

DEFEAT - SPELLED WITH A CAPITAL D

STUDY NOTES FOR CARE GROUPS JOSHUA 7-8

June 28, 2009

THE CENTRAL FOCUS FOR OUR STUDY IS HOW VICTORY CAN TURN TO DEFEAT FOR THE
PEOPLE OF GOD.

Context:

After the victory at Jericho, Israel experiences a major upset when attacking the city of Ai. The men of Ai rout the Israelite army, and 36 Israelites lose their lives. Earlier, the hearts of the Canaanites melted with fear (Joshua 2:9, 11, 24). Now, the hearts of the Israelites melt and turn to water (Joshua 7:5).

Study Part A: Joshua 7:1-26.

I. Defeat at Ai

- (a) **UNFAITHFULNESS:** Achan had acted unfaithfully. In the Old Testament, the expression 'broke faith' (v. 1) describes the breaking of a trust between two parties. In this case, Achan broke faith by violating Yahweh's clear command not to take any loot after the battle at Jericho. Any valuable articles were supposed to go into Yahweh's treasury (Jos 6:18-19). By identifying Achan and his sin at the outset of the story, the narrator indicates that the plot does not turn on 'who committed the sin' or 'why Israel suffered defeat.' Rather, the story focuses on what happens when God's people break trust with Him. In other words, what is the consequence when the people sin against God. As a result, Yahweh's anger burned against the children of Israel (v. 17). Literally, the Hebrew text says that 'Yahweh's nose burned.' The picture comes from a bearded Hebrew male whose red-flushed nose betrays his anger.
- (b) **SELF-RELIANCE:** There was a boastful pride on the part of the spies (v. 3). Unlike an earlier group of spies sent by Joshua into Canaan (Joshua 2:24), this group does not factor Yahweh into the equation. Rather, their report resembles the majority report of Moses' spies more than forty years earlier: it exhibits a lack of faith and trust, which stems from self-reliance. There was no hint of trust in Yahweh's deliverance – the lesson that the battle of Jericho intended to teach.

QUESTION: If Israel had sought Yahweh's help, would Yahweh have revealed Achan's sin before Israel headed into battle and got defeated?

Whatever the answer, the story makes it clear that the sin of one member of the community of faith has a devastating effect on the whole community. The principle still stands today. Sin in a church needs to be identified and dealt with to keep God's people spiritually healthy (1 Corinthians 5).

II. Yahweh's Glory at Stake

Joshua's instructions to Achan reveal what is at stake. The over-riding concern is Yahweh's glory. The Hebrew term 'glory' literally means 'heaviness, weightiness.' When used in reference to God, it refers to the weightiness of His character – that is, the sum total of all God's character qualities. God's concern throughout the Bible is to put His glory on display (Exodus 14:4; Psalm 96:3; Isaiah 48:11; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 1:12, 14, 18).

III. The Seduction of Coveting

Achan explains his sins with the verbs 'saw,' 'coveted' and 'took' (v. 21). These same three verbs appear in Genesis 3:6 in the description of the first sin by a human being, Eve. The underlying sin amounted to coveting. This term appears in the Tenth Commandment, 'You shall not covet your neighbour's...' (Exodus 20:17). Coveting is a person's strong desire to possess what does not rightly belong to them, it can lead them to pursue actions that make no sense – actions as ridiculous as disobeying God's clear commands.

Discussion:

Sin brings nothing but trouble and that communities of faith must deal with sin in their midst in order to experience God's blessing. Only when there is genuine repentance will there be forgiveness and restoration. God stands ready to receive and restore; are we ready to repent and forsake our sins?

Questions:

1. What are some areas whereby we need to deal with in our own individual lives today?
2. How can we safeguard ourselves from coveting in modern globalized and affluent Singapore?

Application:

Start an accountability partner or group whereby you can mutually support and encourage one another through prayer and godly advice.

Prayer:

O Father, holiness is what I long for, holiness is what I need. Transform my mind and conform my will to yours.

Study Part B: Joshua 8:1-35

I. Victory at Ai – new instructions!

Joshua is to deal with Ai and its king as he did to Jericho and its king, but with two exceptions. First, Yahweh has lifted the ban on the devoted things which had been in effect at Jericho and now Israel can take the spoils of war for themselves. Second, Yahweh dictates a different strategy – this time Joshua is to set an ambush behind the city (instead of walking around the city as before in Jericho).

Yahweh tells Joshua to stretch out his sword towards the city (Joshua 8:18a). A reason was given: 'for I will give it to your hand.' Joshua did not draw his hand back until the mission was accomplished. The outstretched sword motif in this story reminds us of two previous situations in which Yahweh delivered His people. First, Yahweh created a crossing through the Red Sea by parting the waters while Moses lifted up his staff and stretched out his hand over the sea (Exodus 14:16, 21). Yahweh also instructed Moses to stretch his hand over the sea to bring the water back upon the pursuing Egyptian army. Then, in Exodus 17:8-16, Joshua defeated the Amalekites while Moses held up his hands. In each of the three situations, the uplifted or outstretched arms signify Yahweh's control over the battle and His supply of power to help the Israelites achieve victory.

II. Obedience – Joshua makes a stone copy of the Law to teach the people

The description in Joshua 8:32 of Joshua writing a copy of the law of Moses provides intriguing insight into the process of preserving Scripture. Writing materials such as plastered stones (See Deuteronomy 27:2) required effort to produce and were not always durable over time. Furthermore, the general populace did not read or write. Joshua ensures that Israel will continue to have a copy of a previously written copy of the Law. The Israelites needed a means of keeping the law of Moses fresh in their minds. Joshua's act of building an altar on Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30-31a) begins the process of obeying a command that Yahweh had issued through Moses in Deuteronomy 27:5-7. While Yahweh has provided specific details to Joshua about each new venture or battle (for example, see 3:7-13; 4:1-3; 6:2-7; 8:1-2), the law of Moses contains the heart of Yahweh's instructions for His people (see Deuteronomy 11:31-32; Joshua 1:7). Joshua makes a priority of knowing God's word.

Discussion:

This episode highlights the need for God's people to review God's commands and keep them fresh in their memory. After all, success flows from obedience, and obedience requires an intimate knowledge of Scripture. Today, the challenge for God's people is a bit different. We have ample Bible translations and a wide variety of study helps – including commentaries and devotions. But God's people still have to discipline themselves to read and reflect on Scripture rather than neglecting it. Ignorance happens when God's people ignore His Word.

Application:

1. Have you kept a consistent Bible Study programme over the weekdays or do you spend time with the Bible only on Sunday in church?
2. How can we encourage one another to press on with our spiritual disciplines of prayer, bible study and application?

Prayer:

Lord, help me to never ever forget Your precepts; for by them You have given me life. Psalm 119:93.