

Joshua Lesson 9 – Defeat in the Land of Victory (Joshua 7)

I. INTRODUCTION

- Moses described Canaan as “a land of hills and valleys” (Deut. 11:11). Not just geography—this reflects Israel’s spiritual experience.
- By faith we claim God’s promises, but life includes peaks of victory and valleys of discouragement.
- Joshua 6 ends in triumph, but Joshua 7 begins with “**HOWEVER**”—a word that signals a tragic shift.

II. A DISOBEDIENT SOLDIER

1. The Sinner (Joshua 7:1, 20–21)

- Achan (Achar — “Trouble”) takes what belongs to the Lord.
- Thirty-six Israelites die in the defeat at Ai.
- One person’s sin can have devastating consequences for many.
- Biblical examples:
 - Abraham’s lie (Gen. 12)
 - David’s census (2 Sam. 24)
 - Jonah’s rebellion that endangered the sailors
- Hebrews 12:15 warns that a single “root of bitterness” can defile many.
- 1 Corinthians 5 — sin tolerated inside the body affects the entire body.
- Israel is one people; God dwelt among them. A defiled camp disrupted their relationship with Him.
- The same is true in the church today (1 Cor. 12:26).

2. The Sin

- God commanded that all spoils of Jericho be devoted to Him and placed in the treasury.
- Achan confesses: “**I saw... I coveted... I took.**”
- James 1:14–15 — desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and sin gives birth to death.
- Examples of temptation followed wrongly:
 - Eve listened to the serpent
 - David surrendered to the flesh
 - Achan coveted worldly riches

Achan's Four Mistakes

1. **Looking a second time** — temptation grows when revisited.
 2. **Changing terminology** — calling God's devoted things "spoils."
 - Isaiah 5:20 — Woe to those who call evil good.
 3. **Coveting the world's riches** — imagination fuels sinful desire (Wiersbe).
 4. **Thinking he could hide his sin** — buried under his tent.
 - Numbers 32:23 — "Your sin will find you out."
 - Hebrews 4:13 — nothing is hidden from God.
- Achan sinned despite all God had done: wilderness care, Jordan crossing, victory at Jericho, covenant renewal.
 - He could not even enjoy what he stole—greater blessings were coming.

III. A DEFEATED ARMY

Joshua 7:2–5

- Joshua sends men to scout Ai; they recommend only a small force.
- Israel walks by sight, not faith.
- **No prayer** and overconfidence lead them into presumption.
- Spies give advice from a human viewpoint, not divine direction.
- God later commands: "Take **all** the troops" (8:1).
- Pride leads to defeat (Prov. 16:18).
- Without God, 36 men die and the army flees.
- In contrast, with God, one soldier could chase 1,000 (Deut. 32:30).

IV. A DISCOURAGED LEADER

1. Remorse (7:6)

- Joshua and the elders tear their clothes, fall before the ark, mourn, and seek answers.
- Israel now "melts" in fear just as the Canaanites once did.
- Humility came **after** the battle.
- The ark—carried at Jericho—was not present at Ai.
- Sin kept God's presence at a distance.

2. Reproach (7:7–9)

- Joshua's prayer resembles earlier Israelite complaints:
 - At the Red Sea, in hunger or thirst, at Kadesh Barnea.
- Morrison: Joshua's prayer sounds as if he blames God.

- God was not responsible for the defeat, but allowed it to expose sin.
- Defeat reveals the true state of our hearts and tests faith.

3. Repentance (7:8–9)

- The central issue: God's glory has been diminished among the nations.
- Repentance is necessary to restore God's honor.
- Israel's reputation is never more important than God's name.

4. Rebuke (7:10–15)

- God tells Joshua to stop mourning and take action.
- Israel sinned; Israel must deal with the sin.
- They had crossed God's clear boundaries by stealing and deceiving.
- The nation had been sanctified before crossing the Jordan—now they must be sanctified again.
- God would expose the guilty party.

V. THE SINNER DISCOVERED

1. Investigation (7:16–18)

- God's methodical process:
Tribe → Clan → Family → Household → Man
- Judah → Zerahites → Zabdi → Achan.
- Nothing can be hidden from God.
- As the circle narrowed, fear and anger likely intensified—especially among families of the 36 slain soldiers.

2. Confession (7:19–23)

- Joshua urges Achan to “give glory to God” — swear truthfully.
- Achan admits he sinned and describes his actions.
- Messengers uncover the stolen items under his tent.
- The items are displayed before the Lord.

3. Judgment (7:24–26)

- Achan, his family, and all possessions are taken to the Valley of Achor.
- Old Testament law prevented punishing innocent family members; Achan's family was complicit.
- Biblical parallels of immediate divine judgment:
 - Nadab & Abihu
 - Uzzah
 - Ananias & Sapphira

- The punishment warned all Israel to take God's Word seriously.
- Achan ("Troubler") became the troubler of Israel—now removed.
- God later transforms the Valley of Achor:
 - It becomes a "door of hope" in the future Messianic Kingdom.
- God can take sin and death and bring hope and joy.
- The heap of stones stands as a memorial of judgment; Gilgal stands as evidence of blessing and obedience.

VI. MOVING FORWARD

- Israel faced two discouraging days, but renewal was coming.
- In Christ, no defeat is permanent and no failure is beyond God's grace.