

=THE LIFE OF JOSHUA=

Lesson 5

Joshua at Ai

AIM: to teach my pupils what causes spiritual defeats.

INTRODUCTION: The Jews had just crossed the Jordan River and entered into the Promised Land. They had won the battle of Jericho, as we noticed last week. Jericho, however, was called by God an accursed city, and the Jews were commanded not to take anything from the city for themselves. They were, however, to put the gold and silver in the treasury of the Lord. There was in the camp of Israel a man whose name was Achan. Achan saw a goodly Babylonish garment, 200 shekels of silver (roughly \$130), and a wedge of gold. He could not resist taking these things for himself. Now there were two things that he did that were wrong: (1) He took a garment that was supposed to be destroyed, and (2) He took money that was supposed to be in God's treasury. This and other things led to a defeat at Ai immediately following the glorious victory at Jericho. Today we discuss the circumstances surrounding this defeat.

POINT OF CONTACT: Bring a nice garment and some coins to class. Begin the lesson by asking the pupils to guess how much money 200 shekels of silver would be. You could give to the one who guesses the nearest the coins you have in your hand. This would certainly get the attention of the class and get their minds all centered on the subject.

I. SPIRITUAL DEFEATS COME BECAUSE WE ROB GOD. The money was supposed to have been put in the Lord's treasury. Ten percent of our income is supposed to be put in the Lord's treasury! Anything we give less than that is money we rob from God. Notice Malachi 3:10. (Teacher, spend some time here teaching tithing. This is very vital. Teach the pupils that one-tenth of everything they earn or get belongs to God. Show them the danger of robbing God. Tell of Achan, who was killed because he stole money from God. Teach them the tithe is the Lord's, and nothing can come from robbing God except spiritual defeat.)

II. SPIRITUAL DEFEATS COME WHEN WE DO NOT PREPARE FOR THE LITTLE BATTLES. Read Joshua 7:3-5. Jericho was a big, well fortified city, and the people knew it would take a miracle. On the other hand, Ai was a small city of only about 12,000 people. The people thought that they did not need to take all of their forces with them. They leaned upon the arm of the flesh, and defeat came! Here is a tremendous truth: No job for God is little. When we realize that everything we do for God is big, then every job becomes a big job. Whatever your task is, if it is for God, it is big. Do it, and do it well!

It is also true in battles for the Lord; when we face the little battles, we need God just as much as we do when we face the big battles. (Teacher, talk here about the little temptations: the temptation to cheat on a test, the temptation not to do our best as president of a class or secretary of a class. Let us prepare for the little battles as well as the big. Let us do well the little jobs as well as the big; hence, every battle becomes big, and every job becomes big.)

III. SPIRITUAL DEFEATS COME BECAUSE WE DO NOT FOLLOW THE WILL OF GOD. Perhaps the biggest reason Israel was defeated was because she did not take the Ark of the Covenant with her to Ai. Over the Ark of the Covenant rested the glory of God. You will recall this ark preceded the Israelites through the Jordan River. It had led them through the wilderness. It led them to defeat Jericho, but they thought that they did not need that for Ai; they could do it themselves. The honest truth is, outside the will of God is unhappiness and misery. (Teacher, stress here again the importance of every pupil doing God's will. Explain that God has a plan for every life and that no one can be happy, successful, useful, and victorious unless he follows God's plan and does His will.)

IV. SPIRITUAL DEFEATS COME BECAUSE WE TAKE THE GLORY OURSELVES. Joshua 7:3d, "...for they are but few." There is no doubt but that the Jews had become very impressed about the victory at Jericho. Had they not crossed the Red Sea? Had they not seen the walls fall down? Was not their faith in God great? Hence, they became cocky and overconfident. If one preaches a good sermon,

his next is likely to be a bad one if he doesn't realize it was God Who gave him the first one. The same is true of those who sing solos, sing in singing groups, teach classes, play instruments, win souls, etc. We must also remember that the strength and the victory come from the Lord. It is not ourselves. It is a serious and dangerous thing for us to take any of the glory or credit. (Teacher, stress very strongly here the fact that more people probably stumble because they cannot take success than those who stumble because they cannot take failure. Rare is the person who can take much success humbly. Teach the pupils how to be successful and how to win victories.)

This is why some baseball teams win the World Series one year and flop the next year. This is why sometimes a sophomore is a good ball player and a great hero, but he never builds up to expectations in the future. Many people have overcome great obstacles to become successful, but they found the obstacle of success to be insurmountable!

- V. SPIRITUAL DEFEAT COMES BECAUSE ALL SIN. Notice in Joshua 7:11 the words, "Israel hath sinned." This has always been very interesting, for it seems that only Achan sinned; yet God said that "Israel hath sinned." He blamed the sin of one upon all, for in a real sense all are to blame for one's sin. Achan's parents, no doubt, had failed. His Sunday school teacher had failed. His Evening Bible Class teacher had failed. His pastor had failed. His school teachers had failed. His friends had failed. Somewhere down the line Israel had failed because there was such a man in her midst. We will never be the kind of servants we ought to be for God unless each of us takes blame for the failures of any of us. When a church member goes astray, the church has sinned. When a class member goes astray, the class has sinned. When an individual goes astray, the nation has sinned. When a Lee Harvey Oswald kills a president, it is the sin of the nation in creating an atmosphere that creates Lee Harvey Oswalds. When one of us goes astray, all of us must assume part of the blame.
- VI. THE LEADER TOOK THE BLAME. Notice something very interesting in Joshua 7:6. Joshua assumed the blame for the defeat. The leader should assume most of the blame since it is his job to instill truths and virtue into the followers. When a church does not thrive, the pastor must assume much of the blame. When a department does not thrive, the superintendent must assume much of the blame. When a class does not thrive, the teacher must assume much of the blame. Leadership is the great need; leadership is the great key. It is always a bad idea for a leader to put the blame on the followers. (Teacher, stress here the importance of our not pushing the blame on others. It is so easy for one player on the team to blame the other members because they were defeated. Young people especially need to have this truth. Even if it is someone else's fault, we should not place the blame on that one alone.)
- VII. JOSHUA AND HIS RESPONSE TO DEFEAT. Notice in Joshua 7:6 and 7, he came to the altar and threw himself on his face there. Several observations follow:
1. He came to the place of blood for forgiveness, for at the altar was where the lamb was slain and the blood was shed. I John 1:7 says, "...and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." That means not only forgiveness for the unsaved sinner but for the saved sinner is given because of the blood of Jesus! We must plead the blood, for it is His blood that keeps on cleansing us from sin.
 2. He came to the house of God. Ah, this is a good idea! When sin comes in the camp, the place to come is the house of God. In fact, faithfulness to the house of God is the biggest single need for the Christian, for it is here that he is reminded of all the other needs in the Christian life.
 3. He came to the altar at the house of God. This is a good idea. Come to the altar when you have a need. Pray it out.