

Previously we read of the conquest of Jericho and God's strict instructions to destroy everything except the metals. Those metals were to be cleansed by fire and dedicated to God and were eventually used for the future temple. The utter destruction of everything in Jericho was God's judgment on the spiritual condition of the city. It was an indication of how separate God's people are to be from the depravity of the world. As Jesus indicated, we are to be in the world but not of the world (John 17:16<sup>i</sup>).

I will remind you often that the theocratic nation of Israel was one-time event in world history. God directed them to carry out His will. No nations since have been so clearly directed by God. God does use nations to judge other nations (1 Chronicles 5:26<sup>ii</sup>), but we see in Scripture that God holds them accountable when they are excessively cruel (Jeremiah 25:12<sup>iii</sup>). The judgment on the people of Canaan came after 400 years of increasingly depraved behavior and worship of demonic gods.

The land had become defiled by the activities of the people of the land. If Israel took their possessions, they too would become defiled (6:18<sup>iv</sup>). God does not have a double standard. This was not about ethnicity. Depravity is just as evil if not more so when it is exhibited by the people of God. This cleansing by fire was a physical picture of a spiritual reality. It is true in a spiritual sense for God's people today.

There are numerous things that defile our culture: pornography, political deception and hatred, bribery, injustice, the destruction of genders, hedonism, and perhaps most prevalent of all, the worship of wealth. Every born-again follower of Jesus should destroy these things from their life. We cannot tolerate them, or we will cease to be a follower of Jesus. What fellowship does light have with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14<sup>v</sup>)? If we are clinging to worldliness, we eventually become an enemy of God (James 4:4<sup>vi</sup>).

The history of Israel bares out this theme. They would draw close to God and obey His commands and prosper. In their prosperity they would stop looking to God and increasingly desire the things the pagans had. The culture would then decline and eventually be overcome by their enemies. Then they would cry out to God and the cycle would begin again. It is obvious where our nation is in the cycle. More importantly, where are you in the cycle? May God help us to always passionately and purposefully dedicate ourselves to love and obey our Savior and Lord.

*<sup>1</sup>But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel.* Joshua 7:1 Do a search in the Scriptures for the phrase "but God." You will find God often intervening to save people from the wrath of other men. Now notice how this chapter begins, "But the people." Everything was looking great. They recommitted themselves to God and watched God bring a miraculous victory, "but the people..."

I can say that God spared my life a number of times, *but then I* was disobedient and consequences came. Thank God He remembers our frame that we are but dust (Psalm 103:14<sup>vii</sup>). But when our actions turn the course of too many people in the wrong direction, God may insist on the justice we deserve. He holds us who know better to the strictest standard (James 3:1<sup>viii</sup>).

"Broke faith" is the term for adultery (Numbers 5:12,13<sup>ix</sup>). Israel had betrayed their covenant with God. This hints at the intimacy and love God had for Israel, and yet

instead of responding with faithfulness, Achan responded by breaking covenant vows. One man sinned but the whole nation was charged. That doesn't seem fair. Surely no one else, except Achan's family knew what he did. So why is the nation held responsible? It is a lesson for us to examine carefully.

The conquest of Canaan was just beginning. To start off with a little disobedience would mean that before long the whole nation would be in rebellion (Acts 5:4,5<sup>x</sup>). My sin does not only affect me, but it also affects my family, and my family affects my city, and my city affects my state, and my state affects the nation. We cannot sin as an island unto ourselves. We are united with others. Husband and wife are one. Those in fellowship in Christ are one. Recall Paul's body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12. When one part of the body suffers, the rest of the body suffers with it (1 Corinthians 12:26<sup>xi</sup>). My disobedience affects us all. Your disobedience affects us all. If something is a little bit contaminated, it is contaminated. If I gave you a cookie and told you only a part of it had arsenic in it, you would throw away the cookie. This has a lot to do with the direction of our nation. We can whine about it, but instead, focus on influencing others toward godliness.

Americans are individualists. Most of the world is still tribal or extended family in culture. That makes it difficult for us to grasp this truth that we are not independent of others. God could not bless the nation when there was outright disobedience. Those not involved directly suffer because of what rebels against God do. We say it is not fair, but that is not because God is wrong. It is because in man's free will someone chose to rebel against God's goodness which affected others. If there is compromise in the life of an individual it affects the whole congregation.

In this chapter we will see the whole lineage of Achan back to the son of Israel listed both going backward and forward. I believe God lists it twice because we should realize that our actions also can honor or shame our ancestors. This is another cultural issue that is biblical but not acknowledged in our own culture (Exodus 20:5,6<sup>xii</sup>). When I lived in Japan, I could see that eastern culture was extremely aware of how their actions affected the family name. That is one reason that one of the Ten Commandments is to honor our father and mother (Exodus 20:12<sup>xiii</sup>). A godly life honors your heritage.

*<sup>2</sup>Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai.*

*<sup>3</sup>And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few." Joshua 7:2,3* The people were moving north, and the first small city to the north and up in the higher country westward was Ai. The spies thought that rather than have the nation move up the mountain ridge a few thousand men should easily take it.

What was different from the siege of Jericho? What was God's plan? Who was going to fight this battle? What had begun at the direction of the Commander of the hosts of heaven was now being decided by men and their good suggestions. Their triumph had resulted in self-confidence rather than increased trust in the Lord. We all have inclinations and "good" ideas, but what does God say and who will speak for Him? Had Joshua so quickly forgotten that the battle belongs to the Lord (Proverbs 21:31<sup>xiv</sup>)?

We, too, can rely on past spiritual victories. When all our testimonies are all from years ago, we should check or present spiritual state. **We are either moving onward and upward in our faith and trust in Christ, or we are slipping backward** into confidence in

what we can accomplish on our own. The battles before us should always be met with prayer as we wait for the Lord's direction.

*<sup>4</sup>So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, <sup>5</sup>and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.* Joshua 7:4,5 No doubt Ai had heard of the fall of Jericho and prepared to do their best in battle. Now the sane thing for Ai to do would have been to seek a truce or flee, but God had hardened their hearts because He had enough of their wickedness. I imagine the army of Israel, seeing no resistance, came to the gate and suddenly had all kinds of things dropped from above onto their soldiers followed by a massive barrage of arrows. That is just my guess, but we do know the battle quickly went south as the Israelites fled. And while fleeing down the slope into the Jordan valley, their backs were exposed and vulnerable.

The effect on Israel was disastrous as their hope and courage melted away. Now it was not the Canaanites whose hearts melted but Israel's heart (5:1<sup>xv</sup>). God wasn't going to collapse every wall and let them go about the conquest in their own way. This defeat came for a reason. Often defeat and grief brings us to our knees to ask God why He has allowed this pain to come into our lives. Sometimes it is to show us where we have been disobedient. God whispers to us in our good times but shouts to us through our pain. I am not implying that all pain or trouble is because we are disobedient (John 9:2,3<sup>xvi</sup>), but that can be the case, and we should search our hearts to see if it is. There is always a reason whether we understand it or not. God is always ready to speak to us, whether for conviction or comfort. We must be eager to listen.

It is natural for us to wonder about those who died. Why them and why then? God has numbered our days (Psalm 39:4<sup>xvii</sup>). We really can't answer that question either. We know it was time for judgment on the people of Canaan, but what about these dead Jews? God knows what we would do in the future. I believe He takes us home at just the right time. It always seems too early for those who are not aged, but we must trust God that He knows best, even in the case of children. We cannot see what would have been, but God can. Only God knows what might have been.

*<sup>6</sup>Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads.*

Joshua 7:6 The 72 elders and Joshua fell on their faces before the ark of the LORD. Dust on their heads was sign of grief and mourning. They were waiting to hear from the LORD, something they should have done before any plans were made. At least they knew where to turn. We might have examined the generals and tried to determine where their strategy had failed. Joshua could have placed blame on the leaders and their lack of courage to face the enemy. But Joshua learned from Moses where to turn when trouble strikes. The practical can be examined later, but **first go to God and ask Him just what went wrong.**

The more that we see of the might and power of God, the more we are accountable to Him. They had seen the miracles in the wilderness, the Jordan River parting, and the amazing levelling of the walls of Jericho. They should have known to seek God's direction before the attack on Ai. Who is responsible for the death of those 36 men? Joshua? Achan? The High Priest? Or is the correct answer all of Israel?

When we face defeats of as a family or a congregation, we should be careful not to blame an individual, though one person may have been the source of it. The congregation should be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Anyone and everyone should speak up. Leadership should humbly admit their failure. And all should thank God that His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22,23<sup>xviii</sup>). I've been in a congregation that tried to hide moral failure. It permeated the whole congregation.

*<sup>7</sup>And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!"* Joshua 7:7 Joshua finally voices what is in his heart. He asks why God did not go before them? Why were they defeated? Were the Amorites going to destroy them? Wouldn't it have been better just to stay on the other side of the Jordan? We could berate Joshua for questions that were contrary to God's promises, but once again we can relate. If we had given orders that ended in losing 36 lives, husbands and fathers who would never be there for their families, we would probably pray in a similar manner. His prayer is a prayer of agony of spirit. It echoed many of the murmurings of Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 20:4<sup>xix</sup>; Exodus 16:3<sup>xx</sup>). That is what we resort to when we are despondent. We express our complaint to God when we don't understand what God has allowed. We forget about the promises of God and previous victories (1:6<sup>xxi</sup>). But God can take it. Better to cry out to God in prayer than to keep it all inside.

*<sup>8</sup>O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies!* Joshua 7:8 In that type of warfare, to turn you back was to expose your vulnerable side to the enemy arrows and swords. The same is true for our spiritual warfare. The description of the armor of God in Ephesians 6 has nothing for the back. That is because we are to always be on the offensive. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4<sup>xxii</sup>). We always have the superiority when it comes to spiritual battles. The Commander of the hosts is more than a match for all the forces of hell. He proved it on the cross. Don't forget that!

*<sup>9</sup>For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?"* Joshua 7:9 Joshua is afraid he will lose the psychological advantage they had if the neighboring tribes hear of this defeat. But it seems he is even more concerned for the Lord's name. If Israel fails God for any reason, it reflects on the great name of God. It will cause the people of the land to have less honor for the God Israel represents.

I hope by now you are starting to see the spiritual parallels to our battles. We have personal battles with our old nature and the temptations of the world. We have battles with the culture around us trying to suppress the truth of Jesus. We have battles with the forces of darkness that would deter us from letting Jesus shine through us and have us settle for less than God has for us. But if we give in, what will God do for His great name? In our grief we forget that God is more than capable of defending His name. The reality is that this defeat *was* defending the holiness of His name.

We have the incredible privilege of representing the Creator of the universe. But when we misrepresent Him, like the Achan did by taking in Jericho's polluted things, we are sending the wrong message. We are saying that our God is not so different from other gods and that He doesn't really change our lives that much. Our message becomes mixed and confusing. The result is people thinking less of Jesus.

If we will really be separate from worldliness like we talked about in the last lesson from Joshua, if we will not compromise with the polluted things and will serve people in love, letting the life of Christ be manifest in our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11<sup>xxiii</sup>), then people will be drawn to Jesus. We will gain ground for the kingdom of God. No walls or gates will be able to withstand our assault on evil to rescue the souls of men (Matthew 6:18<sup>xxiv</sup>). All things work together for good to those who are called according to God's good purposes (Romans 8:28<sup>xxv</sup>). **Even defeat is a blessing from God to turn our hearts and minds toward Him to seek His will.**

But now let me turn to our nation. The polluted things are no longer recognized as being polluted. In fact, they are lauded (Isaiah 5:20<sup>xxvi</sup>). Our entertainment and educational systems have perverted our culture's perspective. We would like to blame our leaders, but nations get the leaders they deserve. While we love this nation and its original principles of a balance of power and equal representation, to be judged by our peers, and that moral principles be honored and laws obeyed, we see that rapidly slipping away. Isn't it fascinating that the army of Israel was defeated by a city spelled AI? Our over-confidence and greed has led to some major defeats. The watering down of the truth of Scripture and the outright mocking of it by so many tells us we are no longer the nation we once were.

The only answer to spiritual defeat is the one we see in this passage. There must be a humbling before the Lord like Joshua and the elders humbled themselves before God, and I'm afraid that will only happen in desperation. But remember church, we are citizens of heaven (Ephesians 2:19<sup>xxvii</sup>). We can humble ourselves before the Lord and the church can rise up victorious despite the culture in which it exists. That is what happened in Rome. **The culture was collapsing, and the nation was splintering, but the church was gaining ground.** We serve the same almighty God today!

A hymn calls to us. *Rise up oh men of God. Have done with lesser things. Give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of kings. Rise up o men of God, the church for you doth wait, her strength unequal to her task, rise up and make her great!* And the way to rise up is to fall down on our faces before God, to rid our lives of the polluted things. James 1:27 tells us, ***27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*** Let us put away the polluted things from our midst. Let us love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37<sup>xxviii</sup>). Let us look to the leading of the Word and the Holy Spirit instead of our natural tendencies and so-called good ideas. It is then that *His life* in us will serve those in need, shine light in the darkness, and overcome the spiritual walls that must come down for the kingdom of God to advance in the hearts of mankind. Jesus promised that if we are standing on Him as our rock of truth the gates of hell could not withstand our assault (Matthew 16:18<sup>xxix</sup>).

Questions:

- 1 Review what has happened so far in Joshua. 2 What is the cycle of nations?
- 3 Why was the nation affected by one man's sin?
- 4 Why do we suffer from the sins of others? 5 What was the first mistake regarding Ai?
- 6 How did Joshua respond? 7 Who was to blame? 8 Why is there no back armor?
- 9 What was Joshua's concern?
- 10 How does that relate to our lives?

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<sup>i</sup> John 17:16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

<sup>ii</sup> **1 Chronicles 5:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and he took them into exile, namely, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river Gozan, to this day.

<sup>iii</sup> **Jeremiah 25:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.

<sup>iv</sup> **Joshua 6:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it.

<sup>v</sup> **2 Corinthians 6:14** <sup>14</sup> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

<sup>vi</sup> **James 4:4** You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>vi</sup>

<sup>vii</sup> **Psalms 103:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

<sup>viii</sup> **James 3:1** Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

<sup>ix</sup> **Numbers 5:12-13 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel, If any man's wife goes astray and breaks faith with him,

<sup>13</sup> if a man lies with her sexually, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and she is undetected though she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her, since she was not taken in the act,

<sup>x</sup> **Acts 5:4-5 (ESV)**

(The same was true for the beginning of the New Testament church. If it started with deceit for appearance sake where would the compromise end?) <sup>4</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." <sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.

<sup>xi</sup> **1 Corinthians 12:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

<sup>xii</sup> **Exodus 20:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Exodus 20:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Proverbs 21:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

<sup>xv</sup> **Joshua 5:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.

<sup>xvi</sup> **John 9:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Psalms 39:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> "O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!

<sup>xviii</sup> **Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;

<sup>23</sup> they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

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<sup>xix</sup> **Numbers 20:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle?

<sup>xx</sup> **Exodus 16:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

<sup>xxi</sup> **Joshua 1:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

<sup>xxii</sup> **1 John 4:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Romans 8:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Matthew 16:18 (KJV)**

<sup>18</sup> And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Isaiah 5:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Ephesians 2:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Matthew 22:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Matthew 16:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.