

Enter at Your Own Rest

Studies in the Book of Joshua

"Full blessing in the Christian life is not bestowed except to eager, hungry people who press in to receive it"

Alan Redpath

Text

Joshua 8:1-29

Topic

The Israelites execute God's unusual battle strategy against Ai while Joshua holds up the spear for them all to see

Title

"Spear Me the Details"

Joshua 8:1 Now the LORD said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.

Joshua 8:2 And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it."

Joshua 8:3 So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night.

Joshua 8:4 And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready.

Joshua 8:5 Then I and all the people who *are* with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them.

Joshua 8:6 For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, '*They are* fleeing before us as at the first.' Therefore we will flee before them.

Joshua 8:7 Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand.

Joshua 8:8 And it will be, when you have taken the city, *that* you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you."

Joshua 8:9 Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people.

Joshua 8:10 Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai.

Joshua 8:11 And all the people of war who *were* with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley *lay* between them and Ai.

Joshua 8:12 So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

Joshua 8:13 And when they had set the people, all the army that *was* on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

Joshua 8:14 Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw *it*, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that *there was* an ambush against him behind the city.

Joshua 8:15 And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.

Joshua 8:16 So all the people who *were* in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city.

Joshua 8:17 There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel.

Joshua 8:18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the spear that *is* in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the spear that *was* in his hand toward the city.

Joshua 8:19 So *those in* ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire.

Joshua 8:20 And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers.

Joshua 8:21 Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai.

Joshua 8:22 Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were *caught* in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape.

Joshua 8:23 But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

Joshua 8:24 And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and

when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword.

Joshua 8:25 So it was *that* all who fell that day, both men and women, *were* twelve thousand—all the people of Ai.

Joshua 8:26 For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

Joshua 8:27 Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua.

Joshua 8:28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day.

Joshua 8:29 And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones *that remains* to this day.

Introduction

'Joshua' was not Joshua's original Hebrew name.

Forty years prior, at the border of the Promised Land, twelve men were selected to go in and spy out the land. Among those listed in the Old Testament Book of Numbers was **Hoshea, the son of Nun** (13:8). A few verses later you read, **Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua** (13:16).

The two names are very similar. **Hoshea** in the Hebrew means *May Jehovah Save*. **Joshua** means *Jehovah is Salvation*.

The name change grows in significance once you realize that the name 'Jesus' is the Greek form of the Hebrew 'Joshua.'

It seems God instructed Moses to change Hoshea's name to Joshua so future generations would see him as a type of Jesus Christ.

Joshua stands out as a type of Jesus in the victory at Ai. I see the type in the mention of the **spear**. The mention of the **spear** in

connection with Jesus immediately takes your mind to the Cross upon which He died. To be absolutely certain the Lord was really dead the Roman soldier pierced His side with a spear (John 19:34).

Jesus is your 'Joshua.' The spear that pierced Him is just as significant for us in our battles as was the spear Joshua held for the Israelites at Ai.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Your Joshua Shows You The Spear In Your Battles, and #2 Your Joshua Sustains The Spear In Your Battles.

#1 Your Joshua Shows You The Spear In Your Battles (v1-17)

Even before you read the conclusion you know that once Joshua stretched out the spear victory over Ai was assured. The Israelites could see him and drew their strength and confidence from his stance with the spear.

If you are in a battle, or the next time you are, you need to see Jesus speared. Once you do, victory is assured.

What do I mean? **I mean that Jesus took the spear on the Cross to defeat all our enemies.**

Our enemies are summarized in Scripture as the world, the flesh, and the devil. Each of them was utterly defeated as Jesus died on the Cross.

⇒The world is utterly defeated at the Cross:

[Galatians 6:14](#) But God forbid that I should boast except in the **cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ, **by whom the world has been crucified to me**, and I to the world.

⇒Your flesh is utterly defeated at the Cross:

Romans 6:6 knowing this, that **our old man was crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

⇒The devil is utterly defeated at the Cross:

Colossians 2:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, **triumphing over them in it** [i.e., the Cross].

When that Roman spear pierced the Lord showing Him to be really dead, your enemies were utterly defeated.

Defeated enemies fight on! The armies of Ai and Bethel were already defeated. Still they fought on and the Israelites had to engage them.

It's the same way with the world, the flesh, and the devil. They fight on and we must engage them. We engage them with what might be called the strategy of the Cross.

The Cross that defeats your enemies seems foolish and weak against them. The Cross is **foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God** (First Corinthians 1:18).

When Jesus was crucified His enemies gloated, thinking they had defeated Him once-for-all. His closest disciples even doubted and scattered. But His death on the Cross as your sacrifice and substitute was the final blow against sin and death for all who would believe on Him.

When we say, "Your Joshua shows you the spear in your battles," we mean that God's way of victory involves the strategy of the Cross. You will seem weak, even foolish, when you follow God's strategy for victory.

This weakness and foolishness was represented in God's strategy against Ai. Israel had only sent three thousand men against Ai's twelve thousand the first time. Israel's total army numbered six hundred thousand men! After the initial defeat you'd think they'd simply overrun Ai by sheer numerical superiority in an all-out assault.

God's strategy was retreat and ambush. God's way seemed weak and foolish. *It was not!* It was exactly the strategy to take the city and to teach God's people – including us – the value of submitting to the Cross.

In verses three through thirteen you read a detailed account of the battle plan. There is some confusion among scholars as to the exact deployment of the Israelite troops:

1. Some commentators see a deployment of three forces – thirty thousand sent to ambush; the main body of five hundred seventy thousand coming against Ai then retreating; and five thousand sent to guard against enemy reinforcements from Bethel.
2. Other commentators think it ludicrous that the twelve thousand men of Ai would go out against a force of five hundred seventy thousand even if they were retreating. They see the thirty-thousand chosen out from the total army. Twenty-five thousand of them would wait in ambush while five thousand pretended to retreat from Ai's attack. The main body – the five hundred seventy thousand – were held in reserve.

In any scenario the armies of Israel seemed weak and foolish. Retreat and ambush are not the tactics of a well-oiled military machine.

Often I want to act or react as I've been taught by the world. My flesh rises up to express itself. The devil incites me. But then the

indwelling Holy Spirit shows me the Cross where my Savior died. Suddenly love, forgiveness, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, not rendering evil for evil; these all seem better, more powerful strategies than to yield my flesh to the ways of the world or the wiles of the devil.

Let's break it down a little. Some of Joshua's army was told to wait. We don't like to wait, do we? We want it and we want it now – whatever 'it' happens to be.

Some of the army of the Israelites was told to lay in ambush. Not only must they wait, but they must do it stealthily, quietly. Sometimes we want to be noticed, recognized, encouraged, but it seems we are passed over. God is in no hurry. He is completing the good work He began in you. Waiting in obscurity can be important to the final outcome of your Christian character.

Some of the army was told to retreat as if they'd been defeated. None of us likes to appear to be retreating. When we are called upon to do things like forgive and be longsuffering it seems as if we are retreating – it seems as if we are losing ground. We're not; we're standing on the ground of the Cross, acting and reacting as Jesus did towards His enemies.

There is also an application here for us as a fellowship. Regardless the deployment, there were still three groups of soldiers and a whole bunch of people not involved in the actual fighting lending support from the camp. Joshua picked thirty thousand out of six hundred thousand, then five thousand out of the thirty thousand. Some hid; some retreated; some may have done nothing at all. Yet God said in verse one that **all the people of war** were involved.

A fellowship of God's saints is like that. We're **all** involved in every battle. Yet Jesus chooses our places or positions as He sees fit. My place may seem small or insignificant. **It is not!**

Our fellowship is moving against the enemy on various fronts. One of them is our effort to *Reach Lemoore* by establishing a Sunday evening study. Find your place. Don't think it insignificant. God's strategy involves **all** of our men and women of war and in the camp to be walking in His strength and by His strategy.

#2 Your Joshua Sustains The Spear In Your Battles (v18-29)

Years earlier Joshua had led Israel's army against the Amalekites while Moses looked down from higher ground (Exodus 17). As long as Moses held up his hand, Joshua prevailed.

Now it was Joshua standing on higher ground holding up his hand. The same principle would seem to be in play: As long as Joshua held up his hand the Israelites would be victorious.

Look at verse eighteen, then twenty-six:

Joshua 8:18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the spear that *is* in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the spear that *was* in his hand toward the city.

Joshua 8:26 For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

He sustained the spear. It rendered the enemy powerless. Look at verse twenty:

Joshua 8:20 And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers.

Because Joshua took the high ground with the spear Israel's enemies **had no power**. Because Jesus took the high ground of Calvary your enemies have no real power.

At some point the men of Bethel joined the men of Ai. Bad day for an alliance! They, too, were wiped-out.

Much is made of the death of Ai's king:

Joshua 8:23 But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

Joshua 8:29 And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones *that remains* to this day.

Brutal! It has its modern counterparts. On April 2, 1945, the body of executed Italian leader Benito Mussolini was taken to the Piazzale Loreto (in Milan) and hung upside down on meathooks from the roof of a gas station. It was then stoned and otherwise abused by passers-by.

Christians should not practice positive thinking. They should practice positional thinking! You should realize that your position is "in Christ."

We previously quoted the verses that speak of the world, the flesh, and the devil being crucified. We need to 'see' them brutally crucified. We need to understand their power was broken so that we will no longer yield ourselves over to their influence.

Jesus' victory **remains to this day**. It is always available to you and I. It never loses its power over your enemies.

I ran across some phrasing this week in my research that might help us put this in perspective. People talk a lot about the power of positive thinking. There are about a million definitions and even more techniques to achieve or maintain positive thinking, but you know what I'm talking about.

Christians should not practice positive thinking. They should practice **positional thinking!** You should realize that your position is “in Christ.”

Real power comes from your position. You’ve been crucified with Jesus. You’ve been raised with Jesus. Your enemies are already defeated.

When they engage you in battle, let Jesus show you the spear; know that He sustains it. The Cross may seem to be foolishness or weakness but it is the power of God to us who are saved.

