

The Fall of Ai
Joshua 8:1-29
Sermon Outline

Introduction: God does not want to leave us in the grip of our spiritual and moral failures. He wants to lift us out of our failure as he lifted Joshua out of the failure at Ai. And so he speaks to us as he did to Joshua: “Do not fear...do not be dismayed...Take...Arise...Go up...See!”

I) Don't give up because of the past!

A) *v. 1: Don't be afraid...Don't be dismayed*

B) Why we shouldn't give up.

- *v.1: I have given*
- *v.28: ...a heap of ruins, as it is to this day.*

II) Fight!

A) *v.1: Take all the fighting men...and arise, go up to Ai.*

B) Meaning:

- God wants us to be honest, but he does not want to shut us down

III) Trust!

A) *v. 1: See, I have given...*

B) Making sense of the annihilation of Ai.

Not a 'dirty little secret'—*vv. 22-26: ...all...all...all...all...to the very last*

1) God will win his conflict with the world absolutely and comprehensively

- Where is history going?

2) There must be a way—beyond us—for us to participate safely in God's victory.

- The hanging of the king of Ai (*v. 29*)
Dt. 21.23: ...a man hanged on a tree is cursed by God
- The hanging of the Messiah.

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Consider a moral and spiritual failure that tends to get you down? What is significant, given your struggle, about the use of the past tense in “See, I have given...” (v. 1)? Compare it to the use of the past tense in Romans 8:30.
- 2) God wanted Joshua, despite the recent disaster, to ‘arise and go up to Ai.’ This reminds us that, while God wants us to be honest about our failures, he does not want us to be paralyzed by them. Notice Jesus’ treatment of Peter—who had denied him three times—in John 21:15-19. Thank the Lord for what you discover there.
- 3) The third piece of advice God gives us for facing failure is to “See God’s triumph.” What does this mean? Think about what Joshua is able literally to see at the moment when God tells him to do so.
- 4) Think of three problems you are facing right now—a personal problem, a relational problem, and a ministry problem. Envision each of these problems as it will find resolution when the Lord returns and completes what he has begun in us and our world. What initiatives do your ‘envisionings’ suggest you might take this week?
- 5) Look carefully at the fate of the people of Ai as described in vv. 22-26. How do you react and why? As you wrestle with the picture, notice two things: (i) there is no hint of either sadism or self-righteousness in Joshua (for good reason, since he had just seen the same curse fall upon Achan, a fellow Jew), and (ii) nothing in the text tells us about the eternal destiny of the inhabitants of Ai.
- 6) Reflect on the following: “The annihilation of the people of Ai means that God will win his conflict with the world—that every vestige of resistance to his good reign will be thrown down. And this makes sense, as hard as it is to picture, because we cannot have comprehensive newness without the eradication of all that is evil.”
- 7) Everybody has a vision for where history is going, even if that vision is “No place in particular,” or “No place particularly good.” What is your vision and how does it help you to make sense of your response to the murder of the 9 year old girl at the ‘meet and greet’ rally with Congresswoman Giffords last week. How does the Bible’s vision help you (Consider Revelation 21:3-8 in its entirety).
- 8) The Qu’ran (Sura 4-An-Nisa, ayat 157-158) reads: “*They [i.e., the enemies of Jesus] said (in boast), ‘We have killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah.’ But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them...for a surety they killed him not. – Nay, Allah raised him up unto himself.*” [i.e., removed Jesus from the scene before he was crucified—for Allah would never subject a faithful prophet to such a curse]. Reflect on the repeated assertion in the Bible to the contrary—that Jesus (who was not only a great prophet but the Messiah, God in the flesh) did in fact bear that curse. Contemplate that what befell the king of Ai eventually befell the Messiah himself. What does this teach you—about your sin, about God’s love, about the experience that the Messiah endured? How does this make the conquering Messiah radically different from other world conquerors (say Hitler or Stalin)? Spend some time in prayer.