

Lesson 9 - 25 December 2011

Israel's Battles at Ai

Lesson Scope: Joshua 7 and 8.

Lesson Focus

With the conquest of Jericho, the long-promised land of Canaan seemingly lay open before the children of Israel. They were ready to take on the next city in their path. Following the procedure used at Jericho, Joshua sent spies to Ai. Concluding hastily that Ai presented an easy target; he made plans to send a small contingent of soldiers to take the city. The marvelous victory at Jericho had possibly given Israel a sense of invincibility. No outward signs warned of the impending trouble at Ai.

The covenant relationship of Israel to God was essential to their conquest of Canaan. Unknown to Joshua, sin had broken this vital link to the power and blessing of God. No longer was God with them as at Jericho. Though successfully concealed from men, the disobedience of Achan halted the progress of the whole group. Not until the sin was exposed and punished could God again bless His people.

In this lesson be sure to see the emphasizes that sin was the cause for the defeat at Ai. It is true that the Israelites appear overconfident in this account, and that may have been the reason they failed to ask direction of the Lord. But God clearly identified Achan's sin as the reason for the defeat.

Hidden sin hinders God's work among His people. Dealing with sin in God's way restores His blessing and opens the door to victory.

Lesson Aim: To see the cause and the remedy for defeat.

Theme Verse: Joshua 7:12. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

Lesson Text:

Consternation

Joshua 7:1-6 ¹ But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel. ² And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which *is* beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. ³ And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; *and* make not all the people to labour thither; for they *are but* few. ⁴ So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. ⁵ And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them *from* before the gate *even* unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. ⁶ And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

Joshua 7:10-13 ¹⁰ And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? ¹¹ Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put *it* even among their own stuff. ¹² Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. ¹³ Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, *There is* an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.

Confession

Joshua 7:19-25 ¹⁹ And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide *it* not from me. ²⁰ And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: ²¹ When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, be-

hold, they *are* hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it. ²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, *it was* hid in his tent, and the silver under it. ²³ And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. ²⁴ And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. ²⁵ And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

Conquest

Joshua 8:1 ¹ And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land:

Joshua 8:28-30 ²⁸ And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, *even* a desolation unto this day. ²⁹ And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, *that remaineth* unto this day. ³⁰ Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Beal,

Questions for Study

Consternation

1. Was the Lord rebuking Joshua for prostrating himself before the ark?
2. Why does self-confidence present a special temptation after a great victory?
3. How does the sin of an individual affect the church?

Confession

4. Why did not the confession of Achan save his life?
5. How does confession of sin bring glory to God?
6. What is the cure for a covetous spirit?

Conquest

7. Enumerate the blessings of a restored relationship with God.

Analyzing the Passage

The Hebrew word for accursed, mentioned eight times in the lesson scope, is translated elsewhere as devoted or dedicated. The spoils of Jericho were devoted to the Lord as the first fruits of the conquest of Canaan. The silver and gold and vessels of brass and iron were to be consecrated into the treasury (Joshua 6:17) and the city burned. Achan appropriated for himself those things that had been dedicated to God.

The spies underestimated the size of Ai. They recommended sending two or three thousand men against a city that had possibly six thousand men (Joshua 8:25). Ultimately, the Israelite defeat resulted from disobedience, but the spies were obviously overconfident.

Dissembled (Joshua 7:11) connotes acting a lie in concealing the stolen goods.

In admonishing Achan to give glory to God (Joshua 7:19), Joshua was adjuring him to tell the truth (compare Leviticus 22:32; Numbers 20:12).

The name Achor means "trouble." The great heap of stones in this valley stood as a mute witness to the awful consequences of sin.

Following the victory at Ai, Joshua led the Israelites north to Mount Ebal where he erected an altar in obedience to the command given in Deuteronomy 27. In the narrow valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, the blessings and cursings contained in the Law were recited to the people assembled on either mountain.

Principles and Applications

Consternation

1. Individual sin affects the whole group (Joshua 7:1). Only one soldier in the Israelite army disobeyed the command to destroy everything in the city of Jericho. But the sin of Achan implicated the whole group. Sin is desperately contagious; therefore it needed to be purged from the group. Today, each church member is responsible to maintain the purity of the body of Christ. We must not imagine that our actions are inconsequential. In fact, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, even our thoughts and attitudes need to be sanctified.

2. Disobedient people become estranged from God and are the objects of His wrath (Joshua 7:1). In sinning, man removes himself from the sphere of God's protection and blessing. The justice of God cannot countenance sin. Contemporary Christianity's portrayal of God as an indulgent father

produces people who do not fear to disobey. A holy fear and an understanding of His wrath on sin are essential for Christian victory.

3. Self-confidence leads to failure (Joshua 7:2-3). Though the city of Ai was small, the inhabitants were too strong for Israel without God's help. How many times has a victory caused us to believe in our own strength to face the foe? Do we feel the need of God's help only in larger matters? Self-confidence militates against the vigilance and reliance on God that is required for victory.

4. Sin takes a toll on people in time and eternity (Joshua 7:5). Sin brings shame and confusion. God withdraws His presence. Often innocent people such as family members suffer. Eternity brings the ultimate punishment for unconfessed sin—everlasting separation from God.

5. Turning to God in sorrow and repentance is essential for overcoming defeat (Joshua 7:6). Sorrow itself is insufficient; godly sorrow leads to repentance. It is not enough to confess sin; repentance means forsaking it. This entails an abhorrence of sin. Godly sorrow precludes any glorying in past sins.

6. Sin can be overcome only by taking personal responsibility in rooting it out (Joshua 7:10-13). God is faithful in bringing conviction and exposing sin. As in the case of Achan, the task of exposing a trespass sometimes devolves on leaders. When sin is committed, personal responsibility is required to deal with the problem. First, confession of sin must be made to God. When others are involved, the issue must be cleared with them as well.

Confession

7. Identifying and confessing sin is essential for victory over sin (Joshua 7:19-21). I saw; I coveted; I took—this is ever the ensnaring course of sin. Achan identified the root cause of his sin when he spoke of the spoils of Jericho. God had clearly stated that all things in Jericho were dedicated to Him; they were not spoils of war. Achan revealed that he did not take the prohibition of God seriously. We likewise are in a hazardous position if we attempt to soften the commands of God. The re-labeling of sin by society today poses a subtle threat to our understanding of sin. God's definition of sin is unequivocal and final.

8. Sin must be thoroughly dealt with to move forward in victory (Joshua 7:23, 25). In this account, retribution was swift and severe. But all was done in an orderly manner. Even though Achan confessed, the hidden arti-

cles were brought forth to corroborate his testimony. The era of grace should not cause us to think that God has moderated His hatred for sin. On the contrary, Hebrews 2:3 asks, "How shall we escape?"

Conquest

9. God will help those who have taken care of the sin problem (Joshua 8:1). "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). We can move forward in confidence when sin has been dealt with. When God forgives our sin, He removes it from the record.

10. Worship is the result of hearts in tune with God (Joshua 8:30). Sin erects a barrier between God and man. True worship can flow only from a heart that has experienced redemption. When sin has been confessed and forgiven, worship is a spontaneous expression of adoration.

Important Teachings

1. Individual sin affects the whole group (Joshua 7:1).

2. Disobedient people become estranged from God and are the objects of His wrath (Joshua 7:1).

3. Self-confidence leads to failure (Joshua 7:2-3).

4. Sin takes a toll on people in time and eternity (Joshua 7:5).

5. Turning to God in sorrow and repentance is essential for overcoming defeat (Joshua 7:6).

6. Sin can be overcome only by taking personal responsibility in rooting it out (Joshua 7:10-13).

7. Identifying and confessing sin is essential for victory over sin (Joshua 7:19-21).

8. Sin must be thoroughly dealt with to move forward in victory (Joshua 7:23, 25).

9. God will help those who have taken care of the sin problem (Joshua 8:1).

10. Worship is the result of hearts in tune with God (Joshua 8:30).

Answers to Questions

1. Was the Lord rebuking Joshua for prostrating himself before the ark?

No, it was right for Joshua to demonstrate his dismay in this manner. But the servant of God may not remain in a position of defeat and helplessness. There are things that God will not do for man. Joshua was responsible to

direct the process of uncovering the sin and dealing with it.

2. Why does self-confidence present a special temptation after a great victory?

The tendency of man is to relax after victory. Man is tempted to take credit to himself for victory. The sense of dependence upon God is more keenly felt in the midst of conflict than in the flush of victory.

3. How does the sin of an individual affect the church?

We are all members of one body. Just as a diseased member causes fatigue throughout our natural body, so sin has a weakening affect in the church. Sin gives occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. Sin may offend one who is young in the faith. It may discourage others. It is leaven that may embolden another to violate the voice of his conscience.

4. Why did not the confession of Achan save his life?

He had partaken of the accursed things of Jericho. In Joshua 6:18, God had warned that those who partook of the accursed things would themselves be accursed. Therefore, Achan needed to share the fate of the accursed things.

5. How does confession of sin bring glory to God?

Confession of sin is a recognition of the justice of God and the immutability of His commands. In confessing sin, man owns the shame of his failure and acknowledges the righteousness of God.

6. What is the cure for a covetous spirit?

To covet is to long for the forbidden. Ever since man was placed in the Garden of Eden, Satan has been tantalizing man with the joys to be had by partaking of forbidden fruit. To be cured of covetousness, we need to accept by faith that God has withheld these things from us for our good. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11).

7. Enumerate the blessings of a restored relationship with God.

Power for victory is available, unity is achieved among the people of God, and the Name of God is vindicated. God's people are prepared to worship.

Summarizing the Lesson

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" (Hebrews 2:1-3).

Research Guide

1. Study the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, and note the similarities to this lesson. In both cases, there was deceit that God revealed to the leaders. Both incidents took place at the beginning of a new era for the people of God, and both were punished severely. The fate of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrates that though the dispensation changed from Law to grace, God's attitude toward sin remains constant.

2. Look at Deuteronomy 27, and observe how Joshua carried out those directives (Joshua 8:30-35).