

The Lord Your God Goes Before You

God's Work in the Book of Joshua

Trouble in the Camp

7:1-26

Focus Attention:

That pesky little word ... "but."

How many statements are ruined by that one little word?

- You did a fine job with that, but...
- I really like that outfit, but...
- You can save a lot of money on this, but...
- I love you, but...
- I'm sorry, but...

When Joshua continues the story of Israel's conquest after the fall of Jericho, it begins with this troublesome word.

^{6:27} *So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.*

^{7:1} *But...*

Isn't that often the case. Things will be going great ... everything will be coming together ... you are on top of the world ... you've had a mountaintop experience ... *but* then ...

It often happens in our spiritual conquest for the inheritance that is ours in Christ. It would be nice to always be on the mountaintop. For every mountaintop, however, there is a valley all around. We experience a great moment of spiritual growth and accomplishment only to be followed by the valley of disappointment or failure. What's going on?

That's what Joshua and the people of Israel want to know in Joshua 7. The crossing of the Jordan had amazed. The renewal of the covenant and the first Passover in the new land had inspired. The crumbling of the walls around Jericho had invigorated.

But ...

The spiritual battles in our lives are marked with many victories and a lot of defeats. What can we learn through Israel's experience right after the battle of Jericho?

Focus on the Word:

A. TROUBLE (vv 1, 20-21)

1. “The Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things” (v 1).
 - a. The “devoted things” had been all the men, women, children, possessions and treasures of Jericho. Nothing was to be taken by the army of Israel.
 - b. Joshua had commanded loudly and clearly: “Keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury” (6:18-19).
2. Actually, it had only been one man who acted unfaithfully: “Achan ... took some of them.” The result, though, was felt by the whole community: “So the Lord’s anger burned against Israel.”
 - a. “God made it clear that it was *Israel* that had sinned and not just Achan alone. Why would God blame the whole nation for the disobedience of only one soldier?” <Weirsbe, p 84>
 - b. “Though one might wish to give credit to the discipline of Joshua’s forces because only one of his soldiers gave in to temptation, even this one did not escape God’s notice. God saw Achan’s sin in take some of the devoted things, and because of it God’s wrath burned against the entire nation. He considered them collectively responsible and withheld his blessing until the matter was made right.” <The Bible Knowledge Commentary>
 - c. “Israel was *one people in the Lord* and not just an assorted collection of tribes, clan, families and individuals. God dwelt in the midst of their camp, and this made the Jews the Lord’s special people (Ex 19:5-6). Jehovah God walked about in their camp, and therefore the camp was to be kept holy (Deut 23:14). Anyone who disobeyed God defiled the camp, and this defilement affected their relationship to the Lord and to one another.” <Weirsbe, p 84>

☞ What parallels do you see in this for the church today? We, collectively, are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16). We, collectively, are the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12ff), and each member belongs to the others. Are we to understand that the sins and failures of someone among the covenant people of God today have a similar profound effect on that community of believers?
3. Achan’s sin was deliberate and blatantly rebelled against the command of God. And it did not happen all at once. In his own words, he went through a series of acts that led to his failure (v21).
 - a. “I saw.” Probably not a glance. He got into trouble when he gave it a second, or third, or fourth look.
 - b. “I coveted.” Achan decided God’s label for the things of Jericho was not good enough. God had called the items “devoted things.” Achan called them “plunder” or “spoils.” That reclassified them into something that it was proper for Achan to take.

- c. “I took.” Achan provided opportunity for his desires to drag him away from God’s purposes, and it gave birth to sin (cf. James 1:14).
 - d. “I hid.” Achan thought he could get away with his deceitfulness by hiding it from view. “Surely no one will miss just this little bit.” How many other men and women in Scripture fell with the same mistaken conclusion?
- ☞ How can awareness and understanding of this downward fall into sin help you in your own spiritual battles with the Evil One?
4. Achan’s name (especially its variant *Achar*, v 27, 1 Chron 2:7) means “trouble.” Achan’s sin brought trouble for himself, his family, and the whole Israelite camp.

B. DEFEAT (vv 1-5)

1. What happened next took Joshua and the people by surprise, and resulted in shock and dismay. They had never experienced defeat before. God had given them one victory after another to this point.

And why wouldn’t He this time? Ai was a smaller city than Jericho had been. It only had a population of 12,000 (8:25). Its fighting force would therefore have been much smaller. Taking his scouts’ advice, Joshua sent a small group of warriors to take the insignificant garrison. Up into the hill country the soldiers marched, 15 miles from Jericho. Down they fled for their lives, routed by the king of Ai.

2. Why did it happen?

One successful man said he owed his success to a close study he made of his Dominicker rooster. That rooster was a powerful fighter. He could fly higher and cut deeper than any other rooster in the neighborhood. But he often lost fights against weaker foes.

His trouble was that right in the middle of a fight, he’d stop to crow.

<Maxwell Droke in Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations: Signs of the Times>

- a. Some have said that Israel’s failure came because Joshua sent some spies to survey the city of Ai. But this is what many good commanders in Scripture do (Num 21:32; Prov 20:18; 24:6), and Joshua had already done this with God’s blessing during his own time of leadership.
- b. The problem seems to be not what they did, but what they had in their hearts.
 - i. Joshua assumed “that the Lord was pleased with His people and would give them victory over Ai... No doubt the impressive victory at Jericho had given Joshua and his army a great deal of self-confidence; and self-confidence can lead to presumption. Since Ai was a smaller city than Jericho, victory seemed inevitable from the human point of view.” <Weirsbe, p 87>
 - ii. Joshua, however, made a fatal mistake. He did not consult the mind of God.
 - iii. There is no mention of God’s strength when the spies returned from Ai. There is no waiting for God’s marching orders. There is no mention of dependence on God’s presence in the attack. “Look at what *we* did to Jericho,” they may have thought. “*We* will have no trouble doing it again.”

3. The loss of 36 fighting men was bad enough, but for Joshua and the people, there was an even greater loss.
 - a. Did the loss at Ai mean God's promises had failed?
 - b. Did the loss mean that Israel would be unable to make a stand against any further enemies in the land.
 - c. Worse yet, did the loss mean that God had taken His presence from among them?
- ☞ "It is a deadly error to underrate the enemy's power. Christians often fail to realize that their enemies are powerful (Eph 6:12; 1 Pet 5:8). So believers suffer the consequences in ignominious spiritual defeat. The calamity that befell Israel was due, at least in part, to minimizing the enemy and to assuming that one victory guaranteed another. But life simply does not work that way. Yesterday's victory does not make a believer immune from defeat today. He must continually depend on the Lord for strength. Speaking of a Christian's conflict with evil Paul wrote, 'Be strong in the Lord and in His might power' (Eph 6:10)." <The Bible Knowledge Commentary>
4. Joshua had no clear instruction from God for this battle. What was he to do? Ai was ripe for the picking. The people were ready to fight. Surely it's better to do *something*, even if it may not be quite the right thing to do!

In this case Joshua should have waited and sought God's direction. If he had, he would have saved a demoralizing defeat. He would have spared 36 lives. He could have found out about the trouble in the camp before he met his next enemy.

*Instead, Joshua presumed to know the mind of God
without seeking the mind of God.*

C. REPENTANCE (vv 6-21)

1. The defeat at Ai left a broken and remorseful people. Joshua led the people in an exercise of true repentance (vv 6-9).
 - a. True repentance is not merely inward (v 6). It will find expression outwardly. Joshua tore his clothes and lay prostrate on the ground in God's presence. This was an act of genuine humility and contrition.
 - b. True repentance seeks answers to the problem (v 7). It is proper to question Joshua's lament as he grieves the defeat. He seems to blame God. His initial thoughts do not seem to consider that the problem could be somewhere with him or the people. He sounds more like the grumblers in the wilderness than the faithful who crossed the Jordan. Joshua's heart, though, is purer than those who perished without receiving the inheritance from God, as his final, prayerful words indicate. His heart leaves him open to God's answers.
 - c. True repentance is concerned more with God than with self (vv 8-9). "Now Joshua gets to the heart of the matter: Israel's defeat had robbed God of glory, and for this they had to repent. If the people of the land lost their fear of Israel's God (2:8-11), this would make it difficult for Joshua to conquer the land. But the important thing was not Joshua's fame or Israel's conquests, but the glory of the God of Israel. Joshua's concern was not for his own reputation but for the "great name" of Jehovah." <Weirsbe, pp 89-90>

2. Joshua and the people's expression of repentance brought about a response from God (vv 10-15).
 - a. God gives them time to consider their circumstances. He waits until the evening sacrifices before He responds.
 - b. God's message to Joshua is clear: There is a time to pray and there is a time to act. The time for praying is over and the time to act has come.
 - c. It would have been easy for the people to get lost in self-pity and grief. Repentance, though, does not stay at the prayer level. Repentance leads people to seek God's redemption.
 - d. This is the only time in this chapter that we read "marching orders" from God. This time, though, it is not against an enemy outside the camp. These directives are to cleanse the camp of wrongdoing. Sin must be dealt with.
 - i. God's word pointed out what was wrong.
 - ii. God's word instructed the people to prepare themselves to face God.
 - iii. God's word instructed the people on how to confront the wrongdoer.
 - iv. God's word instructed the people on how to deal with the wrongdoer.
 - e. "Since God knew who was guilty, why did He not simply reveal his identity to Joshua? The answer is that this dramatic method would impress on the nation of Israel the seriousness of disobeying God's commands. Since the method took time it would also give the guilty person an opportunity to repent and confess his sin. If Achan had responded in this way and thrown himself on the mercy of God no doubt he would have been pardoned as was the guilty David centuries later (Ps 32:1-5; 51:1-12)." <The Bible Knowledge Commentary>
3. Achan's "repentance" contrasts Joshua's repentance (vv 16-21).
 - a. Can you imagine what Achan must have been thinking and feeling as the lot is cast tribe by tribe, clan by clan, family by family, and finally man by man? Did he really think he would be overlooked and his deceit would win?
 - b. When finally confronted face to face, Achan confesses his sin. It is straightforward and without excuse. He owns up to what he has done.
 - c. There is also a distinct lack of sorrow and remorse in his words, it would seem. He does not seem to be concerned about the same things Joshua had expressed a day earlier before God.
 - d. Could it be that Achan was not so much sorry for what he had done in taking the devoted things, as he was sorry that he had gotten *caught*?

☞ What is true repentance? Do I often think I am truly repentant over a sin when as a matter of fact I am truly only sorry that I got caught? Repentance grieves over the way my attitudes or behaviors have made light the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Repentance is more concerned with how God has been affected by my sin than with how I am affected. Repentance seeks to bring reconciliation to my covenant relationship with God more than it desires to somehow save my reputation with others.

D. Removal (vv 22-26)

1. As soon as Achan makes admission of his guilt, Joshua sends men to substantiate Achan's confession. Furthermore, the command of God at Jericho had to be completed and the devoted things delivered into God's possession.
2. The severity of God's judgment on Achan and all that belonged to him has caused great concern for many. How are we to reconcile our knowledge of God as One who is merciful and full of grace with what is demonstrated in this occasion?
 - a. First and foremost in people's minds is the extent to which the judgment of God was carried out. Why would Achan's family be put to death so viciously for something Achan had done?
 - i. God's word said, "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin" (Deut 24:16). Had God commanded the execution of Achan's innocent children, it would appear that He would be contradicting His own decrees on the matter.
 - ii. There is some question about the meaning of the original text. A close reading does not necessary assume that his family was punished with Achan. The Hebrew text reads, "They stoned HIM with stones, and burnt THEM with fire, after they had stoned THEM with stones." The singular before the plurals leaves the references in doubt. The meaning may simply be, "They stoned Achan and burned him with all his possessions."
 - iii. Some suggest that the children were taken to the place of execution, not so they could be put to death, but for the purpose of leaving them with a deep impression that they should not follow in their father's footsteps.
 - iv. It very well may be, however, that the children (no age is given) had become accomplices with Achan in the deceit. There is no mention of Achan's wife, only his children. Had they become aware of the deed and conspired with him in keep the matter hidden?
 - b. "At the beginning of a new period in Bible history, God sometimes revealed His wrath against sin in some dramatic way."
 - i. With Nadab and Abihu when the tabernacle was built (Lev 10).
 - ii. With Uzzah as the ark journeys to the City of David (2 Sam 6).
 - iii. With Ananias and Sapphira at the beginning of the Christian Age (Acts 5).

As the people step foot into the land promised long ago to their forefather Abraham, "the death of Achan . . . was certainly a dramatic warning to the nation not to take the Word of God lightly." <Weirsbe, pp 92-93>
 - c. Joshua leaves a third memorial along their path through the conquest of the land. A pile of stones is left to remind the people – and the generations who would follow – that disobedience is indeed a serious matter with the Lord.

Focus on Tomorrow

How seriously do we take sin into account as we seek to take possession of our inheritance in Jesus Christ? Do I understand the gravity of my own trespasses? Am I aware of the disastrous affect my sin has on not just myself but on my family, my church, and my community? Do we recognize the destruction that occurs when we turn a blind eye to blatant and unrepentant sin within the body of Christ?

A story is told of a father who took his boy on his knee and told him the story of the lost sheep, how it found a hole in the fence and crawled through; how glad it was to get away; how it skipped and played in the sunshine until it wandered so far that it could not find its way back home.

And then he told him of the wolf that chased the sheep, and how, finally, the good shepherd came and rescued it and carried it back to the fold.

The little boy was greatly interested and when the story was over, he surprised his father by asking, "Did they nail up the hole in the fence?"

How often we overlook the "hole in the fence!"

<The Circuit Rider in the Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations: Signs of the Times>