

FINALLY ISRAEL CONQUERS AI

Joshua 8:1-35

Key Verse: 8:1

"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 Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land.'"

In the previous chapter we studied one person, Achan's sin. The entire Israelites experienced tragedy. And Achan's desire to wear a three-piece suit made in Babylon and to buy a chariot drawn by four black stallions was not achieved. Rather, his sin was discovered. He and his wife, including their parents, were stoned to death. And even more pitifully, his cute sons and lovely daughters were also stoned to death. Even his flocks and herds, which did not know the concept of sin, were also stoned to death. Achan might have had an Egyptian dog. It was also terribly stoned and died. The scene was bloody and miserable. Many children's stomachs were torn and blood gushed out. And the tragic cries of children were too pathetic to hear. Finally the place where Achan and his family members and his flocks and herds were stoned became bloody. This tells us that one person's sin causes his children to be cursed. All the Israelites felt that they were once more defeated by the people of Ai. Achan's petty desire for a three-piece Babylonian suit and to drive a chariot drawn by four black stallions blinded his spiritual eyes and caused his family members such a tragic death by stoning. What is more, he caused the Israelites to sink into deep defeatism being defeated by the people of the small city Ai. These days many think, "I am I, and you are you." There is no sense of unity. There is no sense

of community. There is no sense of national identity and loyalty and stewardship because of selfishness which Achan had. "I am not just I, I am one of the precious members of a nation as well as an indispensable member in the kingdom of God." Today's passage teaches us the Israelites won the victory by God's help. There is no defeat in God. There is only victory in God. Therefore, this lesson is a very precious one.

First, God's strategy for the Israelites in defeating Ai (1-2). After Achan's tragic event, the God of Israel did not give them time to think over their defeat and Achan's tragic sin and death by stoning. As soon as Achan was stoned to death, his place of death was covered by many small and large rocks, like an ancient king's tomb. Nevertheless, God's thunderous command was given to the Israelites. This time God taught them how to defeat Ai. God also taught them the strategy to destroy the entire army of Ai. Look at verse 1. "Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.'" God Almighty knew very well that they were doubly discouraged and fearful of the power of Ai. They were even more fearful about God's wrath and punishment. But God Almighty forgave their sins and wanted to muster the Israelite soldiers and bolster their morale.

Verse 1 continues, "Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai." In this command of God Almighty, we learn how the attitude of soldiers should be. There is a saying about a lion's pouncing on a rabbit. He takes his form and jumps on it with all his strength and speed. Because of his attitude, the lion is called the king of the animal world. Tigers' front two paws have great punching power, even to knock down a big tree and smash a rock. But a tiger's boxing

skill is very inferior to a lion pouncing with his full concentration of power and spirit. Here God Almighty teaches the Israelites to be as brave as a lion, not a good boxer like a tiger. Verse 1 again says, "For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land." God promised victory over the soldiers of Ai if they follow God's strategy. But this time, God satisfied good and evil people's desire. Almighty God said at the end of verse 2, "...except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves."

The last part of verse 2, "Set an ambush behind the city," has deep meaning. This is God's strategy. God's strategy is God's wisdom for all men. God's strategy is perfect and sound. God's strategy gives all men the final victory. God's strategy is God's word. God's strategy is wisdom for all men. Many people have their own idea. A student who could not finish junior college in eight years still thinks that he is a smart person, pointing his finger to his head. Not only the student, all people of the world mostly think that, "My way is the best way. My plan is the best plan. If I follow God's plan, I would only maintain a hand-to-mouth kind of family security. So I must live according to my wisdom." Still they attend church meetings at least three times a year: at Christmas Worship Service, the Summer Bible Conference, and one time at the Easter season, for the salvation of their souls. But they cannot save their souls in that way. They must follow God's strategy and God's wisdom and God's words. They must live with their concentration like a lion. Let's see how General Joshua obeyed God's word.

Now! General Joshua ordered the whole army, "Move out to attack Ai" (3). This time not three thousand, but the whole army moved out. General

Joshua chose thirty thousand 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. I and all those with me will advance on the city..." (3-5). This time General Joshua followed God's ambush strategy. The ambush strategy was as follows: "When the soldiers of Ai 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. Ha, ha, ha, ha. Now we are gonna to have a big feast after cutting all their heads with our sharpened swords'" (5-6). The soldiers of Ai were very proud because they defeated three thousand of the Israelite soldiers not long before. General Joshua commanded, "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 hands. When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the Lord has commanded. See to it; you have my orders" (6-8). General Joshua's orders cut to the hearts of his soldiers.

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, General Joshua mustered his soldiers and marched before them to Ai (10). The entire force that was with him marched up and approached the city and arrived in front of it. They set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and the city (11). General Joshua had taken about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city (12). General Joshua's plan was to attack from the north and from the west so that he may surround the soldiers of Ai. General Joshua had his soldiers take up their positions—all those in the camp to the north of the city

and the ambush to the west of it. That night he went into the valley
(13). General Joshua's war plan was thorough and intense.

Second, the king of Ai (14-17). 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 (14). His great mistake was overlooking Arabah. He did not know that the soldiers of Israel were in ambush. He never imagined that there was an ambush set against him behind the city. The king of Ai was very complacent. A student studied hard and he got all A's in a semester. Then he thought he would get all A's the next semester without fail. But he went to a theater and watched a movie and that night he did not write a report. The next night he wanted to watch TV just fifteen minutes. But fifteen minutes prolonged to four hours. So he did not study well at his classes the next day. At the weekend test he got a C-. He wanted to study harder but his sinful nature overwhelmed him. Finally at the end of the second year he flunked out of the school. The king of Ai was just like that. Many people say to themselves, "Only ten minutes of TV watching, just one time of oversleeping doesn't make any difference." But it makes a big difference. Those kind of people cannot graduate from a two-year junior college in two years. Usually those kinds of people take nine years to finish a two-year junior college. And their smart minds lead them to destruction. As we studied, life is war. In the war, complacency is not allowed.

When we see contemporary people, there are many of those who have much money. There are those who work hard. There are many who think they are smart. But they don't follow the strategy of God, that is the

wisdom of God. Their final destiny will be marked with F- and they will all be like the soldiers of Ai led by the king of Ai to be destroyed completely. They lost their so dear children and dogs and cats and everything. In short, they will become losers in the war of life. Let's see how the army of Ai, led by the king was destroyed. All the men of Ai were called to pursue the Israelites, not knowing General Joshua was luring them to come out of their fortress, and they pursued General Joshua who lured them away from the city (16). Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel (17). They thought that they would catch the soldiers of Israel and kill them all. So the soldiers of Ai and Bethel all came out to pursue them. It is common sense that the palace guard or the city guard must remain to watch the city or the king's palace. However, the Bible says that the king of Ai left the city open and went in pursuit of Israel (17). We call these kinds of people smart and stupid people. They think they will get all A+ s but in the end they get F- s. We call these kinds of people the losers in the war of life.

Third, the Lord gives the Israelites great victory (18-25). Then the Lord said to General Joshua, "Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city" (18). This means that God commanded General Joshua to hold out his javelin and ordered his soldiers, "Advance!" and "Charge!" and "Destroy them!" As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed toward the city. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire (19). So the city of Ai became like a big forest fire burning violently and destroying everything. In a few seconds, all the city was burned down to the ground as ashes. The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising against the sky, but they had no chance to

escape in any direction, for the Israelites who had been fleeing toward the desert suddenly turned back around against their pursuers (20). And at the same time the people in the ambush came out, 30,000 well-trained soldiers in all. In this way the soldiers of Ai were surrounded from the west and from the north. They became POWs before fighting. At that time there was no Geneva Convention for the war prisoners. So they were all killed in the fields of Ai and in the desert where they had chased them. Every one of them was put to the sword (24). The blades of the swords of the Israelite soldiers were so fast here and there and the pumping out of blood from so many chopped necks of Ai soldiers was more than tragedy. After putting them to the sword, all the Israelite soldiers returned to Ai and killed those who were in it. How many of them do you think were killed? One thousand? No. Twelve thousand people of Ai were killed, including women. Twelve thousand men and women fell at the sharp sword blades of the army of Israel (25). The king of Ai was defeated completely. Because of his negligence he lost the lives of his soldiers and their wives and all the children. He was arrested to appear before General Joshua. One leader's negligence is not at all forgivable. Our fellowship leaders don't get any hourly pay or recognition of the world or thank-you letters from Presidents of the world. But they are all generals in the sight of God in our generation. They are joining in the spiritual battle between God's soldiers and multi-millions of Satan's agents. Here we learn that we must have a clear identity as a chosen people. We must have a clear identity as generals in the spiritual realm. We must have the courage to cut the necks of God's enemies and still be fearless when we see from the necks of the enemies blood pumping out toward the sky. That should be our attitude as God's generals in the spiritual warfare.

Fourth, General Joshua keeps on holding out his javelin (26-29). In actuality, the battle was won by the soldiers of Israel. But General Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his javelin until he had destroyed all who had lived in Ai (26). This scene is like the Allied Army after destroying the Normandy fortress. Several hundred Americans remained to destroy the remaining enemies. This story is well described in the movie, "Saving Private Ryan." American soldiers destroyed the remaining enemies and, by order from headquarters, wanted to find Private Ryan, whose three brothers had already died in battle. The captain who was in charge of finding Ryan and all his soldiers worked hard and finally found Ryan. But Private Ryan wanted to remain there and fight continually. At the same time, he cried, calling his mommy. So the captain in charge of the rescue mission of Private Ryan became helpless. I hope you can find out the end of the story because I don't remember it, and tell it to me. Anyway, the captain in charge of the rescue mission of Private Ryan was indeed an honorable soldier in his attitude and human integrity as a soldier. Likewise, General Joshua continued to hold out his javelin until he was sure that all who live in Ai were completely destroyed.

Last time, God forbade them to take any of the devoted things from the Jericho fortress. But this time God allowed them to carry off for themselves the livestock and plunder of the city as the Lord had instructed Joshua (27). So after victory, marching back to their camp, on the right shoulder was their armory and with the left hand they were holding the leashes of goats, dogs, donkeys and oxen. What a funny sight it is. Here we learn God's mercy. Last time, when Achan stole a three-piece Babylonian suit and some gold and silver, such a terrible punishment was carried out. But this time, out of his great mercy he

allowed them to bring livestock, as many as they wanted.

So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins (28). He hung the king of Ai on a tree (29). In this way, General Joshua and his soldiers defeated the city of Ai and its soldiers. Without God's strategy, which is God's wisdom and life direction, they could not win the victory. But when Joshua obeyed God's strategy, that is, God's wisdom and way of life, he could win the glorious victory over the king of Ai and his soldiers. Always, victory comes from God. This is the reason we must believe our God Almighty.

Fifth, God renewed the covenant at Mount Ebal (30-35). After the victory, Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the Lord, the Lord God of Israel, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the Israelites (30-31). When this was done, half of the people stood on Mount Ebal and half of the people stood on Mount Gerizim. Afterward Joshua read all the words of the Lord—the blessings and the curses, just as it is written in the book of the Law (33-34). General Joshua read all the words without missing one word (35). In this way, General Joshua thanked God for the victory. How easy it is after victory to think that they won the victory with their own strength and suddenly become proud. But General Joshua proved himself as God's General over the Israelites.

Here we learn that we must follow God's strategy. We must not think, "I am a smart man." Nobody thinks, "I am stupid." So, "I am a smart man," is nonsense. We humbly bow down our heads on the ground and ask God's strategy, that is, the wisdom of God.