

the offensive. We must trust the power of God's word—the **"sword of the Spirit"** (Eph. 6:17) to penetrate the most hardened heart. What would have happened in the early church if the Lord had abandoned hope for that murderous scoundrel Saul of Tarsus?—Or that foul-mouthed fisherman Peter? We must always be prepared when those around us let down their worldly defenses and leave their hearts defenseless for the power of the gospel. As Peter tells, we must **"always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"** (1 Pet. 3:15).

I pray that we will keep these principles in mind as we fight our spiritual battles from day to day. Never holding on to false-confidence or letting down our guard to sin and falsehood. May we never miss opportunities that arise to lead souls around us to Christ.

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November 27, 2016

Faithful Sayings



Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:
Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:
Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:
Kyle Pope

A Strategy for Victory

By Kyle Pope

In the seventh and eighth chapters of the book of Joshua there is a striking record that offers lessons to anyone engaged in conflict—especially the spiritual battles that characterize life in Christ. The descendants of Israel (or Jacob) had come out of their enslavement in Egypt and their wanderings in the desert of Sinai and had begun the conquest of Canaan—the *Promised Land*. As recorded in chapter six, the Lord had given into their hands the city of Jericho in a marvelous display of the power of Jehovah. Yet now, they were to go to battle against Ai, twelve miles west of Jericho.

On their first attempt to take the city they sent only 3000 men (7:4), because the spies had reported **"the people of Ai are few"** (7:3, NKJV). Their first attempt, however, ended in



Et Tell, one of two primary sites thought to have been the location of the ancient city of Ai.

failure because one of the Israelites had kept back some of the spoils from Jericho in violation of what the Lord had commanded them (7:1). The consequence was that thirty-six men died and the rest were forced to flee for their lives from the men of Ai (7:4).

What is striking about this battle is not their initial defeat but what occurred after this. You see, rather than retreating altogether, and giving up with their tail between their legs (so to speak), they took the steps necessary to correct the situation. They discovered who it was who had kept some of the spoils and put him to death as the Lord commanded them (7:13-15; 20-26). Then at the word of the Lord they moved against Ai again.

What had been a defeat during their first encounter actually turned out to be the key to victory in their final battle. Since the men of Ai had so easily routed the Israelites in their first attempt they were confident they could do the same again. They would pursue the Israelites out of the city as they had during their first battle, leaving the city defenseless and vulnerable. That as exactly what happened! Joshua took 30,000 men (8:3) but sent 5000 of them to wait in ambush on the west side of the city (8:12). Early in the morning the king of Ai moved against Joshua's forces to the north, unaware that an entire company was waiting in ambush to the west (8:14). As predicted, **"There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel"** (8:17). This time, when the ambush occurred Ai was burned and the people were defeated because this time the Lord was with Israel.

This battle teaches three important lessons that can help us in our own spiritual warfare:

1) Beware of False Confidence. It's easy after winning a time or two to let our guard down and leave ourselves open and defenseless. This was true of Ai, but it was also true of Israel during their first encounter with Ai. The victory over Jericho made them over-confident. Paul warned the Corinthians, **"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"** (1 Cor. 10:13). That is sound advice! Though we may have been Christians for years—though we have won many battles over sin and falsehood, all the enemy needs is one decisive victory to throw us off track! Is there ever a time when the soldier of the Christ can let down his guard against Satan? Only on that glorious day when, **"The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them and be their God"** (Rev. 21:3) after **"The devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone"** (Rev. 20:10).



Kirbet el-Maqatir, a second possible site where the ruins of the the ancient city of Ai may be located.

2) Watch for Hidden Weapons. The Israelites key to defeating Ai was God, but the Lord used a strategy that was ingenious—He moved Joshua to hold back crucial reinforcements until the opportune time. Sometimes Satan uses this same tactic against us. He gives a little ground and we gain a few victories, but he waits until we are tired and complacent. When Satan was tempting Jesus this was the tactic he tried to employ. After seeing Christ's resolve the Holy Spirit tells us, **"He departed from Him until an opportune time"** (Luke 4:13). If Satan did this to the Lord he will surely do the same to us. We must ever watch for his hidden weapons.

3) Avoid Foolish Judgments. The men of Ai imagined that since the Israelites had posed little threat to them in the past there would be little danger in a second battle. From a different angle, we often do the same thing when it comes to sharing the gospel with those around us. We imagine that rejection of truth in the past or a commitment to sinful behavior means there is no hope of change in the future. As soldiers of Christ we not only defend but there are times we must also go on

