

## JOSHUA 7

## DEFEATED AT AI!

In the progress of this inspired history, the curtain now rises on a solemn and impressive scene. It is eventide; and Joshua and the elders of Israel – with their clothes rent, and with dust upon their heads (the well-known signs of deep sorrow and distress) – are lying flat on their faces before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. The noble-minded warrior addresses himself in prayer to God, and says, “Alas, Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us around, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?”

But what has happened to call forth such expressions, and to awaken fears so sad and distressing? Jericho had been conquered, and never was Joshua more honored and beloved than now! But part of his army had just suffered a defeat, and 36 of his men were just smitten by the people of the land. West of Jericho, there was a city called Ai; and to this city, Joshua had sent spies with the commission to “go up and view the country.” They had obeyed, and they returned with the information that the inhabitants of Ai were few; and therefore, they believed two or three thousand men would be sufficient to take it. This number had been sent; but to Joshua’s utter surprise, they had fled before their enemies! The men of Ai had killed 36 of them, and they had chased the rest from the city gate; and so the hearts of the people had melted and become like water. This defeat was not to be attributed to the smallness of the force which had been sent against the city, and Joshua was well aware of that fact. It was a small detachment indeed, but the Lord can save by many or by few. And Israel’s leader – having the most perfect confidence in God – never anticipated a defeat of any kind. Joshua lamented their defeat because he feared that it would reflect badly upon the Lord’s wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness.

When the Israelites took the city of Jericho, the express command which had been given them was, “Keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.” Little, perhaps, did Joshua think that there was anyone among the people who would be so daring as to violate this order. But alas! There was a troubler in the camp who done just that. And as long as the sin remained unpunished, the guilt of it rested upon the whole nation. Thus we see that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6).

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ The Israelites are defeated in their battle against Ai – verses 1-9
- ❖ Joshua follows God’s directions for discovering the guilty party – verses 10-21
- ❖ Sentence and execution are passed upon the troubler of Israel – verses 22-26

Until the “accursed thing” was put away from Israel, no strength or victory could be expected for them. God encouraged Joshua to make inquiry into this matter. From this, we ought to learn that times of danger and trouble should be times of reformation. We should look at home – into our own hearts, and into our own houses – and make diligent search to find out if there is any accursed thing there which God sees and abhors. We cannot prosper until the secret sin – no matter how much it is cherished – is destroyed out of our hearts, put out of our homes and our families, and forsaken in our lives.

By the casting of lots, Joshua would be enabled to discover the guilty party. Accordingly, the lot ultimately came down upon the head of a man named Achan; he was detected and convicted of his sin in the sight of all Israel. Solemnly but tenderly, Joshua encouraged Achan to make a full confession – giving glory to God by attesting to the truth of the Lord’s ordaining of the lot (Prov. 16:33). With certain and unerring judgment, the righteous God does and will distinguish between the innocent and the guilty; so that although the righteous may be of the same tribe, family, and household with the wicked, yet they never shall be treated as the wicked.

Achan confessed that from the forbidden spoils of Jericho, he had stolen a beautiful Babylonian garment, about 5 pounds (2.3 kg) of silver (valued at around \$1,600\*), and a piece of gold weighing about 1¼ pounds (0.6 kg), which would have been worth around \$36,000.\* For the sake of these things, he had brought wrath and disaster upon his fellow-countrymen. Joshua sent men to speedily fetch the goods in question from Achan’s hiding-place in his tent; and they were brought and poured out before the Lord, to Whom they really belonged. However, although the things had been dedicated to the Lord originally, He could not accept them to be used in His service now; they were the “price of iniquity,” and the Lord will not allow what has been unlawfully gotten to be used in His service – even though it belongs to Him in the first place. The stolen articles were taken to the valley of Achor – along with Achan, his family, and all his possessions. They were stoned to death, and then burned to ashes; and Israel covered them with a great heap of stones, which was to solemnly memorialize the sad occasion which had brought them there.

One sinner certainly destroys much good (Ecc. 9:18). And what will the sinner be obliged to face in the wrath to come? Let us flee from it and find safety in Christ Jesus – the sinner’s Friend!

*Lord, we stand convicted of a multitude of transgressions which are secret to our own knowledge, but which are all open to the light of Your countenance. Help us to fly to Jesus, and take refuge in His all-atoning blood and justifying righteousness! Here, dearest Jesus, we fix all our hope! Upon You, we hang all our expectations of pardon, mercy, and peace! Amen.*