

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA 8

Joshua is encouraged to go up and take Ai, and is directed what method to make use of, (^(H80E)Joshua 8:1,2); accordingly he set an ambush on the west side of it, and, he and the rest of the army went up before it, (^(H80B)Joshua 8:3-13); which, when the king of Ai saw, he and all his forces came cut against them, and the Israelites making a feint as if they were beaten, drew on the men of Ai to pursue them, upon which the ambush arose and entered the city and set fire to it, (^(H804)Joshua 8:14-19); the smoke of which being observed by Joshua and Israel, they turned back upon the pursuers, and the ambush sallying out of the city behind them, made an entire destruction of them, then slew all the inhabitants, took the spoil, burnt the city, and hanged the king of it, (^(H80D)Joshua 8:20-29); after this Joshua built an altar at Ebal, wrote the law on stones, and read the blessings and curses in it before all Israel, (^(H80D)Joshua 8:30-35).

Ver. 1. *And the Lord said unto Joshua*, etc.] Immediately after the execution of Achan, the fierceness of his anger being turned away:

fear not, neither be thou dismayed; on account of the defeat of his troops he had sent to take Ai:

take all the people of war with thee; all above twenty years of age, which, with the forty thousand of the tribes on the other side Jordan he brought over with him, must make an arm, five hundred thousand men; these Joshua was to take with so much to animate and encourage him, or to terrify the enemy, nor because such a number was necessary for the reduction of Ai, which was but a small city; but that all might have a part in the spoil and plunder of it, which they were denied at Jericho, and chiefly to draw all the men out of the city, seeing such a numerous host approaching:

and arise, go up to Ai; which lay high, and Joshua being now in the plains of Jericho, (see Gill on "^(H80E)Joshua 7:2");

see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land; this city, though a small one, had a king over it, as most cities in the land of Canaan had; the number of his people in it were twelve thousand, and his land were the fields about it; all which were given to Joshua by the Lord, and were as sure as if he had them already in his hand.

Ver. 2. *And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst to Jericho and her king*, etc.] Burn the one and slay the other:

only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves; which they were not allowed to do at Jericho:

lay thee an ambush for the city behind it; at the west side of it: some have called in question the lawfulness of the ambush, but, as this was appointed by the Lord, there is no room for it.

Ver. 3. *So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai*, etc.] As the Lord had commanded him:

and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour; out of all the men of war; these were a select company, picked men, not the whole army, as some have thought, for he was ordered to take all the people of war, as he did:

and sent them away by night; from the main army, that they might pass the city and get behind it undiscovered, for they were sent for an ambush; and of these some were to take the city, and be left in it to burn it, and some to smite the men of Ai, as Abarbanel notes.

Ver. 4. *And he commanded them, saying*, etc.] At the time he sent them away;

behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, [even] behind the city; that is, on the west side of it, (^(488B)Joshua 8:9);

go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready; to enter into it, as soon as the forces are drawn out eastward to meet the army of Israel.

Ver. 5. *And I and all the people that [are] with me will approach unto the city*, etc.] That is, Joshua with the main body of the army would march up to the city the next morning, in order to draw out the inhabitants of it to fight them:

and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first; as they had done before, when the three thousand were sent against them, (^{<0004>}Joshua 7:4,5);

that we will flee before them; as the three thousand did, which would animate them to pursue them with the greater eagerness, and to a distance from their city.

Ver. 6. *For they will come out after us,* etc.] Of which there could be no doubt, when they should see them run from them:

till we have drawn them from the city; some distance from it, that they could not return soon enough to save it from the ambush, or prevent their entrance into it, and burning it:

for they will say, they will flee before us, as at the first; they run away as they did before, and let us pursue them and smite them as we did then:

therefore we will flee before them; to draw them out of the city, and make your way easy to get into it,

Ver. 7. *Then ye shall rise up from the ambush,* etc.] When they should see a signal made, that in (^{<0008>}Joshua 8:18,19); and when their watch, they might set in a proper place, should see Israel flee, and the men of Ai at a distance from their city, pursuing, and give notice of it to the ambush:

and seize upon the city; enter into it, and take possession of it, its fortresses, and secure its passes:

for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand; Joshua expresses himself with great confidence, having the promise of God, and relying on it.

Ver. 8. *And it shall be, when ye have taken the city,* etc.] Entered it and become masters of it:

[that] ye shall set the city on fire; not the whole city, only some outlying houses of it, to make a smoke which might be seen both by Israel and the men of Ai, for different purposes; for the spoil of the city was first to be taken before it was utterly burnt with fire:

according to the commandment of the Lord shall ye do; plunder the city, destroy the inhabitants of it, and then burn it:

see I have commanded you; delivered the command of the Lord unto them, and therefore were left without excuse, and could not plead ignorance; besides, he was their general, and he expected his orders to be obeyed, as they ought to have been.

Ver. 9. *Joshua therefore sent them forth*, etc.] The thirty thousand chosen men:

and they went to lie in ambush; as they were ordered, (^{<HXE>}Joshua 8:2):

and abode between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; for as Ai was on the east of Bethel, (^{<HXE>}Joshua 7:2). Bethel must be on the west of Ai, as Jarchi notes:

but Joshua lodged that night among the people; the main body of the army, to direct them in the affair of war, how they should behave the next day, when they came to fight; and to inspire them with courage and confidence, that they might not be afraid, because of their having been smitten before by this people, so Ben Gersom; or rather that he and they might be ready in the morning to march towards Ai, as Jarchi and Kimchi.

Ver. 10. *And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people*, etc.] To see if there were any wanting, and to put them in proper order for their march:

and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai; these elders were either the seventy elders who went with Joshua as council to him; or it may be rather they were inferior officers, who went at the head of their respective corps under them.

Ver. 11. *And all the people, [even the people] of war that [were] with him, and went up, and drew nigh*, etc.] To the city of Ai:

and came before the city; as if they intended to besiege it, storm it, or force an entrance into it:

and pitched on the north side of Ai; which was judged fittest for the purpose:

now [there was] a valley between them and Ai; which the Rabbins call the valley of Halacah, as Jarchi says; so that they were upon a hill, at least on rising ground, and might the more easily be seen by the inhabitants of Ai, whom they wanted to draw out of their city.

Ver. 12. *And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush,* etc.] This was another ambush, as both Jarchi and Kimchi observe; and the latter adds, perhaps he set them nearer the city than the former; though some are of opinion that these are the same ambush spoken of, whose number is here given, being set on the same side of the city; and they suppose that Joshua had with him but thirty thousand men in all, five thousand of which he sent to lie in ambush, and the other twenty five thousand remained with him; but it seems clear that all the men of war were to be taken, and were taken by them, and that out of them thirty thousand were sent by him to lie in wait at first, and now five thousand more:

between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city; and though they were on the same side of the city with the first and larger ambush, yet, as Abarbinel observes, they might be set nearer the city and to the army; and he supposes the first ambush was to take the city, and the second little ambush, as he calls it, was placed, that when the men of the city came out, they might make a noise and a stir, and skirmish with them, that so they might not come upon the camp suddenly.

Ver. 13. *And when they had set the people,* etc.] In battle array, as in (¹⁰⁰⁰1 Kings 20:12); that is, Joshua and the officers of the army:

[even] all the host that [was] on the north of the city; where Joshua and the main army were:

and the liers in wait on the west of the city: both the first and second ambush; when all, were prepared and got ready by their several officers, to act the part they were to do:

Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley; according to Ben Gersom, to see whether the guards or sentinels which were placed there were awake or asleep, lest the men of Ai should come suddenly upon them and smite them; but perhaps it might be to pray and meditate.

Ver. 14. *And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw [it],* etc.] Not the ambush on the west side, but the host or army on the north side, or, however, some of his people gave him notice of it:

that they hastened and rose up early; or made haste to rise out of their beds, on the alarm given of Israel's near approach:

and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle; being raised out of their beds and accoutred with armour, and put into a military order, they marched out with their king at the head of them, to give Israel battle:

he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; which was before the city, the same with the valley mentioned, (^{<0681>}Joshua 8:11,13); the city was built on an eminence, and this plain or valley lay at the bottom of it; and on an eminence on the other side of the valley the army of Israel was pitched; wherefore the king of Ai and all his men of war went out hither to attack Israel, and this is said to be at an appointed time; it is difficult to say what is meant by it, when they seem to have hurried out as best as they could, as soon as they perceived the Israelites were near them: Ben Gersom and Abarbinel think it was the same time of the day they went out at first, which the king might choose as lucky, being before successful, and to encourage the men, that as they conquered then they should now; which seems not amiss, though perhaps it rather designs an appointed place, as their rendezvous, and where to attack Israel, and where they had been before victorious:

but he wist not that [there were] liers in ambush against him behind the city; that he knew nothing of, and therefore took no precaution against them to prevent their design.

Ver. 15. *And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them*, etc.] Or smitten, as some of them might be in the pursuit:

and fled by the way of the wilderness; not a barren desert, but, according to Kimchi and Ben Melech, a place for the pasture of cattle; though perhaps it is the same with the wilderness of Bethaven, (^{<0682>}Joshua 18:12). Epiphanius^{f131} makes mention of the wilderness of Bethel and Ephraim as near Jericho.

Ver. 16. *And all the people that were in Ai [were] called together to pursue after them*, etc.] Because the host of Israel was very numerous, it was judged proper that all the people in Ai should assist in pursuing them, not only to kill the more in the pursuit, but to carry off the spoil and prisoners they should take; or rather the sense is, that all the people in Ai, which were come out with the king to battle, when they saw Israel flee, “cried”^{f132}, or shouted, as soldiers do when victorious, “in” or “while pursuing”^{f133} after them;

and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city; at some considerable distance from it; which was the design to be answered by feigning a flight.

Ver. 17. *And there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel that went not out after Israel,* etc.] For as these two places were very near to each other, but a mile apart, they were in confederacy, and acted together, and could easily be called to the help of each other when required: though there is a difficulty how the men of Bethel could join those of Ai, when the ambush lay between them both, (^(¶¶82)Joshua 8:12); they either went another way, or the ambush purposely let them pass, for fear of a discovery by a skirmish with them, and that Bethel as well as Ai might be cleared of its armed inhabitants, and so fall an easy prey to them as well as Ai: this must be understood only of men of war; for otherwise there were inhabitants left, as old men, and such as were unfit for war, afterwards slain, (^(¶¶83)Joshua 8:24,25);

and they left the city open: they did not stay to shut the gates, nor left porters or any guards about, to take care of, protect, and defend the city:

and pursued after Israel; with great eagerness and vehemence, not having the least apprehension of their city being in any danger.

Ver. 18. *And the Lord said unto Joshua, stretch out the spear that [is] in thy hand towards Ai,* etc.] On which was a flag, as Abarbinel and Ben Melech think; and which is not improbable, and served for a signal for the ambush to come out and seize the city, as both they and Jarchi observe, as well as a signal also to the army of Israel to prepare to turn and face about, and engage with the enemy; though they did not actually do this until they saw the smoke of the city, (^(¶¶81)Joshua 8:21);

for I will give it into thine hand; of which the stretching out of his spear seems also to be a confirming sign to him, and which he kept stretched out until all the inhabitants of Ai were destroyed, (^(¶¶85)Joshua 8:26);

and Joshua stretched out the spear that [he had] in his hand toward the city: and therefore must turn himself towards it; and it is highly probable that at the same time there was a full stop of the army, and that they immediately turned or prepared to turn about.

Ver. 19. *And the ambush arose quickly out of their place*, etc.] As soon as the sentinels set in proper places observed the signal, and gave them notice of it, which was the stretching out of the spear, as appears by what follows:

and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand; and the spear in his hand; from whence it is plain, that though the Lord is said to bid Joshua do this now, he had orders from him for it before and the ambush must have been made acquainted with it before they were sent away; and this was only a renewal of the order from the Lord, and which pointed out the proper time, the very crisis, when it should be stretched out:

and they entered into the city; without any difficulty, the gates being open:

and took it; took possession of it, and the strong holds in it:

and hastened and set the city on fire; that is, they made haste to set some houses on fire as the signal to the army of Israel to return.

Ver. 20. *And when the men of Ai looked behind them*, etc.] On some account or another, perhaps observing that the army of Israel made a full stop and was gazing at the city:

they saw, and, behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven; from whence they concluded an enemy was there, and had set fire to it:

and they had no power to flee this way or that way; for if they turned back to their city there was an enemy, how powerful they knew not, possessed of it, and whom they might expect would meet them; and if they pushed forward, there was the whole army of Israel against them, which now turned and faced them, showing no fear of them:

and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers; the people of Israel, that fled by the way of the wilderness, (^(CHBIS)Joshua 8:15), turned about, and fell upon the men of Ai that pursued them.

Ver. 21. *And when Joshua*, etc.] Or “for Joshua”^{f134}:

and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city; which they knew by the smoke, as follows:

and that the smoke of the city ascended; in large columns, which sufficiently indicated that the whole city was taken and fired by the ambush:

then, or, “and”,

they turned again and slew the men of Ai; great numbers of them.

Ver. 22. *And the other issued out of the city against them*, etc.] That is, the ambush, or at least a part of them:

so that they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side; or, as we commonly say, they were between two fires, the ambush on one side, the army of Israel on the other:

and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape; not one was saved alive, excepting their king, as in (^{<1182>}Joshua 8:23); no quarter was given them, nor any suffered to make their escape.

Ver. 23. *And the king of Ai they took alive*, etc.] They spared him, and reserved him for a more shameful death:

and brought him to Joshua; their general; delivering him into his hands as his prisoner, to do will, him as seemed good in his sight.

Ver. 24. *And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai*, etc.] That came out against them:

in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them; both in the arable lands that were sown with corn, and now clothed with it, the wheat especially, not being gathered in, as not yet ripe, and in the pasture ground, designed by the wilderness, (see ^{<1185>}Joshua 8:15); so Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret it:

and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword; and were slain by it:

until they were consumed; and not one left:

that all the Israelites returned unto Ai; both the ambush that came out of it, and the army that came against it:

and smote it with the edge of the sword; that is, the inhabitants that were left in it unfit for war, as old men, infirm persons, women and children, as follows.

Ver. 25. *And [so] it was, [that] all that fell that day*, etc.] Partly in the city, and partly in the field, both by the ambush and the army: both of men and women;

[were] twelve thousand, [even] all the men of Ai; so that the city was not a very large one, and the numbers of inhabitants were comparatively but few, as in (^{<OR1>}Joshua 7:3).

Ver. 26. *For Joshua drew not his hand back wherewith he stretched out his spear*, etc.] But continued it, and that stretched out:

until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai; just as the hand of Moses was held up, and kept held up until Amalek was discomfited by Joshua, (^{<OR2>}Exodus 17:12,13).

Ver. 27. *Only the cattle, and the spoil of the city, Israel took for a prey unto themselves*, etc.] Even all their substance, as besides their cattle, also their gold, silver, household goods, merchandise, etc.

according unto the word of the Lord which he commanded Joshua, (^{<OR3>}Joshua 8:2).

Ver. 28. *And Joshua burnt Ai*, etc.] The whole city, fire being only set before to a few houses, to make a smoke as a signal; he did with it as he had done with Jericho, for so he was ordered, (^{<OR4>}Joshua 8:2);

and made it an heap for ever; that is, for a long time, for it appears to have been rebuilt, and to have been inhabited by the Jews, after their return from their Babylonish captivity, (^{<OR5>}Nehemiah 11:31);

[even] a desolation unto this day; to the time of the writing of this book; and by what has been just observed, it appears that Ezra could not be the writer of it, since this city was inhabited in his time.

Ver. 29. *And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide*, etc.] By way of terror to other kings in the land of Canaan, that should refuse to submit unto him:

and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcass down from the tree; according to the law in (^{<OR6>}Deuteronomy 21:23); and that the land might not be defiled:

and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city; this was done, according to Ben Gersom and Abarbinel, that it might be publicly known to the rest of the kings of the nations, that they might be afraid to fight with Israel:

and raise thereon a great heap of stones, [that remaineth] unto this day; as a sepulchral monument, showing that there was a person lay interred

there; whether there was any inscription on the stone, showing who he was, does not appear; it looks as if it was only a rude heap of stones; and such kind of sepulchral monuments were common in former times in other countries.

Ver. 30. *Then Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal.*] As was commanded, (^{<45275>}Deuteronomy 27:5). The Samaritan Chronicle says, it was built in Mount Gerizim; but there is a difficulty arises, when this was done by Joshua; it should seem by inserting the account here, that it was done immediately after the destruction of Ai; and Mercator endeavours to prove that Ebal was near to Ai, but what he has said does not give satisfaction; for certain it is, that Ebal and Gerizim were near Shechem in Samaria, at a great distance from Ai, (see ^{<4006>}Judges 9:6,7). The Jews ^{f135} generally are of opinion, that this was done as soon as Israel, even the very day, they passed over Jordan, which they think the letter of the command required, (^{<45129>}Deuteronomy 11:29 27:4,5); though it does not, only that it should be done after they were passed over it; Ebal being at too great a distance from Jordan for them to accomplish it on that day, being, as they themselves say ^{f136}, sixty miles from Jordan; so that they are obliged to make Israel travel that day an hundred twenty miles, and as they assert they did ^{f137} and which they must do, if what they say was true, it being sixty miles to Ebal, and sixty more to return again to Gilgal that night, where they encamped, but this is incredible: and as this account of Joshua's building the altar is too soon after he had passed Jordan, what R. Ishmael ^{f138} has pitched upon is too late, who says this was not done till after fourteen years, when the land was conquered, which was seven years doing, and when it was divided, which were seven years more; what Josephus says ^{f139} is more probable than either, which is, that Joshua, five years after he had entered Canaan, when he had placed the tabernacle at Shiloh, went from thence and built an altar at Ebal; as for what R. Eliezer suggests ^{f140}, that Ebal and Gerizim here mentioned are not the Ebal and Gerizim of the Samaritans, only two hills were made, and they were called by these names, cannot merit any belief or regard.

Ver. 31. *As Moses the servant of the Lord commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, etc.*]

(^{<45275>}Deuteronomy 27:5);

an altar of whole stones, on which no man hath lift up [any] iron; (see Gill on "^{<4025>}Exodus 20:25"), (see Gill on "^{<45275>}Deuteronomy 27:5-6"):

and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings; by way of thanksgiving for the good land they were introduced into, and this was what they were ordered to do by Moses, (⁴⁵⁷⁶Deuteronomy 27:6,7).

Ver. 32. *And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses*, etc.] Not upon the stones of which the altar was made, though some have so thought; but upon other stones erected in the form of a pillar, and plastered over, (⁴⁵⁷⁴Deuteronomy 27:4); which copy of the law was not the whole book of Deuteronomy, as some, at least only an abstract of the laws in it; but rather the decalogue, as Abarbinel; or the blessings and curses later read, as Ben Gersom:

which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel: they being witness of it, that he did what was enjoined.

Ver. 33. *And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark, and on that side*, etc.] Some on Ebal, and some on Gerizim:

before the priests and the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord; it being brought out of the tabernacle on this occasion, and bottle by the priests and Levites:

as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; that is, as well the proselytes as the native Israelites, both appeared and were in the same situation:

half of them over against Mount Gerizim; that is, half of the tribes, and these were Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin:

and half of them over against Mount Ebal; which were the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali; (see Gill on ⁴⁵⁷²Deuteronomy 27:12,13);

as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel, as in (⁴⁵⁷²Deuteronomy 27:12).

Ver. 34. *And afterwards he read all the words of the law*, etc.] Not the whole Pentateuch, nor the whole book of Deuteronomy, but either some parts of it, the decalogue, or whatsoever he had written on the stones, and as follows:

the blessings and cursings, according to all that was written in the book of the law; (¹⁶²⁷⁴Deuteronomy 27:14-26 28:1-6); (see Gill on “¹⁶²⁷¹Deuteronomy 27:11”).

Ver. 35. *There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not,* etc.] So punctually, precisely, and exactly did he observe the instructions and commands that were given him by Moses; and this he did in the most public manner:

before all the congregation of Israel; who were on this occasion called together, and not before the men only, but

with the women, and little ones: who all had a concern in the things that were read to them: yea, even

and the strangers that were conversant among them; not the proselytes of righteousness only, but the proselytes of the gate, that dwelt, walked, and conversed with them.