

**Joshua 8:1 ¶ And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land:**

**Joshua 8:2 And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it.**

After Joshua had dealt with Achan's rebellion and cleansed the camp, the LORD was ready to lead the people against Ai. He told Joshua not to be afraid or discouraged. He was to take the men of war and prepare to take possession of Ai because He had given them the victory. Note that the LORD speaks of it as past tense because what he determines is as good as done.

*Isaiah 14:24 "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:...."*

The LORD promised that Ai would fall just as surely as Jericho. This time, however, the people were to be allowed to take the spoil and livestock for their own use.

This time, the plan was to use an ambush. The details will emerge as the narrative continues.

**Joshua 8:3 ¶ So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night.**

**Joshua 8:4 And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, *even* behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready:**

**Joshua 8:5 And I, and all the people that *are* with me, will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them,**

**Joshua 8:6 (For they will come out after us) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them.**

**Joshua 8:7 Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand.**

**Joshua 8:8 And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, *that* ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of the LORD shall ye do. See, I have commanded you.**

So Joshua got up and gathered all the men of war together in preparation for attacking Ai according to the LORD's command. He chose 30,000 of the best soldiers and sent them away during the night to get in position behind the city, but not very far away. Joshua would take the rest of the men with him and appear to be the attacking force against the city. Considering their previous victory, he was sure that the people of the city would come out to attack them as before; and they would turn around and appear to be running in fear away from

them. Once the men of the city set out to attack the retreating troops of Israel, the men waiting in ambush behind the city were to rise up and take the city because the LORD was giving it to them. Once they had taken the city, they were to set it on fire to destroy all that was left.

Joshua made clear that he was commanding them according to the LORD's command to him.

**Joshua 8:9 Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people.**

**Joshua 8:10 And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai.**

**Joshua 8:11 And all the people, *even the people of war that were with him*, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now *there was a valley between them and Ai*.**

After revealing the battle plan, Joshua sent the designated troops to wait in ambush between Bethel and Ai on the west side of the city. Joshua stayed with the rest of the troops to wait for dawn. He got up early and numbered his soldiers, a practical way of determining the casualties, if any. He then led the army toward Ai along with the elders of Israel. When they got near the city, they took position on the north side of the city where a valley separated them from the city.

**Joshua 8:12 And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.**

**Joshua 8:13 And when they had set the people, *even all the host that was on the north of the city*, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.**

Joshua chose another 5,000 men and sent them to lie in ambush on the west side of the city. Once all the fighting men were in position, Joshua went to spend the night in the valley.

**Joshua 8:14 And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw *it*, that they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that *there were liers in ambush against him behind the city*.**

**Joshua 8:15 And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.**

**Joshua 8:16 And all the people that *were in Ai* were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city.**

**Joshua 8:17 And there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.**

When the king of Ai saw the forces of Israel in position to attack, he got his troops up early to go out against them in battle. He had evidently told them to be ready by a certain time after spotting the army of Israel the night before. He

did not realize, however, that there were men waiting in ambush behind the city. Joshua and his troops pretended to be running away in fear before them toward the desert (toward the southeast according to JFB). All the people in Ai were called to join the pursuit and readily fell into the trap that had been set for them. Every man in Ai and Bethel joined the attack against the retreating troops of Israel, leaving the city wide open.

**Joshua 8:18** And the LORD said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that *he had* in his hand toward the city.

**Joshua 8:19** And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand: and they entered into the city, and took it, and hasted and set the city on fire.

At just the right moment the LORD told Joshua to stretch out his spear toward Ai, evidently the preplanned signal for the troops in ambush to attack. They quickly captured and looted the city and set it on fire.

I tend to think that some of the commentators were correct in assuming that his spear tip must have had some type of flag or banner attached to it to make it clearly visible.

**Joshua 8:20** And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and, behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that way: and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers.

**Joshua 8:21** And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai.

**Joshua 8:22** And the other issued out of the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side: and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape.

**Joshua 8:23** ¶ And the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

When the men of Ai looked behind them and saw too late that the city was on fire, they realized they had nowhere to go because the retreating troops of Israel had now turned around and were in attack mode. The troops of Ai and Bethel faced attack from the front and the rear; all were killed, none escaped except the king of Ai who was taken alive and brought to Joshua.

**Joshua 8:24** And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword.

**Joshua 8:25** And so it was, that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai.

After killing all the people of Ai on the field of battle, the army of Israel returned

to the city to kill everyone else that was still alive—both men and women, a total of 12,000.

**Joshua 8:26** For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

**Joshua 8:27** Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of the LORD which he commanded Joshua.

**Joshua 8:28** And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, *even* a desolation unto this day.

**Joshua 8:29** And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, *that remaineth* unto this day.

“for ever” (v28) – Can mean either to the vanishing point, time out of mind or lasting a long time

Joshua continued to hold out his spear until all the inhabitants of Ai had been destroyed. Israel took the cattle and spoils of the city for their own according to the LORD’s command. Joshua burned Ai and it was still a ruined heap at the time of the writing of this book.

The king of Ai was hung on a tree (evidently impaled—not crucified) until the evening, when they removed his dead body and threw it down at the gates of the city and covered it with stones.

The NIV Commentary noted that the body had to be buried the same day to avoid defiling the land.

*Deuteronomy 21:22–23 “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”*

**Joshua 8:30** ¶ Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal,

**Joshua 8:31** As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up *any* iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

**Joshua 8:32** And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.

Guzik notes that the place identified in these verses was about 20-25 miles away from Ai.

Joshua built an altar to “the LORD God of Israel” in mount Ebal in accordance

with the directions that the LORD had given Moses—using whole stones that had not been marred by the tools of men. They then offered burnt offerings of thanks and peace to the LORD. Upon the stones he wrote a copy of the “law of Moses” as the people watched. (I assume that is a reference to the Ten Commandments.)

**Joshua 8:33** And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

**Joshua 8:34** And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

**Joshua 8:35** There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

It was in this place that the congregation was positioned half on one side toward mount Gerizim and half on the other against mount Ebal to read the words of the law and the blessings and cursings as previously commanded by Moses.

*Deuteronomy 11:26–29 “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal.”*

*Deuteronomy 27:1–13 “And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day. And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaister them with plaister: And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee. Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God: And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God. And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly. And Moses and the priests the Levites spake unto all Israel, saying, Take heed, and hearken, O Israel; this day thou art become the people of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day. And Moses charged the people the same day, saying, These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah,*

*and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali."*

Guzik notes that this place "has a natural amphitheater effect because of the contour of the hills."

Point is made that Joshua read the whole book of the law before the whole congregation of Israel—men, women, children and foreigners that were among them. (I assume this to be a reference to the book of Deuteronomy.)

I am sure that this was quite an experience for Rahab and her family.