Joshua 8:1-29 | Sunday October 18, 2026

Any confidence that was gained for Israel in the victory at Jericho was undone by the defeat of Ai. Achan and his family had sinned, and God could not give Israel victory until the sin was dealt with. Israel proved themselves faithful and purged the sinning family just as God commanded. God is just, and sin must be judged. This is a side of God we tend not to think about, but without it the cross does not make sense. Jesus' death was required because God is just and sin must be fully paid for. We can experience His grace and mercy because sin was fully judged on the cross. Now that Israel has dealt with the sin in the camp, they can experience God's goodness and walk in His victories.

Joshua 8:1-2 ESV

> (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."

Now that the sin in the camp had been dealt with, Israel needed to get up and go take Ai. Ai will become the next Jericho. **God does not want Israel to sit and dwell on their defeat.** He does not want doubt and discouragement to take root. They are back in fellowship with God, and it is time to walk in His victory. He encourages Joshua not to be afraid or be dismayed. **"Dismayed" means to be broken to pieces, shattered, and disheartened**. This is the same encouragement that Moses shared with Joshua as he handed over leadership to him.

Deuteronomy 31:7-8 ESV

> (7) Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him **in the sight of all Israel**, **"Be strong and courageous**, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it.
> (8) **It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you**; He will not leave you or forsake you. **Do not fear or be dismayed."**

I am sure that Joshua heard the encouragement not to be dismayed very differently after the defeat in Ai than he did when Moses gave it to him. Joshua and the people of Israel were humbled by Ai. It reminded them how weak and vulnerable they were without God. **Being dismayed in the Promised Land might have seemed like an impossibility at one time, and now Joshua knew how quickly discouragement could come.** Joshua had been shattered and disheartened. When Joshua was dismayed, God was there to encourage him and draw him back to truth. God was not done with Joshua or Israel. Fellowship was restored, and it was time to take the next city. The people found out how weak they were, but God's strength and power always stood.

Isaiah 51:6 ESV

> (6) Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; **for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment,** and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, **and My righteousness will never be dismayed.**

Having a godly eternal perspective is so hard for us. Things that seem so permanent and fixed God says will vanish like smoke. This entire universe and all its galaxies and stars will one day be no more. This earth will wear out over time. Israel's garments in the wilderness did not wear out, but this planet under the curse of sin is wearing out. **The earth's seams are stretching, and the fabric is growing thin.** We are not to take our hope and comfort from things that will not last. God promises that His salvation will never wear out; it is forever. **His righteousness will never be dismayed, shattered, disheartened, or broken to pieces**. Joshua was dismayed, the people of Israel were dismayed, and we became dismayed, but God's righteousness never will. This is the righteousness that we have been given through Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

> (21) For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, **so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.**

In our weakness and our discouragement, we should come back to the truth that **God's fixed, eternal righteousness has been given to us**. Through Jesus we have been born into and have become God's righteousness. Once we believe in Jesus, even if we are dismayed, disheartened, and shattered, Jesus' righteousness that we have been brought into will not be. We are secure in Him. **His righteousness will never be dismayed**. **He is the faithful one even when we fail.** As God calls Israel not to avoid or go around Ai but to conquer it, He is reminding them of His power and faithfulness.

Joshua 8:2 ESV

> (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."

Unlike Jericho, Israel is told to plunder Ai and to take its spoils and livestock. This cast such a different shadow on Achan's sin**. Achan had legitimate needs and chose to fill them in an illegitimate way.** We know his needs were legitimate because God now lets the entire nation partake of the plunder and spoil. They needed new coats, money, and livestock. The manna had stopped, and God is using the plunder of Ai to provide once again for His people. **This means that Achan only had to be patient and wait a few days to be in the will of God.** Achan chose to ignore God's restriction instead of waiting on His blessings. Achan's sin shows the danger of instant gratification. The sin of wanting something our way and on our timeline and not waiting on God. Achan is not alone in this sin in scripture. There are many examples of how dangerous it is.

Genesis 16:1-2 ESV

> (1) Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.
> (2) And Sarai said to Abram, "**Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children**. Go in to my servant; it may be that **I shall obtain children by her."** And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

Genesis 21:1-2 ESV

> (1) The LORD visited Sarah **as He had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as He had promised**.
> (2) And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age **at the time of which God had spoken to him.**

Sarah could not believe that God would provide a child through her, so she asked Abraham to have a child with her servant Hagar. **Sarah saw no point in waiting for something she thought was impossible.** Sarah and Abraham had a legitimate need of having a child that God promised to them, but they went about it in their own way and in their own timing. The consequences of this choice are still felt all over the world as the descendants of Hagar (Arabs) persecute the descendants of Sarah (Jews). Instead of acting on their own power, Abraham and Sarah should have waited 14 years for God to fulfill His promise.

Acts 7:23-25 ESV

> (23) "**When he was forty years old**, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel.
> (24) And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and **avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.**
> (25) He supposed that his brothers **would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.**

At 40 Moses correctly knew that God would use Him to bring salvation to the Israelites. Yet, **Moses acted in his own power and in his own timing.** After killing one Egyptian, he has to flee to the wilderness. Moses needed to wait 40 years until God would use Him to deliver Israel. So often Satan tempts God's people with a legitimate need or a correct desire but encourages them to go about it in their own power or in the wrong timing.

Luke 4:5-8 ESV

> (5) And the devil took Him up and showed Him **all the kingdoms of the world** in a moment of time,
> (6) and said to Him, "**To You I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.**
> (7) If You, then, will worship me, **it will all be Yours."**
> (8) And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "'**You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.'"**

Satan offered to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. Satan is correct when he says they are his to give away. In John 13:31, Jesus calls Satan the ruler of this world. **Satan is offering to give Jesus all the kingdoms that will one day be His.** The real part of this temptation is what would be avoided, **the cross**. Satan is offering to give Jesus power and authority without having to suffer. He is offering for Jesus to do it in His own way and in His own timing and not according to the will of God the Father. Jesus knows that the instant payoff will never be worth the consequences of this action. He is willing to trust the Father and His timing. Jesus will ultimately be glorified for this decision. Sin comes down to this core issue: **will we trust in God's timing and His way and not our own?**

Hebrews 13:4 ESV

> (4) **Let marriage be held in honor among all**, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Sex outside the marriage bed is a prime example of Satan tempting us with a Godly desire but in the wrong timing and in our own way. God designed and created sex, and He has revealed how it is glorifying to Him within the one-flesh union of marriage. Any time sex is taken outside of marriage, pornography, or sexual immorality of any kind, there are consequences, and we will not experience

God's eternal best for our lives. Instead of pursuing our timing and our way, we are to turn to Him.

Psalm 37:4-5 ESV

> (4) **Delight yourself in the LORD**, and **He will give you the desires of your heart.**
> (5) Commit your way to the LORD; **trust in Him, and He will act.**

Achan needed to delight himself in the Lord. His desire was good, but he should have trusted in God to fulfill his desire. We need to do the same. **We are to delight ourselves; this word means to pamper (focus on) and take pleasure in the Lord.** He is the only one who can correctly and fully satisfy our hearts. God will now satisfy Israel in providing a strategic battle plan to take Ai.

Joshua 8:3-8 ESV

> (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."**

God gives Joshua a wise battle plan that involves setting an ambush and utilizes a fake retreat. **It is amazing how big God is—that He can use Israel's previous failure to their advantage in this attack.** Ai will believe Israel is fleeing in defeat because they already did once before.

Joshua 8:9-17 ESV

> (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.**

It is difficult to tell if verse 12 describes a second ambush to cut off the aid that might come from the neighboring city of Bethel or clarifying details about the first ambush. Either way, **God is able**

to redeem Israel's failure and bring good out of it for them. The men of Ai and Bethel are so confident that they completely abandon their cities as they pursue Israel, leaving them defenseless to Israel's ambush attack.

Joshua 8:18-22 ESV

> (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.**

Joshua and Israel follow God's battle plans to the exact detail. The ambush has worked perfectly and completely demoralized the men of Ai and Bethel. **The smoke of the city going up is the same language as the smoke of a whole burnt offering rising to God**. Ai's defeat is pictured as another offering to God in the promised land. Israel had walked in God's victory as Joshua made sure to follow every detail.

Joshua 8:23-26 ESV

> (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.**

Notice Joshua's attentiveness to God's Word. God told Joshua to stretch out his javelin, and God would give the city into Israel's hands. So Joshua made sure not to draw back his hand until the city was conquered. **The discipline that Israel experienced caused Joshua to be reminded how important God's Word truly was**. Joshua now knew on a deeper level how reliant they needed to be on God for every detail. Unlike Jerhico, Israel is invited to partake of the plunder and enjoy the blessings of being God's people.

Joshua 8:27-29 ESV

> (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.**

If Achan would have waited, he could have enjoyed the plunder of Ai instead of receiving the ban for taking items out of Jerico. Once plundered, Ai was burned and made into a heap of ruins. The king of Ai was displayed as a warning to the land of God's judgment, and then he was buried under a great heap of stones at the city gate**. These heaps of stones served as another monument to be remembered**. Ai was to remind Israel and us of the failure that comes from being out of fellowship with God and the rich blessings and goodness that come from walking with Him. It was to remind us that it is always better to wait on God to fulfill our needs than to try and fill them ourselves.

Lamentations 3:24-26 ESV

> (24) "**The LORD is my portion**," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in Him."
> (25) **The LORD is good to those who wait for Him**, to the soul who seeks Him.
> (26) **It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.**