

SONG:
CLOSE:

Defeat at Ai – A Defeat By Sin

Joshua Series: 10 of 18

TEXT: Joshua 7:11-12

AIM: To encourage the believer to advance in the Christian life.

INTRODUCTION:

A. Joshua and the nation of Israel had just experienced a tremendous victory at Jericho.

It was in chapter 6, under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ, who as Israel's Leader and *Captain of the Host* (5:14) Jericho fell. After its collapse the nation of Israel now lifts up their eyes and looks down the road to a small city by the name of Ai. As a nation they determined to proceed and take the Promised Land in obedience to the Lord's command.

- **PLEASE REMEMBER**, in the possessing of the land of Canaan there is a PICTURE and TYPE of the believer possessing that spiritual maturity and blessing that God says is **OUR INHERITANCE**.
- Just as there were enemies to overcome in the land of Canaan, there are also spiritual enemies that stand in our path, which **MUST** be overcome if we are to receive, the blessings, which God says, are ours.
- God, *according to His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and Godliness* through Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:3), but we are to *reckon* the reality of these things in our on lives by application!

It is now evident, that God was using geographical factors to aid Israel in taking the Promised Land of Canaan. God's military strategy was to cut across the countryside and divide the land. By so doing, Israel would be on top of the hill country and in control of the central ridge of hills that ran to the west – effectively driving a wedge between the northern and southern sections of the Canaan. Israel would then be able to engage the armies of the south in battle, before hitting the more remote enemy in the north.

With Jericho conquered in **Chap. 6**, the way of ascent into these mountains was opened except for another fortress—**Ai**—that stood at the foot of the ascent of these steep hills. If Israel were to capture the hill country, the defeat of Jericho was not enough; they certainly had to take Ai.

However, **chapter 7** opens with the ominous word "**BUT.**" **Joshua experiences a setback in this battle because of a transgression concerning the accursed thing.**

B. The gladness of victory is replaced by the gloom of defeat.

This reversal occurred as result of the violation of God's order with the **DISOBEDIENCE** of **ONE** man – Achan. Jericho was placed under God's ban. Every living thing was to be put to death and the valuable objects were to be dedicated to the Lord's treasury in the temple.

No Israelite soldier was to help himself to any booty. This proved too great a temptation to Achan, who stole that which belonged to God and hid it in his tent.

God saw Achan's sin and His anger burned against the whole nation. He considered them collectively responsible and withheld His blessing and presence from them in battle until the matter was made right. In fact, it is apparent that Israel's history would have ended here at Ai in chapter 7, if God's anger were not appeased. **SEE vs. 12.**

The Defeat at Ai **WAS NOT** a defeat by superior forces or superior technology, but it was a **Defeat** caused by sinful **DISOBEDIENCE**.

Verse 1 introduces our problem >> **READ.**

The rest of the chapter develops on the bases of that there are 6 things to see in this chapter:

1. The Determination of Joshua & Israel to Move/Go Forward.
2. The Defeat of Israel IN Battle that Followed Achan's Sin.
3. The Discouragement of Joshua & Questioning of Defeat.
4. The Directions From God.
5. The Discovery of Sin in the camp.
6. The Destruction of Achan and all his family.

I. THE DETERMINATION OF JOSHUA & ISRAEL TO MOVE/GO FORWARD – 7:2,3

1st It Was Right For Them to Determine to Go Further Into the Land.

1. It was right for them to take the initiative and make a determination that Ai had to be taken.
2. It was right for them to obey God and go into the land as He had commanded back in 1:11 << READ

2nd It Was Right For Joshua to be Sending Spies Out into the land – 2:1

1. Joshua previously had sent spies to secretly spy out Jericho. Seemingly God found no fault found with him doing it at that time. AND there is no reason to suggest otherwise now.
2. There was no sin or lack of faith involved in sending in the spies – It was a good strategic idea.
3. It may surprise some, but God has given us brains to think with!
 - a. It was not an insult to God that we study to learn more about our foes.
 - b. Israel knew that the victory was give by God; they also knew that they were the players who would have to make victory a reality.

3rd It is Entirely Right For Us to Determine To Advance In the Christian Life.

Just as Israel sought to advance further and possess all that God said He had given them, it is proper for us to advance and claim the promises He has given us concerning our Christian life. Victory is ours—all we have to do is be the player who will make it a reality!

1. After we have experienced one victory in battle, it is proper for us to determine to advance further.
2. Nobody is to be standing still in the Christian life.
If we aren't going forward, we are sliding backward.

THERE IS NO STAGNATION – IT IS ONLY ADVANCEMENT or RETREAT!

3. When a spiritual foe is defeated – we are to saddle up and go get the next one!
 - a. Rest easy, God is not going to be upset if you eradicate sin in your life!
 - b. After we have beaten one besetting sin, He wants us to go get another >> the sin of a bad temper; gossiping; smoking; bitterness; lying; bad language, etc. ...the list is endless.

In spite of their determination to go forward the nation was defeated!

II. THE DEFEAT OF ISRAEL IN BATTLE THAT FOLLOWED ACHAN'S SIN – 7:3-5

- A. ***Vs. 3 – The spies reported that the FOES “are but few.” They were right considering a nation was to go up against a city, but wrong for the number of men they sent to do battle.***

1. According to **8:25** there were 12,000 men and women in the city!
2. If half were men that meant 3,000 Israelites were to combat 6,000 from Ai.
3. It wouldn't have made any difference what the number was — 3,000, 300, 30 would have been enough, if God had been with them!
4. The armies of the whole world won't be able to stand against our Lord in the end-time battle of Armageddon, but understand this—all of Israel's 2 million would never beat little ole Ai, if our Lord didn't enable them.

B. Vs. 4 – The Faithful Fled

C. Vs. 5 – Fear Encompassed The Fallen

1. The mighty army of God was whipped.
2. Israel was whipped after a glorious victory in defeating Jericho.

Has this ever occurred in your life?

After winning a great victory – your chest is out – your head is held high – you're walking on cloud 9 – you're praising God, "Glory! I've whipped this or that sin in my life" **AND ALL OF A SUDDEN**, you get walloped and find yourself up against the ropes or even worse – kissing the canvas. "What happened?" You ask. "I thought I had this Christian life routine mastered. I was finally going forward living for God and WHAM!" **"What happened?"**

D. The Most Dangerous Time in a Christian's Life is After a Victory.

E. There are THREE Major Reasons Why Israel Was Defeated – BY THE WAY, These Are The Same Three Reasons Why You'll Be Whipped Every Time!

1st Reason is Over-confidence in self!

(There is no evidence of any express dependence upon God being sought)

- a. Israel figured Ai was a "push-over."
 - 1) It is a deadly error to under estimate the power of the enemy our soul.
 - 2) Christian's often fail to realise that their enemy is powerful.

Eph. 6:12 – *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*

1 Pet. 5:8 – *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."*

- b. It is hard to imagine, BUT Israel **forgot** who gives the victory.
 - 1) They assumed the ONE victory guaranteed another. BUT life and especially the victorious Christian life is just not that simple.
 - 2) YESTERDAY'S victory **does not** make a believer *immune* to defeat today!
- c. Israel **forgot** who was the *"Captain of the Host"* (5:14).
- d. They **failed to realise** apart from God's power, the smallest temptation is too much for us.

- Paul said in **Phil. 3:3** – *"have no confidence in the flesh."*
- Paul also said in **Rom. 7:18** – *"For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing...."*
- Jesus said **Matt. 26:41** – *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

2nd Reason is Lack of Prayer. (There is not mention of anyone praying.)

- a. This was not so at Jericho – there was much communion with God.
- b. Both Joshua & Israel sinned in their failure to consult with God.
 - 1) Joshua was too hasty and acted without the Lord's direction.
 - 2) Joshua acted upon the council of the spies and not on God's Word!
- c. Over-confidence in self ALWAYS leads to prayerlessness.
- d. This probably was a test – to trust God in little things.
- e. The lesson was graciously learned...
 - 1) They learned they were NOT to put confidence in self even with a little foe.
 - 2) Do you realise that if Ai were a bigger foe they would have been wiped out.

3rd Reason was Hidden Sin – Vs.1, 11.

- a. Israel had sinned because of Achan.
 - 1) This was true for Israel as it is for the whole human race in the time of Adam – *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”* (Rom. 5:12).
 - 2) Achan's sin condemned everyone – *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23).
- b. Achan's sin was imputed to the nation as a breach of covenant law – **Josh. 6:17-18 cp. 7:1, 11-12.**
 - 1) Although it was one man's failure, God saw it as national disobedience to a national law. God needed the entire nation to be committed to the job they had agreed to do—conquer the land.
 - 2) Thus, when one person failed, everyone failed. If Achan's sin went unchecked and unpunished, unlimited looting could break out.
 - 3) The nation as a whole had to take responsibility for preventing this undisciplined disobedience.
- c. Achan's sin was direct disobedience to God's explicit command to destroy everything connected with Jericho.
 - 1) Achan's sin was indifference to the evil and idolatry of the city, not just a desire for money and clothes. God would not protect Israel's army again until the sin was removed and the army returned to obeying him without reservation.
 - 2) God is not content with our doing what is right some of the time. He wants us to do what is right all the time. We are under his orders to eliminate any thoughts, practices, or possessions that hinder our devotion to him.
- d. N.T. principle in the church – **TURN >> 1 Cor. 5**
 - 1) Sin of fornication with stepmother – **Vs. 1-2.**
 - 2) The church was to purge the offender from them – collectively, they were contaminated – **Vs. 11, 13.**
 - 3) Reason for purge – **Vs. 6** – *“a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump vs. 7. – “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.”*

- 4) Local church is no more purer than its most impure member
– TURN >> Eph. 4:16; 5:25-27.
- 5) In any social group of which you or I belong, what you do affects me!
- e. You can't go forward and win your Ai's if you have hidden sin – this is the main reason, we aren't living victorious lives.

Self-confidence, depending on human wisdom, impatience, the lack of prayer and secret sin were behind Israel's defeat.

III. THIS DEFEAT AT AI NATURALLY LED TO DISCOURAGEMENT – VS. 4-9

A. Vs. 5 – As the report of the defeat rapidly spread through the camp the People were DEMORALISED.

1. Even though this was Israel's only defeat in the 7-year conquest of Canaan, it was a significant reversal in the campaign.
2. It was significant not so much in the lose of 36 men, that alone must have been disheartening, BUT Israel was all of a sudden filled with misgivings because of the Lord's withdrawal — **WHY was this so? They questioned for what reason had God changed His mind to help them?**

B. Israel's Leadership were DISMAYED – Vs. 6

1. It was too late to have a prayer meeting for victory now.
2. Joshua questioned God – Vs. 7
 - a. When Joshua first went against Ai in vs. 3, he did not consult God but was self-reliant relying on the strength of his army to defeat this small city. Only after Israel was defeated did they turn to God and ask – *what happened?*
 - b. Too often we rely on our own skills and strength, especially when the task before us seems easy. We go to God only when the obstacles seem too great.
 - c. BUT realise only God knows what lies ahead. Consulting him, even when we are on a winning streak, even when things seem easy-peasy may save us from grave mistakes or misjudgements. God may want us to learn lessons, remove pride, or consult others before He will work through us.
 - d. Joshua questioned God's character.
 - e. He questioned the will of God.
 - f. He questioned the sincerity of God's love, motive and sincerity – Vs. 8-9
3. Discouragement causes us to say, think and do things we wouldn't normally do.
 - a. I can hear you say, "Not Me! I wouldn't do that!"
1 Cor. 10:12 – *"Wherefore, let him that thinketh he stand take heed lest he fall."*
 - b. A **notice** posted in the complaints section of a shop read, "WATCH YOUR MOUTH! Speak Softly and Tenderly You May Have To Eat Your Words."
 - c. Imagine praying this way to God as Joshua did in vs. 7-9.
 - 1) This is NOT a formal or ritualistic church prayer—it is the prayer of a man who is afraid and confused by what is happening around him.
 - 2) Right or wrong in his assessment, Joshua poured out his real thoughts to God.
 - a) Hiding your needs from God is ignoring the only One who can really help.

- b) God welcomes your honest prayers and wants you to express your true feelings to him.
 - c) Though He loves us and His ears are open to our prayers, we also need to be prepared for God's response. He has done nothing wrong and will point our failure.
4. Unfortunately, Joshua thought God had failed him.

PLEASE NOTE:

Any time we fail to move forward for God in this Christian life and obtain victory WE can't blame God, but WE need to look into our hearts and see where WE have failed.

- a. Joshua figured maybe God forgot His promises in chapter 1 >> vs. 5-6.
- b. Let us not kid ourselves—Joshua's failure is our failure!
 - 1) He didn't remember that God gives the victory!
 - 2) If we seek His help **BEFORE** the battle – if we are on good terms **BEFORE** the problems come – then we don't have to fall on our knees after we have been whooped and try and blame God that it is entirely His fault!

In response to Joshua's prayer of Discouragement and Despair...

IV. JOSHUA WAS GIVEN DIRECTIONS BY GOD – VS. 10-15 << READ

A. The First Thing God tell Joshua is to "Stop praying!" – Vs.10

1. God directs Joshua to – "*Get thee up*" – Vs. 10. God, in these verses, was in effect saying, "Get up and get the sin out. Purify this camp because you are **NOT advancing one step**, you are **NOT** getting another victory until you do!"
2. In Acts 5 God purified the His new church when Ananias & Sapphine lied to the Holy Spirit about money they received about a plot of land. "*And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things*" – Acts 5:11.
3. The CAUSE of defeat was not some spurious fault with God, BUT a specific sin in the camp! – Vs. 13 – God said, "*There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel.*"
4. If there had been *council* with God BEFORE the battle, undoubtedly the LORD would have revealed the sin in the camp.

B. Sin not only prevents victory in everyday life, but also breaks our fellowship with God – Vs.12.

The Lord revealed steps to be followed in the purging process, which lead to the...

V. DISCOVERY – VS. 13-23.

Because of the deliberate steps in this procedure one would hope that the guilty party would come forward – unfortunately, he did not!

1st The people were told to sanctify themselves – Vs. 13.

1. This meant they were to purify themselves.
Israel, take a personal account of your life and see if sin lies at your door.
2. God emphasised that there would have been no further progress, not one more victory for Israel if this sin wasn't removed from their midst.
3. As it was with them, so it is with us. If there is sin in our lives, there is no forward progress and surely no victorious living.

2nd *The next day the guilty party was to be single out.*

So from Vs. 14-18 we have tribe-by-tribe, clan-by-clan, and family-by-family taken until finally the individual was exposed.

3rd *The culprit and ALL his possessions (not just the things stolen) were to be burned.*

QUESTION: Since God knew *WHO* was the guilty party, why didn't He just reveal Achan to Joshua instead of going through this dramatic process?

ANSWER: This emotionally tense method of God would definitely impress upon the nation the seriousness of disobeying God's commands. It also gave the guilty party – Achan – time to confess & repent, which he failed to do. If Achan had responded with a contrite retentive heart, throwing himself on the mercy of God, there is no doubt he would have been pardoned, just as David, centuries later after being confronted by Nathan the prophet concerning his adultery with Bathsheba >> TURN Ps. 32:1-5; Ps. 51:1-12

VI. DESTRUCTION OF ACHAN AND ALL HIS FAMILY – VS. 24-26.

A. *Sin is a disgraceful thing.*

1. Whether it is yours or mine sin is dishonouring to God, who loves us. Sin dishonours us personally, especially those who claim to be children of a holy God.
2. Our sin, like Achan's is a deliberate disobedience to God's instruction – 6:18.

B. *Like Achan, Your Sin "Troubles" the Congregation.*

1. You can't sin in isolation. Once you decide to sin, you can't commit just one sin – they come in multiples AND they have consequences you can't imagine.

Sin will TAKE you down the road further than you want to GO,
Sin will COST you more than you want to PAY and
Sin will KEEP you longer than you want to STAY!

2. Joshua asked Achan in vs. 25 – *"Why hast thou troubled us?"* Not only would the LORD trouble him that day, BUT ALSO his sin made the entire nation liable to destruction.
3. Achan underestimated God and didn't take his commands seriously (6:18).
 - a. Taking a garment, along with some silver and gold, may have seemed a small thing to Achan, but the effects of his sin were felt by the entire nation, especially his family.
 - b. Like Achan, our actions affect more people than just ourselves. Beware of the temptation to rationalize your sins by saying they are too small or too personal to hurt anyone but you.
4. We are fools to think that we can get away with sin and even more foolish to think that our sin ONLY affects us.
 - a. **LOOK** at the trouble brought upon Achan's family – Vs. 25 – *"All Israel stoned HIM with stones"* [as well as the family], **BECAUSE** they also *"burned THEM [ALL] with fire, after they had stoned THEM with stones."* They were involved!
 - b. Sin is like a cancer: once it enters that body and is allowed to spread the consequences are dreadful.
 - c. Sin tolerated among this fellowship we eat us up and kill us. SIN must be cut out and eradicated, like a cancer, if we are to survive.

C. *Achan's Family aided and abetted his sin – they were accomplices to his crime!*

1. If you have been reading you could say, "BUT my Bible doesn't say that!"
 - a. Well true, it literally doesn't say that, but let me ask you why was his family destroyed along with him? Was this collateral damage?
 - b. How else could he have dug a hole in the ground in the midst of his family's tent and hid the "*accursed thing*," if they hadn't helped him or at least turned a blind eye to the whole thing? >> **Ps. 50:18; 2 Chron. 19:2.**
 - c. Paul charged Timothy NOT to "*be partaker of other men's sins; keep thyself pure.*" Paul instructs us to "*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*" (Eph. 5:11).
2. The Law in **Deut. 24:16** states "*The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.*"
 - a. Since children were not to be executed for the parent's sin, we can assume that Achan's family were accomplices in the crime.
 - b. Sin hurts people we never intended for it to hurt.
 - 1) **A principle of God's Word** – *there are accumulative effects of sin.*
 - 2) That is, sin sets off a chain reaction and there is spin off, over-flow and repercussions that effect other people. **Ex. 20:5** tell us that "*the iniquity of the fathers*" can "*visit*" upon our "*children unto the third and fourth generation.*"
 - 3) Innocent people who are directly guilty are always getting hurt because of the sins of their parents.
 - Who has not heard of people getting respiratory illnesses and cancer from smokers?
 - Drunks: car deaths, poverty, heartache of loved ones;
 - Drugs: here is the same story with added the crime of theft and little innocent babies born into this life addicted to drugs.
 - Sexual sins: broken homes, VD, HIV given to innocent spouses — the list goes on and on.

Sin will TAKE you down the road further than you want to GO,
 Sin will COST you more than you want to PAY and
 Sin will KEEP you longer than you want to STAY!

D. *Vs. 26 – We have the Valley of Achor (located about 1 mile south of Jericho).*

1. Heb. for *Achan* and *Achor* are related.
 - a. *Achor* means "trouble or disturbance." *Achan* was "a troubler."
 - b. How did all this trouble start? Achan said, "*Indeed I have sinned... when I saw...then I coveted...and took*" (7:20-21) of the accursed thing.
2. WHAT is the way out of this valley? There needs to be **Repentance & Restitution** — failure to do so means **Retribution!**
 - a. The nation had to **Repent**: payment of sin had to made or the nation would bear the brunt of God's anger—**Retribution!**

- b. For us today, Christ has borne the brunt of our sin. **Restitution** has been made. If we **Repent** of our own sinfulness and trust in Christ's payment in our behalf, we totally avoid **Retribution**.
3. **Vs. 26** – After the punishment, *“the Lord turned from His anger.”*
 - a. Sin **MUST** be judged. If the Israelites hadn't carried out the judgement on Achan, there was a good possibility that God would destroy them!
 - b. If Jesus had not bore the judgement of sin in His own body, to turn the Lord's anger from the repentant sinner, God would destroy us!

VII. CONCLUSION

Achan left his imprint in this world. It was in the form of a historical marker — *“a great heap of stones”* piled over his body! It served a **good** purpose of a **bad** example—to warn Israel against the sin of disobeying God's express commands.

- What kind of imprint or mark are you going to leave in this world?
- What memories are your family, your children, your spouse or your friends going to have of you when you leave this life?
- Will your life be good example of what not to do, OR a model for someone to form theirs after?
- We all are good for something, even if it is an example of being *good for nothing*.
- What kind of example are ye?
- What banner, what inscription will accompany you name or be placed on your grave?

My prayer is that it will be one that glorifies your Creator and Saviour.

READ >> 8:1 – The momentum Israel had achieved by the miraculous crossing of the Jordan and the supernatural victory over Jericho was stopped by Achan's sin. With his crime judged, God's favour towards Israel was restored and He reassured Joshua that He had not forsaken him or the people.

- Is your life stuck in the “valley of trouble” because of sin?
- I encourage you to **Repent**, to **Confess** your sin and to **Trust** in God's mean's of **Restitution** found in Jesus Christ!
- God **WILL** *restore* you, He **WILL** *energise* you and He **WILL** *place* you on the right road of a fullfillment and victory!

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