

Joshua 7:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.

Analysis

And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the land. And the men went up and viewed Ai.

After Jericho's spectacular victory, Joshua employs conventional military reconnaissance—a fatal error given the unconfessed sin in the camp. The command to "view the land" (*ragelu et-ha'aretz*, רָגְלוּ אֶת־הָאֶרֶץ) means to spy or scout, standard military procedure (Numbers 13:2, Judges 18:2). However, Joshua acts without seeking God's guidance, contrasting with earlier dependency on divine direction (chapters 1-6).

The location identification is precise: "beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel." Bethel means "house of God," while Bethaven means "house of wickedness" or "house of vanity"—names carrying theological irony. Ai means "the ruin," foreshadowing its eventual fate. The detailed geography emphasizes historical reality—these were actual places in actual battles, not mythological symbolism.

Theologically, this verse marks the transition from supernatural victory (Jericho) to human presumption (Ai). Joshua's reliance on conventional tactics without seeking God reveals subtle shift from divine dependency to self-sufficiency. This illustrates the spiritual danger following great victories—success can breed confidence in

methods rather than continued trust in God. From a Reformed perspective, this demonstrates that past victories don't guarantee future success when unconfessed sin remains in the camp. God will not bless His people's endeavors when covenant unfaithfulness persists.

Historical Context

Ai's location has been debated, with et-Tell identified as the most likely site, though archaeological challenges exist. The site shows occupation gap during some proposed conquest dates, leading to various explanations (different site, different dating, literary compression). The biblical text clearly indicates Ai was a real, known location east of Bethel.

Reconnaissance missions were standard ancient Near Eastern military practice before engaging fortified cities. Spies assessed defenses, troop strength, resource availability, and tactical advantages. Egyptian, Assyrian, and Hittite military records document similar intelligence gathering. Joshua's use of spies wasn't wrong per se, but doing so without divine consultation following Jericho's miraculous victory revealed spiritual complacency.

The timing is significant—this occurred immediately after Jericho's fall but before Achan's sin was exposed (verse 1). God knew of Achan's theft, but Israel did not. God allowed military defeat to reveal hidden sin requiring exposure and judgment. This pattern recurs in Scripture: Saul's disobedience at Amalek (1 Samuel 15), David's census (2 Samuel 24), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). God uses circumstances to bring hidden sin to light, protecting the covenant community from corruption.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do past spiritual victories sometimes breed self-confidence that leads to acting without seeking God's current guidance?
2. What 'conventional wisdom' do you employ without confirming God's specific direction for present circumstances?
3. How quickly do you move from supernatural dependency to self-sufficiency after experiencing God's provision?
4. What role should consistent seeking of God's guidance play in decision-making, even when situations seem straightforward?
5. How does this passage warn against presuming God's blessing continues automatically rather than through ongoing covenant faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּשְׁלַח	וְיְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶנְשֵׁי יָם	מִיִּרְיָח וְ	הָעִי:	אֲשֶׁר	עִם
sent	And Joshua	H376	from Jericho	Ai	H834	which is beside
H7971	H3091		H3405	H5857		H5973
בֵּית	אֶתְּ	מִקְדָּם	לְבֵית	אֵל	לְאֵמֹר	אֲלֵיהֶם
H0	Bethaven	on the east side	H0	of Bethel	and spake	H413
	H1007	H6924		H1008	H559	
לְאֵמֹר	וַעֲלוּ	וַיַּרְגֵּל וְ	אֶת	הָאָרֶץ	וַעֲלוּ	הָאֲנָשִׁים יָם
and spake	Go up	and view	H853	the country	Go up	H376
H559	H5927	H7270		H776	H5927	and view
						H7270
אֶת	הָעִי:					
H853	Ai					
	H5857					

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 18:12 (Parallel theme): And their border on the north side was from Jordan; and the border went up to the side of Jericho on the north side, and went up through the mountains westward; and the goings out thereof were at the wilderness of Beth-aven.

Hosea 4:15 (Parallel theme): Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The LORD liveth.

1 Samuel 14:23 (Parallel theme): So the LORD saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Beth-aven.

1 Samuel 13:5 (Parallel theme): And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth-aven.

Proverbs 24:6 (Parallel theme): For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.

Proverbs 20:18 (Parallel theme): Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.

Matthew 10:16 (Parallel theme): Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Genesis 12:8 (Parallel theme): And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.