

Commander Joshua in the Promised Land • Part 2

Lesson #53 - "Shame at Ai"

• HANDOUT •

► With Israel finally in the Land of Promise, this lesson establishes the Commandership of Joshua. Israel is still struggling with obedient trust toward the Lord and consequently, they struggle to settle the Promised Land.

This study serves as the beginning of a kind of Part 2 in our Joshua project, focusing on the exploits of Israel under Joshua. In Joshua, we find a man who is hungry to learn and grow in the wisdom of God and who is committed to follow in God's Precepts. His first battle is behind him, and he knows there are many battles to come.

Before we took our side road to focus on Rahab, we left the story of the conquest of Jericho at the end of chapter six. The wall had collapsed, the articles of silver, gold, bronze and iron had been added to the Lord's treasury, Rahab and her family had been rescued, and everything else had been declared "devoted," which means it had to be destroyed with fire and/or sword.

The last notation of chapter six: "So the LORD was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the land." This is a triumphant time for Israel. The price has been great, but they are finally home in the land God promised their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As chapter 7 opens, nothing prepares for the headlines that scream at us: "*Israel has acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things ...*"

► Verse 1 is an extension of Chapter 6 and the fall of Jericho. The Lord had commanded everything in Jericho to be considered "devoted" -- destroyed -- with the exception of the gold, silver, bronze and iron, which was to be brought into the Treasury. A great emphasis was made by the Lord: no one was to take anything from Jericho -- there was to be no plunder. Until this very moment in scripture, it looked like everything had been done just as the Lord commanded. But now we are told that an Israelite named Achan has disobeyed. Though Achan probably thought no one would ever know, the Lord knew and He is very angry -- not just at Achan but at Israel as a whole.

► **Joshua 7:1** •But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.

Q: Why would God be angry with ALL the people of Israel over what only one man, Achan, did?

► Verse 2 seems to set aside the actions of Achan by moving on with the military strategies of Joshua, without even a backward glance. However, Achan's sin and Joshua's military strategies will soon intersect and difficult lessons are waiting there for us.

As we move on with Joshua's military strategies...

► Joshua is in full "commander mode" and for the first time, he begins to plan and act. His overall strategic plan is to confine his military exploits to the mountainous regions where the enemies' chariots would be unable negotiate the terrain. His plan also includes dividing the control of the central mountains to prevent a united attack from the inhabitants.

Joshua focuses first was on a place called Ai. This place was referred to as "Hai" in Genesis 12:8. It was located north of Jericho about 10 miles, next to Beth Aven on the east side of Bethel. As will become his custom, Joshua sent spies to check the area out. When they returned the spies reported that there were very few inhabitants in Ai, so it wouldn't be necessary for Joshua to send all his warriors into battle. In the end he only sent 3,000 men to fight.

It was a complete disaster. The men of Ai killed 36 of Israel's men and Israel fled from the place. What a contrast to their former battles when Israel won even when there at great odds against them. By the time Israel arrived at the camp across the river from Jericho, their reputation was so fierce that the people of Jericho were terrified of them. Now, the inhabitants of little Ai has totally decimated Israel.

Q: All of this seems like a solid military strategy on Joshua's part. Israel's fighting men have become well seasoned. So, what went wrong with Joshua's plan?

After the disaster Joshua goes before the LORD ..

► **Joshua 7:6-9** • Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the Ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great Name?"

Q: How does Joshua respond to the disaster?

Q: Do you think Joshua believed that the defeat of Israel meant the end of his leadership?

Q: At the end of Joshua's dialogue with the Lord what does he express as his greatest concern?

The Lord responds to Joshua and with His explanation the sin of Achan and the disaster at Ai intersects ...

► **Joshua 7:10-12** • The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

Q: What is significant about the Lord commanding Joshua to "stand up?"

Q: Now the Lord speaks plainly. What does the Lord say caused Israel defeat?

Q: What does it mean that “they have been made liable to destruction?”

Q: What judgment decree does God utter regarding the devoted things being in Israel?

Q: What solution does God provide?

Q: What is the one thing that is not disclosed or discussed regarding the taking of the things which were devoted to destruction?

God instructs Joshua to have the people prepare for God to remove the defilement from Israel ...

► **Joshua 7:13-15** • "Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.

In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD takes shall come forward clan by clan; the clan that the LORD takes shall come forward family by family; and the family that the LORD takes shall come forward man by man.

He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done a disgraceful thing in Israel! "

Q: The people were told to consecrate themselves in preparation for God to deal with the devoted things that were among them. What is involved in the “Consecration” process?

Q: After the consecration process, what were the people to do?

Q: What was to be the outcome when the guilty person had been revealed?

Early the next morning ...

► The very next morning, Joshua began to fulfill the Lord's instructions. When the tribes were gathered together in front of the Tent of Meeting, Joshua selected clans from the tribe of Judah to go first. Each clan was to choose one person to represent them. Achan was to represent Judah. One by one each was asked about the devoted things and told not to hide anything. When it was Achan's turn, Joshua addressed him:

► **Joshua 7:19** • Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me."

Q: Why would Joshua address Achan as "my son?"

The Moment of Truth ...

► **Joshua 7:20-21** • Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

Q: When Achan confessed to his sin, he referred to what he had stolen as "plunder." Why is that a problem?

Q: How do we know that Achan knew that what he was doing was a serious sinful act?

► **Joshua 7:22-26** • So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.

Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today."

Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

Q: Why did Achan's sons and daughters have to pay for Achan's sin in such a terrible way?

Q: What was the outcome from Achan's death?

Epilogue ...

► **Joshua 8:1-2** • Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land. You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves.

► Early the next morning Joshua mustered his men for a second battle at Ai. The first time Joshua had sent his men into battle while he stayed back in camp. This time he would lead his men to battle, accompanied by the Elders of Israel.
In accordance with detailed instructions from the Lord, Joshua separated out 30,000 men and sent them under cover of night to set an ambush behind the city. The rest of Israel's fighting men would approach the city from the front. Joshua would stay with those approaching from the front. The plan was for those who approached the city from the front to flee when the men of Ai attacked them, just as they had before. Ai was expected to pursue Israel, thus exit from the city. The scripture reports that: *"there was not a man left in either Ai or in Bethel – they all pursued Israel."*
Joshua gave the men who were waiting in ambush a signal: When Joshua raised up the spear he was holding in his hand, the men waiting in ambush knew it was time to enter the city. They entered the city of Ai, seized it and set it on fire.
Ai was defeated, completely destroyed with everything and everyone in it, except they could take any plunder which they desired back to camp. The King of Ai was hanged, then buried under a heap of stones placed at the entrance to the gate of the city.

Q: This was a very difficult story, but it illustrates both Israel's history and her future, as the book of Judges will testify: They are in a spiritual cycle that will hinder their success to settle the Land. [It also illustrates the potential of a continuing spiritual cycle within the Christian community today.] What is that spiritual cycle?

Obedience followed by _____ followed by _____
followed by _____ followed by _____
_____ followed by _____
_____ followed by _____
followed by _____ followed by _____
and the cycle continues. The cycle can only be broken through the power of the Holy Spirit.

► **We continue with Joshua's exploits as Commander in the Land of Promise.**

Next Time • Lesson #54
"Commander Joshua"