

# Victory for the Covenant People

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Preacher: Jamie Payton

[ 0 : 00 ] The reading this evening is Joshua chapter 8, and you'll find it on page 222 in the Church Bibles, 222.

Then the Lord said to Joshua, Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, take the whole army with you, and go up and attack I.

For I have delivered into your hands the king of I, his people, his city, and his land. You shall do to I and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves.

Set an ambush behind the city. So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack I. He chose 30,000 of his best fighting men and sent them out at night with these orders.

Listen carefully. You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don't go very far from it. All of you be on the alert.

[ 1 : 17 ] I and all those with me will advance on the city, and when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them. They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say, They are running away from us, as they did before.

So when we flee from them, you are to rise up from ambush and take the city. The Lord your God will give it into your hand.

When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the Lord has commanded. See to it you have my orders.

Then Joshua sent them off, and they went to the place of ambush and lay in wait between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai. But Joshua spent that night with the people.

Early the next morning, Joshua mustered his army, and he and the leaders of Israel marched before them to Ai. The entire force that was with him marched up and approached the city and arrived in front of it.

[ 2 : 32 ] They set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and the city. Joshua had taken about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city.

So the soldiers took up their positions, with the main camp to the north of the city and the ambush to the west of it. That night, Joshua went into the valley.

When the king of Ai saw this, he and all the men of the city hurried out early in the morning to meet Israel in battle, at a certain place overlooking the Arabah.

But he did not know that an ambush had been set against him behind the city. Joshua and all Israel let themselves be driven back before them, and they fled towards the wilderness.

All the men of Ai were called out to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city. Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel.

[ 3 : 45 ] They left the city open and went in pursuit of Israel. Then the Lord said to Joshua, Hold out towards Ai, the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city.

So Joshua held out towards the city, the javelin that was in his hand. As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward.

They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire. The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising up into the sky, but they had no chance to escape in any direction.

The Israelites, who had been fleeing towards the wilderness, had turned back against their pursuers. For when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that smoke was going up from the city, they turned round and attacked the men of Ai.

Those in the ambush also came out of the city against them, so that they were caught in the middle, with Israelites on both sides. Israel cut them down, leaving them neither survivors nor fugitives.

[ 5 : 05 ] But they took the king of Ai alive and brought him to Joshua. When Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the wilderness where they had chased them, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in it.

Twelve thousand men and women fell that day, all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his javelin until he had destroyed all who lived in Ai.

But Israel did carry off for themselves the livestock and plunder of this city, as the Lord had instructed Joshua.

So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day. He impaled the body of the king of Ai on a pole and left it there until evening.

At sunset Joshua ordered them to take the body from the pole and throw it down at the entrance of the city gate, and they raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day.

[ 6 : 24 ] Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used.

On it they offered to the Lord burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings. There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on stones a copy of the law of Moses.

All the Israelites, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, facing the Levitical priests who carried it.

Both the foreigners living among them and the native-born were there. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had formally commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.

Afterwards, Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessings and the curses, just as it is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children and the foreigners who lived among them.

[ 8 : 08 ] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Michael.

And it would be very helpful if you could keep your Bibles open on page 222. Hi, my name's Jamie. I'm a ministry trainee here at St. Silas, and let me add my welcome to Simon's.

We have a great victorious passage tonight. We all love victory, don't we? A good story of conquest. Many of our films tell such stories.

Take The Lord of the Rings, a favorite of mine. It is one of the best-selling books and one of the highest-rated movies for a reason. Triumphant over the enemy is good, and the richness of the story builds a picture of why this victory is good.

And in the many celebrations at the end of the movie, we see the great consequences of this victory. But the stories that mean the most to us are those that are connected to us.

[ 9 : 14 ] World War II films matter as they tell of our grandparents or great-grandparents, how they fought for us. We can today visit many battlefields and remember that we have benefited from their victory.

We can stand where they fought and celebrate that the war was won. So the question then is, what does this battle of Joshua and his forces against the king of Ai and his forces over 3,000 years ago have to do with us?

What can it teach us today? Well, let me pray as we get into the text. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and how it speaks to us.

Holy Spirit, we ask that you would open our hearts to hear from you, that you would guide us all as to what you are saying to us about who you are and what it means to be your people.

Amen. Well, our first point this evening is the courageous plan. We begin with the Lord instructing Joshua how to defeat Ai and then Joshua relaying this plan to the army.

[ 10 : 32 ] Read 8 verse 1 with me. Then the Lord said to Joshua, do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. Why is it that Joshua might be discouraged?

Well, last week we saw in chapter 7 that there was a failed attempt to take this city of Ai. 3,000 went out to fight, confident of their victory.

After all, the spies had reported that Ai was only a small city. It should have been easy. But when the battle came, it quickly went wrong. And 36 casualties later, the Israelites are fleeing back, defeated.

What a disaster. No wonder Joshua is afraid. Why should this time be any different? Even worse, the reason for the failure last time was because the Lord's anger burned against Israel. The Lord didn't go with them into battle because one of the Israelites, Achan, had taken the plunder that was devoted to God and in so doing so had violated God's covenant.

[ 11 : 41 ] But that sin has been dealt with. Achan is now under a pile of rocks. He's been punished justly. And so the Lord's anger has been turned away.

And so now the Lord says to Joshua, do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. And these are familiar words in Joshua. In the very first chapter, we hear this from the Lord God to Joshua. He says, Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua can be confident. Joshua can be courageous because the plan is back on. It's business as usual. God is bringing his people into his promised land. He is judging the Canaanites.

And he is keeping all of his promises. The plan hasn't changed because God hasn't changed. So Joshua can be sure of this upcoming victory.

[ 12 : 44 ] And God doesn't want Joshua to be confident in himself or in his army. No, God commands courage in Joshua because, verse 1, God has delivered into Joshua's hands the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.

So what then is this courageous plan? Well, have a look to the end of verse 2. It is an ambush. This clever military strategy is what is going to bring victory and defeat the king of Ai.

Notice in verse 1 that it is primarily the king who is delivered into Joshua's hands, though the people and the rest of the city are too. The king of Ai is the one facing God's judgment along with his people.

God, in giving the land to his people, is defeating rebellious kings. These kings who do not trust God and instead think arrogantly that they can rise up against him.

And also see that this plan of ambush is from God and by God. In verse 2, it is still the Lord who is speaking when the ambush is first mentioned.

[ 13 : 55 ] God is not just the almighty warrior in action, but even in strategy. And in verse 7, we have Joshua instructing the army to rise up from ambush and take the city.

Why? Because the Lord, your God, will give it into your hand. The plan is conceived by God and executed by God through the army.

Despite the 30,000 men marching around, God is the one who is at work. And as a master tactician, God uses the previous failure for victory while also using the king of eyes false confidence against himself.

Read verse 5. Joshua is going to advance on the city with the first part of the army. Let's call them Army A, otherwise we'll get confused later, which it seems is about 25,000 men.

And he tells Army A that when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them. They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say they are running away from us as they did before.

[ 15 : 05 ] But Army A is a decoy. They are to look weak and the king of eye will think he can strike them again. In the meantime, a second army, Army B, of 5,000 men shall then ambush and take the city.

I hope you're starting to read this as an exciting battle that the author thinks it is. The original readers think that this is an epic narrative. The tension builds.

We only get a teasing snapshot of the plan from the Lord in verses 1 and 2. Then Joshua gives a more detailed outline to the army in verses 3 to 8, hinting as to what is about to unfold when the battle begins.

Well, with the height built up, let's go to battle. Our second point is the complete victory. In verses 10 to 13, we see Army A and Army B get into position.

They do exactly as told. So let's follow the action from verse 14. When the king of eye saw this, he and all the men of the city hurried out early in the morning to meet Israel in battle at a certain place overlooking the Arabah.

[ 16 : 17 ] But he did not know that an ambush had been set against him behind the city. Joshua and all Israel let themselves be driven back before them and they fled towards the wilderness.

All the men of eye were called to pursue them and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city. The battle has come and the men of eye are falling for the ambush.

Joshua and the army know what's going on but the king of eye is clueless. Notice how it goes exactly to plan. In verses 5 and 6 we see that the plan is for Army A to advance and then flee from the city luring the king of eye away.

Then in verse 15 what happens? Army A let themselves be driven back and they flee. The armies of eye follow. In verse 6 and 7 the plan is that when Army A flees Army B is to ambush.

Verse 19 as soon as Joshua leads Army A away he gives the signal and the ambush is sprung.

Verse 8 when they take the city they are to set it on fire.

[17:26] In verse 19 after they capture the city what happens? They set it on fire. this entire scene this entire battle demonstrates complete obedience.

God's people trust him and trust his leader Joshua. They follow the instructions precisely. The Lord's victory is delivered through his people's obedience.

And again see that the Lord is the one in control. The victory is his. See verse 18. It is the Lord who at the pivotal moment tells Joshua to hold out the javelin as a signal.

It's here when the ambush the key part of the strategy begins. This is when the city is taken and destroyed. We read in verse 26 that Joshua holds the javelin for the remaining duration of the battle.

For him this might have been a strange experience. As he would recall an episode more than 40 years earlier. A different battle where Joshua was at the front of the army and it was Moses who held aloft the staff.

[18:39] This battle is actually part of the same campaign. The journey out of slavery in Egypt through the desert and now into the promised land is one long journey. And God has led the way the entire time.

Joshua still relies on the Lord. Joshua raises this javelin high declaring that his trust is in the Lord, that the battle belongs to him and that the Lord is faithful.

It's here that the battle reaches its climax. In verse 22 we see that men of Ai are surrounded, caught in the middle with Israelites on both sides.

they have army in front of them and army emerging from the city leaving it in smoke and ruin. No soldier is left standing. Now it's also here that some of you may question whether this is really a good thing.

What did these poor men of Ai do to deserve such a fate? Well this has already been covered earlier in our sermon series but I'll say a few things here.

[19:51] Firstly we have that God's salvation and his judgment are always linked together. The events of the Exodus are a clear example of this. The cruelty of Pharaoh and his oppression of the Israelites is punished with the plagues and it is these very plagues that God uses his mighty arm to force Pharaoh to release the slaves.

The Israelites are saved by God's judgment on Pharaoh and Egypt. This is what's happening here in Ai. God is not clearing out innocence to give his people space.

No, he is bringing his people into the promised land while at the same time in the same way bringing righteous judgment upon the kings and nations of Canaan.

God has made his judgment of the Canaanite people clear long before the Israelites crossed the river. In Deuteronomy chapter 9 we read this, it is not because of your righteousness he is speaking to the Israelites or your integrity that you are going to take possession of their land but on account of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God will drive them out before you to accomplish what he swore to your fathers.

And also I should clarify that we will see later that this is not an ethnic thing. There are non-Israelites within God's people and there are ethnic Israelites who are out.

[21:18] Look at Achan last week. He was an Israelite but on account of his sin he died and was left under a pile of rocks. God's judgment is very serious.

All sin deserves death. It is really the awesome mercy of God towards the Israelites which should shock us here not his judgment on human evil.

And so we see that this battle as much as it is the deserved judgment of Ai it is a truly glorious victory for God a victory for his people in following him.

And indeed we see that it is a complete victory. Verse 24 when Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai and a bit later and when every one of them had been put to the sword.

Verse 25 12,000 men and women fell that day all the people of Ai further down verse 28 we see the totality of this victory in that so Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins a desolate place to this day.

[ 22 : 40 ] This was not a simple setback for Ai no Ai is no more destroyed. The outcome of this battle is confident it is complete the victory belongs to God.

He has won the day he has defeated those who reject his rule. Israelites for centuries after could go to the location of this battle and see nothing but a ruin.

They could walk the land won for them by God and remember his great victory. They could also see the pile of rocks as a memorial of the king's defeat. see what happens to this king in verse 29.

The king is displayed for all to see not placed but nailed impaled his body being torn by its own weight on a pole a wooden pole a tree.

Deuteronomy says that anyone who hangs on a tree this demonstrates that they are cursed by God and we see this curse when at sunset the king is taken down and his body is covered by a pile of rocks.

[ 23 : 51 ] Only a few incidents in the entire Bible receive such a curse. Achan in the previous chapter was one. The Lord's anger burned against Achan and only when the pile of rocks is raised over him do we see that the Lord's anger has been satisfied.

The same goes here only as the king's body is taken down and then a pile of rocks goes over him do we see that the Lord's anger is satisfied.

This is a king and his people experiencing God's judgment and that is the judgment he faces because he is a king set against God. But there is another king who has faced God's judgment.

Jesus faced God's judgment not because he was set against God but because he was obedient.

He faced God's judgment not with his people but for his people.

He took the place of those who were under God's judgment. I was doomed because its king rebelled because the king was against the Lord God.

[ 25 : 02 ] But if you take refuge in the king who has taken judgment for you then you take refuge in the Lord God himself. it is Jesus impaled on a tree where God's salvation victory is perfectly displayed through judgment.

It is there that the Lord's anger is turned away and it is because of that victory that we today can celebrate as the Lord's people. And with all that in mind let's turn to our final point the celebrating people.

This final section also helps clarify the purpose of these battles. This is the big thing that's going on. God is building his covenant people.

In verses 30 to 35 we see that Joshua after this momentous victory of the Lord gets the Lord's people to celebrate. We see sacrifices and offerings in verse 31.

On the altar they offered to the Lord burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings. Burnt offerings are pleasing to God.

[ 26 : 09 ] Joshua leads the Israelites in acknowledging God's victorious battle plans his conquest. The fellowship offering includes a feast. They rejoice as one people, the people of God victorious under his covenant.

They have fellowship with one another and are rejoicing in the presence of the Lord who is their God. God as we look at this covenant celebration let's notice who gets to take part.

Verse 33 towards the end or in the middle both the foreigners living among them and the native born were there and then the second half of verse 35 the whole assembly of Israel including the women and children and the foreigner who lived among them.

All of Israel are equally part of this. Whether they served on the battlefield or stayed in the camp they are a part of the people of God.

They are his people. Notice even and actually especially the foreigner. We met Rahab back in chapter 2 and she turned to follow the Lord and was saved during the battle of Jericho.

[ 27 : 21 ] There is no doubt that should any citizen of I have turned to God to have sought their refuge in him then it would have been granted. God is merciful.

Well after the offerings the law is written and then read to all. In carving the law into stone Joshua sets this time of celebration as not just looking back on all that God has done though it is that but also looking forward to him continuing to be their God and their continued obedience to him that is what it means to be his covenant people you see this whole ceremony was commanded back in

Deuteronomy 27 the covenant is the promises between God and his people he promises to be their God to rule them lead them care for them as he has just demonstrated with this victory over the king of eye and so the law is given as a means of grace for those already saved by God it is proclaimed to all the people and it declares only two ways to live cursed against God or blessed with him the curses are read to the curses are only too real to a nation which is 40 years behind schedule they know that failing to follow the law has real consequences they've just stoned a man who took what was the

Lord's and they've just wiped out a king and city who rejected God but the blessings from Gerizim are wonderfully real too here they're in the land promised their forefathers here they have the plunder taken from Ai as well as that from Egypt a generation ago and they have the Lord himself the ark with his presence is right there with the priests carrying it the final verse 35 is wonderful there was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read it is the word of God spoken through Moses that is powerful that word has been kept Joshua reads aloud the word that he trusts God has been faithful to his promises throughout the 40 years since the law was given to Moses he has been faithful to his word for over 400 years since

Abraham first received the promise of a nation and a land these promises that are now being filled in these battles it is God's word that has brought his covenant people here it is his word that brought victory and binds his covenant his word has brought his people here so that they can be his covenant people this victory is great God has delivered victory for them they can celebrate his wisdom in his courageous plan they can celebrate his strength and might in delivering them complete victory and as his covenant people they celebrate with this covenant that they are the people of God the people of the Lord this is our God who keeps his promises we too can celebrate in the victory that he has delivered for us and that we are part of his covenant family let me pray as the band come up to lead us in more worship sung worship heavenly father we do thank you for the great victory that we see here in the battle of

I we thank you that you are building your covenant people Lord we just pray that you would help us to know the great blessings of a life lived with you as one of your people we pray this in Jesus precious name Amen