

The spiritual analogy we saw in the previous chapter where Ai defeated Israel in battle was that when we have clung to the wicked things in this world, the Lord will not help us fight our spiritual battles. Compromise handicaps our spiritual lives. We need to turn to the Lord to know how to get back on track.

Now that the compromise was dealt with and the things devoted to destruction were burned and buried, Israel was ready to continue the conquest of the land. When we confess and forsake our sins, the Lord goes before us and helps us fight our spiritual battles. We saw how important it is for us to forsake the evil things in our own lives.

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. Joshua 8:1 Joshua is encouraged by the LORD to not fear or be dismayed. The word in Hebrew for dismayed means broken down or fall apart. In other words, quit being afraid, buck up, and get it together. That is how we begin to get back on track. **We should not wallow in our failures, but we should repent and turn to the Lord for His directions (Romans 8:1¹).**

Most importantly God told Joshua the city has been given to him, past tense, done deal! We can know that the Lord has given us the victory too. It was already won on the cross. We can wallow in our past, but God says to us what He said to Joshua, "Get up! Stop being fearful. Get yourself together!" Deal with the sin. Get rid of the unclean things and start walking in the power of the Spirit. Claim the resurrection power of Jesus to empower you to say no to sin and yes to His will. Know that the battle before you is already won!

As with Jericho, the LORD gave Joshua the battle plan. He was to lay and ambush behind the city. Apparently, there were more details given as we see in verse 8. Some of our weaknesses also need battle plans. What verse will you memorize to counter the temptation or bad habit? Who will you ask to keep you accountable? Whatever the Lord directs you to do, do it!

God rarely has us do the same thing twice. That is because we would end up following the method instead of looking to the Lord. If every time Jesus healed someone He put mud over their eyes, we'd have a "mud over eyes" ministry. It would teach what mud to use, how to make it, how to apply it, and where to have the person wash it out. However, there is only one method that always works. Ask the LORD for direction and do what He says.

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." Joshua 8:2 This time the spoils of war would belong to the soldiers. Manna is no longer falling, and they need to feed their families. As was the case with Jericho, no one was to survive. I explained why that was a necessity in the previous sermon. In brief, it was because of the culture's 400 years of increasing depravity.

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. Joshua 8:3-7 This time Joshua took a much larger army. He sent 30,000 men on a night march to Ai and hide to the west of the city. He took the smaller group to encamp on the north side of the city with a ravine between them and the city. This would be the battle force the king of Ai would see in the morning.

The plan was to draw the army of Ai out after the smaller group as they retreated. If all went well, the men of the city would also come out hoping for spoils of war when they saw the Israelites retreat. That would leave the city open to attack. Then Joshua would signal the hidden forces to attack the city. The smoke from the city burning would frighten and confound Ai's forces as they would realize they could not retreat to the city's walls.

In the morning, the king of Ai ordered his army to attack. Israel retreated, which encouraged all the men still holding the city and the men of a nearby town, Bethel, to leave the cities and pursue them. The plan worked just as intended. The city was completely defenseless to the soldiers who were hidden. I'm going to skip over the battle details and go on to verse 18.

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. Joshua 8:18 Apparently there was a prearranged signal that when Joshua held his javelin toward Ai, the hidden forces were to attack the city. The LORD spoke to Joshua to tell him the best moment and repeated His promise that He had given Israel the city. Joshua gave the signal.

The hidden troops quickly set fire to the city so that the army of Ai would see their city was taken. This would have caused them to panic, knowing they had been tricked. The men with Joshua turned around and attacked. The troops in the city attacked and the forces of Ai were trapped in between and slaughtered. The only one left alive was the King of Ai. Now skipping down to verse 24.

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. Joshua 8:24-25 Once the battle was over, the entire population of Ai was killed, a total of 12,000 people. Yes, this was genocide, but not because of their race, but because God's judgment of their vile lives. If you have not read the reason for this in previous sermons in Joshua please go back and read of the justice and patience of God and the barbarity of that civilization that was devoted to destruction.

It is a foreshadow of the Great White Throne judgment when all of mankind will be held accountable for their rebellion against the goodness of God (Revelation 20:15ⁱⁱ; 21:8ⁱⁱⁱ). To say God is barbaric is to ignore the wickedness of these people and the need for God to be just. The problem with all of man's systems is injustice. In numerous Bible passages judges were told to be impartial and to refuse to accept bribes (Exodus 18:21^{iv}). We are unjust toward others because of the selfishness and greed that are part of our fallen nature. The only remedy is Christ who changes our hearts.

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. Joshua 8:26 Joshua kept his javelin stretched out toward Ai until they had done all the LORD commanded them to do. Perhaps he remembered how Moses' arms were held up by Aaron and Hur when he fought the Amalekites. As long as Moses held the banner high, they were victorious (Exodus 17:10,11^v). The LORD told Joshua to stretch it out, and so he obeyed until all was accomplished.

Sometimes we hear what God wants us to do and we begin to obey. But after the main thing seems almost done, we slack off and never fully finish. Partial obedience is not really obedience. Joshua understood that. His stretched out javelin was a sign to the army to finish what they had begun. **This reminds us to persevere in our spiritual battles until we are home in glory.** Do not be weary in doing God's good will, for in due season you will prevail if you do not quit (Galatians 6:9^{vi})

I have seen many begin to follow the Lord and in time they settled for the world and what it has to offer. Sometimes the most excited new believer falls the hardest because he or she finds the cost was more than they were expecting. That is why we must count the cost and decide if we are in this to the end because Jesus took it to the end for us (Luke 14:27,28^{vii}).

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. Joshua 8:27-28 While Jericho and all things in it were devoted to destruction, the LORD gave permission for the army to take the spoils from the city of Ai. Once the city was plundered and burned, the walls were toppled to make it a ruined heap.

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. Joshua 8:29 The king was hanged on a tree and left until evening. The Law told them whoever was hanged on a tree was cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23^{viii}). Then his body was thrown at the entrance of the city and rocks were piled high over it. When the author recorded the account, the pile of stones was still in place. This foreshadows Satan's final demise when he and his angels are thrown into the Lake of Fire.

*The Old Testament foreshadowing is seen supremely in the prophecy of Isaiah, written as an extended answer to the question posed in his opening chapter. How can the faithless city (Jerusalem) become the faithful city (the new Jerusalem)? Or to put it in more universal terms, how is the sinful human race ever to be rescued, redeemed, and restored to the image of God in which we were created? Isaiah's answer is given in the three portraits of the Messiah as the incarnate Son, God with us, Emmanuel (Isaiah 1-39), the suffering servant (Isaiah 40-55), and the warrior king or the anointed conqueror (Isaiah 56-66). The last of the three figures is especially significant here. In Isaiah 63:1-6^{ix} the portrait is drawn of a mysterious figure clothed in splendid apparel, but his garments are red-stained not with the vintage of the trodden grapes but with the lifeblood of the nations, trampled in his wrath. This is "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isaiah 61:2^x). **If there is no ultimate destruction of all God's enemies, there can be no guarantee of the ultimate inviolability of his eternal kingdom of love, joy, and peace.** The opposition has to be vanquished and removed if the kingdom of God is to rule as the new creation.*

So the picture of the king of Ai hanging on a tree until evening, gruesome as it is, conveys the reminder that the same destruction ultimately awaits all God's enemies, "for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29^{xi}). Or in Paul's words, "Then comes the end, when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:24-26^{xii}). This is the logical necessity if there is to be an everlasting kingdom, a holy city, the new Jerusalem, where death shall be no more and where there will be no mourning or crying or pain or tears (see Revelation 21:1-4^{xiii}).^{xiv}-David Jackman

If you are saddened that there will be those who forever refuse the goodness and love of God, you share God's heart. He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9^{xv}). But God will not force anyone to repent, nor will He allow anyone who refuses His mercy to corrupt our heavenly home with their rebellious presence.

After the victory, the nation moved northward to fulfill a command God gave through Moses. 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.* Joshua 8:30-31 Joshua was told in chapter one verse eight to be careful to do all that is written in the Law (Joshua 1:8^{xvi}). He was to obey the commands God gave to Moses. We find the commands of what they were to do when they crossed the Jordan in Deuteronomy 27:4-8: ⁴ *And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster. ⁵ And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; ⁶ you shall build an altar to the LORD your God of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God, ⁷ and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God. ⁸ And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly.*

Burnt offerings were the sacrifice of an unblemished male bull, sheep, or bird, depending on the financial ability of the one bringing the offering. It was to atone for their sin. Atone means to cover sin. It does not mean to remove it. Only Jesus' blood could remove our sins (Hebrews 10:4^{xvii}). The person bringing the offering would place his hand on the head of the animal before it was slain. This pictured repentance and the transfer of sins so that the penalty of death was upon the animal. Of course, this only was a picture of how Jesus would come and take our sins upon Himself and the punishment of death that our sins deserved. (See Leviticus 1.) There had been Achan's sin of breaking the covenant and Israel's self-directed attack on Ai resulting in loss of 36 lives. That is why the sin offering came first. That could then be followed by the peace offering, also known as the fellowship offering. The peace offering is described in Leviticus 4. It was a celebration that peace between them and God had been restored (Leviticus 7:29-34).

It is significant that they were given the animals from the city of Ai. So, it was really God who provided their sacrifices, just as He would provide the ultimate sacrifice.

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.* Joshua 8:32 Deuteronomy 27:2-4 tells us that these uncut stones were to be covered in plaster. Since no tool could mark the stones the

law would have been written on the plaster over the stones. The book of the law of Moses would cover Exodus 20 through chapter 23 which includes the Ten Commandments.

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. Joshua 8:33-35 This was the perfect place for the recitation. The mountain formations form perfect amphitheatres. The direction God gave Moses was to build the altar on Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:4^{xviii}), the mountain where the curses are recited. This altar was recently discovered on Mount Ebal. (see picture)

Israel was divided into two groups, one on Gerazim and the other on Ebal with the ark of the covenant and the Levitical priests who carried the ark in the valley of Shechem between the two mountains. Joshua read the blessings for obeying the law and the curses for disobeying it. Deuteronomy 11:29^{xix} tells us the tribes on Gerazim, a wooded and fruitful mountain, would repeat the blessings and the tribes on Ebal, a barren rocky mountain, would repeat the curses (Deuteronomy 27:12,13^{xx}). This would have included Deuteronomy 28 which lists the blessings and curses. The altar on top of the mountain of curses signified atoning sacrifices saving us from the just judgments of God.

The people were taking the land, and these laws with their blessings, and curses were to be their guide as to how to live as a nation. Because of their recent failure, it was the perfect time to renew their covenant with God. I wonder what their future would have been had they done this on a yearly basis. During the life of Joshua, they did obey (Joshua 24:31^{xxi}), but not long after Joshua's death, they began to do what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6^{xxii}). They forgot the barren picture that Mount Ebal presented. We forget it today. A life in obedience to Jesus' commands and walking in the Spirit will be fruitful (Psalm 1:2,3^{xxiii}). A life in lived for the flesh will be a barren waste (Galatians 6:8^{xxiv}).

We have the same challenge of reading the blessings in God's promises that we have in Jesus. We also have the warnings from Israel's history, the New Testament authors, and from Jesus (Matthew 7:24-27^{xxv}). Are we reading them often and taking heed to them? Whenever we read the New Testament, we will come across blessings, the greatest of which is forgiveness of sins and eternal life with our Savior (Ephesians 1:7^{xxvi}). The ultimate curse comes from our rejection of the Holy Spirit drawing us to Jesus (John 6:44^{xxvii}). That curse is eternal judgment. These blessings and curses are infinitely greater than those they recited on the Gerazim and Ebal. Shouldn't we remind ourselves each day of what has been revealed to us in the Word?

Let us end the message today by doing what they did but with promises and curses given to us in the New Covenant. Those to my right please read the promise on the screen and when they are finished those on the left read the curse. Let us stand and recite them together.

Promises John 3:36 (ESV)

^{36a} Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;

Romans 2:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;

Revelation 7:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Mark 9:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

Curses ^{36b} whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Luke 21:34 (ESV)

³⁴ “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

Romans 2:5 (ESV)

⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

Does that give you a little sense of what it would have been like? We need reminders to walk in victory, to refuse compromise, and to give us regular reality checks. Let me close with pronouncing a benediction of praise to God for giving us the truth of His Word.

Romans 11:33-36 ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* ³⁴ *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* ³⁵ *“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Questions:

- 1 What had happened previously that cleared the way for God to help them?
- 2 How do we know our battle is already won?
- 3 How do we prepare for our battles?
- 4 What does the destruction of Ai foreshadow?
- 5 Why did Joshua keep his javelin stretched out?
- 6 Why must God’s enemies be defeated and judged?
- 7 What two sacrifices were offered? Why in that order?
- 8 How did the condition of the mountains convey the message?
- 9 Did reciting those verses give you a sense of what it was like?
- 10 Will you remember the declarations in God’s Word daily?

ⁱ Romans 8:1 (ESV)

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

ⁱⁱ Revelation 20:15 (ESV Joshua 8:29)

¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

ⁱⁱⁱ Revelation 21:8 (ESV)

⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

^{iv} Exodus 18:21 (ESV)

²¹ Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens.

^v Exodus 17:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.

^{vi} Galatians 6:9 (ESV)

⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

^{vii} Luke 14:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

^{viii} Deuteronomy 21:23 (ESV)

²³ his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

^{ix} Isaiah 63:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." ² Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? ³ "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. ⁴ For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. ⁵ I looked, but there was no one to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold; so my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. ⁶ I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."

^x Isaiah 61:2 (ESV)

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

^{xi} Hebrews 12:29 (ESV)

²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

^{xii} 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 (ESV)

²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

^{xiii} Revelation 21:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

^{xiv} David Jackman, *Preaching the Word - Joshua: People of God's Purpose*

^{xv} 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

^{xvi} Joshua 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you

may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

^{xvii} **Hebrews 10:4 (ESV)**

⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

^{xviii} **Deuteronomy 27:4 (ESV)**

⁴ And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster.

^{xix} **Deuteronomy 11:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.

^{xx} **Deuteronomy 27:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² "When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. ¹³ And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

^{xxi} **Joshua 24:31 (ESV)**

³¹ Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel.

^{xxii} **Judges 17:6 (ESV)**

⁶ In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

^{xxiii} **Psalms 1:2-3 (ESV)**

² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

^{xxiv} **Galatians 6:8 (ESV)**

⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

^{xxv} **Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)**

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

^{xxvi} **Ephesians 1:7 (ESV)**

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

^{xxvii} **John 6:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.