

## **Joshua 8, The Second Battle of Ai**

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### **Overview**

This battle is best understood by comparing it with the battle of Jericho, both in terms of preparation and in terms of execution. In this study we will work out the comparisons in terms of execution, but first, see how the relation of ch.7 to ch.8 is like that of 5 to 6.

### ***Relation of 5 to 6***

Structural unity: threefold mention of the fear of the Canaanites, at 5:1, 6:1, and 6:27, the outer two concerning all the nations, the central one focusing on Jericho.

The repetition at 6:1 separates the preparation in ch. 5 from execution in ch. 6.

The preparation in ch. 5 had three parts:

1. 2-9, circumcision reflecting salvation
2. 10-12, passover and firstfruits reflecting discipline in daily life
3. 13-6:5, encounter with captain of the Lord's host, reflecting submission in specific details.

In sum, ch. 5 is about spiritual preparation when everything goes as it should. The people come out of the wilderness directly into the covenant and obedience in Passover. The result, seen in ch. 6, is victory.

### ***Relation of 7:1 to 7:2-5***

Negative preparation (sin) and its consequences (defeat). Reinforces that there is a dependency, and reminds us that God's people do sin. Two shortcomings in the initial battle:

1. A sin of Commission, Achan's violation of the Ban.
2. A sin of Omission, lack of any word from the Lord (as in 6:1-5 or 8:1-2) telling them to move against Ai. Joshua just assumed he was on autopilot.

### ***Relation of 7:6-26 to 8:29***

Now we learn how God's people should recover from a situation of sin. Not just starting from neutral, but recovering from a failure. Thus Josh 7-8 is a picture lesson of 1 John 1:9, the offering of restoration upon forgiveness. Cf. Prov 28:13, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh [them] shall have mercy." Cf. God's promise to Israel in Lev. 26:40; Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:47; and David's testimony in Ps 32:5.

Perhaps the most thorough OT outline of the process is Elihu's prophecy in Job 33:14-28. Compare it with Israel's experience in Josh. 7.

**Table 1: Restoration in Josh 7 and Job 33**

Stage	Josh 7	Job 33
Awareness of sin, either through some disaster to wake us up (as here) or the Spirit's rebuke;	4-9	14-22
Listening to God's word to tell us what is wrong	10-12	23
Confession (agreeing with God's judgment)	16-23	27
Forsaking the sin	24-26	(lacking)
Restoration to fellowship	Ch. 8	28

Elihu also sees the need for a legal foundation for the pardon in a ransom, v.24.

**Vocabulary Note (not in sermon)**

*What is the difference between transgressing (Strong 5674, the word used in Josh 7:11,15) and breaking (6565) the covenant (1285)? Isa 24:5 has both verbs together.*

*What "transgresses" the covenant?*

- *Mainly following other Gods. Deut 17:2; Josh 23:16; Judg 2:19,20*
- *General disobedience, 2 Kings 18:12*
- *Jer 34:18 paraphrases, "not perform the words of the covenant"*
- *Hos 6:7, violence. Cf. 8:1.*

*What "breaks" the covenant?*

- *Gen. 17:14, failure to receive circumcision*
- *Lev 26:15, despising the covenant and not do his commandments*
- *Deut 31:16, 20 go whoring after (16) or serve (20) other gods*
- *Jer 11:10, serve other gods*

*It is noteworthy that God can contemplate breaking the covenant (Zech 11:10; Jer 14:21; Lev 26:44), but never transgressing the covenant. This suggests that "transgress" focuses on violating the terms, while "breaking" focuses on ending the relationship.*

**1-2, The Lord's Instructions**

Four parts.

1. Reassurance, needed after the earlier loss.
2. Explicit command to go up against the city. We are most confident of the Lord's blessing when we know that we are following his directions.
3. New battle orders. This time they can keep the spoil! If only Achan had waited.
4. Specific tactics: use an ambush.

## 3-29, The Second Battle of Ai

### **Geographical Situation**

Gilgal is at elevation 225 m, coordinates 193-143. The exact location of Ai is somewhat uncertain, but one likely candidate is at elevation 825m, coordinates 174-147. The difference is a rise of over a kilometer and a straight-line distance of 20 km, a day's march, much more along the mountain track.

### **Sequence of Events**

3-9, an advance force of 30,000 is sent out the evening of day 1, to occupy the west side of the city, toward Bethel.

10-11, day 2, Joshua advances to the north of the city on day 2.

12, evening of day 2, an additional 5,000 sent to the west of Ai. (Robert's chart suggests these were a blocking force to guard against interference from Bethel.)

13, Joshua enters the valley north of the city to challenge the city.

14-17, the people of Ai pursue them back down into the Jordan valley. "Beth-el" here probably refers not to the town to the west, but to the "house of God," the sanctuary within the city, which often served as a last-ditch fortress (cf. Judg 9:46) and which would ordinarily have been left guarded. The king of Ai is so confident that he does not even leave the sanctuary guard behind.

*Note: Bethel itself is apparently not conquered at this time, and its conquest in the period of Joshua is not described explicitly, only a later conquest in Judges 1:22. In the summary of the conquest in 12:9-24, the king of Bethel is named after the cities conquered in the southern campaign of ch. 10 (16), not with Ai (9), suggesting it may have been part of a mopping-up operation associated with that campaign.*

18-19, the forces on the west of the city enter it and set it on fire.

20-22, pincer movement against the army of Ai

23-29, destruction of the civil population, spoiling of the city, and execution of the king. Note Joshua's care to follow Deut 21:22-23 with regard to not leaving the king hung all night long. The sinner may be exposed for one day to shame him, but not longer, lest undue attention be drawn to his wickedness. This issue of balance in publicity afforded to wickedness is one that we have neglected in our day; now the evildoer often gets so much attention that one feels justice has been slighted.

### **Comparison with Battle of Jericho**

Both begin with a spy expedition. *Lesson:* Preparation is not inappropriate.

The strategies are completely different. Jericho is an openly miraculous battle with a completely unconventional battle plan. Ai is a carefully planned ambush, a classical battle plan. *Lesson:* The Lord does not always lead in exactly the same way. It is very dangerous to try to lock God up in a box and say that he cannot work in such-and-such a way. It is far more important to listen carefully for his leading and follow it.

The policies on reward are also different, as shown in Table 2.

*Lesson:* Like God’s actions, his gifts also may change from time to time. Just because another Christian is permitted something doesn’t mean you are, and vice versa.

**Table 2: Disposition of Jericho and Ai**

	<b>Jericho, 6:21-24</b>	<b>Ai, 7:27-28</b>
Humans	Slain, 21	Slain, 25
Animals	Slain, 21	Personal spoil, 27
Gold and Silver	Into Tabernacle, 24	Personal spoil, 27
City	Burned, 24	Burned, 28

### 30-35, Bible Conference at Mt. Ebal

Now that the nation has access to the hill country, they move quickly to fulfill the command by Moses in Deut. 27, to build an altar, post the law, and recite the blessings and curses to one another at Shechem. They have hardly eliminated all the possible enemies, but Joshua is eager to obey the command and moves at the earliest possible moment to do so. Contrast the rebelliousness of Achan.

Ebal and Gerizim are N and S of Nablus, which is the modern city immediately to the west of ancient Shechem. The modern city is less than a kilometer wide, between the two adjacent peaks. *Slides.* So the people could gather on the slopes, six tribes to the south to bless, and six to the north to curse, according to Deut. 27:12. The curses themselves are in 27:15-26, 28:15-68; while the blessings are sandwiched between them in 28:1-14.

Details of the passage:

- 31, Altar of whole stones, as commanded first in Exod 20:24-25, for field use, “in all places where I record my name.” Temporary, befitting the tabernacle. In contrast, the a fixed sanctuary was a human idea by David and Solomon.
- 31, the particular offerings rendered: burnt and peace. Recall the meaning of the four main classes of sacrifice:
  1. Sin: need for forgiveness to become God’s people. Not in focus here; the nation is seen as victorious and in fellowship with the Lord.
  2. Burnt: the entire commitment of the worshipper to the Lord. This is in focus. As he requires them to devote the conquered peoples to him, so they are to dedicate themselves to him.
  3. Peace: voluntary worship and praise. Also in focus here. They are grateful for the victory he has given them.
  4. Trespass: dealing with particular acts of sin in the believer’s life. Not in focus here.
- 35, inclusiveness of the meeting. Included even the children and the strangers. A model for worship today; no “junior church.” Cf. De 29:11 31:12 Ezr 10:1 Joe 2:16 Mr 10:14.