

The Book of Joshua

The Battle for Canaan

The Battle of Ai

Text: Joshua 7 - 8

- I. The Defeat at Ai (Joshua 7:2-5)
- A. Much like had been done at Jericho, spies were sent to get a good look at the city of Ai before Israel engaged it in battle.
 - 1. The name Ai means, "Ruins" or "Heap of ruins."
 - 2. It was originally known as Hai (Gen. 12:8; 13:3) and later called Ai, Aiath (Isa. 10:28) or Aija (Ezra 2:28; Neh. 7:32; 11:31).
 - 3. It was near this location that Abraham built his second altar in the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:8).
 - 4. It was to this place that Abraham returned after his first trip down into Egypt (Gen. 13:1-4).
 - B. Upon their return, the spied declared that Ai easily would be defeated.
 - 1. This was certainly a different attitude from the spies that first searched out Canaan!
 - 2. Clearly, the Israelites were confident after the defeat of Jericho.
 - 3. The spies declared that only 2,000 - 3,000 men of Israel would be needed to defeat the people of Ai.
 - 4. They claimed that the number of men in Ai was few - when, in fact, the population was around 12,000 (8:25).
 - C. Joshua agreed with their assessment and sent about 3,000 men into battle.
 - D. To the surprise of the Israelites, they were put to flight by the men of Ai.
 - E. Sadly, about 36 men of Israel were killed in this conflict.
 - F. Naturally, the people became discouraged.
- II. The Reprimand of Joshua (Joshua 7:6-12)
- A. Joshua was also stunned by this development.
 - B. He rent his clothes and fell on his face before the Lord, both mourning and seeking answers.
 - 1. Note how verse 7 sounds very much like what was said by the Israelites who fell in the wilderness.
 - 2. Joshua was afraid for the nation, concerned that they would be defeated and destroyed.
 - 3. However, he finally came to the appropriate question - how would all of this reflect upon the name and power of God.
 - C. God's answer to Joshua is striking: "Get up!"
 - 1. There is a time for weeping and searching.
 - 2. Yet, there comes a time when action must be taken.
 - D. God declared that Israel had sinned and transgressed His covenant - this was the reason for their defeat.
 - E. Because they had taken the accursed thing, they were also accursed.
 - F. God was not with them and He would not be with them again until they made right their sin by destroying that which was accursed.

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- III. The Instruction for Restoration (Joshua 7:13-15)
- A. The people were to be sanctified so that they might carry out the judgment of God.
 - B. The accursed thing was to be taken away from among them.
 - C. God would inform them of the guilty party (cf. 1 Sam. 14:42).
 - 1. He would start with the entire nation and then select the tribe.
 - 2. From the tribe, He would select the family.
 - 3. From the family, He would select the household.
 - 4. From the household, He would select the man.
 - D. The one who was guilty was to be put to death and then burned with fire.
- IV. The Sin and Punishment of Achan (Joshua 7:1, 16-26)
- A. Achan sinned by taking that which was accursed - devoted to God.
 - B. Achan sinned by attempting to hide his transgression.
 - C. Achan sinned by refusing to confess his sin until there was no other option.
 - D. Achan sinned by being covetous (cf. Exo. 20:7).
 - 1. The first sin in a perfect Creation (Gen. 3:6).
 - 2. The first sin in a promised Canaan (Josh. 7:21).
 - 3. The first sin in a pure Church (Acts 5:1-11).
 - a. Begins with enticement, lust of the eyes (Jam. 1:14; 1 Jn. 2:16)
 - b. Becomes lust, desire, covetousness (Jam. 1:15)
 - c. Begets deception - idolatry (Col. 3:5)
 - d. Brings death
 - E. Achan sinned by disobeying God's law (cf. Deut. 7:1-6, 16-26; Acts 20:33-35).
 - F. Achan sinned by breaking God's covenant (cf. Esther 8:11; 9:10, 15, 16).
 - G. The hidden treasure of Achan was found in his tent and brought before the people.
 - H. Thus, Achan, his family, and his animals were brought into the valley of Achor and killed by stoning.
 - 1. This was God's ordained punishment for a city that committed idolatry (cf. Deut. 13:12-18).
 - 2. As head of his household, Achan had brought his family into the guilt of his sin.
 - 3. It is highly unlikely that he could have buried treasure in his tent without his family knowing about it - making them accomplices to his sin.
 - I. Afterward, they burned the bodies with fire and raised a heap of stones over them.
 - J. The place where these events took place became known as the Valley of Achor - or, the Valley of Trouble.
 - K. When the sin was removed from Israel, God removed His anger toward them.

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- V. The Defeat of Ai (Joshua 8:1-29)
- A. God gave assurance and comfort to Joshua, promising that He would give Israel the city of Ai.
 - 1. Past failure did not ensure future defeat.
 - 2. When sin is forgiven, fellowship is restored.
 - 3. When fellowship is restored, victory is assured.
 - B. The people and city of Ai were to be utterly destroyed, just as God had commanded a Jericho - with one exception.
 - C. At Ai, Israel was allowed to take spoils of the battle.
 - D. God instructed Joshua to win this battle by setting up an ambush for the people of Ai.
 - 1. 30,000 soldiers were sent by night to hide and “lie in wait” behind the city to the west.
 - 2. Joshua and the rest of Israel’s fighting force would approach from the front and draw out the men of Ai.
 - 3. When the time was right, the hidden troops would take the city and burn it - setting a trap for the men of Ai.
 - E. Note that the people of Ai brought their own judgment upon themselves.
 - 1. God used the rebellion of Ai against it.
 - 2. God used the arrogance of Ai against it.
 - F. When Israel attacked, they pretended to retreat in order to draw out the men of Ai.
 - G. When the city was empty, the ambush force took control of it and then pursued the men of Ai from the rear.
 - H. Quickly, the fighting force of Ai was trapped and defeated.
 - I. Joshua’s leadership also involved holding forth his spear toward the city of Ai until it was soundly defeated (cf. Exodus 17:11).
 - J. The picture of Ai’s predicament is an illustration of man’s entrapment when lost in sin (vs. 20; cf. Rev. 6:15-17).
 - K. The people of Ai were destroyed (some 12,000), the king was killed, the city was burned and made a heap as a reminder of the justice and judgment of God.
- VI. The Reading of the Law (Joshua 8:30-35)
- A. Idolatry was replaced by true worship of the true God - for Joshua built an altar.
 - B. Moses had commanded the reading of the Law (Deut. 11:29-30; 27).
 - C. True faith remembers and reflects upon the commands of God - then, obeys them.

