

VICTORY!

A STUDY OF JOSHUA

PLANS

Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th President of the United States and former Supreme Allied Commander in World War 2, famously said, "In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."

Plans change, they must adapt. If the old saying is true, "No plan survives first contact with the enemy," a leader cannot be rigid in their execution. This is as true in a game plan, as a battle plan.

Some people read James 4:14 and believe that planning is unspiritual. It reads, "You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." This view is wrong. Holding fast to our plans as if we control the universe is unspiritual. However, if our plans echo verse 15, "'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" then we see Eisenhower's wisdom that planning is indispensable.

In today's study, we will see that a thoughtful plan *doesn't* reveal a lack of faith. In fact, it took an immense amount of faith to carry it out.

JOSHUA 8:10-17

¹⁰ Joshua arose early in the morning and mustered the people and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. ¹¹ And all the fighting men who were with him went up and drew near before the city and encamped on the north side of Ai, with a ravine between them and Ai. ¹² He took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. ¹³ So they stationed the forces, the main encampment that was north of the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. ¹⁴ And as soon as the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the men of the city, hurried and went out early to the appointed place toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. ¹⁵ And Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness. ¹⁶ So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. ¹⁷ Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. They left the city open and pursued Israel.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"You're better than that!" In the 2006 movie *Rocky Balboa*, tells Rocky's comeback story. The premise sounds crazy, and it is, but it's worth watching. The clip in the QR code is worth watching too.

I imagine God saying similar things, not to Israel, but to us. The world ain't sunshine and rainbows because of sin. However, through Christ, we may get knocked down, but we don't have to stay down. The world blames everything for their problems but sin. Only Jesus offers the comeback.



DISCUSSION

Describe a time when you made plans, but things didn't go quite as you expected.

ICEBREAKER
OBSERVATION

1. What 3 things did Joshua do the next morning? (10)

2. After the soldiers attacked Joshua's Decoy Force, describe Ai's defense. (17)

3. What is the relationship between developing/ implementing a strategy vs. exercising faith?

INTERPRETATION

4. Consider the spiritual battle that you face. What factors have you considered as you developed your strategy for your victory?

APPLICATION

1st Who are your other soldiers around you?

2nd How can your coach grow or lead you?

3rd What Bible verses speak to your battle?

4th How can you seek God in your battle?

Struggling with your spiritual battle? Maybe you haven't even decided whether or not you want to take up the fight. If you need help, talk to your coach today.



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STUDY NOTES THE COMEBACK

One of the most incredible sports comebacks ever occurred at a college track meet. In 2008, Heather Dorniden of the University of Minnesota competed in the Big Ten 600-meter championship. Favored to win, by the end of the second lap (indoors), she had secured the lead position. Then the unthinkable happened. After a competitor's toe brushed her heel, Dorniden fell and every runner passed her by.

Determined to give her very best, Dorniden rose to the challenge. With just 200 meters (one lap) to go, she readied herself to run as never before. Although about 20 meters behind the last place runner, Heather rallied herself for the toughest lap of her life. Over the next 30 seconds, she renewed her purpose and passed every runner in front of her and took first place. For the most inspirational 1.5-minute video, scan the QR code.



Israel got smashed in the mouth by Ai once. However, God had given them a command to take the Promised Land. Achan's sin had been purified, yet I'm sure some of Israel's fighting men had concerns. Joshua trusted God's Promise when he said, "*Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land. And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it*" (8:1–2). Joshua laid out the plans to the men and it was time to move.

VICTORY REQUIRES COMEBACKS

Joshua arose early in the morning and mustered the people. The Israelites hiked the 2,500 ft. climb as they **went up**. The famous quote, "Leaders lead," illustrates Joshua's position—**he and the elders of Israel** took point and went **before the people of Israel to Ai. All the fighting men who were with him.** They **went up and drew near before the city and encamped on the north side of Ai, with a ravine between them and Ai.**

Joshua planned what we'll call "The Strike Force" of **about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city.** These 5,000 men were **stationed** unseen by the men of Ai. They were too busy focusing on **the main encampment that was north of the city.** Joshua led the main encampment, what we'll call

"The Decoy Force." Finally, in order to protect the main encampment, "The Decoy Force," Joshua established a **rear guard west of the city.**

With these three groups, the plan was set. **As soon as the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the men of the city, hurried and went out early to the appointed place toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle.** Of course, the king **did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city.**

Joshua dipped, dived, ducked, and dodged **and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness.** The "head-fake" of the Decoy Force succeeded and **all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them. Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. They left the city open and pursued Israel.**

COMEBACKS OCCUR FOR THOSE WHO ARE READY

Joshua fought a *physical* war to take a *physical* land by slaying a *physical* enemy. Today, we fight a spiritual war against an unseen enemy to reclaim that which sin has corrupted. Our physical reality still matters, that's just not where the front-line of the war is today.

Perhaps you feel like you're already out of the fight because of the damage done by sin in your life. Maybe you've given up or given in—you don't even know why you're at this Bible study. Maybe you've done things you think the people sitting around you wouldn't believe. If that's you, it's time for a comeback.

How do you make a comeback? Like sports, you must ready yourself. Accurately assess the past, isolate the causes of the earlier defeat, and develop a winning strategy for the future. That means maximizing your strengths and minimizing your weaknesses.

Your strengths in the war are many. *First*, sitting in this study, you have soldiers around you who want to help you win. *Second*, you have a coach who can help lead you. *Third*, you have enormous power in God's Word in your hands. *Finally*, but probably most importantly, you have an offer for a relationship with the Creator of the Universe, purchased by the blood of Christ, and experienced through Holy Spirit in our lives (see Romans 5:1–5). If you don't have a relationship with God, today you can. If you do have a relationship with God, but you've been running from him, you can stop running and return to the Father who loves you (1 John 1:9).

We have an enemy in the war, but our God is greater. He's given us a battle plan, we just have to act on it. Are you ready?

