

Ai Campaigns: Do as I Say

In the Old Testament, all young men were required to have military training. This principle came from the Lord. Moses is specific about who is to go into battle. Rules of engagement are spelled out clearly. Personal preparation for battle on the part of each warrior is a part of the preparatory process. Failure to observe these rules will bring battle casualties. When we look at the first battle of Ai, we are struck by the fact that few of these rules appear to be followed.

The conditions of Deuteronomy are:

- God's minister is to address the people. This was not done.
- Warning is to be given about fearfulness. This is not done.
- Warn not to panic. This is not done.
- Cause to remember that God goes before them. This was not done.
- Removal of those who should not go into battle. This was not done.
- There was no attempt to cleanse the people of unrighteousness.
- No search made to determine sin.
- No recon of the area to know the enemy presence.

Joshua did not attempt to seek out his own failure before accusing the Lord.

In fact, there is no indication after the battle of Jericho that Joshua made an effort to follow up on the Lord's direction that none of the devoted things was to be taken. After the loss of the first battle, Joshua, shamed by the failure of his troops, falls on his face before God blaming Him for the loss.

God confronts Joshua with his failures as leader and refuses his false contrite bowing down before Him. God demands that he get up then tells him about the stolen property.

Joshua had made no real effort to recon the area of Ai, but relied on the information and conclusions provided by his spies. There was no inquiry of the commander of the army (the Lord) about what was to be done.

So what happened at Ai? With respect to Jericho, Joshua gave specific directions to the two men sent to gather intelligence before the attack. They were chosen for their ability. Joshua was careful in the selection process. Comparing this with the directions for reconnaissance of Ai, one is struck by the dearth of direction, really limited directions were vague almost careless. He simply said, "Go spy out the land." (Joshua 7:2). In like manner the spies give a vague report and then conclude a couple of thousand can do the job. The men's advice reveals at most a mediocre reconnaissance and likely criminal neglect in fulfilling their duty.

Ai is located about 12 miles west of Jericho about 6 to 8 hours march. The spies hurried and missed a few important details. They probably crawled up to the top of one of the mounts surrounding the city and looked down into the valley where Ai is located and saw a small town in partial ruins. The text calls it 'the Ai' a translation that means 'ruins'.

If they had sent men into town, they would have discovered that this town served as a large outpost protecting Bethel. It was well fortified and forewarned about the Israelites, and thus heavily armed and prepared for a visit.

It must be remembered that God had not trained Israel in siege warfare. The walls of Jericho had fallen down Israel neither had the equipment nor experience in taking armed, walled cities.

I suspect a couple of thousand Israelites walked up to the front gates expecting an easy victory. This attitude is so like our attitude towards solving problems. We think a

little sermonette will resolve deep-seated attitudes. A friend does some not so nice sinning and we pay a visit to warn him of the error of their way only to have the door slammed in our face and occasionally a lawsuit in our hand. We are shocked, our feelings shattered and our ego in shambles. We easily forget our enemy is a roaring lion, and to make matters worse we ignore the spike sticking out of our own eye.

The text says Israel went up to fight and ran from the enemy. Fearfulness in close combat has cost many a battle and a multitude of casualties. However, the real crux of the matter, how Joshua knew that something was severely wrong, was not so much that his men ran from the enemy. They did do that, but it was the death of 36 men in that battle. You see success was to be judged by the lack of any losses!

Now Joshua gets to the heart of the matter; the theft of God's property. He deals with the offender and reexamines the battle plan.

The text does not address it but I imagine Joshua spent a lot of time talking to the men who had gone up to do battle. What he discovered was the enemy would be no push over.

Whereas his army was lightly armored with sword, shields, slings, and bows the enemy was heavily armed and masters of the battlefield. They were able to use long pikes and phalanx formations. It is doubtful that they would have chariots in this mountainous area but possibly a light cavalry. The Egyptians found the Canaanite to be a bitter enemy at the battle of Kedesh several years prior. Now Joshua understands why.

The Canaanites armed with single edged sickle swords or battle-ax, powerful composite bows, long pikes and rectangular checkered shield and scale armor. Tactically they were use to fighting on open battlefields. The Israelites were not. Neither had Israel

been trained in tactics for defeating an enemy in a phalanx formation. Knowledge of one's weaknesses and the enemies' strengths is imperative.

With new information Joshua is able to prepare a plan of battle which best suits his armies abilities; the ambush. Joshua uses a bronze javelin, as his personal weapon of choice.

Dividing his forces, Joshua now recognizing the danger that Bethel presents, sends a 5000 man blocking force west of the city between Ai and Bethel.

Then Joshua takes his main force and places them on the North in front of Ai. It is evening; he rests his troops in view of the city, preparing them for attack the next morning. Joshua stays with the troops to encourage them for the coming battle.

True to form, the king of Ai attacks the main force early the next morning. He is unaware of the large force behind him. Joshua has his forces do a tactical withdrawal as if fearful of the enemy. Thinking that Israel has been frightened again, the enemy pushes the attack chasing Israel up the hill. Joshua signals the ambushing force to attack the empty city and set it afire.

The soldiers of Ai notice the city burning and try to retreat to the city and Joshua wheels around and attacks. The enemy crushed. The city taken and all the inhabitants killed, 12,000 in number. Notice please, the error of the initial reconnaissance. The original patrol thought to take a city with a fourth the number of defenders. Military doctrine dictates the aggressor attack a fortified position with three to four times as many soldiers as the defenders.

The city falls with all of its treasures as well as the arms. Between the defeated armies of Jericho and Ai, his force is now exceptionally well armed. However, more importantly Joshua has succeeded in putting the fear of God in the enemy.

Now the enemy comes knocking on his door wanting to surrender. The Gibeonites have heard and seen enough. They trick Joshua into making peace with them and at the same time signing a treaty requiring Joshua to defend them. Shortly thereafter, a huge army of Canaanites marches against them, threatening to destroy their city. They call for help.