**Ai Destroyed**

Last week we read about how Israel’s attempt to take Ai ended in disaster because God was not in their plan. Joshua had to regroup because Ai was an important stronghold. Ai was only about 12.5 miles west of Jericho but it sat at a much higher elevation which made it a valuable strategic location. It was also in the midst of several other cities that would need to be taken including Bethel, Gibeon and Jerusalem. Joshua had to know that failure to defeat Ai would result in giving the Canaanite kings boldness to resist the Israelites and would discourage the Israelite army. Fortunately God seized control of the situation.

Chapter 8 begins with God encouraging Joshua not to fear or be dismayed. Joshua had suffered his first defeat as leader of Israel and had to put an entire family to death. God told Joshua that not only had He had given Ai into Israel’s hand, they would be allowed to take plunder and livestock from Ai. God’s plan of attack was to set an ambush against the men of Ai who were probably confident after they had so easily defeated the Israelites. Joshua shared the plan with the army and selected a force of 30,000 men to carry out the attack. The following day Joshua took 25,000 men and marched toward Ai while the remaining 5,000 set up an ambush between Ai and Bethel. As the men of Ai came out against them, Joshua’s men retreated toward the desert with the army of Ai pursuing thinking they would earn another easy victory. The ambush force of 5,000 went into the unprotected city, captured it and set it on fire. The Ai troops were caught between the ambushers and the main Israeli force and all were killed as were all the inhabitants of Ai, 12,000 men and women. Joshua had the city burned and hung the king of Ai. As God had instructed, the livestock and plunder were taken to be divided among the tribes.

After the defeat of Jericho and Ai, Joshua felt secure enough to proceed with Moses’ instructions to build an altar at Mt. Ebal (see Deut. Chapter 27). This meant that the entire assembly had to journey about 25 miles to reach Mt. Ebal where Joshua had the altar built with uncut stones as Moses had told him. The altar was to be simple with no human improvements that would distract from the holiness of the altar. Joshua copied the law of Moses onto the stones. Moses had also instructed the people to pronounce blessings and curses from Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. The 2 mountains were separated by the plain below in which the city of Shechem was located. Oddly, the curses were proclaimed from Mt. Ebal which was where the altar was built. The chapter concludes with Joshua reading the entire book of the law to the people.

The first and most obvious point this chapter makes is that any plan that God devises is far superior to the best plan a human mind can conjure and we should never make plans without including God. Joshua sent a skeleton crew of men tom take Ai without consulting God first and they paid the price.

Notice also that the defeat of Ai included much more involvement of the army than that of Jericho. I think this was God’s way of preparing the Israelites to do their part in the conquests ahead of them. While relying on God is important, His safety net can become a hammock if we are not careful.

I think the most important point of the chapter is reconciliation. After Joshua purged the sin from the camp, God quickly moved to preparing Joshua to take Ai. There was no mention of what had happened, only what lay ahead of them. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:12).