

A Severe Mercy

Joshua 7 - 8:29



Joshua 7:1 - 8:29 records a dark day in Israel's campaign to conquer the land of Canaan, a day that raised many questions and caused many to fear.

Joshua and the children of Israel were on a tremendous "high." Why shouldn't they be? Look what has happened in the past few days: the Jordan River had miraculously stopped to permit their passage into Canaan, the city of Jericho fell with almost no effort, every Amorite and Canaanite king was shaking in his boots at the thought of fighting Israel.

Suddenly, without warning, disaster struck. Thirty six Israelites were killed in the battle at Ai. The remaining warriors were chased away from the city all the way back home. Why had God allowed such a thing to happen? Hadn't God promised victory for Joshua in conquering the land?

- *Achan's sin against the Lord (7:1-5)*
- *Joshua's lament over the failure at Ai (7:6-9)*
- *The Lord's rebuke and instruction following the defeat at Ai (7:10-26)*
- *The Victory at Ai (8:1-29)*

What does it say?

What does it mean?

Joshua 7:1-8:29



¹ But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.

² Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and spy out the region." So the men went up and spied out Ai.

³ When they returned to Joshua, they said, "Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there." ⁴ So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, ⁵ who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water.

⁶ Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. ⁷ And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to

7:1-5 Compare 7:1 with 6:17-19. What had Achan, son of Carmi, done that caused the Lord's anger to burn against Israel?

What do you learn about the character of God from what is recorded in 7:1-5?

7:6-9 Joshua and the elders of Israel humble themselves before the presence of God in 7:6-9. Do you think Joshua's response to the tragedy at Ai was correct?

What does it say?

destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! ⁸ O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? ⁹ The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"

¹⁰ The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? ¹¹ Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. ¹² That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

¹³ "Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.

¹⁴ "In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD takes shall come forward clan by clan; the clan that the LORD takes shall come forward family by family; and the family that the LORD takes shall come forward man by man. ¹⁵ He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done a disgraceful thing in Israel!"

¹⁶ Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken. ¹⁷ The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was taken. ¹⁸ Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me."

²⁰ Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: ²¹ When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I

What does it mean?

7:10-12 How does God respond to Joshua's lament in verses 10-12?



Why should Joshua have already known that sin was the cause of Israel's failure (compare Joshua 1:6-9)?

7:20-21 In verse 21 Achan describes why he sinned against the Lord. What are the 3 main verbs he uses to describe the process of that sin? I'll give you a hint:

I ____, I _____, I _____.

(see 2 Samuel 11:2-5, David's sin with Bathsheba follows a similar progression. Also see James 1:13-15.) What do you learn about the dynamics of sin from this passage?

"Covetousness":

An inordinate desire for what one does not have, which has its basis in discontentment with what one does have. It has an element of lawlessness, and is sinful because it is contrary to the command, "Be content with such things as you have."

Read Hebrews 13:5

What does it say?

coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. ²³ They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.

²⁴ Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵ Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today."

Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. ²⁶ Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

¹ Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land. ² You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city."

³ So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack Ai. He chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night ⁴ with these orders: "Listen carefully. You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don't go very far from it. All of you be on the alert. ⁵ I and all those with me will advance on the city, and when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them. ⁶ They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say, 'They are running away from us as they did before.' So when we flee from them, ⁷ you are to rise up from ambush and take the city. The LORD your God will give it into your hand. ⁸ When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the LORD has commanded. See to it; you have my orders."

Read Joshua 8:9-29...

What does it mean?

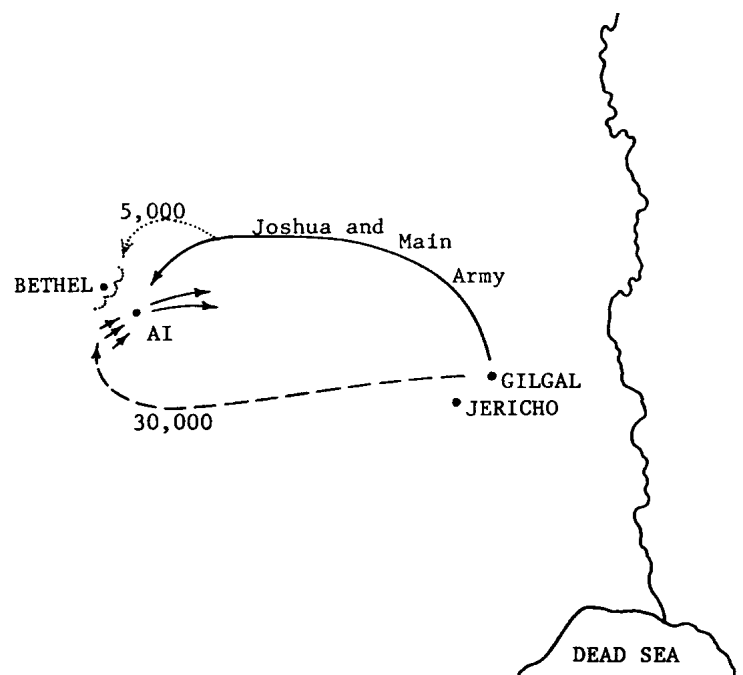
God disciplined the children of Israel through the death of Achan and his family in 7:24-26. What effect would this discipline have on Israel's view of God? On themselves?

Compare 8:1-8 with 7:2-5. What difference do you see in the attitude of the people after Achan's discipline?

Joshua's stretching out his hand is reminiscent of Moses. Look up the following verses and try to determine what the outstretched hand was intended to symbolize:

Exodus 14:16-21

Exodus 17:8-13



The Battle at Ai (Joshua 8)



Application — What does this mean in my life?

1. God disciplined the children of Israel in order to bring them back to the place of blessing under the covenant. Does the idea of God disciplining you comfort you or scare you? Why?
2. Francis Schaeffer (in his book Joshua) suggests the following progression in the principle of judgment of the people of God:
 1. *When we sin, God knows (because He exists and is infinite).*
 2. *When we sin, the blessing slows or stops. It can even stop for a whole group on the basis of the sin of one or a few.*
 3. *There will be judgment either from ourselves in confessing our sin or from God.*
 4. *If we return, the blessing rolls on again.*

What do you think of Schaeffer's analysis?

2. God is a holy God, who although gracious and forgiving, never “winks” at our sin. How has your view of God changed as a result of reading this chapter?

3. What does this section teach about how God thinks about sin and how we should deal with it? How diligent does He want us to be?

4. What other things besides sin do we tend to want to blame our failures on?

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:7-11