

Message #13

Joshua 7:1-15

The enemy who will probably cause us the most problems and setbacks will not be an enemy from without; but one from within. There have been nations, cities, churches and individuals who have been utterly ruined because of an enemy from within. This is true even with ourselves; the truth is we are our own worst enemy. We have ourselves hurt our relationship with God more than any outsider.

J. Vernon McGee said that he personally saw more churches wrecked by forces within rather than forces without. He writes: "Disloyalty and unfaithfulness in the church today is hurting God's cause more than any enemy that is on the outside."

This text in Joshua shows us how one person can rob an entire organization of the blessings of God. One person within can be the reason for God permitting destructive things to happen. **Corporate guilt, in the sight of God does not negate individual responsibility, but corporate guilt, in the sight of God can be brought on by one individual.**

One disloyal member, who is in secret rebellion and who is living a lie, can cause God's anger to burn to the point where the entire organization suffers. It is not just a person doing something secretly that only affects him; it can affect everyone.

What we see here in this text is this:

ONE DISLOYAL AND DISOBEDIENT INDIVIDUAL WHO IS HIDING SOME SECRET SIN CAN ANGER GOD TO THE POINT WHERE THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION CAN SUFFER JUDGMENT AND DEFEAT.

Now this principle is not only true for the nation Israel. The Apostle Paul said concerning a local church: "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it..." (I Cor. 12:26). Dr. H. A. Ironside said this verse is both precious and exceedingly solemn. The lessons found in this passage live on. God views a nation or a church as a unit. When one of its members is disloyal and disobedient, it can and it does affect the whole.

Now if there is a traitor in the group, this is encouraging because one way or another it will surface and when it does surface, God expects action to be taken. Triumphs occur when the whole group is focused together on becoming what God wants it to become and tragedies can occur when one from the group is not in harmony with the whole. Again, Dr. McGee said he saw more churches ruined by women and men who pretended to be so in love with God and God's church, but behind the scenes were verbally destroying the whole operation. He writes, "I was a pastor for forty years, and I could tell you story after story about the antics of the super-duper saints" (Vol. 2, p. 18).

Now there six observations we may make from these first 15 verses:

OBSERVATION #1 – God is angered at all Israel because of one disobedient act of one disobedient man. **7:1**

Verse 1 sets the stage for the rest of the account. There are four facts we may observe:

Fact #1 - The unfaithful act occurred in Jericho. **7:1a**

The conjunction “but” which begins the verse connects us to the preceding context concerning Jericho. Jericho had been a wonderful experience, one of the greatest victories in history; “but” one individual had not obeyed God in the taking of Jericho.

Fact #2 - The unfaithful act affected the “sons” (plural) of Israel.” **7:1b**

There was corporate guilt because of the unfaithful act of one. This is not new in the program of God. When Adam sinned, we all received the death penalty. The unfaithful act of one brought corporate guilt to us all.

Fact #3 - The unfaithful act was specifically about disobeying what God banned. **7:1c**

The specific ban of Jericho was that everything from the city belonged to God—any silver, gold, bronze or iron things taken belonged to God and no one was to personally keep any of the spoils (Josh. 6:17-19). All the spoils were banned. In fact, God warned that if any person disobeyed this ban, he would bring trouble on all of Israel (6:18).

If God specifically bans something or specifically says it is sin and we choose to disobey and do it, it will have a leavening effect on us and on the whole organization. Disobeying God and specifically doing something that He forbids is dangerous and serious business.

Fact #4 - The unfaithful act was specifically committed by one person. **7:1d**

There are four specific details we learn about this person:

(Detail #1) - We learn his identity—His name was Achan.

(Detail #2) - We learn his family.

Achan was the son of Carmi, who was the son of Zabdi, who was the son of Zerah, who was from the tribe of Judah. In I Chron. 2:6 we learn that Zerah was a son of Judah.

This is a good pedigree. This is a family from the right side of the tracks. What this tells us is that you could have great parents and grandparents and not obey God. The faithfulness of other family members does not mean everyone is faithful. This one rebellious, disobedient son was a threat not only to his own family, but to all Israel.

(Detail #3) - We learn about his disobedience. 7:1e

What Achan did was that he “took some of the things under the ban.” He took things that had been set apart to God. Achan could care less that God said that if you did this you would bring trouble on the entire nation (6:18). He did not care that his sinful action could affect everyone. He did what he wanted to do and it did not matter to him how many people he hurt.

He took some of the spoils while he was in Jericho and he appeared to get away with it. He thought his little private rebellion would go unnoticed. But he was about to learn a lesson, which we need to learn, **God will settle the score eventually**. You may appear to get away with disobedience in the moment, but there will be a payback in the future. **Private sin is really not private**. No one escapes the seeing eye of God.

(Detail #4) - We learn about Achan’s disobedient impact. 7:1f

Achan caused “the anger of the LORD” to burn against the whole nation. The NET Bible reads “The LORD was furious with the Israelites.” At the time God’s anger is burning, neither Joshua, nor the Elders, nor anyone else knows it. As far as they are concerned, God is pleased with them. But they will soon learn this is not the case.

One commentator said God was so angry that if it were not for His Word and promises to Abraham, the entire nation could have ended right here.

Now why was God so angry?

- 1) His Word had been specifically disobeyed.
- 2) His property had been secretly stolen.
- 3) God saw this as being more dedicated to things rather than to Him.

Any believer who specifically defies God and steals that which belongs to God will anger God.

Dr. Alan Redpath, who was the pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, in the mid 50’s, wrote this: “Now mark well a lesson here for all time. What actually had happened? One man had stolen property which belonged to God, had taken of the spoils of victory that were to be set apart for the Lord. One individual in the camp had betrayed God’s trust, and the verdict from heaven was not, ‘Achan hath sinned,’ but ‘Israel has sinned.’ One man had failed and the whole army was defeated. You see, the children of Israel were a nation - they were brought to redemption ground as one man, the weakest of them and the strongest of them. They were a complete entity; God was dealing with them as a corporate body through whom His purposes for men were to be fulfilled. Here at Ai, therefore, the verdict of heaven on the sin of one member of the community was ‘Israel hath sinned.’ I trust that the Holy Spirit is going to write this lesson deeply on your hearts. Where one member of a local fellowship is guilty before God of sin, the verdict from heaven is, ‘My people have sinned.’ When one man steps out of blessing and does something contrary to God’s will, the verdict of the all-searching eye of our Master is, ‘My people have sinned.’ No individual Christian can sin without affecting the whole church.

No child of God can grow cold in his spiritual life without lowering the temperature of everybody else around him. The victory of the whole community depends on the victorious life of every individual church member. Let no Christian ever think that because he is not doing some specific task for the Lord he does not matter. Let nobody imagine that he can be lost in a crowd and be forgotten. Let me say that the testimony of your church depends on the victorious life of every man and woman on your church rolls. The witness of our church to the glory of God is affected by the testimony of every one of us. If only we would realize that, how readily we would recognize the need for helping and strengthening and praying for each other on the pilgrim journey. The unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace are the testimony of victory in the house of God" (*Joshua: Victorious Christian Living*, pp. 118-119).

OBSERVATION #2 – Joshua prepares to conquer the next key city. **7:2-3**

Now from Joshua's perspective, Israel is on the move. The people are excited and they have had a great victory. They probably think this taking the Promised Land will be a piece of cake. We march around cities, blow trumpets and shout and the land is ours. **The next key city to take after Jericho was Ai.**

According to John Garstang, Ai was located about 13 miles from Jericho and ascends in elevation about 3200 feet (*Joshua-Judges*, p. 155). Ai was located about 33 miles north of Beth-aven. It is interesting that "Bethel" and "Beth-aven" are both mentioned. "Bethel" means house of God and "Beth-aven" means house of wickedness. The mention of these two places pinpoints the location of Ai.

Following the protocol of Jericho, Joshua sent some men to spy out the city (v. 2) and when they returned they told Joshua that they did not need the entire military, but only 2000-3000 soldiers would do it (v. 3). Ai was not a big city and they figured it would be easy pickings.

Now before we move on, there are three points to make about this:

1) Joshua does not consult God about taking Ai.

Had Joshua consulted with God, he would have known God was angry. Joshua just appears to send out his men. One would think the way that Jericho was taken that Joshua would discuss the matter with God to see if another such victory would occur. There is no record of Joshua consulting God. He is simply trusting God that He will give victory.

2) Joshua's spies are self-confident.

It appears as though the spies are totally relying on themselves for this victory. They are so self-confident that they take it upon themselves to reduce the number of the military needed. Trusting in self for victory will never lead to victory in any area. There must always be a dependence on God.

3) Joshua's spies think they can get victory without the whole.

We know from Joshua 8:25 that there were at least 12,000 people in this city. However, God wanted this nation all involved and these guys have come up with some subdivided number they have invented. We never get victory by scheming ourselves.

OBSERVATION #3 – Joshua sends three thousand men and they are defeated. **7:4-5**

Joshua decided to listen to these spies and not consult with God and, as a result, the three thousand men from Israel ended up running away in fear and 36 of them were killed. The men of Ai chased them to the “shebarim” the stone quarries or “broken places.” These men fled to some quarry ravines or gorges. Instead of the Canaanites being afraid of Israel, Israel is afraid of the Canaanites. In fact, the heart of the Israelites “melted and became like water.”

OBSERVATION #4 – Joshua and the Elders humble themselves before God. **7:6**

Neither Joshua nor the Elders knew why this defeat had occurred, but they sure knew what to do in the aftermath of the defeat. Joshua “torn his clothes” which was a sign of deep sorrow (Gen. 37:34; 44:13). They immediately fell down before God and put dirt on their head, which again was a sign of deep sorrow and humility. This is the first mention of the Elders and they obviously knew this was a very serious moment. They too fell “before the ark of the LORD.” These leaders are totally and completely humbling themselves to the authority of the Word of God. As soon as there had been defeat they ran to the Word. The truth is disobedience will always leave us humiliated and depressed.

OBSERVATION #5 – Joshua prays to God. **7:7-9**

This is what Joshua should have done before going against Ai, but he did the right thing after the defeat of Ai. He goes right to God's Word and right to prayer. It is so interesting because Joshua is talking to God and has no clue as to why Israel has suffered this defeat. There are four matters he mentions in this prayer.

Matter #1 - Joshua asked God about the reason for the defeat. **7:7a**

Matter #2 - Joshua wondered if they should have stayed put when they crossed the Jordan. **7:7b**

Matter #3 - Joshua admits that Israel turned their backs on their enemies and ran away. **7:8**

Matter #4 - Joshua is concerned that the Canaanites will destroy them. **7:9**

The Canaanites are building momentum and would destroy Israel and then God's name would be destroyed.

OBSERVATION #6 – God answers Joshua’s prayer. **7:10-15**

In **verse 10** God tells Joshua to get up. When God says, “why have you fallen on your face,” God is basically saying this problem is not about Me abandoning Israel, it is about Israel sinning against Me. You don’t need to be praying about this; you need to be dealing with a sin issue. There are six answers God gives to Joshua:

Answer #1 - Israel has specifically sinned and disobeyed God. **7:11a**

The problem is not with God or His Word; it is with Israel. They have violated His covenantal agreement which said give me the spoils and don’t you take them.

Answer #2 - Israel has specifically stolen things that belong to Him. **7:11b**

Stealing from God is a serious sin. There are deceptive people who are not faithful and loyal but they are deceptive thieves. What these types of people need to know is that God will track them down. If you are a deceptive liar, you can be certain God will expose you.

Answer #3 - Israel will not win another battle until this sin is faced. **7:12**

The reason why Israel would not win another battle is because God will not be with them to let them win until they face and eliminate this problem. God is gracious to restore and bless, but the evil must be faced and eliminated.

Answer #4 - Israel must consecrate herself to God. **7:13**

When there has been sin, there needs to be renewed consecration. Most of the people had no idea what was going on, but they all needed to set themselves apart as holy to the Lord.

Answer #5 - Israel must be completely examined. **7:14**

Every tribe, every family and every household would be examined by lot to determine whether or not they were guilty. This was serious judgment. This would be a humiliating moment for one deceptive.

Answer #6 - Israel must punish the offender. **7:15**

As unpleasant a task as this would seem, the offender needed to be removed, burned and destroyed. At this point, no one but God even knows who did it. But when He reveals it, they need to act.

There is a N.T. text that teaches the same thing for the church (I Cor. 5:11, 6-7). Our private, unconfessed sin can hurt the entire body. Our disloyalty and unfaithfulness can hinder the blessings of God. Each of us has a responsibility to God and to each other.

Nothing we do in private will ever escape the all-seeing, all-knowing God.