

1. Joshua learns to take nothing for granted

• God gives us a lot of freedom

• But God likes to be consulted

Now that the sin of Achan has been repudiated the conquest of Canaan may proceed.

1. Joshua learns to take nothing for granted. God tells Joshua that the whole nation must be involved in the conquest of Ai. It is contrary to the spies' advice^{□1}. Detailed guidance is given. Previously the spies did not feel it necessary to seek God's plan; they gave Joshua their own plan of battle^{□2}.

□1 8:1; 7:3

□2 8:2; 7:3

God gives us a lot of freedom in the way in which we live for Him. He fulfils the desires of our hearts when we wish to serve Him. Yet it is a mistake to think that our plans and desires do not need to be checked with Him. Even when God gives us freedom He likes to be consulted. Joshua made the mistake at first of taking for granted the victory of Ai – and was defeated.

Now the second attempt at taking Ai is different. This time it is attempted in fellowship with God. We have to learn not to take things for granted in the Christian life. Even when God gives us freedom – as He often does – we shall fall because of the hidden 'Achans' of life if we do not stay alert and check out what we do with God.

2. The town of Ai is taken by a clever strategy, not by a miracle

• The plan to trick and ambush the enemy

2. The town of Ai is taken by a clever strategy, not by a miracle. Two groups of soldiers move into position at night ^{□1}. One group has thirty officers in it. (The common translations say 'thirty thousand' but the Hebrew word for 'thousand' can have other meanings such as 'officer' or 'large company of soldiers'.) Thirty officers move into position to the west of the city^{□2}; the city gate is apparently on the east side. They will soon have with them five thousand men, but the officers go to look for good hiding places.

□1 8:1

□2 8:4

A much larger group (with Joshua) approach the city from the east side towards the eastern wall of the town where the city gate is to be found^{□1}; they will pretend to run away in fear^{□2}. When the defenders of the city come out after Joshua and his men, then the first group will come out from their ambush and will seize the city^{□3}. The city must then be utterly destroyed^{□4}.

□1 8:5

□2 8:5–6a

□3 8:6b-7

□4 8:8

It all happens as God has planned. At night the thirty commandos hide west of the town, on the far side from the city gate. Joshua stays on the east side among the common people and with another fighting force^{□1}.

□1 8:9

The next day Joshua and the people march towards the city^{□1}. It is daytime. The citizens of Ai can see what is happening but they know nothing of the Israelites in hiding on the west side of the town. Joshua and his people march around part of the city and camp on the north side. There is a valley to the north of the town, between the people camping in the north and the town itself^{□2}. Five thousand men (perhaps going along the ravine where they cannot be seen) join the thirty officers in the west and hide there^{□3}. They spend the night in those positions; Joshua stays in the valley keeping watch on what the men of Ai might be doing^{□4}.

□1 8:10

□2 8:11

□3 8:12

□4 8:13

This gives the king of Ai time to get his army together. He has seen the army which is now in the valley to the north of the city. The next day he comes out with his army¹. He hopes to fight the Israelites in the 'Arabah' – a term which normally means the Jordan valley but here it seems to mean the valley to the north of the town. The Israelites pretend to have changed their mind and act as if they are running back eastwards along the route called 'the Wilderness Road', the road that goes down to the Jordan Valley². The soldiers of Ai and many of Ai's citizens chase the Israelites who are running eastwards³. The city is left unguarded⁴.

1 8:14

2 8:15

3 8:16

4 8:17

Then the Lord says to Joshua, 'Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand...' ¹. The five thousand men in hiding west of the town, come out of hiding and set fire to the almost empty city². The men of Ai look back and see that their city has been destroyed and they are now without any place of refuge³. The 'escaping' Israelites turn around and start attacking the forces of Ai⁴; and the five thousand also come back out of the town which they have just destroyed⁵. The soldiers of Ai are trapped between two Israelite armies and are soon destroyed. The king is captured⁶.

1 8:18

2 8:19

3 8:20

4 8:21

5 8:22

6 8:23

• Ai and its soldiers destroyed

God given cleverness

What is striking about the story is the contrast it forms with the destruction of Jericho. Jericho was destroyed by a sheer miracle; the Israelites did not have to do any fighting for the walls to fall. In the case of Achan the victory comes – eventually – by cleverness. The trick of Joshua was a skilful ruse by a clever soldier. It was given to him by God¹ but it was not miracle; it was God-given cleverness.

1 8:2

• Projects often started off with encouraging special miracles

It is clear in the Scriptures that miracles and special guidance do not come all the time. We may well be started off in any project for God with some marvels and wonders which give us encouragement and make us know that what we are doing is of God. Yet from that point on we may have to get down to the hard work of seeking God's guidance for work that has to be done with less supernatural help than we had before. As first we are carried like a baby, but when we grow up a little we have to walk ourselves. Yet God is with us when we walk as well as when we are carried.

• Later on – less supernatural help as we work and walk with God



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