

# ***Joshua: Walking by Faith, Growing in Grace***

*Achan*

Joshua 7:1-26

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HDBC

Some of life's most important lessons are learned not in the thrill of victory, but in the agony of defeat. No one likes to lose. But sometimes, **out of the ashes of defeat** principles and truths are learned that will thrust a person or a nation to even greater victories.

And so it was for the Hebrews as they moved beyond the miraculous victory over Jericho. With that highly fortified city destroyed, they were confident beyond imagination. Nothing would be able to stop them. They would race through the land. The warriors whose families were waiting on the eastern side of the Jordan River would not have to wait long. Their husbands, fathers and sons would be home in no time.

Then they came to the small town of Ai. Ai was a little town about 12 miles west of Jericho. It was on the main north-south highway through Canaan. That gave it some strategic value.

As quickly as their confidence soared at Jericho, it plummeted at Ai. They came crashing from the mountain peak of victory to the valley floor of despair. Joshua chapter 7 is a **reality check**. It is a clear reminder that some things are still more important to God than victory. I believe this is the only record of defeat found in the book of Joshua.

## **1. The Sin (1)**

Notice the first word of this chapter. Not the first time that this word is used in the book, but here it is incredibly significant. **It is a word of contrast. It denotes a change.** This is a warning to all believers who have just experienced a great victory. The joys of that victory can evaporate quickly into defeat and despair. That first word indicates that something has changed. All is not the same.

In a very direct way the writer declares that the people of sinned, for Achan has taken some of the things under the ban. This has resulted in the anger of the Lord burning against Israel.

### **Two things to note:**

**First**, **One man's sin is apparently affecting God's view of the entire nation**. No man is an island. We do not live in a vacuum. What you do affects others in more ways that you can possibly imagine.

**Second**, the writer is giving us an explanation of the unfolding events even before describing them. He wants it very clear that there is a reason for the debacle that he was about to describe.

**Acted unfaithfully** translates a Hebrew word that was used to describe **a wife's adultery**. It was **a betrayal of trust** that existed between two parties. Achan's sin was simply a personal matter between one man and God, but it was also corporate. His sin broke the covenant between God and Israel.

## **2. The Setback (2-5)**

Joshua sent spies. Their recommendation was to send an army of two or three thousand. That would more than take care of the problem. There is something conspicuously missing from their report. Previously, the spies offered a favorable and confident report. But in that case their confidence was in **God's ability to give the city of Jericho** into their hands. In this case, it seems that **God was not a part of the equation**.

They were soundly defeated. Chased back to their camp like whipped puppies. Thirty-six men died that day. That may not sound like many casualties. But compare it to the number killed in the taking of Jericho. None. There were thirty-six families with someone missing around their tables that night. Thirty-six beds would lie empty. Some dads, some husbands, some brothers, sons, uncles. **They lost courage. Just like that, the momentum shifted.**

On the surface this may seem to be just another one of those rare times when the underdog defeats the favorite. Let's face it. Most of us like it when the little guy, the underdog overcomes the odds and wins. **David killing Goliath. Rocky going the distance with Creed? 1980 USA Hockey Team taking down the mighty Soviets in Lake Placid?** Those are the events that make history and create legends.

But not this time. This is not about the underdog overcoming the bad guy. **This is not about the army of Ai. This is about the people of Israel.**

It would have been interesting to debrief the defeated soldiers. They would have had no more clue about what happened than Joshua. How could they be defeated by the small village of Ai? They would have no answer.

**If you interviewed the Arab nations of Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq immediately after Israel's war for independence in 1948 they would be clueless to explain how the little nation of Israel had not only held its own but had actually defeated their invading armies.**

The two scenarios are not identical. But there is a common denominator in them. In each one **there is the obvious work of God**. In both cases God was reaching down and causing a certain outcome. In both cases the outcome was more than simply one side having a better strategy, better army, better weapons. And in his heart, Joshua must have known that. Look at his reaction.

### **3. The Search (6-9)**

Joshua did the right thing. Rather than trying to analyze the defeat, he recognized it as a symptom of a deeper and more profound problem. The only way to find that was on his knees before the Lord. He knew where to get the answer.

Notice three things about Joshua's prayer

### **1) It was offered in humility (6)**

His actions and posture demonstrated that he was willing to fully humble himself before God. This was not the time to remain dignified, to save face, to present a strong front. It was time to lay it all on the altar and yield to the Lord. **That's the kind of leaders we need over this nation. It's the kind of leaders churches need, cities need, schools need, families need.**

### **2) It was emotional and honest (7)**

**Reflected a sense of doubt.** Maybe this was a mistake.

*If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan.*

In fact Joshua's words were stronger than regret. He was actually blaming God for this defeat. He was falling into the footsteps of those who had complained that God should have left them in Egypt. It was God's fault. BTW, this goes all the way back to Eden, when Adam hinted that it was God's fault for giving him the woman.

This is not what Joshua needed to be thinking. This is like saying, "If only we had been content to stay outside of God's blessing?"

### **Reflected the reality of defeat (8)**

They'd been beaten. The survivors were running for their lives. Rather than standing like warriors, empowered by God, they ran for cover.

### **Reflected a fear of the future (9a)**

Joshua recognized that this would embolden the other nations. He was concerned about their future battles and he was willing to admit it to God.

### **3) It was properly focused (9)**

At least that is true of the finish. That is the way to get the attention of God. Pray in such a way that you demonstrate concern for His name and glory.

#### 4. The Answer (10-15)

God answered the prayer, explaining to Joshua that there was a very good reason for the defeat. There is sin in the camp and this must be dealt with. Until it is, the Lord would not be with them. They would be on their own.

The seriousness of Achan's action is seen in the progression of words for sin in verse 11.

**Sinned** – General word for sin. Hata.

**Transgressed** – Abar. Literally, crossed over the line.

There is an interesting play on words. Joshua, in his prayer, said it was God's fault for causing them to **cross over** the Jordan. God says it is your fault because you have **crossed over** my covenant. Same word.

God then gave Joshua clear instructions on how to proceed. Verse 13.

##### 1) Consecration (13)

The people were to get their hearts right. It would be a night of soul-searching. Each person would be examining his own heart to make sure he had not violated the will of God. I wonder if this was also a time when God wanted Achan to voluntarily confess his sins and come forth?

##### 2) Clarification (14)

The next day they would discover the sinner. I wonder if Achan was able to sleep that night? I wonder what the conversation was like around that table?

##### 3) Purification (15)

The guilty person would be destroyed, along with his possessions and family. This sounds cruel. This was a sign that God not only meant business about clearing the land of the ungodly Canaanites, but also of keeping the Hebrews clear of sin within the camp.

*A disgraceful thing* – Nebala – denotes disorderly and unruly action in breaking a custom. Behaving treacherously toward God.

## 5. The Obedience (16-26)

They did exactly as God directed. Achan was selected. Note the process. It must have been unnerving for Achan and his family as the spotlight kept getting closer and closer to them. I wonder, at what point did they realize they were in deep trouble. Ultimately, it became clear that he was culprit.

Joshua asked for a confession. At this point, Achan had been caught. There was no point in trying to deceive any longer. Listen to his confession in verse 20.

*I have sinned against the Lord . . .when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold. . .then I coveted them and took them. . . and behold they are concealed.*

Here we find the typical path to sin.

**I saw, I coveted, I took them and I hid them.**

They recovered the stolen goods. Brought them along with Achan, his family and his possessions and stoned them to death. Burning their possessions. Covered the them with a pile rocks. Because the law of God was clear that innocent family members were not to be punished for the sins of their relatives (Deut. 24:16), it is safe to assume that Achan's entire family were involved in the sin.

## Lessons from this chapter

### 1. After a great victory, be very alert.

That is when we are most vulnerable. This is when we are most susceptible to pride. We tend to humble ourselves after we fail. If we humbled ourselves after every victory, maybe those failures were be fewer,.

## 2. The impact of sin is often wider than we imagine.

When I sin or you sin, it touches more than just you or I. Never underestimate the amount of damage one man's sin can do. **Abraham's disobedience in Egypt almost cost him his wife. David's disobedience in taking a census of the people led to the death of 70,000 people. Jonah's sin of running from God almost caused a ship to sink. Churches can also be impacted by the sin of one or a few.** This is why Paul was so adamant that the church in Corinth discipline the unrepentant man in their fellowship.

## 3. God's mercy is an awe-inspiring thing.

When we see the judgment of God in such a graphic way, it points to the ugliness of sin, the seriousness of sin, the pure evil that accompanies every sin against a holy God.

I am so glad God does every sinner with the swiftness that he judged Achan and his family. Even with them, there was time for confession and repentance. Instead, they chose to cover it up, to hide it, to keep it. That is what led to their judgment.

Why does God not always judge sinners so quickly and directly? The simple answer is **mercy**. God is giving time for confession and repentance.

Keep one final thing in mind. If the image of Achan and his family being executed for their sins is repulsive to you, remember Jesus. Remember Calvary. Remember the cross. Remember that the wrath of God for your sins and mine were placed upon Jesus. He suffered more than Achan, for He suffered not for His sins but for the sins of others. And He did so because of His great love for us.

God's judgment is fearful, dreadful, and terrifying.

God's mercy is rich, incomprehensible, and satisfying.