

August 9

Scriptures: Read Joshua 8

Key Verse: “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed... I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.” (Joshua 8:1)

Overview

Now that Israel was purged from the sin that Achan had brought upon them, they were ready to press on. The Lord reconfirmed His presence among Israel and brought fresh confidence to Joshua. He reassured him of victory over Ai. What was yet to come for Joshua was already an accomplished fact for God. Joshua merely had to obey, step out in faith, and claim the victory. This time they would not be defeated, for God was with them and He

The plan was brilliant and, of course, successful. The “mighty men of valor” (v.3) made the journey to Ai by night (a distance of twenty-four kilometers with a climb of 975 meters), and waited in ambush at the west side of the city. The next morning Joshua and the main army of Israel marched in full visibility to the north side of Ai. A second ambush of 5,000 men was positioned in the west between the city of Bethel (Ai’s allies) and Ai (v.12) to prevent the army of Bethel from attacking their first ambush waiting outside Ai. Their adversaries rushed out to fight, probably expecting to defeat Israel once again, and Israel pretended to flee before them. With Joshua’s signal, the ambush on the city made its move, and with all the men of Ai in pursuit of Israel, the city had no defense. Between Joshua’s two forces, Ai (Hebrew Ha’ay, “the heap”) was easily defeated and their city laid waste and in a “heap” of ashes and rubble. They, like the inhabitants of Jericho, had been delivered into the hand of Israel by the hand of God.

All that was found within the walls of Jericho had been under the ban (devoted to the Lord). It could be referred to as the first fruits of the land, which was to be given over totally to God. However, in Ai, the second city conquered, only the wicked inhabitants were under the ban, and the Lord permitted the cattle and spoil to be taken by the army. If only Achan had obeyed God, waited, and been content with what he already had, God would have blessed him with the spoil from Ai.

Instead of pressing on to conquer more cities, Israel had an important command from Moses that they were now to fulfill: a divinely ordered pilgrimage to the central area of Canaan to proclaim and ratify the covenant with God and make His Law the law of the land. It must have been a beautiful moment of spiritual devotion when the whole nation of Israel proclaimed their loyalty to God and His Law.

Upon Mount Ebal, Joshua built an altar of unhewn stones to make sacrifices to the Lord, and all Israel thanked God for the victories He had given them. Joshua then wrote the Law of Moses upon the stones so they could be read and learned by all the people who were congregated in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. These mountains form a natural amphitheatre, which made it possible for all Israel to hear the curses and the blessings being proclaimed from the center of the valley by the priests standing with the Ark of the Covenant.

Everything was done just as Moses had prescribed (Deut.11:26-30; 27:1-8, 11-13) and the Lord must have been pleased. Moses, and now Joshua, wanted to be sure the people knew the conditions of the covenant, because the only way they would remain safe and successful in the Promised Land was by obeying God.

Prayer

Lord God of Israel, we worship You. Thank You for Your covenant with Israel, and because You are also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we renew our commitment to the New Covenant—the New Agreement between Your Son and You. He represents us to You and You to us. Help us to be true to this New Covenant.