

## LIVE STRONG. FACING LIFE WITH FAITH

### Week 5 notes/Joshua 7/Faith and Failure

The Christian life will have mountain top experiences as well as valleys, but defeat in the Christian life requires careful examination. Joshua 7 contains two accounts of defeat that may seem independent of one another. Even though the two accounts are different in nature, they are indeed connected

Joshua 7:1 tells the reader something Joshua, Israel's leader, does not know. A man named Achan has stolen some of the items from Jericho that were under the ban. Achan is introduced to the reader through 5 family links. The writer is establishing Achan's connection to others.

#### I. Joshua's Neglect

(Joshua 7:2-5) The next city to conquer is Ai. It is a small outpost for the larger city of Bethel. Joshua sends two spies to gather information about the city. They come back with information but also a battle plan. It was not their job to suggest a battle plan. They tell Joshua he only needs to send a portion of the army to fight Ai. Ai is built on a tel (mountain) that is 1700 feet in elevation. The spies conclude that the entire nation does not need to get worn out scaling the tel to fight such a small army. Joshua considers what the spies say. He does not inquire of the Lord, He does not pray. He agrees with the spies and only sends 3000 soldiers to fight against Ai. The results are disastrous. Thirty –six Israelite soldiers are killed. The Israelite army runs in defeat. The people of Israel are filled with fear. It is Israel's first taste of defeat in the new land—and it is terrifying.

(Joshua 7:6-9) Joshua is perplexed and angry. He falls before the Ark of the Covenant and mourns. It is the first mention of the Ark in the battle against Ai. The Ark had gone before Israel crossing the Jordan and it had been with them as they marched around Jericho. But there is not mention of the Ark, the presence of God, being taken into battle against Ai.

Joshua prays for the first time in reference to Ai. It seems he is questioning the character, the plans, the purpose, and the reputation of God. Joshua seems to think there is something wrong with God. His prayer is filled with complaining and accusation.

Mark 4:35-41 is a familiar account. Jesus is in the boat with his disciples when a storm rages—but Jesus is asleep. It seems the very capable disciples try to manage on their own, after all Jesus is tired and asleep and they are expert fisherman, well acquainted with storms. But when the storm proves too much for their expertise, the disciples wake Jesus up and actually accuse him of not caring that they are perishing.

**When we have had past victories, we are prone to trust in our own abilities, but past victories are not adequate for future battles.** We can never take for granted that the Lord will work today in the same way He worked yesterday. We must seek Him daily.

Joshua never inquired, he never asked for God's perspective or God's plan. If Joshua had asked, God would have warned Joshua about Achan's sin. Joshua's neglect is at least in part responsible for the deaths of 36 soldiers. So how do we avoid spiritual defeat and the consequences of spiritual neglect? To live in the victory God intends for us, we must daily practice these three things.

1. **Humility.** *Humility can be defined as declaring my total dependence on Christ.* James 4:6 says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." The word *opposed* means God is in an aggressive position to come

against the person who is prideful. Pride is usurping God's authority. It is saying we know better than God and we are willing to push God's authority aside in order to do things our own way. God opposes pride because it is the sin of Satan, perpetrated on all mankind. Every sin has its roots in pride, God hates pride and He will come against it—even in the life of His children. James 4:10 gives the solution. We are to humble ourselves. We choose to be dependent on the Lord. Certainly, God can humble us, but He would rather that we willingly humble ourselves.

2. **Trust.** Trust is complete confidence, knowing the rug will not be pulled out from under us. Psalm 9:10, *"Those who know Thy name will put their trust in Thee."* To know God's name means to know His character, His nature, His heart. When we know God, we trust Him. He never lies, He never changes, and He never fails. We know Him, and ultimately trust Him, when we abide in His Word.
3. **Surrender.** Surrender means abandoned to Christ. The Apostle Paul often uses the Greek word *doulos*. It is translated *bond-servant*. It means *one who is in a permanent relationship of servitude, his will lost in the will of the master*. For a Christian, the greatest evidence of a surrendered life is prayer. Lack of prayer in the life of a Christian, is the greatest evidence of pride. 2 Chronicles 7:14 is written to Israel, but certainly there is application to the New Testament Christian. *"If My people who are called by My name shall humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* Present day application of this verse is **directed to the church**. The church is being called to humble themselves and pray and seek the face of God, not just the blessings of God. The church is being called to turn from their wicked ways! Then God will hear and forgive and heal...not their land, but their lives. We do not inherit a land like Israel did. We have inherited a life in Christ (Ephesians 1-3). It is our lives that are in need of healing.

If only Joshua had prayed, sin would have been exposed before defeat entered the picture. We must humble ourselves, trusting God enough to surrender our plans, our agenda, our desires, and our will to Him. When we are humble enough to pray, the Holy Spirit will use the Word of God to expose our sin, and adjust us before we experience defeat.

God gives Joshua instruction in Verse 10-15.

- 1) *Get up and stop complaining!* Notice God speaks about sin in the plural tense. He sees Israel as a whole, not just one guilty individual. Verse 12 however, is directly to Joshua. Joshua must deal with the problem because Joshua is the leader. It is a strong word to us to pray for our church/spiritual leaders. They are held to a high standard and they carry a high and holy responsibility.
- 2) *Consecrate the people.* It is that word we saw in Joshua 3. Qadesh. It means to make clean. For Israel it was an outward sign of an inward condition.
- 3) *Cast lots to find the guilty individual.* Joshua calls the people together and casts lots, selecting first the tribe, then the clan, then the family, then the individual.

Why did God make them go through this process? Why didn't He just give Joshua the name of the man? Because the entire nation needed to re-examine themselves. They had collectively experienced defeat, and they collectively needed to experience consecration (Personal holiness.) Joshua 7:17-18 is interesting. The writer wants us to see that Achan is connected to his family, his clan, his tribe, and his nation. His sin does not just affect him. It affects everyone.

## II. **Achan's Sin (Joshua 7:20-26)**

1. Achan speaks in the singular. "I have sinned." God spoke in the plural. "They (Israel) have sinned."

2. Achan reclassified the sin. He called the items he took as spoils. They were in fact ban. Spoils are the goods God will eventually allow Israel to keep after a battle. Ban means everything belongs to the Lord and He alone decides what to do with it.
3. Achan saw and then coveted. It was not a sin to see the stuff. Everyone saw it. But Achan took a long enough look for coveting to set in. He was not resolute. His mind was not anchored. (James 1:8)
4. He thought he could get away with it. (Numbers 32:23)
5. Achan hid the items. He wanted something so badly but he could never fully enjoy it. He had to hide it in order to keep it.
6. By taking items under the ban, Achan was disregarding the goodness of the Lord.

If Achan had waited two days, he could have taken the spoils of war from Ai (Joshua 8:27). He settled for less than the best. Warren Wiersbe says, "Unbelief is always willing to settle for less than God's best." Achan proved by his actions he did not trust God. Somehow God was holding out on him and he must take for himself what God would not give him. We disregard God's provision for us and His goodness to us when we want and then take something outside the will of God. Listen carefully! Anything we must conceal or hide in order to continue in, is sin. Any relationship, habit, plan, or place we must lie about and deceive others in order to maintain, is a sin. I am not talking about wise discretion; I am talking about lying in order to hang on to sin.

7. Achan suffered severe personal consequences for his sin that he could not foresee. Likewise, we can choose our sin but we cannot choose the consequences.
8. Achan's sin had unintentional cooperate consequences for both Israel and his family. For Israel, 36 men died, the people became afraid, and God's reputation would be questioned by the enemy. The effects on his family however, were dire as well. Those closest to him were stoned and burned with him. Deuteronomy 24:16 sheds light on the death of his family. God gave His law to Moses and Deuteronomy is very clear. An innocent family member cannot be killed for the sins of a guilty family member. God does not break His own law. Therefore, we must assume that Achan family knew about the stolen items. They may have been accessories after the fact, but they knew, and they lied and deceived with him and for him. Their guilt stand on its own. Sin had infected the entire family.

The warning is clear. Be alert! Sin looks appealing and it has a promise of no consequences, at least no lasting consequences. But dear one, there is death in sin—death of a marriage, a family, a friendship, a close relationship with God. There is death to peace of mind and joyful living. There is death to living in freedom. There are consequences we can never foresee and we cannot avoid. Ian Thomas said, "*Sin will take you farther than you ever thought you would go. It will keep you longer than you ever thought you would stay. And it will cost you more than you ever thought you would pay.*"

The solution to overt sin is the same as the solution to neglect. While the consequences are different, the answer is the same. Humble yourself. Trust the Lord. Surrender to Him.

### III. Why is this passage so difficult for us to understand?

1. **We misunderstand God's love for us.** We have relegated God's love to mush when in actuality it is a strong, protective, rightfully jealous love. Because God loves us so much, He equally hates sin. Sin harms us, therefore God hates it. You don't have to be parent very long to agree with its truth. We hate the very things that harm those we love. Calvary is not just a demonstration of God's love for us. It is also a demonstration of God's hatred for sin.

2. **We misunderstand the great cost of sin.** Sin cost God greatly. The wages of sin has always been death. While Achan and his family paid with their lives and it seems brutal to us, we see four times in Scripture where God acts swiftly to deal with sin. All four times, God is doing a new thing among His people and His people need to understand the seriousness of sin from the onset. (Leviticus 10, Joshua 7, 2 Samuel 6, Acts 5) God had already provided a plan for yearly atonement for sin. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would slay a spotless lamb and sprinkle its blood on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The blood was a covering for the people's sin and the priest was the mediator between holy God and the people. But in the New Testament, Jesus is both the high priest and the spotless lamb. (Hebrew 9:11-14, 22). God provided the perfect sacrifice in His son, Jesus. A once and for all shedding of His blood to forgive our sins. The cost was great and we must not ever take it lightly.
3. **We misunderstand the danger of sin.** Sin holds nothing but death. We cannot rename it and make it more palatable. We cannot co-exist with it. We must live alert so that we do not fall into the trap of the tempter. Sin should make us ache not only for ourselves but for those we love most, for indeed sin has a generational effect on our families, our churches, and our nation.
4. **We misunderstand the concept of community.** Here in America, we think like Greeks, or Westerners. We see the individual person as the most important element of society. The Far East and Middle Eastern culture thinks differently. They view the family and the village or tribe as the most important. They think corporately while we often think individually. The Israelites operated as a unit. God did not view them as a large group of individuals. He viewed them as one nation. Therefore He uses plurals when speaking of sin. He holds the nation accountable. While Achan and his family suffered the consequences as a family unit, the entire nation was required to consecrate themselves. The Apostle Paul gives us keen insight into this idea of community in 1 Corinthians 12 when he describes the church as the body of Christ. The body is made of individual members, but it functions as a whole. The point is that sin affects the entire body not just the individual sinner. While the other members of the body do not suffer the same consequences as the individual sinner, we must realize that the body does indeed suffer when sin is present. Personally, I believe the church in America is missing out on a mighty move of God because we have chosen as individuals to embrace personal sin. Repentance, both individual and corporate, always precedes revival.

#### IV. **So where is the hope?**

So far in Joshua there are two piles of stones: one at Gilgal to remind them of God's great wonders and another in Joshua 7 to remind them of the severity of sin. The Valley of Achor where they stoned and burned Achan's family, would seem to be a constant reminder of defeat and yet that valley is mentioned two other times in the Old Testament. Isaiah 65:10 says the Valley of Achor will be a place of rest and Hosea 2:14-15 says the Valley of Achor will be a door of hope.

God never intends for us to dwell in the defeat of the Valley of Achor. There is no condemnation for the believer in Christ. (Romans 8:1). God is a redeeming God. He can use the defeat of the past for future victories. In fact Joshua 8:6 says that when Israel went back to fight Ai, they used the past defeat as a decoy to win the battle. God does that for us too if we let Him. If we confess our sin, trust Him to forgive us, and surrender ourselves to Him, He uses everything in our lives for His glory (Romans 8:28). God does not want us to dwell in the Valley of Achor. He wants us to live abundantly, living in freedom. God is not obligated to restore all we have lost to sin and disobedience, but He redeems. He buys back and makes new. This is our hope in Christ—a hope that anchors us. (Hebrews 6:19)

