this were the case, then the thirty-man group was a highly selected commando unit, assigned to enter the vacated city and burn it. This view may better explain also the description of the contingent as chosen for being "mighty men of valor"—more meaningful to a thirty-man group than to a 30,000-man unit. It should be noted here, however, that the second ambush definitely involved 5,000 men (8:12).

Alan Carr - Israel had already learned what happens when you do things the Lord's way. When you fight the battle by following His plan, you cannot fail. They had also learned what happens when they refused to do it God's way. They learned that failure awaits that person who goes against the will of the Lord. Remember, we are talking about fighting this flesh that we all carry around. If you are going to pursue victory over your flesh and if you ever expect to gain the victory, then you must go about it God's way. No other plan will work! I will say more about God's plan for dealing with the flesh in a moment, but for now, you need to know that if you will win the victory over your flesh, then you need constant contact with the things of God. We are strengthened spiritually when we are

exposed to the things of the Lord. There are several that need to be a huge part of our lives: (1) The Word of God—1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:15 (2) Prayer—Luke 18:1; 1 Thes. 5:17; James 4:2 (3) Church Attendance—Heb. 10:25 (4) The Fellowship of the Saints—1 Cor. 12:27. None of these things will give victory in and of themselves, but we need each one to strengthen us and to help us grow in the Lord. When we begin to neglect even one of these essential areas, then we are sure to suffer spiritually. You see, when we feed the flesh and ignore our spiritual needs, then we are headed for trouble in our spiritual lives!) ([Joshua 8:1-35 How To Ambush Your Ai](#))

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary - Verses 3-22. Observe Joshua's conduct and prudence. Those that would maintain their spiritual conflicts must not love their ease. Probably he went into the valley alone, to pray to God for a blessing, and he did not seek in vain. He never drew back till the work was done. Those that have stretched out their hands against their spiritual enemies, must never draw them back.

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

3. So Joshua arose to go up against Ai. That is, set about the business of going up, took measures preparatory to it, consulted and laid the plan of operations. It does not express the fact of their actually marching towards Ai, for this is inconsistent with what follows, but according to a familiar idiom of the Hebrew, on which we have remarked before, ch. 6:25, merely implies their entering upon the preliminary measures. 'To arise,' in innumerable instances in the scriptures, means nothing more than to address one's self to a particular business, to set about it, to engage in it.

Chose out thirty thousand mighty men. The whole number of men to be employed on this occasion.

And sent them away by night. That is, as we suppose, not the whole of the thirty thousand, but the party of five thousand expressly mentioned Josh 8:12. The next verse, as well as Joshua 8:9, seems to limit it to those who were 'to lie in wait,' and these were unquestionably the five thousand, and not the whole detachment specified above, who could not well have executed such a design without being discovered. It is true that, according to this interpretation, we must suppose the pronoun 'them' to be put before its antecedent, which is left to be inferred from the tenor of the ensuing narrative, but this is no unusual thing with the sacred writers. See Ex. 14:19; Ps. 87:1; 105:19; Prov. 7:8. On any other mode of construction it is extremely difficult to make out a consistent narration of the facts, unless it be supposed that the verbs here should be rendered 'had chosen,' and 'had sent,' and the entire portion, from this place to the end of v. 9, be taken as a parenthesis, which is not improbable. The reasons for sending an ambuscade by night are too obvious to require remark.

Joshua 8:4 He commanded them, saying, "See, you are going to ambush the city from behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready.

- **going to ambush:** Jos 8:16 Jdg 9:25 20:29,33,36 1Sa 15:2,5 Ac 23:21
- **Do not go:** Ec 7:19 9:16
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**BE READY
TO POUNCE!**

He commanded them, saying, "See, you are going to ambush the city from behind it- Note that this is Yahweh's instructions to Joshua which he is passing on to his soldiers. That is this group of warriors would go to the west side of Ai in order to ambush it. In Joshua 8:12 we read that Joshua "took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city."

Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready- When Joshua raised his javelin (Josh 8:18, 26), they need to launch their "[commando raid](#)" on Ai.

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

4. And he commanded them. That is, the party of 5,000 just spoken of as sent away by night.

Joshua 8:5 "Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out to meet us as at the first, we will flee before them.

- Jos 7:5
- **will:** Jdg 20:31-33 Mt 10:16
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BAITING THE TRAP

Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out to meet us as at the first, we will flee before them - This is the strategy for defeating Ai. Joshua would lead the larger contingent of Israelite soldiers and would draw them out of the city by pretending to be retreating. Joshua anticipated that as the men of Ai saw them draw near, they would assume that they were adopting similar tactics to the first time and come out to meet them. Note the phrase **as at the first** which alludes to the tragic defeat of Israel by the men of Ai. Now it was the men of Ai whose confidence in their previous victory would lead them into the jaws of defeat!

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

5. All the people that are with me That is, the 25,000 remaining after the 5,000 were sent away, and whom he kept for a lure to draw out the inhabitants of Ai from the city.

Joshua 8:6 "They will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city, for they will say, 'They are fleeing before us as at the first.' So we will flee before them.

- **drawn:** Jos 8:16
- **They are fleeing** Ex 14:3 15:9 Jdg 20:32 Ec 8:11 9:12
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

JOSHUA EXPLAINS THE TRAP

They will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city, for they will say, 'They are fleeing before us as at the first.' So we will flee before them - Joshua imagines what the Ai-ites will say when they see Israel fleeing.

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

6. Till we have drawn them. Heb. התיקנו hattikēnū, till we have pulled, or plucked them.

Joshua 8:7 "And you shall rise from your ambush and take possession of the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand.

- **for the Lord:** Jos 8:1 2Ki 5:1 Pr 21:30,31
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE MEN IN AMBUSH

And you shall rise from your ambush and take possession of the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand
 The ambush force is given the re-assurance that God would deliver the city into their hands (power). Despite Israel's overwhelming numbers, ultimately it was God Who would **deliver** victory! Don't miss it - yes, the Israelites had a responsibility, but ultimately it was God's sovereignty and omnipotence that assured the taking of Ai.

THOUGHT - This same pattern (God's sovereignty/man's responsibility) is true in all our spiritual warfare beloved. Look at Romans 8:13+ where Paul writes "if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Notice our absolute dependence on the Holy Spirit's enabling power in synergy with our making the choice to "kill sin!" If we desire to have victory over our strong enemies, the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and

the [devil](#), we need to practice this vitally important principle - [Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#) (100/100)

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

7. **Then shall ye rise up from the ambush** Upon the signal given, v. 18.

Joshua 8:8 "Then it will be when you have seized the city, that you shall set the city on fire. You shall do it according to the word of the LORD. See, I have commanded you."

- **set the city:** Jos 8:28 6:24
- **I have:** Jos 1:9,16 Jdg 4:6 2Sa 13:28
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

YAHWEH'S COMMANDMENT TO JOSHUA

Then it will be when you have seized the city, that you shall set the city on fire. You shall do it according to the word of the LORD. See, I have commanded you - NET = "Do as the LORD says! See, I have given you orders." Clearly the strategic plans were from Yahweh even though they were spoken to the soldiers by Joshua. This is probably emphasised in light of the last foray against Ai. These plans were the Lord's and as such had to be adhered to in every detail.

Grant comments that "Although it was a different strategy from that used against Jericho, there was still the need for discipline and adherence to the Lord's instructions. In addition, the knowledge of the enemy, which they had gained in their failure, was to be utilised. Obedience to the word of the Lord, knowledge of the enemy and dependence upon the Lord were necessary for success. When a believer revisits the scene of his failure and seeks to overcome the obstacle which blocks the pathway of progress in his walk for the Lord, it is necessary for him to obey the Word of God and also utilise his knowledge of the enemy Paul stated that "we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor 2:11+) and draw strength from the Lord for the conflict." ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Utley - Fire is both a judgment and a way of cleansing.

Utley - "according to the word of the LORD" This is the key theological phrase in the OT. Here it refers to Deut. 20:16-18. However, the concept is wider (cf. Isa. 45:23; 55:11). It is the human side of covenant!

According to the word of the LORD - 28x/28v -Num. 3:16; Num. 3:51; Num. 4:45; Num. 36:5; Deut. 34:5; Jos. 19:50; Jos. 22:9; 1 Ki. 12:24; 1 Ki. 13:26; 1 Ki. 14:18; 1 Ki. 16:12; 1 Ki. 16:34; 1 Ki. 17:16; 2 Ki. 1:17; 2 Ki. 4:44; 2 Ki. 7:16; 2 Ki. 9:26; 2 Ki. 14:25; 2 Ki. 23:16; 2 Ki. 24:2; 1 Chr. 11:3; 1 Chr. 11:10; 1 Chr. 12:23; 1 Chr. 15:15; 2 Chr. 35:6; Jer. 13:2; Jer. 32:8; Jon. 3:3

Bush writes "Probably this means no more than that they should kindle a fire in the city, the smoke of which should be an indication that they had taken it. Had they set fire to the whole city, the spoils which were to be divided among the people, would have been all consumed. It appears, moreover, from Josh 8:28, that the city was not burnt till afterwards.

Joshua 8:9 So Joshua sent them away, and they went to the place of ambush and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua spent that night among the people.

- **between:** Jos 8:12 7:2 Ge 12:8, Hai, Ezr 2:28 Ne 7:32
- **spent:** Ge 32:21
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

So Joshua sent them away, and they went to the place of ambush and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua spent that night among the people - Note that in Joshua 8:9-13 we begin to encounter the major difficulties in piecing together the chronology of the events and the numbers of soldiers.

Utley - "So Joshua spent the night among the people" This phrase is possibly to reassure the people of God's presence and power for the upcoming battle. A very similar Hebrew phrase is repeated in Josh 8:13 with the change of one additional Hebrew consonant.

Grant - Joshua "lodged that night among the people" (v. 9). His leadership is evident in his decision to remain with the majority of the men of war. He was not distant or in any way separated from the people. The crucial importance of the events that were to follow on the morning could not be underestimated. Having experienced defeat at the hands of the men of Ai, they could not afford to be defeated again since this would mean the end of their advance into the land. At a time of crisis and pressure among the people of God, a true leader will be found among them. It was the night before His suffering and the scattering of His disciples, that the Lord spent time with them in the upper room comforting and preparing them for the days that lay ahead. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

9. Joshua lodged that night among the people. That is, the people of war, as they are called, v. 11, or in other words the 25,000. Others suppose the night was spent at the camp at Gilgal, with the main body of the people. But this is less likely.

Joshua 8:10 Now Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai.

- **rose:** Jos 3:1 6:12 7:16 Ps 119:60
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MUSTERING FOR BATTLE

Muster means the process or event of accounting for members in a military unit. Now keep the context in mind - It was not long since the "hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (Joshua 7:5). Joshua needed to present himself as strong and courageous so that his people would follow suit.

Now Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai - NET = "Bright and early the next morning Joshua gathered the army, and he and the leaders of Israel marched at the head of it to Ai." So in contrast to the previous attack on Ai, now we have Joshua leading the charge.

It is interesting that there is still no mention of the **Ark of the LORD** in Joshua 8 until we come to the renewing of the covenant at Mt Gerizim and Mt Ebal in Joshua 8:33. We know that the LORD is enabling Israel for in Josh 8:1 and Joshua 8:7 we see that the LORD had already given Ai into their hand.

Grant has an interesting observation - In the place of prominence at the head of the procession were the men who had "put dust on their heads" (Joshua 7:6) and humbled themselves before the Lord. This is an example to those who would seek to lead the people of God. There are times when they will be in the forefront of the spiritual battle, in the place of prominence, and at other times humbled on their faces before the Lord. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

10. Numbered the people. Or, Heb. וַיִּפְחֹד va-yiphkōd, visited, inspected, mustered, set in order.

He and the elders of Israel. As a kind of council of war, to give more weight and solemnity to the proceeding, and to see to the just and equal distribution of the spoil. The elders were usually associated with the leader in every important measure that concerned the interests of the people.

Joshua 8:11 Then all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near and arrived in front of the city, and camped on the north side of Ai. Now there was a valley between him and Ai.

- Jos 8:1-5
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

TEMPORARY CAMP

IN PREPARATION FOR ATTACK

Then all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near and arrived in front of the city, and camped on the north side of Ai. Now there was a valley between him and Ai - Joshua, coming from the southeast, moves up around to the north of Ai toward the Sea of Galilee. And with the valley between him and the residents of Ai, he set up a temporary camp.

Grant feels "there is a parenthesis in the narrative, which, if removed, takes the reader from the end of v. 10 to the beginning of v. 14. In common with other restatements of events in the book, the parenthetical verses provide further detail, as well as emphasis, within the narrative. Verse 11 provides details of the troop movements between v. 3, when Joshua began the preparations, and v. 10, when they moved on the following morning." ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Joshua 8:12 And he took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

- **five thousand:** Jos 8:2,3
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE SCENE IS SET FOR THE BATTLE TO COMMENCE

And he took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city- So here is the strategy - On the north, the main force was placed across a valley from Ai. On the west, hidden from sight, the ambush force waited.

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

12. And he took about five thousand men. Rather, 'he had taken.' The verse is apparently thrown in as a parenthesis, with a view to give a more particular explanation of what is said, in a general way, v. 3, 9. Incidents omitted in their proper place are often brought in, in this manner, in order to prevent the interruption of the previous narrative.

Joshua 8:13 So they stationed the people, all the army that was on the north side of the city, and its rear guard on the west side of the city, and Joshua spent that night in the midst of the valley.

- **they stationed the people** Jos 8:4
- **west:** Jos 8:8,12
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

So they stationed the people, all the army that was on the north side of the city, and its rear guard on the west side of the city, and Joshua spent that night in the midst of the valley - Grant has an interesting comment that "During the night when he lodged with the main battle force, across the valley from Ai, Joshua did something similar to what he had done at Jericho (Joshua 5:13) and "went that night into the midst of the valley" (v. 13). His leadership is seen again as he would not lead the people into ground where he had not stood. When the spiritual battle rages among believers, it is good to have leaders who lead the saints through ground where they themselves have stood. Personal experience of the battlefield is important for a leader in any conflict." ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

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13. Their liers in wait. Heb. 'their lying in wait, their ambuscade,' abst. for concrete. Or it may be rendered 'their heel,' i. e. the hinder part of the army, referring to the party that lay in ambush.

Went that night, into the midst of the valley. That is, as is most likely, very early in the morning, when it was yet dark, as John 20:1. It seems hardly probable, that when every thing was ready they should have remained inactive during a whole day. We prefer the opinion that Joshua, having sent away the five thousand in the evening of the previous day, and having taken a few hours' sleep with the 25,000, rose at a very early hour, perhaps a little after midnight, and had them inspected, which might be speedily done by the aid of the officers, and then went, at so early an hour that it might still be called night, into the valley, perhaps alone, to supplicate God for a blessing on the enterprise in which he was now engaged, and which had come so near to its crisis; or, it may imply that at this time he led the army through the valley, and when the day dawned appeared in full view of the city, from whence the king and

people immediately sallied out in pursuit.

Joshua 8:14 It came about when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose up early and went out to meet Israel in battle, he and all his people at the appointed place before the desert plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city.

- **Ai saw it:** Jos 8:5,16
- **he did not know:** Jdg 20:34-36 Ec 9:12 Isa 19:11,13 Da 4:31 Mt 24:39,50 1Th 5:1-3 2Pe 2:3
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

KING OF AI FALLS FOR THE TRAP

It came about when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose up early and went out to meet Israel in battle, he and all his people at the appointed place before the desert plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city - This is exactly what Joshua had anticipated when he declared "Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out to meet us as at the first, we will flee before them." (Joshua 8:5)

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14. When the king of Ai saw it, they hastened and rose up early. That is, when the king was informed of it, by the city guards, an alarm was immediately given, and the citizens who had not yet risen hurried from their beds, and soon commenced the pursuit. 'To see,' in scripture usage, often has the sense of to know, to learn, to understand.

He and all his people. That is, all the men of war; for the rest, the old men, the women, and children, remained in the city, as appears, v. 24.

At a time appointed. Heb. מועד mo'ed, either an appointed time, or a concerted signal, as the same word is rendered where it occurs in Judg. 20:38

Joshua 8:15 Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.

- **by the way:** Jos 18:12
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

JOSHUA DRAWS OUT THE AI-ITES

Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness- This is the first stage of the battle plan. The Israelites are fleeing now back to the east from the men of Ai in order to entice them away from the security of the city.

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15. Made, as if they were beaten. Turned their backs. Heb. ינאגוּ yinnâgeū, were beaten or smitten; but rightly understood, as here rendered, of apparently suffering themselves to be beaten, to make a show or pretence of being beaten. See a like phraseology, Gen. 42:7; 2 Sam. 13:5.

Fled by the way of the wilderness Lying between Ai and Jericho or Gilgal.

Joshua 8:16 And all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city.

- **called together:** Jdg 20:36-39

- **drawn away:** Jos 8:5,6 Jdg 20:31 Ps 9:16 Eze 38:11-22 Rev 16:14 19:19-21
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

And all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city - The military operation is [working to a T](#). Joshua is doing everything just exactly as the Lord had instructed, and everything is falling into place, and the game plan is a winner.

Bush "That is, all who had not sallied out before, all the men able to bear arms who remained behind when the first body of pursuers issued forth from the city. Some portion of the population, however, was still left, who were afterwards slain, Josh 8:24. The original word for 'were called together' is יִצְעָקוּ yizzâekû, which properly signifies were cried together, that is, were summoned by mutual shouts and vociferations.

Joshua 8:17 So not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out after Israel, and they left the city unguarded and pursued Israel.

- **a man:** Jos 8:3,24,25 11:20 De 2:30 Job 5:13 Isa 19:11-13
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NOT A SINGLE MAN LEFT AT AI OR BETHEL

So not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out after Israel- This mention of Bethel indicates the soldiers from that city had joined with those from Ai. Any left would not have been fit for military service.

And they left the city unguarded and pursued Israel- This refers to the city of Ai.

Grant comments - It is worth noting that not only was Ai emptied of men, but "there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel" (v. 17). This is interesting because the ambush force was situated between Bethel and Ai and if men had been sent from one city to the other it would have been discovered, since it consisted of five thousand or even thirty thousand men. It is more likely, although not stated, that the men of Bethel were in Ai prior to the commencement of the battle and perhaps as a result of Joshua's first attempt to take Ai. There is very little detail concerning Bethel in the record of the conquest of Canaan, other than the king of Bethel being one of the kings listed as slain by Joshua (12:16). Some commentators have speculated that a treaty of mutual support bound Bethel and Ai or that, owing to its size, Ai was a satellite city of Bethel. The end of the 2nd stage of the battle concluded with the city of Ai open and defenceless. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

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17. Was not a man left in Ai. Not a man that was able to bear arms, not one fit for military service.

Or Bethel. This city, situated at three miles distance from Ai, was probably confederate with it, and aiding it with forces on the present occasion.

Joshua 8:18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." So Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city.

- **Stretch:** Jos 8:7,26 Ex 8:5 17:11 Job 15:25
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

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YAHWEH AS COMMANDER GIVES ORDER TO JOSHUA

Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand- Whether this had been a prearranged sign to the men of the ambush is not clear, but very likely there must have been prior communication. Joshua was given responsibility to raise the javelin, but God's sovereignty gave Israel the city of Ai. There is an interesting repetition of hand, which in the OT is often a symbol of power and it appears to be so in this context.

Utley - "**Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai**" Here again we see the similarity between God's dealing with Moses in the use of the shepherd's staff and His dealing with Joshua in the use of the javelin. Both the staff (BDB 641, cf. Exod. 4:20; 17:9; Num. 20:8) and javelin (BDB 475) show the power is of God and not in human leaders. The VERB ([natah](#), Qal IMPERATIVE) is used several times of YHWH directing Moses (cf. Ex 7:19; 8:5, 6; 9:22; 10:12; 17:16, 21; Isa. 10:26).

So Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city- Joshua immediately obeys Yahweh's command. Somehow the Israelite forces lying in wait to ambush were able to see Joshua's sign to attack.

Grant - It is interesting that the weapon raised by Joshua is not described by the usual word for a spear, but by a word which can be translated as "javelin" (RSV). In the same way as the Lord instructed Aaron to "stretch forth thine hand with thy rod" (Ex 8:5) and Moses to "lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it" (Ex 14:16), Joshua was to stretch out the spear toward the city and remain in that position until the city was taken (v. 26). There are similarities to the upheld arms of Moses, when he held the rod of God (Ex 17:9, 12), as Joshua fought the Amalekites at Rephidim. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Alan Carr - They Had God's Power— The Context. Israel fought the battle, but God gave the victory! You see, the first time Israel went to Ai, they went in their own power and they suffered terrible, humiliating defeat. This time they went to battle walking in the power of God and they were victorious.. **Again, there is a lesson here for those of us who struggle with this flesh The battle will not be won by our ability to say "No!" The battle will not be won because we are more powerful than the temptations we face.** The fact is, if you try to fight the spiritual battles of life in your own power, you are headed for terrible defeat in your life. You might as well plan now for a string of sins and defeats in the flesh. My friends, there is just one way for us to prevail in this battle, and that is for us to learn to appropriate the power of God in our lives. We need to realize that when we cannot win the battle, He can! (**ED: LEARN TO WALK IN HIS POWER, BY THE SPIRIT** - Gal 5:16+) When we are unable to fight the flesh, sin and the world, God will fight it for us (**ED: YES THAT IS TRUE BUT STILL IT IS NOT "LET GO, LET GOD" BUT "LET GOD, LET'S GO!" WE ALWAYS HAVE SOME ROLE, SOME RESPONSIBILITY IN KILLING SIN IN OUR LIVES, DOING SO OF COURSE ONLY BY HIS POWER!**). I'll tell you how to fight the flesh: fight it in God's power—Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:13; 1Co 10:13. The only way any of us will ever see victory over this flesh is through the power of God!) ([Joshua 8:1-35 How To Ambush Your Ai](#))

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18. Stretch out the spear that is in thine hand. That is, hold extended or stretched out, continue it in that position. Comp. Josh 8:26. This was probably agreed upon as the signal to be given by Joshua to the men in ambush, to notify them of the precise moment when to issue forth from their retreat and rush into the city. If, as some commentators suppose, a flag or a burnished shield were fixed to the end of a long spear, pike, 'or lance, making it conspicuous from a distance, it would still better answer the purpose intended. Conjoined with this there might have been, as far as we can see, another object in thus elevating the spear on this occasion; viz. that it should serve like the lifting up of Moses' hands in the battle with Amalek, as a token of the Divine presence and assistance, a pledge of the secret efficacy of the Almighty arm in securing them the victory. This seems highly probable from v. 26.

Joshua 8:19 The men in ambush rose quickly from their place, and when he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it, and they quickly set the city on fire.

- Jos 8:6-8
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

JOSHUA'S SIGNAL PROMPTS ATTACK ON AI

The men in ambush rose quickly from their place, and when he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it, and they quickly set the city on fire - Somehow the men in ambush saw the signal of Joshua's raised hand (presumably with his javelin). Some suggest the signal was the sun's rays reflecting off the spear, but we cannot be dogmatic. Other writers point out the similarity to Moses' raised hands in Exodus 17, so that when they were elevated, Joshua experienced

advantage over the Amalekites. (cf. Ex 17:8–12).

Joshua 8:20 When the men of Ai turned back and looked, behold, the smoke of the city ascended to the sky, and they had no place to flee this way or that, for the people who had been fleeing to the wilderness turned against the pursuers.

- **the smoke:** Ge 19:28 Isa 34:10 Rev 18:9 19:3
- **and they had:** Job 11:20 Ps 48:5,6 76:5 Am 2:14-16 Rev 6:15-17
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SMOKE SIGNAL BODES ILL FOR MEN OF AI

When the men of Ai turned back and looked, behold, the smoke of the city ascended to the sky, and they had no place to flee this way or that, for the people who had been fleeing to the wilderness turned against the pursuers - The men of Ai realized that the smoke signaled they now had no way of escape from the Israelites. They knew at this moment they had been fooled, and they were defeated.

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20. Had no power to flee. Heb. לֹא יָדַיִם lō yâdayim, no hand, i. e. no place, no quarter, no direction to which to flee, being hemmed in on every side. Most of the ancient versions, however, render with ours, 'power, ability, strength,' in which sense it is certain that 'hand' is sometimes used.

Pursuers. Heb. רֹדְפִים rodēph, pursuer, collect, sing.

Joshua 8:21 When Joshua and all Israel saw that the men in ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and slew the men of Ai.

- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SMOKE SIGNAL BODES GOOD FOR JOSHUA

When Joshua and all Israel saw that the men in ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and slew the men of Ai - The smoke from Ai wrought fear in the men of Ai and courage in the men of Israel. They knew it was the opportune time to turn back and attack the men of Ai.

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21. When all Israel saw. That is, all the Israelites then present, all that were employed in this service.

Joshua 8:22 The others came out from the city to encounter them, so that they were trapped in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side; and they slew them until no one was left of those who survived or escaped.

- **no one was left** : Jos 6:21 10:28 11:11,12 De 7:2 Job 20:5 Lu 17:26-30 1Th 5:3
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ISRAEL ENFORCES A "TAKE NO PRISONERS POLICY!"

The others came out from the city to encounter them - The others refers to the Israelites who had been in ambush and burned the city of Ai. Now they came after the men of Ai.

So that they were trapped in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side; and they slew them until no one was left of those who survived or escaped - Israel's ambush was like a [pincer effect](#) that effectively eliminated the enemy! Yahweh had clearly instructed Joshua in effect to "[take no prisoners!](#)"

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22. And the other. Heb. ואלה ve'elleh, and these, i. e. those who had formed the ambush.

So that they let none of them remain or escape Heb. 'so that there remained not to them a survivor (i. e. one taken alive) or one that escaped.' They were all indiscriminately put to the sword, with the single exception mentioned in the next verse.

Joshua 8:23 But they took alive the king of Ai and brought him to Joshua.

- Jos 8:29 10:17 1Sa 15:8 Rev 19:20
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ONE EXCEPTION TO TAKING NO PRISONERS

But they took alive the king of Ai and brought him to Joshua - Why was the king singled out? We are not told in the text. Clearly he desired death in God's eyes and for some reason he was to die by hanging.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary - Verses 23-29. God, the righteous Judge, had sentenced the Canaanites for their wickedness; the Israelites only executed his doom. None of their conduct can be drawn into an example for others. Especial reason no doubt there was for this severity to the king of Ai; it is likely he had been notoriously wicked and vile, and a blasphemer of the God of Israel.

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23. The king of Ai they took alive. He was reserved for a more exemplary and ignominious death as a warning to other kings who, like him, might be disposed to defy the power of Israel.

Joshua 8:24 Now when Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the field in the wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them were fallen by the edge of the sword until they were destroyed, then all Israel returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword.

- **returned to Ai:** Jos 10:30-41 11:10-14 Nu 21:24
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Now when Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the field in the wilderness where they pursued them- While not specifically stated, presumably these persons were the women, children, and elderly who had been in the city but were not warriors.

And all of them were fallen by the edge of the sword until they were destroyed- In keeping with God's instruction all were killed.

Then all Israel returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword - NLT = "they went back and finished off everyone inside." Apparently not all of the citizens of Ai had fled the city, but they met the same fate as their brethren in the wilderness.

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24. Smote it with the edge of the sword. Heb. לפי חרב lephi 'hereb, with the mouth of the sword. That is, the old men, women, and children who remained in the city, who had not joined in the pursuit, v. 16, 17.

Joshua 8:25 All who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000--all the people of Ai.

- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ENEMY CASUALTY REPORT

All who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000--all the people of Ai - Clearly Israeli forces had far outnumbered the warriors at Ai. Nevertheless Yahweh called for a unique military strategy to defeat them.

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25. Both of men and women. Heb. מֵאִישׁ וְעַד אִשָּׁה mēishh ve-ad ishah, from the man to the woman.

QUESTION - [Why did God command the extermination / genocide of the Canaanites, women and children included?](#)

ANSWER - In 1 Samuel 15:2-3, God commanded Saul and the Israelites, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'" God ordered similar things when the Israelites were invading the promised land (Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:6; 20:16-18). Why would God have the Israelites exterminate an entire group of people, women and children included?

This is a difficult issue. We do not fully understand why God would command such a thing, but we trust God that He is just – and we recognize that we are incapable of fully understanding a sovereign, infinite, and eternal God. As we look at difficult issues such as this one, we must remember that God's ways are higher than our ways and [His thoughts are higher than our thoughts](#) (Isaiah 55:9; Romans 11:33-36). We have to be willing to trust God and have faith in Him even when we do not understand His ways.

Unlike us, God knows the future. God knew what the results would be if Israel did not completely eradicate the Amalekites. If Israel did not carry out God's orders, the Amalekites would come back to trouble the Israelites in the future. Saul claimed to have killed everyone but the Amalekite king Agag (1 Samuel 15:20). Obviously, Saul was lying—just a couple of decades later, there were enough Amalekites to take David and his men's families captive (1 Samuel 30:1-2). After David and his men attacked the Amalekites and rescued their families, 400 Amalekites escaped. If Saul had fulfilled what God had commanded him, this never would have occurred. Several hundred years later, a descendant of Agag, Haman, tried to have the entire Jewish people exterminated (see the book of Esther). So, Saul's incomplete obedience almost resulted in Israel's destruction. God knew this would occur, so He ordered the extermination of the Amalekites ahead of time.

In regard to the Canaanites, God commanded, "In the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). The Israelites failed in this mission as well, and exactly what God said would happen occurred (Judges 2:1-3; 1 Kings 11:5; 14:24; 2 Kings 16:3-4). God did not order the extermination of these people to be cruel, but to prevent even greater evil from occurring in the future.

Probably the most difficult part of these commands from God is that God ordered the death of children and infants as well. Why would God order the death of innocent children? (1) Children are not innocent (Psalm 51:5; 58:3). (2) These children would have likely grown up as adherents to the evil religions and practices of their parents. (3) These children would naturally have grown up resentful of the Israelites and later sought to avenge the "unjust" treatment of their parents.

Again, this answer does not completely deal with all the issues. Our focus should be on trusting God even when we do not understand His ways. We also must remember that God looks at things from an eternal perspective and that His ways are higher than our ways. God is just, righteous, holy, loving, merciful, and gracious. How His attributes work together can be a mystery to us – but that does not mean that He is not who the Bible proclaims Him to be. [GotQuestions.org](#)

Related Resources:

- [What does it mean that "the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" \(Genesis 15:16\)? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- Multiple sources discussing God's command to Utterly Destroy (in commentary on Numbers 31)

Joshua 8:26 For Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

- Jos 8:18 Ex 17:11,12
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

For Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai - This description reminds one of Moses' raised hands calling forth the Lord's power against the Amalekites. Joshua was faithful to do exactly what the Lord had commanded him to do, and he stayed with it until the task was complete.

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

26. For Joshua drew not his hand back, &c. The object of these words seems to be to assign the reason of the utter and unsparing destruction of the people of Ai. The movements of Israel were directed by the uplifted spear of Joshua. As long as that continued stretched out they were to persist in the work of slaughter. When it was let down they were to cease. This shows that the stretching out of the spear was not designed merely as a signal to the men in ambush, for in this case the continuance of the act would have been unnecessary. It was doubtless intended to answer the same end as the uplifted hands of Moses on the occasion before referred to, that is, as a visible sign of the presence and agency of Omnipotence in behalf of his people as long as it continued to be extended. To the judgment of sense there was perhaps little connexion between Joshua's holding forth his spear and the success of the combatants at a distance, and it might have appeared that he would have been better employed at the head of the army, animating and directing them. But he knew who alone could give the victory, and that a compliance with God's commands was the surest means of obtaining help from Him. Hence without any apprehensions as to the issue, he maintained his stand before God, and held forth his spear till all his enemies were destroyed. Such is the confidence and perseverance which the Christian is to evince in his conflicts with sin and Satan, notwithstanding the apparently little connexion between his poor efforts and the destruction of such mighty foes. It is perhaps in allusion to this circumstance that the phrase 'stretching out the hand against' is employed by the prophets as equivalent to contending with, or fighting against. Thus Is. 5:25, 'Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble and their carcasses are torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still,' i. e. his judgments still continue as did the slaughter of the Aiites while Joshua's outstretched spear was not withdrawn.

Until he had utterly destroyed. Heb. החרים he'herim, had devoted to a curse.

Joshua 8:27 Israel took only the cattle and the spoil of that city as plunder for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua.

- **the cattle:** Jos 8:2 11:4 Nu 31:22,26 Ps 50:10 Mt 20:15
- **he commanded:** Jos 8:2
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**TO THE VICTOR
GO THE SPOILS**

Israel took only the cattle and the spoil of that city as plunder for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua

Joshua 8:28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation until this day.

- **a heap:** De 13:16 2Ki 19:25 Isa 17:1 25:2 Jer 9:11 49:2 50:26 Mic 3:12
- **To this day:** Jos 4:9
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation until this day - Ai apparently means "heap" and so it literally was

memorialized as a **heap forever!**

Grant - The picture is clear. Having been defeated at Ai on one occasion they would not be defeated there again, and to make sure, Joshua obliterated the city. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

THOUGHT - This is the only way for the Christian to deal with the cause of defeat in his life. The utter destruction of the obstacle will ensure that it never troubles him again. This was the lesson that Jacob failed to learn when he was returning to Gilgal and dealt with the idols in his household. "Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem" (Gen 35:4). It would have been better to grind them into dust as Josiah did (2Chr 34:4). Buried idols can be resurrected into the Christian's life; those which are destroyed do not cause problems in the future. (Grant)

Desolation (08077) ([shemamah](#) noun from [shammah - see word study](#)) means desolation or waste and can refer to the condition of land, cities and houses as a result of neglect or devastating war (e.g., Ex. 23:29; Lev. 26:33; Isa. 1:7) and of Israel's idols as a result of God's judgment (Mic. 1:7). It is used figuratively of princes being clothed with devastation under the same conditions (Ezek. 7:27). God's judgment is figuratively referred to as His cup of desolation (Ezek 23:33). Basic to the idea of the root is the desolation caused by some great disaster, usually as a result of divine judgment (Mal 1:3)

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

28. Made it an heap for ever. Heb. תל עולם *tël olâm*, an heap of eternity, i. e. an everlasting heap, a perpetual pile of ruins. The meaning is, it was made such for a long time, through a long tract of ages; a frequent sense of the phrase 'for ever.' It seems to have been rebuilt about a thousand years afterwards, by the Benjamites, Neh. 11:31, under the name of Aija or Aiya.

David Guzik summarizes this chapter - 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.

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

Joshua 8:29 He hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; and at sunset Joshua gave command and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the city gate, and raised over it a great heap of stones that stands to this day.

- **the king:** Jos 10:26-28,30,33 De 21:22,23 Es 7:10 Ps 107:40 110:5 Ac 12:23 Rev 19:17,18
- **as soon:** Jos 10:27
- **a great heap:** Jos 7:26 2Sa 18:17
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Numbers 25:4+ The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel."

Deuteronomy 21:22-23+ **(WHY HANG THE KING?)** "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely **bury him on the same day** (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

Joshua 10:26-27+ So afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they hung on the trees **until evening**. 27 It came about at sunset that Joshua gave a command, and **they took them down from the trees** and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and put large stones over the mouth of the cave, to this very day.

KING OF AI HANGED

He hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; and at sunset Joshua gave command and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the city gate, and raised over it a great heap of stones that stands to this day - Hanging the king prevented later efforts to muster a Canaanite army. It is interesting that in Joshua 7 ended with death of a criminal memorialized by a heap of stones and now at the end of Joshua 8 a pagan king is similarly "memorialized."

Grant on the **King of Ai** - He had resisted and defeated the children of Israel and was dealt with in accordance with the Law of Moses (Deut 21:22–23). The place of defeat was now the location of a memorial to their ultimate victory. Cairns of stones sat at Gilgal, the valley of Achor and Ai lest they forgot the hard learned lessons of spiritual warfare. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Woudstra - The story of Ai ends with the report of the erection of two monuments which recall the event until this day (for this expression see commentary on 4:9). The first monument is the ruin heap of Ai itself, the other is the pile of stones over the dead body of the city's king (v. 29). God's past acts of deliverance for Israel and of judgment on those who disobey him, be they Israelite (Achan) or non-Israelite, could thus be recalled by generations to come. ([The Book of Joshua The New International Commentary on the OT](#))

TSK has an interesting note on why the king was hanged - The kings of Canaan lay under the same curse as their subjects and probably were more deeply criminal. The reserving of the king of Ai for a solemn execution, would tend to strike terror into the other kings (cf Nu 25:4+), contribute to the success of Israel, and give their proceedings the stamp of a judicial process, and of executing the vengeance of God upon his enemies.

Monson has an interesting comment on this strategic victory in the central hill country - "It is interesting to note again that this first victory in the Hill Country was in the region of Ai and Bethel, exactly where some of the most significant promises had been given to Abraham and Jacob hundreds of years earlier, (Genesis 13 and Ge 28.10-22). In addition to the strategic nature of the region, these earlier promises may have played a part in Joshua's decision to begin his campaign precisely here. Joshua's bold move toward this part of the Hill Country may have been just what was needed to unify the Canaanites in the Bethel region. Up to this point they appear to have been in disarray in the face of the Israelite threat (Joshua 5.1). What better place to make their stand than here at the entrance to the strategic region of Bethel and the Central Benjamin Plateau?" ([The Land Between](#))

Campbell writes "Thus Israel, restored to God's favor, won a great victory. After failure came a second chance. One defeat or failure does not signal the end of a believer's usefulness for God." ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Alan Carr applies Israel's burning Ai and killing the king of Ai to our battle with the flesh -

At this point in this story, Israel has followed God's plan and that have achieved the victory. Now, they must maintain their victory. They take two steps that make this a reality for them. In our lives, we can achieve the victory over the flesh! We can walk in the will of God and be alive to spiritual things. However, for us to maintain that victory, the same steps that Israel took need to be taken in every one of our lives this morning. Let me share them with you.)

Joshua 8:27–29 **Victory Is Preserved By Death**—Please notice that they did not leave a single person alive in Ai. No one from the king down to the humblest servant was spared from death in this battle. Joshua knew that this enemy had to be totally eradicated or there would be problems down the road.

The lesson for us this morning is this: Your flesh is still alive and well, but it needs to be put to death! Now, there are some preachers going around telling folks that when they got saved, their flesh was put to death. But I've got news for you, they are wrong! Your

flesh is as alive this morning as it ever has been. It still likes all the things that it used to like, and if you turned it loose, it would run to sin like a pig to a wallow. Your flesh is not saved. Your flesh is not holy. Your flesh is rotten and it hates God and everything He stands for! Of course, I am talking about our old sinful natures. Now, we need to understand some things about our flesh if we are to have the victory over it today. Allow me to share some truths with you about your flesh.

1 Your flesh is alive and is at war with the Spirit of God Who is in you—Gal. 5:16–24. (We have been given the divine nature—2 Pet. 1:4. This is a struggle that the Apostle Paul dealt with in great detail—Ro 7:14–25. (ED: cf 1Co 9:24, 25, 26, 27+).

2 At the same time, your flesh was crucified with Jesus Christ—Ro 6:6–7. (This is our positional standing. In the eyes of God, our flesh, all it works and everything it stands for was crucified with Jesus at Calvary. God reckoned the wicked, sinful natures that we possess to be in His Son on the cross.

3 We are to reckon the flesh dead daily—Col. 3:1–10. (ED: SEE Ro 6:11+, ACTUALLY THE FIRST COMMAND IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS!) (Ill. This is how we are to live practically everyday.) Why this list of sins? Because these are things that seem to have a way of dominating our lives. Notice what some of them are:

Fornication—Illicit sexual activities. There is only one appropriate place for the expression of the sexual appetite and that is within marriage. I know that is an old fashioned attitude in this day and time, but you can either live to please the flesh or you can live to please God. Just ask some who have experienced the dark side to sex to tell you whether it was worth it or not.

- Uncleaness—Moral impurity. Doing things that dirty and pollute the soul life.
- Inordinate Affections—Passions and intense arousals for things that are forbidden by God. This is a desire or craving for wrong things.
- Evil Concupiscence—evil desire, a yearning and an aching for all kinds of evil. It is that within a person that pulls him to desire, grasp, grab, and take hold of all forms of evil that give pleasure to the body and its members.
- Covetousness—Craving, grasping, grabbing, desiring to have something. It is desiring to have something when it is not needed; it is desiring more than what we need and more than what we should have. Note that covetousness is idolatry.

4. The secret lies in being able to reckon the flesh dead like God does—Rom. 6:11–14; Gal. 2:20. When we come to the place that we can look at our flesh and its lusts and remind it that it is dead to sin then, and only then, can we expect victory in our lives. (Ill. We don't crucify the flesh by gratifying it! You cannot feed every lust that enters your mind and claim to be living a life that is pleasing to the Lord. The flesh must die today! When tomorrow comes, it must die again. I must reckon it dead to sin and to the lust for sin!) We are told to flee those things that tempt us—2 Ti 2:22.

5 It all boils down to whether or not you want to please the Lord by the life you live—Rom. 8:1–13.

6 Thankfully, there will come a day when the battle with the flesh will end. One day, the Lord will deliver us from this vile flesh and we shall be changed to be like Him. You see, positionally, God says that our flesh is dead to sin. Practically speaking it can be, but only as we take the initiative to reckon it dead day by day. However, one day, we will be changed and we will be perfected by the power of God, Ro 7:24–25. ([Joshua 8:1-35 How To Ambush Your Ai](#))

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

29. The king of Ai he hanged. The kings of the devoted nations were dealt with with more exemplary severity than the common people, because they were more deeply criminal, both in having formerly by their connivance encouraged the abominations of their subjects, and in now instigating them to resistance, when they might and should have known that resistance was vain. In the present case, though the king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua, yet it is not certain that he was not first put to death in some other way, and his body hung upon a tree after his execution as a mark of the utmost disgrace and detestation. Upon consulting the following passages, this opinion will appear far more plausible than the one which maintains that he was first hung, a mode of capital punishment that does not appear to have been customary in those early days, ch. 10:26; 2 Sam. 4:12; 1 Sam. 31:8–10.

As soon as the sun was down. This was according to the law, Deut. 21:22, 23, 'If a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree; his body shall not remain upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day.'

Cast it at the entering of the gate. The gates of cities were usually the places of judgment, of the transaction of the most important public business, and of general resort and rendezvous. We know of no other reason for casting the dead body of the king of Ai in this place, than that it was the most public place that could be chosen, one that would stamp the act with the utmost possible notoriety.

Joshua 8:30 Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal,

- **built an altar:** Ge 8:20 12:7,8
- **mount Ebal:** Jos 8:33
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ebal

Note Bethel Which would be region of Ai. Mt Ebal & Mt Gerizim are directly north.

2

Enlargement of Mt Ebal and Mt Gerizim with Shechem in middle

JOSHUA BUILDS ALTAR TO YAHWEH THE GOD OF ISRAEL

Joshua 8:30-35 deal with renewal or reaffirmation of the covenant with God.

Grant points out that "Following the capture of Ai, the children of Israel repeated a course of action which would make no sense to the military mind. As was previously noted, momentum is a key element of any successful campaign of conquest, and Joshua willingly gave this up again, having already waited at Gilgal for the circumcision of the people. With the cities of Jericho and Ai destroyed, the gateway into Canaan was open, but he did not take the people through....there was no rash advance into Canaan with Joshua demonstrating obedience to the command of the Lord by taking the people to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal for the fulfilment of the Lord's command through Moses. Yet again the reader is reminded that the advance into Canaan was directed by the Lord and that, for success in such a conflict, obedience to the word of the Lord is the paramount consideration. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Then Joshua is sensitive to come back to the Lord after the victory has been granted and note that the focus is on the Word of God again.

Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal- Refer to the maps above and locate Bethel on the larger map. Bethel would be in vicinity of where Joshua had just defeated Ai. He would then have taken the nation about 30 miles directly northward (see **red marker on map**) to the region of Shechem. On the map enlarging this area you can see Shechem situated between Mt Ebal on the north and Mt Gerizim on the south (see [also map above](#)- click to enlarge). Apparently the victory at Ai had secured this area so they could safely travel northward without any military action being necessary. And so here at **Mount Ebal** Joshua obeys the instructions written by Moses...

So it shall be on the day when you cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God gives you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and coat them with lime 3 and write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over, so that you may enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. 4 "So it shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall set up on **Mount Ebal**, these stones, as I am commanding you today, and you shall coat them with lime. 5 "Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron tool on them. 6 "You shall build the altar of the LORD your God of uncut stones, and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God; 7 and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. 8 "You shall write on the stones all the words of this law very distinctly." (Deuteronomy 27:2-8+)

Note that Mt Ebal is the place from which the cursings were to be proclaimed. Given that the altar and sacrifices point to Jesus, one can see how this is a very appropriate location. As Paul wrote

Christ **redeemed us from the curse of the Law**, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"— (Gal 3:13+)

Woudstra comments that "The story of the building of an altar on Mount Ebal and of the solemn reading of the blessings and curses of the covenant at that site is strategically important for understanding the message of the book of Joshua. No sooner has the significant victory at Ai been won, so the narrator means to suggest, than the claims of the covenant Lord of Israel have to be published abroad. The story of the erection of the altar, the setting up of the stones inscribed with Moses' law, the reading of blessing and curse to which the people respond by a solemn "Amen" (see Deut. 27:11–26), all shed significant light upon the message of Joshua. In unmistakably clear symbolism the reader is told that the right of possessing the promised land is tied to the proclamation of, and subjection to, God's covenant claims upon his people (and upon the world). Whatever questions the interpreter may face in reading these many stirring words, this basic lesson should not be lost. ([The Book of Joshua The New International](#)

John Calvin on the significance of the altar - "This made it palpable [sic] even to strangers entering the land what God was worshipped in it, and all excuse for error was taken away."

Stephen Grant comments that "Moses also instructed the people to build an altar on Mount Ebal (Deut 27:4), when they crossed over the Jordan, and it was those instructions which Joshua carried out in these verses. His obedience and attention to detail is noteworthy as he again displayed the vital characteristic of submission to the Word of God. This is seen to be so important looking back at the events through the lens of the New Testament. Almost the whole of the land is visible from the top of Mount Ebal and therefore it was a most suitable place to build an altar for worship and to have the Law read and acknowledged as being the Law for the land that lay before them. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

TSK note says "It was a federal transaction: the covenant was now renewed between God and Israel upon their taking possession of the land of promise, that they might be encouraged in the conquest of it, and might know upon what terms they held it, and come under fresh obligations to obedience.

Campbell has an interesting comment - After the victory of Ai Joshua did a strange and militarily foolish thing. Instead of securing the central sector of the land with further victories he led the Israelites on a spiritual pilgrimage. Why? Simply because Moses ... had commanded it (Deut. 27:1–8). (**ED: NOT SURE I AGREE IT WAS FOOLISH SINCE MOSES COMMANDED IT AND GOD WAS HONORED**). ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Henry Morris - A huge stone altar has been discovered on Mount Ebal that may well be the altar built by Joshua. It seems to date from the time of Joshua and is surrounded by the bones of many animals possibly used in sacrifice (Joshua 8:31).

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary - Verses 30-35. As soon as Joshua got to the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, without delay, and without caring for the unsettled state of Israel, or their enemies, he confirmed the covenant of the Lord with his people, as appointed, Deuteronomy chapters 11 and 27. We must not think to defer covenanting with God till we are settled in the world; nor must any business put us from minding and pursuing the one thing needful. The way to prosper is to begin with God, Matthew 6:33. They built an altar, and offered sacrifice to God, in token of their dedicating themselves to God, as living sacrifices to his honour, in and by a Mediator. By Christ's sacrifice of himself for us, we have peace with God. It is a great mercy to any people to have the law of God in writing, and it is fit that the written law should be in a known tongue, that it may be seen and read of all men.

Related Resources:

- [What is the importance of Shechem in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#) - Note that there is no record of Joshua taking military action against the people of Shechem and Shechem is not mentioned as one of 31 cities and kings in Joshua 12.

Technical Note - This "floating pericope" (Joshua 8:30-35) is found in three positions: A DSS fragment has it between 5:1 and 5:2; in LXX it is found after notice of the formation of the Canaanite coalition at 9:2; and it appears here at 8:30ff. However, there is no reason to follow anything other than the universal Hebrew reading, which places it at the end of chap. 8. (Moody Bible Commentary)

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 8](#)

30. Joshua built an altar—in mount Ebal. This was in obedience to the command given Deut. 27:2–8, on which see Notes. Mount Ebal, as well as mount Gerizim, was situated near Shechem in what was afterwards the tribe of Ephraim, and not far from the ancient Samaria. It was at a considerable distance from the camp at Gilgal, yet as it was a ceremony that had been expressly commanded, and the performance of which was not to be delayed any longer than was absolutely necessary after they had entered Canaan, Deut. 27:2, they seem to have penetrated in a body through the mountainous regions that intervened till they came to the appointed place, although no details of the journey thither are given. Viewed in connexion with their then present circumstances the incident was a remarkable one. While engaged in the mid career of conquest, the business of the war is suddenly suspended, and instead of pushing their victories on every side, after mastering the frontier towns, they commence a peaceful march into the heart of the country to attend upon a religious solemnity! But God had ordered it, and they cheerfully obeyed. Whatsoever else stands still, the service of God must go forward. Whatever other interests may suffer, our spiritual concerns must receive attention. But in truth there is no danger that our worldly interests will suffer in consequence of a paramount regard to the one thing needful. God will take them into his own hand, and see that we are no losers by any thing done for him. In the present instance, we see that his providential care was wonderfully exercised towards his faithful servants. Though in the midst of an enemy's country, as yet unconquered, yet they passed on unharmed, the terror of God having fallen upon the cities round about, as when Jacob some ages before had passed through this very region on his way to Bethel, Gen. 35:5. The way of duty is the way of safety.—The object of erecting the altar was to offer the sacrifices spoken of in the next verse. It was a federal transaction in which they were now engaged. The

covenant was now to be renewed upon their taking possession of the land of promise, and a formal profession made of their subjection to the law, and of their dependence for success in all their enterprises upon the blessing of the Most High. All this it was proper should be ratified by sacrificial offerings.

Joshua 8:31 just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones on which no man had wielded an iron tool; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

- **as it is:** Jos 8:34,35 1:8 2Ki 14:6 22:8 2Ch 25:4 35:12 Ezr 6:18 Ne 13:1 Mt 12:26
- **altar:** Ex 20:24,25 De 27:5,6 1Ki 18:31,32
- **and they offered:** Ex 18:12 24:5 De 27:6,7
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 27:1-6+ Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying, “Keep all the commandments which I command you today. 2 “So it shall be on the day when you cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God gives you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and coat them with lime 3 and write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over, so that you may enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. 4 “So it shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall set up on Mount Ebal, these stones, as I am commanding you today, and you shall coat them with lime. **Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron tool on them.** 6 “You shall build the altar of the LORD your God of uncut stones, and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God;

JOSHUA OBEYS MOSES' COMMAND

Just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses- Joshua apparently had access to a written copy of Moses' writings. This would seem to explain why Joshua did not immediately strike the other Canaanite cities. He put God first, even before what logically would seem to be the best course of action. This is always the best course to take beloved!

An altar of uncut stones on which no man had wielded an iron tool and they offered burnt offerings(olah) on it to the LORD, and sacrificed (zabach) peace offerings (selem/shelem) - Burnt offerings to Yahweh are given for atonement of sins and peace offerings speak of fellowship of the people with Yahweh. When God originally cut the Mosaic Covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, there was a very similar ceremony memorialized by building an altar of uncut stones (TO KEEP FROM DEFILING THE ALTAR) and celebrating with similar offerings...

‘You shall make **an altar** of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your **burnt offerings and your peace offerings**, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. 25 ‘If you make **an altar of stone** for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. 26 ‘And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.’ (Exodus 20:24-26+)

Comment - The stones were to be **uncut**, either to emphasize that the Israelites were not to depend on the technology of pagan craftsmen in building such an altar, or simply because the use of any tool would profane an altar dedicated to the Lord

Stephen Grant - The **burnt offering** was a voluntary offering which was consumed on the altar, producing a sweet savour and making atonement (Lev 1+). It is a picture of the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, which brought pleasure to the heart of God and atonement for man, so that every believer is “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6). The peace offering was the only offering which provided a portion for God, the priest and the offerer (Lev 3:1–17+; Lev 7:11–21+), with the sweet savour arising to heaven as a result of the sacrifice. It speaks of the enjoyment of fellowship between God and man, which is only possible as a result of the work of the Lord Jesus. ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Burnt offerings (05930) '**olah** from '**alah** = to ascend and thus the picture of **going up** in smoke) refers to a whole burnt offering

(one which **goes up** in smoke), which was voluntary, was understood as a sacrificial gift to God, resulting in a pleasing aroma acceptable to Jehovah (Lev 1:9). The presenter laid hands on the sacrifice which many feel signifies they saw the animal sacrifice as their substitute. The blood was sprinkled on the altar (Lev 1:6) When this offering was properly carried out (including a right heart attitude not just a "going through the motions," [which was not pleasing to God - Jer 6:20, Jer 7:21, 23, 24, see David - Ps 51:16-17+] not just an external "work," but an internal submission and obedience to Jehovah), they made atonement and were acceptable before Jehovah. The total burning indicated (or should have indicated) total consecration of the presenter's heart and soul and life to Jehovah. As noted a key feature of **'olah** appears to be that among the Israelite sacrifices only **'olah** is **wholly burned**, or wholly consumed by the fire rather than being partially burned with one part eaten by the worshipers and/or the priest. Thus, the whole animal is brought up to the altar and the whole is offered as a gift (*minha*) in homage to Yahweh. Whole offering would be a better rendering in English to convey the theology. It is indeed burned, but the burning is essentially secondary to the giving of the whole creature to Yahweh.

Peace offerings (08002) **selem/shelem** is a noun which means fellowship offerings, thanksgiving offerings and all uses (except [Amos 5:22](#)) are in the plural form (**selamim**). The root Hebrew word conveys the idea of completion and fulfillment, of entering into a state of wholeness and unity, a restored relationship. The peace offerings were voluntary offerings (like burnt and grain offerings) given to God with thanks and praise. **Selem** symbolizes the gift of **shalom**, i.e. the blessing of wholeness, prosperity, and the status of being at peace with God. This involves more than forgiveness of sin, in that fullness of life, prosperity, and peace with men is the expected result of **shalom** status. A second alternative is identified by de Vaux as "communion sacrifice," i.e. one in which there is a sharing of the sacrificial animal and the resultant fellowship around a meal. The **šēlāmīm**, then, were social occasions "**before**" (Hebrew = *panim* = face) the Lord never "**with**" the Lord (Dt 12:7, 18; 14:23, 26; 15:20). There is no sense of attaining mystical union with God through these sacrifices.

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31. Over which no man hath lifted up any iron. Rather 'had lift up.' The writer does not intend to quote the precise words of the law, but merely to say that Joshua constructed an altar in accordance with the precept of Moses, Ex. 20:25; Deut. 27:5; viz., one over which no man had lifted up an iron tool.

Joshua 8:32 He wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel.

- De 27:2-3,8
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

LAW OF MOSES ON THE STONES

He wrote there on the stones - There is a paucity of detail describing this activity commanded in Dt 27:2-3,8+.

Bush suggests that "Upon comparing this with the injunction, Deut. 27:2-7, it appears quite obvious that in addition to the altar they were required also to erect a number of stone pillars, and that the writing was to be done upon the pillars, instead of upon the altar, for which purpose they were previously to be plastered over." Joshua functioning as Israel's spiritual leader wrote a **copy of the law**, much as the future king would be required to do (Dt 17:18-20)."

A copy of the law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel- Joshua copied the writings of Moses, but how much we can only speculate - just the 10 commandments, the blessings and cursings of Dt 28-30, the entire Pentateuch? We simply do not know. However given the fact that the blessings and cursings are clearly stated in Dt 28-30, it would be reasonable to assume they read at least those parts of Moses' writings.

Grant - The nation was reminded that their covenant relationship with the Lord was based upon the Law and their observance of it. Their acceptance before the Lord and their fellowship with Him was dependent on their obedience ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Bush comments on **copy of the law of Moses** "That is, a copy of the blessings and curses commanded by Moses; not a copy of the decalogue, as some imagine; nor of the book of Deuteronomy, as others think; much less of the whole Pentateuch; but simply that part of the law which contained the blessings and curses, and which was to be read on this solemn occasion.

32. **A copy of the law.** Heb. משנה תורה mishnēh torâh, a repetition, a duplicate of the law.

Joshua 8:33 All Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as the native. Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had given command at first to bless the people of Israel.

- **all Israel:** Jos 23:2 24:1 De 27:12,13 29:10,11
- **priests:** Jos 3:3,6,14 4:10,18 6:6 De 31:9,25 1Ch 15:11-15
- **stranger:** Ex 12:49 Lev 24:22 Nu 15:16,29 De 31:12
- **Moses:** Jos 8:30-32 De 11:29 Dt 27:12-13
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

AN ANTIPHONAL GATHERING AT GERIZIM AND EBAL

Antiphonal refers to a short sentence or its musical setting which is sung, recited, or played alternately by two groups. And noted below the blessing would be read from Mt Gerizim and the curse from Mt Ebal. So it is very likely that they chanted antiphonally the blessings and the curses of the covenant. Most

All Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger ([ger](#)) as well as the native - Apparently the Ark is centrally placed between Mt Gerizim and Mt Ebal.

Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had given command at first to bless ([barak](#)) the people of Israel - Moses had given more specific instructions regarding the placement of the tribes writing

“When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on **Mount Gerizim to bless the people:** Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. 13“**For the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal:** Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. (Dt 27:12-13+)

Alan Carr - This exercise was to remind them of what God would bless and of what He would not bless. They were reaffirming their commitment to live by the Word of God every day! So, in obedience to the command of the Lord, Israel made the 30 mile trips to these mountains and they stood there facing one another across that 2 mile wide valley. As the commandments were read, they shouted “Amen!” Imagine what that scene must have looked and sounded like that day! There’s was a devotion to living by the Word of God. Folks, if we are to ever experience lasting victory over this flesh, then we too must learn to walk in the Word of God. It isn’t enough to fight the war with the flesh and hope to achieve the victory. If we are to win and preserve the victory day by day, then we must learn to live by the Word of God. If God said do it, then do it! If God said don’t do it, then don’t do it. If you have a doubt, then leave it out! Where is your devotion this morning? It needs to be to the Word of God! Are you living by the book like to should? Can you echo what Job said in Job 23:12? Can you honestly say that what God says matters in your life? If you want lasting victory over the flesh, there must be absolute devotion to the Word of God! ([Joshua 8:1-35 How To Ambush Your Ai](#))

Related Resource:

- [What are the blessings God promised Israel for obedience? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What does it mean that you are the head and not the tail in Deuteronomy 28:13? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Gerizim](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Gerizim](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Gerizim](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Gerizim and Ebal Ebal](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Gerizim](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Gerizim](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Gerizim](#)

- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Gerizim, Mount](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopedia [Ebal and Gerizim Gerizim Mount](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Gerizim Gerizim, Mount](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Gerizim, Mount](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Ebal](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Ebal](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Gerizim and Ebal](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Ebal](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Ebal, Mount](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Ebal Ebal, Mount](#)
- The Nuttall Encyclopedia [Ebal, Mount](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Ebal](#)

Stranger (01616) **ger** from **gur** = to live among people not one's blood relatives) is a masculine noun meaning sojourner, alien, stranger. It describes a person who does not belong to the nation of Israel by ancestry. The word is used most often to describe strangers in Israel who were not native-born Israelites. "The stranger" was a description of residents in Israel who were permanently associated with the children of Israel, but were not Israelites by birth. They had to enter into a covenant relationship with the Lord (Deut 29:11–12) and enjoyed the blessings of the children of Israel as seen in their participation in the feasts of the Lord (Ex 12:43–49; 20:10; Deut 16:10–14; 26:10–11). It is important to note that the stranger was not a temporary visitor among them. He would have the same status as an Israelite (Lev 22:25; Deut 14:21).

Bless (Lxx = [eulogeo](#))(01288) **barak** is a verb which literally can mean to kneel (to go to one's knees - Camel in Ge 24:11, Solomon in 2Chr 6:13) as contrasted with standing position or even a bowing at the waist). And so barak can refer to an act of adoration sometimes on bended knee. To give divine blessings (Ge 1:22, 9:1-7) To esteem greatly or adore God for His blessings (Ge 24:48, Ps 103:1) To invoke blessings upon another (Ge 24:60, 27:4, 27) The Hebrew is usually translated in the Lxx with [eulogeo](#) which literally means to speak well of and in this context to pronounce or bestow a blessing or gracious benefit upon the recipient. The English definition of to bless means "pronounce words in a religious rite, to confer or invoke divine favor upon; ask God to look favorably."

Barak in **Joshua** - Jos. 8:33; Jos. 14:13; Jos. 17:14; Jos. 22:6; Jos. 22:7; Jos. 22:33; Jos. 24:10

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33. Before the priests, the Levites. That is, in view of the priests, the Levites; not that the elders, officers, and judges stood nearer the ark than the priests, but that they so surrounded the ark that the priests who were carrying it had a full view of them. In like manner it might be said that a great crowd in a funeral were before the bearers and pall-bearers, if they stood full in their view.

Over against mount Gerizim and over against mount Ebal. For an account of these mountains see on Deut. 11:29. The two divisions seem not to have stood upon the summit of the mountains, but were ranged along their base and some way up their sides, that they might be nearer the ark, which occupied the valley between, and more conveniently hear the reading of the law.

That they should bless the people. And curse also, though the last is not expressly mentioned; it is however plainly to be inferred, both from the original command of Moses, Deut. 27:13, and from the phraseology of the next verse.

Joshua 8:34 Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

- **he read:** De 31:10-12 Ne 8:2,3 9:3 13:1
- **blessing:** Lev 26:1-46 De 27:14-26 28:1-68 29:20,21 30:15-20
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Dt 11:29-30 It shall come about, when the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on **Mount Gerizim** and the curse on **Mount Ebal**. 30 "Are they not

across the Jordan, west of the way toward the sunset, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, opposite Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh?

CEREMONY IMPRESSES IMPORTANCE OF THE LAW

Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law - The blessing would be read from [Mount Gerizim](#) and the curse from [Mount Ebal](#). These two mountains were located in the center of the Promised Land and would (or should) serve as dramatic "memory joggers" of the importance of obedience to God's law to ensure God's hand of blessing. Sadly, Israel's memory was short-lived as the book of Judges reveals!

Grant - The generation who had covenanted with the Lord had fallen in the wilderness and a new generation had entered the land. A restatement of the basis of their relationship with Him was required, together with their agreement to the terms of the covenant. The people that had left Egypt had failed and had not entered into the land. They had fallen under the curse of the Law as a result of their disobedience and lack of faith in their God. Their failure did not mean that a new generation had to fail. They were given the same opportunity as their predecessors to affirm their covenant with the Lord as they entered into the land ([What the Bible Teaches - Joshua](#))

Donald Campbell - As the curses of the Law were read one by one, the tribes on [Mount Ebal](#) responded, "Amen!" As the blessings were likewise read the tribes on [Mount Gerizim](#) responded "Amen!" (Deut. 11:29; 27:12–26) The huge **natural amphitheater** which still exists there made it possible for the people to hear every word and with all sincerity Israel affirmed that the Law of the Lord was indeed to be the Law of the land. From this point on the history of the Jews depended on their attitude toward the Law which had been read in their hearing that day. When they were obedient there was blessing; when they were disobedient there was judgment (cf. Deut. 28). It is tragic that the affirmations of this momentous hour faded so quickly. ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

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34. And afterward he read. That is, he commanded the priests or Levites to read, as is evident from Deut. 27:14. In innumerable instances in the Scriptures, a person is said to do that which he orders or procures to be done.

The words of the law, the blessings and cursings. All the sanctions of the law; from which and from v. 35, it would seem that much more was read on this occasion than was written on the stones.

Joshua 8:35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them.

- **was not:** De 4:2 Jer 26:2 Ac 20:27
- **women:** De 29:11 31:12 Ezr 10:1 Ne 8:2 Joe 2:16 Mk 10:14 Ac 21:5
- **strangers:** Jos 8:33
- [Joshua 8 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 31:11-13 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. 12 "Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. 13 "Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them - Having heard clearly the blessings and the cursings, all the people of Israel were now accountable for their response. They had just witnessed a dramatic example of Achan who had disobeyed God's commandments and that should have served to imprint on them hearts and minds that God would keep His Word regarding both obedience and disobedience!

Who were **the strangers who were living among them?** - We know that Rahab the Harlot and her family were strangers living among the Jews. There was also likely proselytes, Gentiles who choose to join with the Jews and their God Jehovah.

Henry Morris - This ceremony again confirms both the Mosaic authorship and the verbal inerrancy of these Scriptures, as well as the reverent obedience with which they should be received.

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35. With the women and little ones. It was a word that concerned all, and all of all sexes and ages were present, giving a solemn and heedful attention to what was read. Children would be deeply impressed by the solemnities of the scene, and a salutary fear of offending God would sink into their tender hearts.

The strangers that were conversant among them. Heb. הגר ההלך בקרבם haggēr hahōlek bekirbām, the stranger that walked among them. Proselytes. No other strangers can well be supposed to have been present at this time.

F B Meyer - Arrest and Defeat (JOSHUA 8:1, 2)

“ ‘Now, Christians, hold your own—the land before ye
Is open—win your way, and take your rest.’
So sounds our war-note; but our path of glory
By many a cloud is darkened and unblest.”
KEBLE.

THE conquest of Canaan occupied seven years, and during the whole of that time Israel lost but one battle; indeed, the six-and-thirty men smitten in the head-long flight before the men of Ai seem to have been the only loss which their hosts sustained. The story of this defeat is told with great minuteness, because it involved lessons of the greatest moment to Israel, and of incalculable value to ourselves.

The experience of defeat is far too common to the majority of Christians. They are constantly turning their backs before their enemies. They are defeated by in-dwelling sin and the assaults of Satan, and by the mighty evils which they assail in the name of God. But instead of taking their defeats to heart, they become inured to them. For the time they are filled with mortification and chagrin, but the impression soon wears away. They do not lie on their faces before God, eager to discover the cause of failure, to deal with it, and to advance from the scene of defeat to wider and more permanent success. If we but carefully investigated the causes of our defeats, they would be only second to victories in their blessed results on our character and lives.

There were three causes for this defeat.

I. THEY WERE SELF-CONFIDENT BECAUSE AI WAS SMALL—Jericho was a heap of smoldering ruins. Man and woman, both young and old, and ox and sheep and ass, all had been utterly destroyed with the edge of the sword. The only relics were—the silver and gold and vessels of brass and iron which had been placed among the precious stores of the Tabernacle; the woman Rahab, her people and her property; and a certain Babylonish garment, some silver shekels, and a wedge of gold, of which we shall hear again.

Fearing no attack from the rear, Joshua at once set his face toward the interior of the country, and chose a deep gorge or ravine, which lay a little toward the north, as the passage-way for his army. Eight miles from its opening on the Jordan valley this ravine met another, “in a wild entanglement of hill and valley,” and near the junction of the two stood the little town of Ai, with a population of twelve thousand persons. The proportion of fighting men has been calculated at about two thousand; but the situation was strong and commanded the pass, so that Joshua had no alternative but to mete out to it the same terrible fate as that with which he had visited Jericho.

Speaking after the manner of men, there was considerable force in the report of the spies sent up the valley to reconnoiter. The place was much smaller than Jericho, and would apparently require much less expenditure of time and strength for its capture. Jericho may have needed the entire host; but for Ai, some three thousand men would surely suffice. “Make not all the people to toil thither; for they [i.e., the men of Ai] are but few.”

But this recommendation went on the supposition that Jericho had been overthrown by the attack of the hosts of Israel; whereas, in point of fact, they had had singularly little to do with it. They had walked around it, and shouted—that was all. It had been taken by their great Captain and Leader, and by him given into their hands. The silence that reigned over its site was no criterion of their might, but of his. To speak as they did was to ignore the real facts of the case, and to argue as though the victory were due to some inherent qualities in themselves; with the inference that because they had conquered at Jericho they must therefore necessarily conquer at Ai.

There is no experience in the Christian life so full of peril as the hour when we are flushed with recent victory. Then comes the temptation to sacrifice to our net, and burn incense to our drag. We magnify our part in the conflict till it fills the whole range of vision. We boast to ourselves that we have gotten the land in possession by our own sword, and that our own arm has saved us.

Counting from our great triumph at Jericho, we despise such a small obstacle as Ai. Surely, we argue, if we have carried the one, we shall easily prevail at the other! And so it frequently happens that a great success in public is followed by a fall in private; that those who had swept all before them in the pulpit or on the platform are overcome by some miserable appetite, or by petulance in the home; and the bitter regret of that sin wipes out all the glad exhilaration of the hour of victory. We never so need to observe the injunction to “watch and pray” as when the foe is flying before us. When the mighty convocation breaks up, its convictions having been turned by our single voice—as in the story of Elijah—and as the people are departing to their homes, and the bodies of the priests of Baal choke the Kishon, we must be careful to go up to the top of Carmel, where we had girded ourselves for the conflict, and, bowing to the earth, put our face between our knees in prayer.

Had Joshua acted thus, he would never have been induced by the words of the spies to reason on mere military grounds; he would never have presumed on the insignificance of the little town; and he would never have had the anguish of seeing his panic-stricken soldiers come rushing down the rugged pass, or sheltering in the stone-quarries on either hand, whilst the men of Ai, in full pursuit, were cutting down the hindmost and least nimble.

There is nothing small in Christian life—nothing so small that we can combat it in our own strength. Apart from God, the smallest temptations will be more than a match for us. So weak are we, that occasions of sin, which are perfectly contemptible in themselves, will overthrow our most confident resolutions. The victories which we have won in fellowship with God have imparted no inherent might to us; we are as weak as ever; and directly we are brought into collision with the least of our enemies, apart from him, we shall inevitably go down before the shock. The faith, watchfulness, and fellowship with God, which availed before Jericho, can alone serve as the key to Ai.

II. THEY FAILED TO WAIT ON GOD.—An accursed thing in their midst broke the link of fellowship between them and the hosts that served beneath the celestial Warrior who had appeared to Joshua. And though it must have been a severe sorrow to Jehovah to inflict sorrow on his people, yet for their sake, and for the sake of his holy name, the sin must be judged and put away. Joshua pleaded, “What wilt thou do for thy great Name?” But it was for that very reason that the defeat had been permitted.

There is not the least doubt that if Joshua had been in abiding fellowship with God, the Spirit of God would have indicated the presence of evil in the host; so that Achan and his sin would have been discovered and judged before the march to Ai. It was so in an analogous case in the Acts of the Apostles. What Achan was to Israel, that Ananias and his wife were to the early Church. The fifth chapter of the Acts would have recorded some great defeat or crushing disaster, if it had not contained the story of the discernment on the part of the apostle Peter, and by the Holy Ghost, of the accursed thing to which the guilty pair were privy.

If we may dare to imagine what would have been the consequence in the primitive Church had that root of evil been left unextirpated, we should be obliged not only to wipe out the record of the signs and wonders wrought among the people, of the unity of the disciples, and of the burst doors of the prison; but we should have to interpolate an account of how the hosts of God, in diminished numbers, gave back before the fury of their adversaries; of how Peter lay with his face in the dust of the Temple courts; of how panic and dismay filled the hearts of leaders and led; and of how the name of the Lord Jesus was blasphemed, and his character traduced. But none of these things befell, because the Spirit of God was able to utter his unhindered testimony.

Very important is it for us to heed the Apostle's warning, “if we discerned ourselves we should not be judged.” God sees the little rift in the lute; the spot of decay in the fruit; the ulcer in the flesh, threatening to eat away its vitality. These may not be realized by us; but he knows how inevitably they must lead to defeat. Nor is he slow to warn us of them. Yet of what use is it for him to speak to deaf ears; or to those who are self-confident in their own wisdom; or who pride themselves on victories which were wholly his gift? Amid the gayety of the revel, we do not see the handwriting on the wall; amid the unanimous advice of the false prophets, we do not inquire for the one voice that may speak evil of our plans; amid the radiant sunlight of the morning, in which the dancing wavelets flash, we do not care to see the falling glass, or be guided by the dark prognostications of the weather-beaten sailor. Probably there is no single temptation which has not to claim permission of God before it touches us. He who permits it prays for us, raising his voice in lonely vigil whilst we sleep, anticipating the attack by ambushes of intercession. Yea, not content with this, he warns us not once or twice; he even touches us with fingers that would thrill us were we not insensible, steeped in spiritual lethargy.

Where God's children, like Joshua, are oblivious to the warning voices which speak in ever fainter tones as they are disregarded, God is compelled to let them take their course until some terrible disaster flings them on their faces to the ground. Ah, if Joshua had only prostrated himself amid the shoutings of victory over Jericho, there would have been no need for him to prostrate himself amid the outcry of a panic-stricken host! If he had only sought counsel of God before he sent the spies up the pass, there would have been no need to ask what he should do to repair his defeat. The iron pruning-knife of trouble has to do for many of us, roughly and hurtfully, what the silver pruning-knife of the Word of God might have effected.

Before ever we make some new advance, although the point of attack be but an Ai, it is our duty, as it is our best policy, to get back to Gilgal. Joshua does not seem to have returned there after the fall of Jericho. We ought to seclude ourselves in spiritual converse with our Almighty Confederate, asking if he has aught to say to us; entreating that he should reveal any evil thing that he may see in

us, and mustering the tribes of our heart before his scrutiny, that the Achan lurking there may be brought to light before, instead of after, the fight.

III. THEY HAD COMMITTED A TRESPASS IN THE DEVOTED THING.—(1) Joshua was inclined to lay the charge of their failure on God. It seemed to him as if the Almighty had done ill by them in bringing them into the heart of such mighty difficulties. In his judgment, warped by the presence of disaster, it appeared as if it had been better for the camp to have remained on the other side of Jordan. The dreariest anticipations of defeat and destruction passed in spectral form before him. He spoke as one whom faith had deserted, the locks of his might shorn, and himself no longer a hero, but, like the Canaanites themselves, whose heart had melted as his did now. But, in point of fact, the blame lay not with God, who was engaged in conducting his people within reach of superlative blessedness, but wholly with themselves.

There are times in our lives when we are disposed to find fault with God. "Why, Great Potter, hast thou made me thus? Why was I ever taken out of my quiet home, or country parish, or happy niche of service, to be plunged into this sea of difficulties?" When we are smarting from some defeat, caused by the overpowering might or the clever strategy of the foe, we are prone to blame God; either that our nature was not stronger, or that he has brought us from the shelter of comparative obscurity and placed us on the mountain slope where the storms expend their wildest fury. Alas! we forget that our Father brings us across the Jordan to give us larger experiences, to open before us vaster possibilities, to give us a better chance of acquiring his unsearchable riches. There is no task without sufficiency of grace; no foe without a sufficiency of victorious power; no trial without a sufficiency of resource by which, as in the old dream of the alchemist, the hardest, commonest metal may be transformed to gold.

The defeats that we incur in the Land of Promise are not necessary. They are due entirely to some failure in ourselves, and they cause grief to the immortal Lover of our souls. There is no reason for defeat in the Christian life; always and everywhere we are meant to be more than conquerors. The course of the Christian warrior should be as the sun when he goeth forth in his strength, and in regular gradients drives his chariot from the eastern wave up the steep of heaven. Child of God, never lay the blame of your failure on God; seek for it within!

(2) One Israelite only had trespassed, and yet it is said, "The children of Israel committed a trespass in the devoted thing." Not one of us stands alone; we cannot sin without insensibly affecting the spiritual condition of all our fellows. We cannot grow cold without lowering the temperature of all contiguous hearts. We cannot pass upward without lifting others. No asteroid revolves through space without affecting the position and speed of every member of its system. No grain lies upon the seashore without influencing all its companion grains. "None of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself." "Whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."

If Israel had but realized how much the safety of the whole depended on the obedience of each, every individual would have watched his brethren, as he watched himself, not for their sakes alone, but for his own; and did the members of Christian communities understand how vast an influence for weal or woe depends upon the choice, the decision, the action of any, there would be a fuller and more intelligent obedience to the reiterated injunctions of the New Testament—for the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak; for the loftiest to stoop to wash the feet of the lowliest; and for all to look not on their own things only, but also on the things of others. "Looking carefully lest any man fail of the grace of God."

Should these words be read by any soul which is conscious of playing an Achan's part, let it take warning, and whilst it is called To-day, confess, restore, and repent. Not only that it may escape an inevitable judgment; but that it may not bring disaster and defeat upon those with whom it associates, dragging the innocent down into the vortex of a common fate. The hands of Achan were stained with the blood of the thirty-six that perished in the flight to Shebarim.

(3) How careless we are of God's distinct prohibitions! Nothing could have been more clearly promulgated than the command to leave the spoils of Jericho untouched. The city and its contents were devoted to utter destruction, a specified number of articles only being preserved for Tabernacle use. This ordinance was probably intended to preserve the children of Israel from the temptation which must have accrued, had they glutted themselves with the spoils of the city. The abstinence tended to strengthen their character, and to educate their faith. But to Achan, the will of God was overborne by the lust of his eyes and the pride of life. The strong tide of passion swept him over the barrier reared by the divine word.

Let us not, however, judge him too hardly. He is not the last who has acted in distinct violation of divine commands. The Bible is full of prohibitions against the love of the world, the love of dress, the love of money; against censoriousness, and pride, and unhallowed ambition; against the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold; and yet thousands of Christian people live in complacent disobedience, as if God were one of themselves, or as if his words were unsubstantial as smoke. What wonder that the forces of his Israel meet with defeat, and that the old word is verified in individual experience and in the history of the church, "Israel hath sinned; yea, they have even transgressed my covenant which I commanded them; yea, they have even taken of the devoted thing. Therefore they cannot stand before their enemies. I will not be with you any more, except ye destroy the devoted thing from among you."

F B Meyer Ebal and Gerizim (JOSHUA 8:30)

“Therefore, child of mortality, love thou the merciful Father! Wish what the Holy One wishes!—and not from fear but affection: Fear is the virtue of slaves; but the heart that loveth is willing; Perfect was before God,—and perfect is—Love and Love only!”

LONGFELLOW.

THIS was one of the most impressive scenes that occurred during the occupation of Canaan. Jericho and Ai were heaps of blackened ruins; their kings and people utterly destroyed; their dependent villages mute with terror. And all through the land the rumor ran of the might of Israel's God. And beyond the horizon of the visible, into those realms of evil spirits, which had too long filled the chosen land with horrid rite and obscene orgy, must tidings have come that struck the knell of their supremacy. There must have been panic there, in those dark realms, like that which Milton, in his sublime “Ode to the Nativity,” ascribes to the hour of the birth of Christ.

The nations of Canaan appear to have been so panic-stricken that they offered no resistance, and made no attempt at molestation, as all Israel went on a pilgrimage of thirty miles to perform a religious duty, which had been distinctly, and more than once, commanded by the great Lawgiver, whose words constituted their supreme directory.

“It shall be,” so the word stood, “on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaster them with plaster, and thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law” (Deut. 11:26–32; 27:2). Joshua lost no time in obeying these minute and urgent injunctions; and within two or three days after the fall of Ai—perhaps within three weeks of the passage of the Jordan—the people were assembled in the valley of Shechem, which lies from east to west, sentineled on the north by the sterile slopes of Ebal, rearing itself gaunt and barren against the intense blue of the Eastern sky; and on the south by its twin-giant Gerizim, “a majestic mass of limestone, with stately head and precipitous sides, but fruitful and picturesque, girt with foliage and beauty.”

The valley between these two is one of the most beautiful in Palestine. Jacob's well lies at its mouth; and all its luxuriant extent is covered with the verdant beauty of gardens, and orchards, and olive-groves, rolling in waves of billowy beauty up to the walls of Shechem; whilst the murmur of brooks flowing in all directions fills the air. The width of the valley is about a third of a mile; though the summits of the two mountains, in the lap of which it lies, are two miles apart. It is remarkable that where the two mountains face each other and touch most closely, with a green valley of five hundred yards between, each is hollowed out, and the limestone stratum is broken into a succession of ledges, “so as to present the appearance of a series of regular benches.” Thus a natural amphitheatre is formed, capable of containing a vast audience of people; and the acoustic properties are so perfect in that dry and rainless air, that Canon Tristram speaks of two of his party taking up positions on the opposite mountains, reciting the Ten Commandments antiphonally, and hearing each other perfectly.

Thither Joshua led the people, that, by a solemn act, they might take possession of the land for God.

I. THE ALTAR ON EBAL.—Ebal was stern and barren in its aspect. There was a congruity, therefore, between its appearance and the part it played in the solemn proceedings of the day. For far up its slopes gathered the dense masses of the six tribes, who, with thunderous Amens twelve times repeated, answered the voices of the band of white-robed Levites, as, standing with Joshua and the elders and officers and judges in the green valley, they solemnly repeated the curses of the law.

But that was not the first proceeding in the holy ceremonial. Before the people took up their assigned places on the mountain sides, an altar was reared on the lower slopes of Ebal. Special directions as to its construction had been given in Deuteronomy 27. It was to be built of unhewn stones, on which no iron tool had been lifted; probably to guard against any attempt to set forth the likeness of God, and to discountenance the florid and lascivious ornamentations of which the surrounding heathen were so fond.

There they offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings. The Burnt-offering was what was known as a sweet-savor offering. The whole of the victim was burned. “It was an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord” (Lev. 1). Herein the Holy Ghost signified, secondarily, our duty to present ourselves without reserve to God; but primarily the devotion of our blessed Lord to accomplish his Father's will in our redemption. He held nothing back; there was no reserve. He emptied himself, and he did it ungrudgingly; for he said, “I delight to do thy will, O my God.” How sweet this was to the heart of the Father! If on the one hand there was anguish such as only God could feel, on the other there was the gratification of delighted love.

The Peace-offering also belonged to the sweet-savor offerings, but it was not wholly consumed; a part was eaten by the offerers, to testify that in it they had fellowship and communion with God. In the sight, therefore, of Israel, Joshua and other chosen representatives par-took of portions of the sacrifices, and obeyed the divine injunction, “Thou shalt eat there, and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God.” If any of the native Hittites, peering out from behind great boulder-stones, were spectators of that scene, they must have been impressed with the thought that Jehovah delighted in the happiness of his people, and that his service was as

the scent of clover, or as the feast of children at their father's table. We feed on the peace-offering when we meditate on the love and death of our blessed Lord, and enter into some of the Father's thoughts of satisfaction at the work he did, and the spirit in which he did it.

As we pass into the Land of Promise we must see to it that we do not leave behind the devout and loving consideration of that precious blood by which we have been redeemed and which is our life. Our highest and most rapturous experiences can never take the place of this. Constantly we must remind ourselves and others that we are redeemed sinners; and that all our hopes of salvation, our fellowship with God, our motives for service, are derived from what our Saviour did when he bore our sins in his own body on the tree.

Since he died there, we need never stand on the mount of cursing. Because he counted not his life dear to himself, those gaunt and forbidding slopes have become the scene of blessed communion with God. We sit and feast with him, and from peak to peak joy chases the terrors of the curse; and smiles look out on us from the old rocks, whilst the torrents tinged with the light of the sun flash and sing. Because he shed his blood, there shall, unlike the field of Gilboa, be "dew, and rain, and fields of offerings," even on Ebal; until its terraced slopes resemble those of the opposite mount of blessing. Ah, blessed Lord, how shall we thank thee, who hast redeemed us from the curse of the law, and made Ebal so choice a trysting-place with God!

II. THE LAW IN CANAAN.—Around the altar strong men reared great stones, and plastered them with a facing of cement, composed of lime or gypsum, on which it was easy to write all the words of the law very plainly (Deut. 27:8). In that dry air, where there is no frost to split and disintegrate, such inscriptions—graven on the soft cement, or written on its polished surface when dry with ink or paint, as in the case of the monumental stones of Egypt—would remain for centuries. As the time could not have admitted of the inscription of the whole law, it is probable that the more salient points were alone committed to the custody of those great cromlechs, to perpetuate to after generations the conditions of the tenure on which Israel held the lease of Palestine. They were a standing protest against the sins which had blighted those fertile valleys, and an incentive to the obedience on which so much of the future hinged.

But when we turn from the literal to the metaphorical, and ask for the underlying typical meaning of this inscription of the law in so prominent a position in the Land of Promise, we are at first startled. What can it mean? Is there a connection after all between law and grace? Are those who sit with Christ in heavenly places still amenable to law—"under the law," as the Apostle puts it? Is it not true that, by our union with Christ who died, we have passed out of the sphere in which we were married to our first husband, the law, and have left it behind us? Are we not, therefore, discharged from the law of our former husband and married to another, even to him that was raised from the dead?

There is but one answer to all these questions. We have died to the covenant wherein we were holden. We do serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter. We are not looking to our obedience to merit the favor of God, or to win aught of the blessings of the Gospel. But it is also true that faith does not make the law of God of none effect; and still, in the Land of Promise, he undertakes to write it clearly on the tablets of our hearts. In each one of us there is an Ebal with its altar and its stones. The soul comes back again and again to those first principles of the perfect life; not by compulsion from without, but by the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

The case is this. When we yield ourselves entirely to the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus, and which passes freely through us, as the blood through artery and vein, he makes us very sensitive to the least commandment or desire of him whom he has taught us to love; we dread to see the shadow of suffering pass over his face more than to feel the pang of remorse rend our hearts; we find our heaven in his smile of approval, and the "Well done!" that glistens in his eyes when we have done aught to the least of his; we are conscious of the pulse of a love which he has instilled, and which supplies us with the highest code for life—and so insensibly whilst we yield ourselves to him we find ourselves keeping the law after a fashion which was foreign to us when it was a mere outward observance, and we cry with the psalmist, "Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day."

III. THE CONVOCATION.—When these rites were fulfilled, the third and concluding scene of this extraordinary transaction took place. In the center of the valley the ark rested, with its group of attendant priests and Levites. Hard by, Joshua and the leaders of the tribes, elders, officers, and judges. Then up the slopes of Ebal, finding seats on its terraced sides, were Reuben, Gad and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali; whilst up the slopes of Gerizim were the larger and more important tribes of Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin. It was as though the voice of blessing must be louder than that of cursing—a prediction of its final prevalence and triumph.

Then Joshua read aloud "all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them." And as he solemnly read, whether the blessing or the curse, each several item was responded to by the Amens that thundered forth from thousands of throats, and rolled in reverberating echoes through the hills. Earth has seldom heard such shouts as those!

It is well worth our while to ponder the list of blessings appended to obedience in that memorable twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, that we may discover their spiritual counterparts, and, having found them, to claim them.

Let us, first, be quite sure that we are right with God; next, that we are on his plan and doing his will; also thirdly, that we are set upon his glory, altogether irrespective of our own interests; and we shall find ourselves able to appropriate blessings of which we little dreamed. The Lord will open his good treasury in heaven and make us plenteous for good, and establish us for an holy people unto himself.

Nor can we better close our meditation than by asking that the Holy Spirit may so indwell and guide us that we may choose what he ordains, and not swerve by a hair's breadth to the right or left of the narrow path of obedience; keeping his commandments; obeying his biddings; perfectly conformed to his will. Thus shall Ebal cease to frown, and Gerizim rain its blessings upon us. Ours shall be the Beatitudes with which our Master opened his great discourse. Ours, the heavenly Kingdom, the divine comfort, the earthly inheritance, the filling and the mercy, the vision of God, and the blessed prerogative of sonship, and finally the great reward (Matt. 5:1–12).