

Entering the Promised Land in 2021

Failure at Ai

Joshua 7-8

Jan. 20, 2021

I. Background

A. The Israelites had just experienced a remarkable victory at Jericho

1. It was their first battle for the Promised Land
2. They accomplished what many probably thought was impossible
3. The victory was encouraging, exhilarating, and reassuring – Josh. 6:27

B. However, their next encounter would be a devastating and humiliating defeat

1. Remember that the Promised Land is a picture of the Christian life
2. Often after a mountaintop experience of a great spiritual victory, we soon find ourselves in a deep valley of defeat and despair

II. The reason for failure

A. Joshua 7 records the defeat of Israel at Ai

1. Joshua sent men to scout out the city of Ai and the surrounding country – 7:1-3
2. The men returned with a report that only 2-3,000 soldiers could easily defeat the city – nothing like the fortified city of Jericho
 - a. Since the strong city of Jericho had fallen to Israel, surely this smaller, weaker city would be a pushover, an easy victory
 - b. The name “Ai” means “ruin” or “heap”
 - c. To the Israelites, it was nothing more than a rubble heap compared to Jericho
 - d. This time, they were not relying on the Lord for the victory

- B. About 3,000 of the Israelites went to Ai and they were soundly defeated, and they had to flee – 7:4-5
 - 1. Only 36 Israelites were killed, but the hearts of the people melted because of this unimaginable defeat
 - 2. Joshua and his leaders spent the whole day in prayer before the Ark of the Covenant – 7:6-7
 - a. Joshua tore his clothes, fell on his face, and mourned the defeat at Ai
 - b. His prayer in v. 7 reveals that he was overwhelmed and desperate
 - c. He was probably at a point where he doubted God, God’s plan, and God’s power
- C. But, Joshua did not continue to focus on defeat or surrender to it – 7:8-9
 - 1. Even though he doubted, feared, and was angry, he still knew that God was his source and could still be trusted
 - 2. Though he was discouraged, he was more concerned about the glory of the Lord and Israel’s testimony before the heathen nations than he was about the discouragement of the defeat
- D. God set the record straight – 7:11-12
 - 1. *“Israel hath sinned”*
 - 2. Their failure was the result of their sin
- E. God instructs Joshua – 7:13-15
 - 1. He told Joshua to *“sanctify the people”*
 - 2. He instructed Joshua to speak to the people on His behalf
 - 3. God instructed Joshua to have all the people present themselves by tribes – 7:14
 - a. The nation was comprised of 12 tribes
 - b. This process would have taken a long time, but the guilty party would be discovered
 - 4. God prescribed harsh and thorough punishment – 7:15
- F. What was the sin that had been committed?
 - 1. God had made it clear that the spoils of Jericho were to be “devoted” or “dedicated” to Him and placed in His treasury – 6:17-19
 - 2. One of the Israelites directly disobeyed God’s command

III. The known sin had to be admitted and confessed

- A. The man Achan was isolated as the guilty culprit – 7:19
- B. One man's sin involved the entire nation
- C. Joshua confronted Achan directly
 - 1. Achan sought glory for himself by taking the expensive cloak and the silver and gold from Jericho – 7:20-21
 - a. “goodly Babylonish garment” = a long robe woven of gold and silk threads
 - b. 200 shekels of silver – estimated weight today would be valued at \$24,000
 - c. A bar (wedge) of gold weighing 50 shekels = value today would be about \$96,000
 - 2. Ironically, the very things Achan thought would help him “get ahead” resulted in his losing everything
- D. Joshua also required Achan to admit what he had done
- E. Achan acknowledged his wrongdoing and confessed what he had done
- F. NOTE: 4 key aspects of the journey into sin and rebellion against the Lord
 - 1. He saw something he wanted and was tempted
 - 2. He coveted; he desired something that did not belong to him that would bring him pleasure
 - 3. He took – Coveting easily becomes the motivation for stealing
 - 4. He hid his sin; he attempted to cover it up

IV. Joshua dealt with Achan – 7:25-26

- A. Achan was stoned to death
 - 1. He was brought to the Valley of Achor
 - a. “Achor” = “trouble” – the Valley of Trouble
 - b. Achan had brought great trouble on Israel through his disobedience
 - 2. Undoubtedly, the other members of his family knew what he had done, so they were complicit in his sin
 - 3. They also had to be judged for their sin and disobedience
 - 4. Because the entire community was affected by the sin, the entire community was required to participate in the stoning

- B. The people stoned Achan and his family and their bodies were burned
 - C. When the sin was removed from the camp, “*the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger*”
 - 1. Sin incurs the Lord’s anger
 - 2. Because Joshua and the people obeyed, they were once again in God’s favor
- V. What becomes of God’s plans for His people when one or more of them disobey?
- A. God’s plans are not nullified by human sin; God told Joshua not to be afraid or dismayed – 8:1-2
 - B. The simple plan to conquer Ai – 8:3-19
 - C. A total and complete victory for the Israelites – 8:25-29
 - 1. However, the victory was once again won before the army ever moved out
 - 2. God had already given the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land to Joshua
 - 3. Interesting: The destruction and desolation of Ai was so total and complete that archaeologists have never been certain of its location even today; it has never been located
 - 4. This time, God allowed the people of Israel to take the spoils from Ai – 8:2, 27
 - a. NOTE: If Achan had been obedient to the Lord and waited a few more days, he would have been blessed with all the wealth he could have carried
 - b. NOTE: God did not expect Joshua and the Israelites to live in failure and defeat
- VI. Lessons/Applications
- A. God expects us to deal honestly with our sin
 - B. Victory and blessing in our lives come only as a result of our obedience to the Lord
 - C. We should avoid situations that will tempt us to sin – look, then flee
 - D. When we fail because of our sin, we can deal with it, and God will still work His plan through us