

Joshua 8

Verse 1

Now the Lord said to Joshua, “Do not fear or be dismayed. Take all the people of war with you. Arise, go up to Ai; see, I have handed over to you the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. ² You shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king; you shall take only its spoils and its cattle as plunder for yourselves. Set an ambush for the city behind it.”

Take all the people of war with you. Arise, go up to Ai;

We know that Israel had about 600,000 men of war while they were in the wilderness.

See chart 805

	Numbers 1 2-1-02	Numbers 26 year 39	
Tribe	1ST Census	2ND Census	
Reuben	46,500	43,730	
Simeon	59,300	22,200	43,730
Gad	45,650	40,500	40,500
Judah	74,600	76,500	26,350
Issachar	54,400	64,300	<hr/>
Zebulun	57,400	60,500	110,580
Ephraim	40,500	32,500	
Manasseh	32,200	52,700	
Benjamin	35,400	45,600	
Dan	62,700	64,400	
Asher	41,500	53,400	
Naphtali	53,400	45,400	
Total	603,550	601,730	

2 1/2 tribes

The 2 1/2 tribes had 110,000
And sent about 40,000

During the 38 years between census 1 & 2 the troop levels remained pretty much the same.

We also know that the 2 ½ tribes had about 110,000 men of war but they only sent 40,000 men over the Jordan. This was about 36 % of their available military.

The other men of war protected the women and children and provided the work force needed to keep their new land productive. These men would also rotate in and out with the other men that were at war on the west side of the Jordan. Therefore, the total number of troops in the army was only reduced by 70,000 men.

But why would God command so many (530,000 men) to be involved in the capture of Ai? It seems likely that most of the army was not involved in the actual battle. God simply wanted them there to witness the victory over Ai so the morale of all the fighting men would be restored.

You shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king; you shall take only its spoils and its cattle as plunder for yourselves

The only thing the people could not take was captives to be their slaves.

If Achan had resisted the temptation to take the robe and money, he could have saved his family, his possessions and his life. Plus he would have shared in the spoils of war in the very next battle.

Verses 3 - 9

So Joshua rose up with all the people of war to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night. ⁴ He commanded them, saying, “See, you are going to ambush the city from behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. ⁵ Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out to meet us as *they did* the first time, we will flee before them. ⁶ They will come out after us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say, ‘*They* are fleeing before us just as *they did* the first time.’ So we will flee before them. ⁷ Then you shall rise from *your* ambush and take possession of the city, for the Lord your God will hand it over to you. ⁸ Then it will be when you have seized the city, that you shall set the city on fire. You shall do *it* in accordance with the word of the Lord. See, I have commanded you.” ⁹ So Joshua sent them away, and they went to the *place of ambush* and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua spent that night among the people.

³ And Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night. ⁴ He commanded them, saying, you are going to ambush the city from behind it. So Joshua sent them away, and they went to the *place of ambush* and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai.

See maps 810



The distance between Bethel and Ai is about 1.5 miles.

⁵ Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out to meet us as *they did* the first *time*, we will flee before them.

Joshua and the men with him will approach from the east and when the men from Ai come out, Joshua and his men will flee pulling all the men of the city away from the town.

⁷ Then you shall rise from *your* ambush and take possession of the city, for the Lord your God will hand it over to you.

With all the army of Ai in pursuit of Joshua the city would be pretty much defenseless.

The 30,000 men waiting in ambush could easily take the city and burn it.

Verses 10 -17

Now Joshua got up early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai. ¹¹ Then all the people of war who *were* with him went up and approached, and arrived in front of the city; and they camped on the north side of Ai. And *there was* a valley between him and Ai. ¹² Then he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. ¹³ So they stationed the people, all the army that was on the north side of the city, and its rear guard on the west side of the city, and Joshua spent that night in the midst of the valley. ¹⁴ And it came about, when the king of Ai saw *them*, that the men of the city hurried and got up early, and went out to meet Israel in battle, he and all his people at the appointed place before the desert plain. But he did not know that *there was* an ambush against him behind the city. ¹⁵ Then Joshua and all Israel pretended to be defeated before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. ¹⁶ And all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city. ¹⁷ So not a man was left in Ai or Bethel, but they had all gone out after Israel, and they left the city unguarded and pursued Israel.

¹⁰ Now Joshua got up early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai.

During the night, the men who were in the ambush were sent ahead so they would be in a concealed position when the main force arrived the next day.

Joshua spent the night with the people of Israel and the rest of the army.

In the morning Joshua and the elders lead the way toward Ai.

¹¹ Then all the people of war who *were* with him went up and approached, and arrived in front of the city; and they camped on the north side of Ai. And *there was* a valley between him and Ai.

All of the modern versions of the bible say the army camped on the north side of Ai.

But the Septuagint says the east side.

See pic 815

From the Septuagint

Joshua 8:9-14

9 And Joshua sent them, and they went to lie in ambush; and they lay between Baethel and Gai, westward of Gai. 10 And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people; and he went up, he and the elders before the people to Gai. 11 **And all the men of war went up with him, and they went forward and came over against the city eastward.** 12 And the ambuscade [was] on the west side of the city. 13 14 And it came to pass when the king of Gai saw [it], he hasted and went out to meet them direct to the battle, he and all the people [that were] with him: and he knew not that there was an ambuscade [formed] against him behind the city.

So how do we know which version is accurate.

Since the 30,000 men were sent behind the city of Ai to the west, this would seem to indicate that Joshua and the other men were on the eastern side.

And that is the direction they would be coming from after defeating Jericho.

See map 810 above.

¹² Then he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

We know from verse 3 that it was 30,000 men and it took place the night before.

In addition, this same verse in the Septuagint only affirms that there was an ambush on the west side of the city. It doesn't say 5,000 men or imply a different day.

See pic 820

From the Septuagint

Joshua 8:9-12

9 And Joshua sent them, and they went to lie in ambush; and they lay between Baethel and Gai, westward of Gai. 10 And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people; and he went up, he and the elders before the people to Gai. 11 And all the men of war went up with him, and they went forward and came over against the city eastward. 12 And the ambuscade [was] on the west side of the city.

13 So they stationed the people, all the army that was on the north side of the city, and its rear guard on the west side of the city, and Joshua spent that night in the midst of the valley

In reading this verse it sounds like Joshua spent another night in the valley just as the battle was about to take place. However, that doesn't really make sense.

If the army was spread out from the north to the west it would create two problems.

1. This would defeat the purpose of having the men to the west waiting in ambush.
2. If the troops were in the north and west then they would have to flee to the northwest instead of fleeing to the east.

But again we have a solution to this problem by accepting the text in the Septuagint.

Verse 13 does not appear at all in the Septuagint.

Therefore the two conflicts mentioned above can be set aside.

See pic 825

Joshua 8:11-14 from the Septuagint

11 And all the men of war went up with him, and they went forward and came over against the city eastward. 12 And the ambuscade [was] on the west side of the city. 13 14 And it came to pass when the king of Gai saw [it], he hasted and went out to meet them direct to the battle, he and all the people [that were] with him: and he knew not that there was an ambuscade [formed] against him behind the city.

Anyone reading verses 11 thru 13 in any of our modern translations has to be confused with the story line as it is presented.

1. Israel stationed to the north instead of the east.
2. The wrong number of men being sent to the west side of Jericho on the wrong day.
3. Joshua spending an extra night in the valley when the battle was at hand.

Clearly, these 3 verses have been corrupted in the Masoretic text.

Then Joshua and all Israel pretended to be defeated before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. ¹⁶ **And all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city.**

Joshua & the army were between the city of Ai and the people of Israel. But when they pretended to flee the army and all of Israel began to flee in unison.

So not a man was left in Ai or Bethel, but they had all gone out after Israel, and they left the city unguarded and pursued Israel.

We find out here that the city of Bethel was in league with the people of Ai. This makes sense since the two cities were only a mile and half away from each other.

However, in this case it was a losing coalition.

Verses 18 - 23

Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Reach out with the sword that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will hand it over to you.” So Joshua reached out with the sword that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹ Then the *men in* ambush rose quickly from their place, and when he had reached out with his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it, and they quickly set the city on fire. ²⁰ When the men of Ai turned back and looked, behold, the smoke of the city ascended to the sky, and they had no place to flee this way or that, for the people who had been fleeing to the wilderness turned against the pursuers. ²¹ When Joshua and all Israel saw that the *men in* ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and killed the men of Ai. ²² The others came out from the city to confront them, so that they were *trapped* in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side; and they killed them until there was not one left who escaped or survived. ²³ But they captured the king of Ai alive and brought him to Joshua.

So Joshua reached out with the sword that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹ Then the *men in* ambush rose quickly from their place, they ran and entered the city and captured it, and they quickly set the city on fire

The army of Ai pursued Israel leaving the city defenseless and the men waiting in ambush quickly captured the city and set it on fire.

The others came out from the city to confront them, so that they were *trapped* in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side; and they killed them until there was not one left who escaped or survived.

After the city was set on fire those who had ambushed the city came out to help Joshua and his men.

In the meantime Israel quit fleeing to the east and turned to face the enemy.

The armies of Ai & Bethel were now surrounded by the army of Israel on the east and the west side.

Israel had a huge advantage over the smaller Ai force and no one from Ai or Bethel could escape or survive.

Verses 24 - 29

Now when Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the field in the wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were destroyed, then all Israel returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword.²⁵ So all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand—all the people of Ai.²⁶ For Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he reached out with the sword until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.²⁷ Israel took only the cattle and the spoils of that city as plunder for themselves, in accordance with the word of the Lord which He had commanded Joshua.²⁸ So Joshua burned Ai and made it a refuse heap forever, a desolation until this day.²⁹ And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; but at sunset Joshua gave the command and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the city gate, and erected over it a large heap of stones *that stands* to this day.

Now when Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them had fallen by the edge of the sword, then all Israel returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword.

After the entire army of Ai had been destroyed, Israel went back to the Ai to kill all of the woman and children of the city.

This was not an act of revenge or anger on the part of Israel but rather what God had commanded them to do in all the land of Canaan.

For Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he reached out with the sword until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

Joshua did not lower the war signal until all of the people of Ai had been killed.

Moses did this when Joshua fought Amalek at Rephidim.

See Exodus 17:8- 13

Israel took only the cattle and the spoils of that city as plunder for themselves

They were not allowed to keep any of the women as wives or concubines.

Nor could they keep any children as slaves.

And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; but at sunset Joshua gave the command and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the city gate, and erected over it a large heap of stones *that stands to this day.*

This was in compliance with the Law.

See Deuteronomy 21:22 and 23

Verses 30 - 35

³⁰ Then 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 sons of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones on which no one had wielded an iron *tool*; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. ³² And he wrote there on the stones a copy of the Law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel. ³³ And all Israel with their elders, officers, and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the stranger as well as the native. Half of them *stood* 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 first to bless the people of Israel. ³⁴ Then afterward he read all the words of the Law, the blessing and the curse, according to everything that is written in the Book of the Law. ³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

³⁰ Then Joshua built an altar to the Lord on Mount Ebal, an altar of uncut stones; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings

In verse 29 Israel was at Ai and then in verse 30 they are at Shechem.

We know it is Shechem because this city lies between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim.

It's safe to assume that Israel conquered Shechem and killed all of the people.

The battle was not mentioned because it was secondary to the more important events that took place here.

See pic 830

Ai to Shechem



Moses and the elders of Israel had commanded Joshua and the people to do what is outlined in this paragraph about 2 months before they entered Canaan.

See Deuteronomy 27:1-8

And he wrote there on the stones a copy of the Law of Moses

There were two sets of stones that were set up.

1. There was an altar of uncut stones set up for sacrificing.
2. And there were large stones coated with lime to write the law on.

This is not spelled out in detail here in Joshua because it is an abbreviated account but it was in Deut. 27:2-3, 5.

There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

The purpose of writing the law on these large stones was to establish the Law of Moses as the official law of the land.

But it was also important for the people to be reminded of what had been commanded.

The two mountains acted as a natural amphitheater so all of the people could hear the word of God.

See pic 835



Isn't it interesting that the people of Shechem had such modern looking building for their time in history? 😊 😊

By the way, this is the place where Levi and Simeon deceived the men of Shechem following the rape of Dinah 335 years earlier.

See Genesis 34