

Abide in Me

John 15:4

***Bible studies for disciples
who make disciples***



Volume 7 - Number 2

The week of October 31, 2021

A New Beginning
Semper Reformanda
Joshua 8:1-35

THE BIG PICTURE

In the Israelites first battle against Ai they experienced an embarrassing defeat. In the cleanup after the battle of Jericho, God's instructions had been ignored, thirty-six people died, and Achan and his family were stoned to death for his willful disobedience. The momentum Israel gained was lost and the people were filled with despair. In Joshua 8, Joshua is told to return to the place of defeat and launch a second attack against Ai. Joshua's strategy worked brilliantly. After the victory, Joshua led the entire nation to the Valley of Shechem and on opposite mountains renewed the covenant between God and His people in dramatic fashion.

Warm-up: When you have sinned, do you normally feel close to God soon after confessing? Or do you continue to feel distant and ashamed for a while afterwards?

READ THE STORY

- Read the entire passage and circle each time *the Lord* is mentioned.
- In the left margin of verse 1 write *The Second Battle Against Ai*.
- Place brackets around God's words to Joshua in verses 1 and 2. Double underline the words *do not fear* and *do not be dismayed*.
- Underline verses 18 and 26.
- In the left margin of verse 30 write *Renewing the Covenant* and make a simple drawing of what you read in verses 30-35.
- In the right margin of verses 30-35 write *See Deuteronomy 27-28*.

¹ And the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land." ² And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it."

³ So Joshua and all the fighting men arose to go up to Ai. And Joshua chose 30,000 mighty men of valor and sent them out by night. ⁴ And he commanded them, "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you remain ready." ⁵ And I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out against us just as before, we shall flee before them. ⁶ And they will come out after us, until we have drawn them away from the city. For they will say, 'They are fleeing from us, just as before.' So we will flee before them. ⁷ Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city, for the Lord your God will give it into your hand. ⁸ And as soon as you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire. You shall do according to the word of the Lord. See, I have commanded you." ⁹ So Joshua sent them out. And they went to the place of ambush and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai, but Joshua spent that night among the people.

¹⁰ Joshua arose early in the morning and mustered the people and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. ¹¹ And all the fighting men who were with him went up and drew near before the city and encamped on the north side of Ai, with a ravine between them and Ai. ¹² He took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. ¹³ So they stationed the forces, the main encampment that was north of the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. ¹⁴ And as soon as the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the men of the city, hurried and went out early to the appointed place toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. ¹⁵ And Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness. ¹⁶ So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. ¹⁷ Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. They left the city open and pursued Israel.

¹⁸ Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.” And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹ And the men in the ambush rose quickly out of their place, and as soon as he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it. And they hurried to set the city on fire. ²⁰ So when the men of Ai looked back, behold, the smoke of the city went up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that, for the people who fled to the wilderness turned back against the pursuers. ²¹ And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city, and that the smoke of the city went up, then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. ²² And the others came out from the city against them, so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side. And Israel struck them down, until there was left none that survived or escaped. ²³ But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him near to Joshua.

²⁴ When Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to Ai and struck it down with the edge of the sword. ²⁵ And all who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000, all the people of Ai. ²⁶ But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction. ²⁷ Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as their plunder, according to the word of the Lord that he commanded Joshua. ²⁸ So Joshua burned Ai and made it forever a heap of ruins, as it is to this day. ²⁹ And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening. And at sunset Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day.

³⁰ At that time Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, ³¹ just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, “an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.” And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings. ³² And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. ³³ And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel.

³⁴ And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. ³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.

DISCUSSING THE STORY TOGETHER

1. The military strategy used in the battle of Ai was entirely different from the plan implemented at Jericho. How would you describe the difference? What does this tell us about the methods God uses to accomplish His purposes and direct our lives?

2. Only a few battles in Israel's history are given the kind of attention as the second battle of Ai. In your judgment, why is the battle of Ai recounted with such detail?

3. As we saw with the destruction of Jericho in Joshua 6, God's command to destroy all the people of Ai seems harsh. Read Deuteronomy 12:1-4 to better understand the spiritual reasons for God's judgment.

4. What did God command Joshua to do during the battle? (see verses 18 and 26). Read Exodus 17:12-14. How is God affirming the leadership of Joshua here? What did Joshua learn about obedience by doing this?

5. Read Deuteronomy 27:1-4, 8. Why did Joshua lead the Israelites to this precise location? Read Genesis 12:6-7. What did Abraham do in Shechem some 600 years before? Why was this an appropriate time to reaffirm Israel's commitment to the Lord?

6. Why did Joshua build an altar to the Lord on Mount Ebal and not on Mount Gerizim?

APPLYING THE STORY CORPORATELY AND PERSONALLY

1. In verse 1 Joshua was assured of total victory. How does this same principle of victory work out in the Christian life?

2. How would you describe God's total judgment on the people of Ai to an honest skeptic looking to understand the character of God?

3. What important truths can we learn from the battle at Ai and the renewal of the covenant at Shechem? How are these stories meaningful to us?

4. The title of Sunday's message was *Semper Reformanda* or *Always Reforming*. It means that we are always being reformed by the Word of God rather than the spirit of the age. How is the world trying to squeeze you into its mold? What one truth from this account do you need right now to be reformed by God's Word?

GLIMPING THE GOSPEL-STORY IN THIS STORY

All Scripture ultimately points to Jesus. How does Joshua 8 directly point us to Jesus?

PRAYER

Our Heavenly Father, give us humble hearts to yield to Your instructions at all times, so that we can walk in victory. Make us moldable for the Holy Spirit's guidance so that we can obey You. Let us follow when You lead, and let us be willing to receive Your blessings whenever You are ready to dispense them. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

