

Setbacks

*O 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 round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great
name?*

Joshua 7:8-9

As we peruse the prayers of the Bible, we come upon this scene where Joshua cries out to the Lord from his prostrate position among the elders of Israel, after an unexpected routing from the little army of Ai. Up to this point, Joshua had enjoyed the encouragements of the miracle of crossing the dry Jordan, a glorious holy meeting with the Lord to receive the battle plan for Jericho, and the miraculous fall of the walls of Jericho with the ensuing defeat. We can imagine how Joshua's confidence grew with each experience, expecting that the Lord would continue to magnify him in the sight of the people, as promised in Joshua 3:7, so that the army would remain resolute in their conquest. But now in this context, we see him complaining to God that the plan has been foiled, and predicting Israel's military doom. On top of that, he implies doubt of God's sovereign power with the question, "what wilt thou do...?" Is this the same Joshua that was charged to be strong and of good courage, which he had been until this point? If this were only a modern story, we would expect it to tell how God came to comfort poor Joshua in his time of loss. But instead we see the reality of God telling him to get up and deal with the issue at hand.

And what do we do in the face of setbacks? Do we throw obedient faith to the wind and complain to God, that perhaps He now has a problem to figure out? If this can happen to a mighty man like Joshua, who had experienced God's glory under Moses and His victory up to this point, it can certainly happen to us. As we learn from the rest of the story, Joshua first had to deal with the human cause in the situation. So, let us heed the lesson and, before we fall upon our faces, examine the state of our own camp. May we be able to hear Him say to get up and address our responsibilities to seek and destroy our own human causes of failure. Then let us know that we can then fall upon our faces and, instead of accusing God, beg Him for His mercy to do what we cannot.

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