

Joshua 8:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it.

Analysis

God's instruction for Ai differs from Jericho: 'thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves.' Unlike Jericho where all was devoted to God (cherem), at Ai Israel may keep plunder. This merciful adjustment follows Achan's sin—God provides legitimate means for acquiring wealth, removing temptation to steal devoted things. The distinction teaches that not all conquered cities carried the same restrictions. God's commands vary according to His purposes. The permission to take spoil also provided practical provision for Israel's massive army. The strategic instruction 'lay thee an ambush for the city behind it' shows God directing military tactics—combining supernatural guidance with natural means. God's sovereignty doesn't eliminate human strategy but directs it. This balance between divine initiative and human responsibility characterizes biblical faith.

Historical Context

Ai's strategic location in the central highlands made its conquest essential for controlling Canaan's interior. Unlike Jericho, which as first conquest was entirely devoted to God, subsequent cities would provide plunder for Israel. This pattern follows ancient Near Eastern practice where conquering armies lived off the

spoils. The permission to take cattle and goods as prey (baz, ַבַּז—plunder, booty) provided economic sustenance for an army that had wandered forty years without establishing agriculture. The instruction to set an ambush shows God working through military wisdom. Ancient warfare employed ambushes frequently—Judges and Samuel record multiple examples. God's sovereignty doesn't bypass human means but sanctifies and directs them. The combination of divine promise ('I have given into thy hand the king of Ai') and human strategy (ambush) illustrates covenant partnership—God guarantees outcomes while commanding human participation.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's varying commands (Jericho vs. Ai) teach about following specific guidance rather than assuming patterns?
2. What does permission to take spoil teach about God's provision through legitimate means after Achan's theft?
3. How do you balance trusting God's sovereignty with exercising strategic wisdom?

Interlinear Text

עַשׂ יָתְ	לַעַי	וּלְמֶלֶךְ הָ	כְּאֶשֶׁר	עַשׂ יָתְ	לִירִיחוֹ
And thou shalt do	to Ai	and her king	H834	And thou shalt do	unto Jericho
H6213	H5857	H4428		H6213	H3405
וּלְמֶלֶךְ הָ	בֶּקֶר	שְׁלָלָהּ	וּבְהֶמְתָּהּ		
and her king	H7535	only the spoil	thereof and the cattle		
H4428		H7998	H929		
תֵּבָה זֹאת	לָקַחְתָּ	שִׁים	לָבְ	אֶלְבְּ	
thereof shall ye take for a prey	H0	unto yourselves lay	H0	thee an ambush	
H962		H7760		H693	
לַעַי יִרְ	מֵאַחֲרָיָהּ:				
for the city	behind				
H5892	H310				

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 20:14 (Parallel theme): But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee.

Proverbs 13:22 (Parallel theme): A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.

Joshua 6:21 (Parallel theme): And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

2 Chronicles 20:22 (Parallel theme): And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.