

# Sermon Outline

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## “AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”: A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

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### THE LORD OUR GOD: DIVINE STRATEGIST AND HISTORIAN (JOSHUA 8:3-17)

#### I. Introduction

#### II. The Ai Campaign Begins (Joshua 8:3)

- A. Following the Lord’s reassurance in 8:1, Joshua prepares to do God’s will.
- B. 8:3: “Joshua and all the fighting men arose to go up to Ai.”
  - 1. Israel rises as one to do the will of God.
  - 2. Once again, Joshua and his people show themselves to be the humble and obedient servants of God.
- C. Since God had instructed Joshua to set an ambush, “Joshua chose 30,000 mighty men of valor and sent them out by night.”
  - 1. The mighty men of valor are the bravest of Israel’s soldiers.
  - 2. They would be something like the guardsmen or the commandos of a modern army.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Joshua do after receiving God’s reassurances in 8:1? (2) In response to God’s command to set an ambush, what military action does Joshua take? (3) Who are the “mighty men of valor”?

#### III. Joshua Instructs the Men of Valor (Joshua 8:4-6)

- A. Before he actually sends out the men of valor, Joshua gives specific instructions to these special soldiers (vv 4-8).
- B. Joshua’s first instruction: “And he commanded them, ‘Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you remain ready.’”
  - 1. Joshua is now transmitting the Lord’s instructions to his soldiers.
  - 2. At this point in Israel’s history, the Lord is very much in control of Israel’s army. He is the chief tactician of Israel.
  - 3. As such, all of God’s military commands are *holy words*.
  - 4. Today, many believe that God should be kept in a box, far away from the real world—especially from things political and military.
  - 5. But here, we see that God does not impose such limits on himself.
    - a. God is fully involved in the military strategizing of Israel.
    - b. This does not necessarily mean that God dictates what Israel should do every step of the way.

- c. It means that Joshua’s tactics cannot go against God’s specific instructions.  
—God wants Israel to ambush Ai. And Joshua’s plans have to support that basic plan of attack.
- C. But what about the rest of the troops?
  - 1. Joshua says: “And I and all the people who are with me will approach the city.”
  - 2. As the 30,000 soldiers wait behind the city, Joshua is going to lead the main body and they are going to march straight up to the gates of Ai.
  - 3. But this is not to attack Ai—rather, it is to lure Ai’s soldiers out of the city (v 6).
- D. Once Ai’s soldiers leave the city to pursue the main body, the men of valor who have been waiting behind the city will strike: “Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will give it into your hand” (v 7).
  - 1. In comparison to the Jericho campaign, the campaign against Ai is going to involve Israel a little more.
  - 2. But we see that the Lord is still in the picture.
    - a. Israel will win because the Lord will give Ai over to them.
    - b. The Lord is the real power behind his people.
    - c. Therefore, all glory for Israel’s victory returns to the Lord alone.
- E. What then are the soldiers to do once they have invaded the city?
  - 1. The soldiers are to execute the divine ban: “And as soon as you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire....” (v 8).
  - 2. Joshua also makes clear that this destruction is “according to the word of the LORD.”
- F. Joshua’s briefing comes to a close.
  - 1. This has to got be one of those rare occasions when a military briefing is also a sermon.
  - 2. But that was the reality for Israel in that point in time.
  - 3. During the time of Moses and Joshua, Israel was a theocracy, a nation ruled directly by God. The implication of this is that all of Israel’s laws, even the civil laws, are the Word of God.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Joshua ask the men of valor to do (a) after they leave the Israelite camp and (b) after the Israelite troops lure Ai’s soldiers out of the city? (2) What are the rest of the troops to do while the men of valor wait behind the city? What is the purpose of marching up to Ai? (3) What role does the Lord play in the upcoming battle?

#### IV. Joshua Sends Out the Men of Valor (Joshua 8:9)

- A. Joshua sends out his men of valor: “And they went to the place of ambush and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai, but Joshua spent that night among the people.”

- B. The 30,000 men of valor go out under the cover of darkness.
- C. With a group this size, it was possible that the whole movement from the Israelite camp to the back of Ai took the whole night.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Where in relation to Ai did the men of valor situate themselves? (2) Given the size of the force, what precautions do you think the soldiers made?

## V. Joshua Leads His Troops to Ai (Joshua 8:10-13)

- A. The next day begins: “Joshua arose early in the morning...”
  - 1. That’s phrase often appears before God’s people embark on a great mission.
    - a. In 3:1, just before Israel crossed the Jordan.
    - b. In 6:12, just before Israel marched against Jericho.
    - c. In 7:16, just before the process of elimination to discover Achan began.
    - d. Now, in 8:10.
- B. In historical narratives, God tells us that something important is about to happen by repeating certain key phrases.
- C. The diligent interpreter of the Bible must learn to pick up on these verbal cues within the sacred text.
- D. So “Joshua arose early in the morning and mustered the people and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai.”
- E. He leads the soldiers to set up a camp on the north side of Ai, “with a ravine between them and Ai.”
- F. Once the force was in place, Joshua “took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city” (v 12).
  - 1. By this time, there was already a force of 30,000 soldiers in place on the west of Ai.
  - 2. These 5,000 men were probably sent in to further strengthen the numbers that were already there—and perhaps to make the main body a little more nimble in their retreat.
- G. Altogether, Israel had two groups in place.
  - 1. The first was camped to the north of the city.
  - 2. The second—the real attack force—was behind the city, its western side.
- H. The movement of soldiers must have taken a good part of the day, because we are told “Joshua spent that night in the valley.”
  - 1. This suggests that a full day had passed.
  - 2. The valley here is the ravine in front of Ai (vv 9, 11).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the significance of the phrase “Joshua arose early in the morning”? (2) Having led the soldiers up to the region of Ai, where does Israel camp in relation to the city? (3) How many more men does Joshua lead to the west of the city? (4) How many groups does Israel have in place near Ai?

## VI. Contact (Joshua 8:14-17)

- A. When the king of Ai learns that Israel is encamped across the ravine from his city: “he and all his people, the men of the city, hurried and went out early to the appointed place toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle.”
- B. But the king “did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city.”
- C. When the king charged at Israel, “Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness.”
- D. Seeing Israel retreat, the soldiers of Ai called for all the people in the city to pursue the Israelites (v 16).  
—They may have wanted to finish Israel off for good.
- E. Verse 17 says, “Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel.” But in doing that, they did what Israel wanted them to do: “They left the city open...”

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What happens when the king of Ai learns that Israel has deployed near Ai? (2) What did the king of Ai not realize when he went out to meet Israel? (3) What did Joshua and his troops do when the king charged at Israel? (4) What happened when the soldiers of Ai saw Israel retreat (v 16)?

## VII. Our Lord God As Divine Strategist and Historian

**In this episode of Israel’s life, the Lord reveals himself as the divine Strategist and Historian of his people. God intends for this revelation to guide his people in all generations. If the Lord is the Strategist and Historian of his Church, it means (1) that we can trust the Lord to guide his people today in all their struggles with the World, and (2) that we can trust the Lord to teach us about who we are, and what we need to be.**

- A. The Lord continues to be the divine Strategist of his people today.
  - 1. We can continue to trust the Lord to guide us today in our ongoing struggles with the World.
  - 2. Joshua 8:3-17 is a call to rely on God’s guidance in our ongoing struggle with the World.
  - 3. The Lord calls us to weaken the World by filling ourselves and our communities with new influences—the influences of the Kingdom of God.
  - 4. We do this in four ways:
    - a. By meditating daily on the Word of God
    - b. By praying regularly  
—“praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (Eph 6:18)
    - c. By Christian fellowship (1 Thess 5:9-11; Heb 3:13)
    - d. By proclaiming the Gospel (Mt 28:19-20)

- B. The Lord is also the divine Historian of his people.
1. He is the divine Recorder and Writer of the history of his people.
  2. History is important because...
    - a. it tells us where we have come from, and therefore, who we are;
    - b. it points us to where we need to be going, and therefore, what we need to become.
  3. History is a matter of identity and purpose.
  4. God gives his people a lot of history in his Word because he wants us to know who we are and what we need to be doing.
  5. The battle for Ai was recorded to remind future Israelites that God's people are to be soldiers of the Lord.
  6. The purpose of our people is to press God's holy influence into every corner of society using all the means God has given to us.
  7. While the single nation of Israel has blossomed into the universal Church of Jesus Christ, the essential calling remains the same:  
—God's people struggle to apply God's rule into the world.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What are three key ways that we push the World's influence out of ourselves? (2) Why is the history in Scripture so important for God's people? What purpose does this serve in the life of God's children? (3) Under Joshua, God's people were his soldiers against the wicked nations of Canaan. Does this calling still apply to God's people today? How so?