

Joshua and Ai: Wasted Potential

Joshua 7:2-13, 19-26

Intro:

Read 19-26

A. Many reasons why the defeat of Ai is a tragic and Sad story:

- Armies of Israel were driven back by a paltry force
- 36 men died in the retreat
- Achan's whole family suffered for his sin, possibly other aspects

B. Perhaps most tragic is that the story illustrates just how quickly God's people can fall out of His grace and away from the blessings He wants so badly to give them

C. Consider the events leading up to Ai:

- Israel had just taken Jericho in only one week (sieges take months)
- This was brought about w/out anyone breaking a sweat!
- *Read Joshua 6:20*
- Jericho was not a test of physical strength, nor was it a physical victory
- Jericho was a great test of faith, and a spiritual victory
 - Unfortunately, as is often the case, after such victories, it is an opportunity for strength as well as temptation; Satan can sneak in and pull people away from God's blessings and His will.

D. This is exactly what occurred in Joshua 7:

- The question we will consider this morning, is *How?*

1. *The Children of Israel let their Guard Down*

- As stated, this often happens to God's people when they become used to walking in the Light and the blessings that come with that
 - Instead of a constant striving to make sure we don't stray from that path, we become lax and are prone to wander
- First notice the failure to consult God's will before battle, and the ensuing arrogance that followed: *Read 7:2-3 (how do we know they didn't consult)*
 - How can they be serious? Had they learned nothing from Jericho? Had they failed to take the lesson to heart that God's battles are not decided by numbers?

- A couple of Questions:
- What did it matter how many men Ai had? Great or few they would only win if God willed it
 - Why send so many for so few?
- While we might wish for a more detailed explanation of their reasoning, one thing is clear:
 - The people had allowed themselves to quickly fall into a state where their guards were let down: and that is all the opportunity the Devil needs to strike

2. *Israel Underestimated their REAL Enemy*: Read 7:4-5

- It is always dangerous to underestimate an enemy in a physical conflict; but the consequences are far greater to one who does the same in a spiritual battle:
 - By failing to remember the true nature of how their battles were lost and won, they underestimated the enemy they opposed in the spiritual side of this battle:
- The Devil is not an enemy exclusive to the Books of Genesis, Job, and the New Testament
- Satan had been fighting the people every step of the way
 - From the steps of the Red Sea to the feet of Mt Sinai and every complaining step in between
 - He had fought them during the Report of the Spies and with the prophet Balaam
- Although they had not lost the war, they had lost all of those battles!
 - You'd think they'd learn not to underestimate an enemy that had so soundly defeated them so many times, causing the death of hundreds of thousands of Israelites along the way!
- But Israel was guilty of the same trap we so often fall into, a trap brought about by taking our focus off of God and placing it on the temporal: we forget that our enemy is a Roaring Lion looking for someone to devour!

3. *Joshua Forgot His Mission and Destination, Placed Focus on Self* Read 7:6-8

- If the people had hearts of water: then Joshua had feet made of Clay!
- It is again an ironic and stark comparison between this defeat and the victory of Jericho
 - Recall from 2:11, even though the People of Jericho were shut up in a mighty fortress, those doors were locked for a reason. Rahab said their hearts melted and no courage remained!
 - Yet now, it is not only God's people that these words are applied to, but their leader as well
 - Sadly, Joshua invokes many examples of lack of faith:
 - Ex. 14: 11-12, Red sea: Let us stay in Egypt!
 - Matt. 14:29-31 Peter, who took his eyes off of the Lord, sank!
 - Joshua allowed this physical set back, brought on in part by his actions, to take his eyes off of God, and he too sank
- But it went beyond that: after taking his vision off of God, he placed his focus on himself in v.8-9
 - Joshua seems to be concerned with the disgrace of the defeat:
 - What can *I say*: This is embarrassing! Everyone will hear and then they will be emboldened to attack
 - But he then goes on and tries to shift blame and responsibility to God v9
 - What are *YOU* going to do about it then?
 - Joshua is asking all the wrong questions, and it would seem the first words of v 10 show God's disapproval.

5. *Both Joshua and People forgot the Seriousness of Sin* Read 7:10-13

- God's first instructions are: Get up! what are you doing wallowing on the ground in pity when there is work to be done!
- If you ever need a reminder that God takes Sin seriously: here it is
 - Achan had gone against God's express commands without any thought to the consequences (2:20-21) One man's sin derailed a whole nation and brought about the loss of many lives

- Just like God's people today, Achan forgot the need for God's people to be blameless and unified by that pursuit.

Conclusion:

- It is always tragic when God's people deviate from his plans, and end the end have wasted potential, possibilities
- But we should learn from this chapter in Joshua's life that these events are not brought about by accident or happenstance.
 - It is a progression and series of missteps that happen when God's people let their guard down.