

THE DEFEAT AT AI
The High Cost of Sin
Joshua 7

Up to this point in the conquest the army **Joshua** led had *experienced only victory*. Unexpectedly **Israel** would next taste *defeat*. The possibility of defeat was the remotest thing from the **Israelites'** minds ...particularly after the triumph over **Jericho**. Yet God's people are never more vulnerable, never in greater danger, than right after they have won a great victory.

Ai was the next objective on **Israel's** path of conquest. It was smaller than **Jericho** but was at a strategic junction of two routes ascending from **Jericho** to the hill country around **Bethel**. Defeating **Ai** would also lead to the ultimate control of the main route running from north to south along the central highlands.

I. DISOBEDIENCE: (vs. 1)

The chapter opens with the ominous word **But**. The *greatness of victory* was soon replaced by the *despair of defeat*. And all this was because of the *disobedience of one man*. **Jericho** had been placed under God's **ban (Joshua 6:18)**...meaning that *everything living was to be put to death and valuable objects were to be dedicated to the Lord's treasury*. No **Israelite** was to help himself to the *plunder* ...but that temptation was too strong for one man...**Achan**.

Temptation vs. Testing...same Greek word.

God saw **Achan's** sin in taking some of the **things under the ban**, and because of it, **the anger of the Lord burned against the sons of Israel**...the entire nation (vs. 1).

Acted unfaithfully...literally means that they *broke faith*. The children of **Israel attacked a stronghold without the Lord**...they did it in the *flesh*.

- *The basic essence of sin is a spirit of independence* (I don't need God...or as a token, you may casual mention God to appear to be spiritual).
- *The basic essence of fellowship is dependence* (absolute surrender to the Lordship of Christ).
- *Sin is living the normal patterns of life...independent of God.*

II. DEFEAT: (vs. 2-5)

Unaware of **Achan's** disobedience and eager to take advantage of their first victory...**Joshua** made preparations for the next battle by sending *spies 10 miles northwest of Jericho to Ai*...which was **east of Bethel**...which was his normal pattern.

They returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up; only about two or three thousand men need go up to Ai; do not make all the people toil up there, for they are few (vs. 3)...It looked easy in man's eyes. So do *strongholds* in our lives. We think that they will be easy to conquer.

When the spies returned they spoke with *great confidence*. They said that **Ai** could easily be conquered with **only two or three thousand men** since **they are few (vs. 3)**.

On this occasion there is no mention of *prayer* and no evidence of *dependence* on God. Every time man's planning is developed without consulting God...man fails! **Joshua** and **Israel** went up against **Ai without prayer**...they used *man's* way...the *military* way.

Though smaller than **Jericho**, **Ai** was *well fortified* and her soldiers *well entrenched*. **Israel** was guilty of *underestimating* the strength of her enemy...and *overestimating* her own strength. It's a deadly error to underrate *the* enemy's power (vs. 2-4)...just as it's a deadly error to underrate *our* enemy's power.. the *devil*.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

~Ephesians 6:12

"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

~I Peter 5:8

This is exactly why believers today don't experience the *victorious Christian life*...and why so many suffer the consequences of *humiliating spiritual defeat*.

So only **about three thousand men from the people went up to Ai (vs. 4)**...where sadly, they *did not conquer*...but were *routed*.

The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them down on the descent (vs. 5). *Yesterday's victory* doesn't make a believer immune from *defeat today*. We must *continually depend* on the Lord for strength.

The hearts of the people melted and became as water (vs. 5)... **Joshua 2:11**. Even though this was Israel's *only defeat* in the *seven-year conquest* of Canaan...the significant matter was not the loss itself, or even the deaths of the 36 men. Israel was suddenly *vulnerable*. Had the Lord's help been withdrawn? Had His *hedge of protection* been removed? Had He removed His *hand* from them?

III. DISMAY: (vs. 6-9)

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads (vs. 6)...In keeping with ancient custom, Joshua and the elders *mourned*.

Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord God, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?" (vs. 7a)...In essences Joshua was blaming God for the defeat...even though it was Israel who had *sinned* and *disobeyed* God. Again, that's the *normal pattern of life*. We always want to *blame someone else* for our failures. Ie. *I am a victim*.

If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan (vs. 7b)... Self-pity! Looking *back* (**Numbers 11**) instead of looking *upward*.

Cut off our name (vs. 9)...*Pride...humiliation*. Joshua was more worried about their *reputation* in the eyes of the heathens in Canaan than he was for the *glory of God*.

IV. DIRECTIONS: (vs. 10-15)

Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things (vs. 11)...God explained the *cause of the defeat* and the *need for action*. The cause of the defeat at Ai *sin*. In His indictment God used an accumulation of *verbs*...beginning with the *general* and moving to

the specific: *sinned...transgressed My covenant...taken some things under the ban...stolen and deceived*.

Therefore, the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, for they have become accursed. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst (vs. 12)...Sin must be dealt with. You must go back and deal with the sin...*repent*...before you can go on with God.

Rise up! Consecrate the people and say, "Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, for thus the Lord, the God of Israel, has said, 'There are things under the ban in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you have removed the things under the ban from your midst'." (vs. 13)...

The Lord revealed the steps to be followed in the purging process. It begins with the instruction to *consecrate (purify) yourself* (vs. 13):

- Repent

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

~I John 1:9

"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

~Proverbs 28:13

- Remove the sin

"There are things under the ban in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you have removed the things under the ban from your midst" (vs. 13).

- Return...to God. Restore a *whole heart* for God. Do *God's work, God's way*. Make *restitution*.

V. DISCOVERY: (vs. 16-21)

All Israel was assembled to determine the offender.

Process of purging (vs. 16-18):

- Tribe of Judah
- Family of Zerahites
- Clan of Zabdi
- Person of Achan

God's wrath was poured out on **Israel** because of *one man...Achan*. But remember...*sin in the world* is the result of *one man...Adam*.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many...For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ...so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

~Romans 5:12, 15, 17, 21

Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I implore you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.” So Achan answered Joshua and said, “Truly, I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel...” (vs. 19-20a)...Joshua addressed Achan tenderly but firmly...exactly how we should confront sin. Achan's response was *straightforward* and *complete*. But even though he *confessed his sin* and *gave no excuse*...he never expressed *sorrow* or *grief* for disobeying God's order. Any *remorse* he felt was only *because he had gotten caught*.

Achan is a picture of *sin in the believer's life*. The Bible *doesn't teach* that God has made it impossible for the believer to sin...even as you move into victory in the abundant life. But the Bible *does teach*...while it is not impossible for you to sin...it is possible for you to not sin.

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

~I John 2:1

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

~I Corinthians 10:13

For the **unbeliever...sin is his nature**...it's *natural*. But for the **believer...sin is not his nature**...it's a *choice* he makes...he *chooses* to sin.

Achan said, this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it (vs. 20b-21)...Achan lays out his temptation that led to his sin.

These are the same tragic steps in the **Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6)** and with **David with Bathsheba (II Samuel 11:2-4)**.

Steps of sin:

“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

~James 1:14-15

- See something (*lust of the eyes...tempted*)
- Coveted it (*desired it...lust of the flesh*)
- Took it (*sin*)
- Concealed it (*hid it*)

VI. DEATH: (vs. 22-26)

God's Word can never be *disobeyed*...or even *rationalized* away...without penalty.

Since **Deuteronomy 24:16 prohibited the execution of children for the sins of their fathers**, it is evident that Achan's children must have *condoned* or *assisted* him in what he did.

“Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.”

~Deuteronomy 24:16

They raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day (vs. 26)...

The valley of Achor (vs. 26)... **Achor** means *trouble* or *disaster*. But because **Israel** was willing to deal with the sin problem, the **Lord's anger (vs. 1)** was turned from their *trouble* and *disaster* to once again leading them *to victory (chapter 8)*.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- **Sin has a ripple effect. It never affects just you. It affects everyone around you...affecting those closest to you the greatest.**
- **Sin always cost you more than you were willing to pay.**
- **Sin always takes you farther than you were wanting to go.**
- **Sin always keeps you in bondage longer than you wanted to stay.**

One final reminder...according to Scripture, **sin is punished to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20:6)**.