

1. I call this lesson "Dealing with defeat: How to take inventory of what went wrong!" Well, isn't that a happy lesson title! ☺ In this lesson, the Israelites get their first real taste of defeat in their attempt to conquer the Promised Land. The good news is Joshua takes the right steps to deal with that defeat. My purpose of this lesson is to get you and me to understand just what to do when one experiences defeat in life.
2. Let me start by reminding all of us, what the "Promised Land" represents on a spiritual basis: It is to live the life where one completely trusts in God for all aspects of one's life.
  - a) There are going to be times in our life when things just sort of "fall apart". In times like that, a good place to start is to take inventory of our relationship with God.
    - i) Every "bad day" does not mean we are doing something displeasing to God. It may just mean He wants us to try something different or approach something a different way. The important thing in some sort of everything is going wrong situation is to take an "internal inventory" of what God has asked us to do at a particular moment and contemplate are we doing something to displease God.
    - ii) With that said, let me now focus on this chapter and then I will come back to the issue of being displeasing to God.
3. At this point in the Book of Joshua, the Israelites had just completed their first major victory. They had done what God commanded them to do, and completely wiped out the City of Jericho after God made the walls of the city fall down.
  - a) Even before this moment, the whole book of Joshua has been one string of successful events where the Israelites did exactly what God wanted them to do, even if those events did not make logical sense at the time.
  - b) A point here is that the way God guides us in life is often contrary to the "world's way" of doing things. God will ask us to do things as if to say in effect, "Trust Me (God) as I am working out a plan for you that may not make sense now, but will work if you (that's you and me) trust in My timing and My way of doing things."
    - i) The "what we do" is going to be different for you than it is for me. The point is to regularly seek Him through prayer and His word, then just "go forward" in life and trust that God is working out His plans for our lives.
  - c) Meanwhile, back in Joshua: We are now done with Jericho and it's time to attack the next city. Joshua sends out some spies to check out a nearby city called "Ai". The spies come back and say in effect, "This is a small city. No need to bother the whole army. Let's just send out a few thousand men and we the Israelites should win easily."
    - i) Do you know what is missing in this plan? Any inquiry of God. A key point of Chapter 7 is the Israelites fail miserably because they did not consult God as to what to do next and the Israelites lost their first battle in the land.
    - ii) Much of Chapter 7 deals with, "OK, why did we lose this battle?" Right after the defeat, Joshua prays to God. He then tells Joshua that somebody among the Israelites took things from the Jericho battle site. If you recall, everything from Jericho was to be burned or be turned over God to be used by the priests.
    - iii) The chapter then goes into a discussion of how the guilty person was found. The guilty person confesses the sin and then the guilty person is stoned to death. One thing I'll bring up later in this chapter is why the person was still killed even though he has confessed his sin before God and the Israelites. In short, it does not mean we stone sinners. If that were true, no one would be live very long. ☺

- d) In Chapter 8, (next lesson) the Israelites will conquer this small city of Ai. The "sum" of that chapter is the Israelites learn again to be dependant upon God and Ai is defeated because the Israelites were once again trusting God with their lives.
  - i) A key point of Chapter 8 is that just because there was sin to be dealt with in a group, does not mean that God gives up on the group. Once the sin was dealt with is when God began to work collectively for the Israelites to win this battle.
- 4. In the bible, one has to understand that there is the concept of "individual sin" and "individual responsibility". There is also the concept of "group sin" and "group responsibility". In Chapter 7, only one person sinned. Yet, God held all of the Israelites responsible and some Israelites died in the first attack on Ai due to the sins of one person.
  - a) So why did God hold all of the Israelites responsible for the sin of one person and what does that mean for you and me?
    - i) God is teaching the concept of complete obedience to Him. If a part of Israel is turning against God, then collectively all of Israel is guilty because God wants all believers to be responsible to watch out for one another. Let me explain further:
    - ii) If there is a significant problem of one person sinning in our church and nobody does anything about it, God is going to hold the whole church guilty: Not for that sin, but for not dealing with that sin.
    - iii) That was a key point in 1st Corinthians Chapter 5 (Verse 1-2) where a man was having a sexual relationship with his father's wife i.e., his stepmother. The sin in focus in Corinth at that time was the fact that the church was simply tolerating that sin and not dealing with it. That's the danger here, toleration of a sin.
  - b) This leads us back to the issue of "group sin and group judgment". God will hold the individual accountable for the sin, but will also hold the group accountable to deal with the sin and keep that group "clean" of sin.
    - i) In the book of Joshua, God held Joshua himself responsible as their leader. God may hold our pastor or a group leader or even a civic leader more responsible because they let something "go" and didn't do anything to deal with that situation.
- 5. Let me describe one more danger before jumping into the actual text.
  - a) If one studies the life of Peter in the Gospels, one of the high moments in Peter's life is when he is asked by Jesus, "Who do you (Peter) say that I (Jesus) am?" Peter answered, in effect, "You are the Messiah and the Son of God. (See Matthew 16:16-17). Jesus then compliments Peter by saying that God (The Father) revealed that information to him.
    - i) My point here is that when Jesus made that statement to Peter, I'm pretty positive that Peter's ego went up 100 notches. If Jesus Himself just said that the words coming out of our mouth were given to us by God Himself, we would think at that moment we are "pretty hot stuff".
  - b) It was only a few moments later when Peter was trying to talk Jesus out of going back to Jerusalem and facing death. Jesus then told Peter in effect, "Satan is using you right now Peter to get me to avoid doing the will of My Father".
    - i) My point is, if Peter's ego shot up 100 notches a few moments back, I'm equally sure that Peter's ego just shot down at least 100 notches when Jesus told Peter the last thing he just said was influenced by the devil himself. (Matthew 16:22-23.)
  - c) OK John, that's neat. What's your point? The point is often that the time of greatest danger to a believer is right after some great victory where God used us in a mighty way. After a "victory" we often praise God for that victory or expect some sort of additional blessing at that point. What we often fail to do after a great victory is then to seek God for whatever is "next" our lives.
    - i) The point is to beware after some major victory occurs in our life. God will often bring our ego's back to earth right after that!

6. Chapter 7, Verse 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.
  - a) As I stated in the introduction, God is currently mad at Israel for a specific sin committed by a single Israelite during the attack on Jericho. Verse 1 summarizes the key point of the chapter: There was an Israelite named Achan who took some stuff from Jericho and tried to keep it for himself. Because of that sin, God was angry with all of the Israelites.
  - b) Verse 1 is in effect, an editorial comment. We will discover in a matter of verses that Joshua had no knowledge of this sin until later in the chapter. This verse is placed here so the reader knows what is coming up and why the Israelites lost the upcoming battle.
  - c) So why was all of Israel punished for the sin of one man? To answer that, first remember that when it comes to eternal judgment, all people are judged individually. Regarding life "here and now" God also judges us corporately as well as individually. With the nation of Israel at this moment in time, there was a sin that was not dealt with and all of Israel will suffer as God performs "group judgment" even when one person in that group sinned.
    - i) So why be so tough on all of Israel when only this one person sinned? The answer is God wants us to learn the concept of corporate (or group) responsibility. Let's face it, if God "let it go", then others would find out what Achan got away with and could or would "follow suit". If you don't deal with a sin, it spreads.
    - ii) Think of it this way: If there was a member of our church who had committed a crime or a significant sin, God does not want that sin to spread to the whole church. That is why it must be dealt with and confessed as soon as it is known.
  - d) Are you saying we all have to be perfect? No, but we do have to be forgiven. It's a healthy idea every now and then for a church to hold a time of confession and ask God for forgiveness. There are different styles for different churches, but the point is one reason that God wants sin to be confessed and turned from is that it affects the "group".
    - i) God does not expect perfection, but He wants us to be "perfectly forgiven".
  - e) Let me also address this issue another way: Remember that my theme for all of Joshua has to do with the Promised Land being symbolic of our relationship with God. It is about living the rich, full life that God wants with believers in Him. With that said, God cannot tolerate any sin in our life. We can't blame part of our body for a sin and say the rest of our physical body is innocent. Along the same line, the "whole" body of believers bears the responsibility if there is an individual who sinned in that group.
7. Verse 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.
  - a) Before we get to "Achan" and the sin he committed, the Israelites are still camped out near Jericho. Joshua is ready to move on to the next battle. Joshua picks the city of "Ai" to attack next. Joshua sends out spies to check out Ai prior to attacking it.
  - b) On a different note, a good general does not let his troops sit around and "wallow" in one victory, but wants to keep the troops moving on to the next battle. In other words, Joshua knows that he was chosen to lead all of Israel in conquering all of the "Promised Land". The conquering of Jericho was only one battle to be fought in this land.
    - i) Joshua understood that there was more work to be done than just burning Jericho to the ground. He was ready to start the next step in the process.
  - c) Before I jump into the next set of verses, there is something I want you to consider when you read those next set of verses. I want you to notice what Joshua does not do: That is to consult God. Joshua's key personal mistake coming up is that he forms a plan to attack "Ai", and then loses the battle. He did this without consulting God if that attack plan was the thing to do. The good news is that Joshua then consults God after losing this battle and realizes what he did wrong. With that said, we can now read Verse 3.

8. Verse 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." <sup>4</sup> So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, <sup>5</sup> 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.
- a) Again, notice in these verses there was no prayer or any contact with God. Joshua made plans to attack Ai without consulting God.
    - i) This gets back to something I said in the introduction. Our greatest time of danger as a Christian is often right after a great victory. We may still be praising God for that past victory, but we may be failing to seek God as to what to do next.
    - ii) Joshua makes a key error here in that he makes plans to attack Ai without first consulting God. Verse 4 says that mistake cost the life of 36 men in this battle.
  - b) So John, are you telling me that I should not make any decision in life without consulting God first? What about when I first get up in the morning? Do I have to consult God before brushing my teeth or going to the bathroom? Not exactly. ☺
    - i) The point is "seeking God's desire for our life" should be part of one's life. Personally, I like praying first thing in the morning (yes, after the bathroom) and asking for God's guidance for the day. I don't know what the day will bring but God does and I ask Him to guide me in whatever happens that day.
    - ii) The point is to make God part of one's life through prayer, and regular time in His word. With that done, trust in the fact that He is guiding us.
    - iii) In life, there are often significant decisions that have to be made. It is helpful to again, stop and pray prior to significant decisions. If God is silent about such decisions, I often just go forward and make the best decision possible (after being as informed as I can be about that decision) and assume God is guiding me.
    - iv) The danger is forgetting to seek God, which leads us back to Joshua.
  - c) Joshua sent some spies out to check out "Ai". The spies reported back how big was the City of Ai. We know the city has about 12,000 people from Chapter 8, Verse 25.
    - i) Here's part of the mistake: The spies recommended how big of an army to send out and attack the city of Ai. It was the job of the spies to check out the city. It was the job of Joshua to seek God and determine what to do next.
    - ii) The point is Joshua took the recommendation of the spies without consulting God.
  - d) The next thing we read about in this story is the Israelites losing the battle to "Ai".
    - i) It says that about 3,000 troops were sent to attack this city. They did not wait for any walls to come down, but just attacked it head on. The Israelites ended up running away in defeat and about 36 Israelites died in that defeat.
    - ii) The last line is Verse 5 says in effect that the "hearts" of the Israelites were now in fear due to that battle loss.
    - iii) Think about the Israelites this way: They had recently seen God stop up the Jordan River so they could cross it. Soon afterwards, they marched around the walls of Jericho and saw the walls fall down so they could attack and defeat that city. Now they have a set back at a place called "Ai" and now everyone was afraid.
      - a) I've always believed that the problem with visual miracles is that they are only good until a need for another miracle comes along. Some Israelites attacked this city called "Ai" and they expected God to perform another miracle as if God works "our way" and on our commands.
      - b) Now that the Israelites have lost the battle, they have forgotten about past miracles and now they are all focusing on the fear of losing. My point for the moment is that one should not be dependant upon miracles. They often serve a point, but what God really wants is just trust in Him.

9. Verse 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.
- a) It's time to give Joshua a little credit here. At this point he realizes his mistake of failing to discuss the battle plan with God. Joshua then went facedown on the ground to pray. Notice that they prayed until evening. What I suspect it means is that God let them stay there in prayer for a while to let them think about what they did.
    - i) When things are going "downhill fast", the best thing to do is get on our knees before God and seek Him for advice on what to do next.
    - ii) This verse also mentions the leaders of Israel "doing the same".
  - b) We also read of two cultural traditions here. Joshua tore his clothes and the other leaders in Israel sprinkled dust on their heads. Both of these are symbolic acts of showing remorse over one's action and showing one's dependence on God.
    - i) The idea of sprinkling dust on our heads is a visual reminder that we as humans are essentially "dust". The physical elements that make up the human body are the same elements that exist in dirt (i.e., dust). In order to save our souls, we must be rescued as our physical bodies decay and return to dust.
    - ii) Does this mean that today, when we confess sins we should tear our clothing and sprinkle dust on our heads? Well, that depends upon how big is our budget for buying new clothes. ☺ There are other ways of showing remorse over sin without going through this specific ritual. This ritual was never called for by God, but just became a cultural tradition in Israel.
10. Verse 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 destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!"<sup>8</sup> O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?<sup>9</sup> 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?"
- a) Remember that for many years prior to Joshua's leadership, he was Moses' personal assistant. That means that Joshua was aware of how Moses would pray to God. Both Moses and Joshua would use this style of prayer as given in these verses. In other words, they would appeal to God based on His goodness and His promises and not based on how the Israelites have acted in the recent past.
    - i) Let me summarize this prayer: "Lord, you promised that our people would inherit this land and we are to conquer it. We have just lost this battle here and we don't know why. Word will get around quickly that we can be beaten. Therefore lead us to victory because your (God's) name is now at stake."
    - ii) It is a good prayer. The problem is that it missed the reason for the battle loss. Since that is not the issue of the moment, God will make it clear.
  - b) Let me put this prayer in "our" vocabulary: "Lord, You promised that if we seek You, that You will guide us all the days of our lives. I don't know why You just allowed "this" to happen, but I trust that You are working all things out for Your glory and I (we) will continue to trust in You despite what is happening now."
  - c) The problem wasn't the prayer itself, but it missed the point of what the problem was. It didn't hurt the Israelites to pray this prayer, nor does it ever hurt us to come to God based on His promises to us. God does not criticize the Israelites for this specific prayer. God is about to say in effect, "You missed the point" and He then turns the focus on the Israelites.
    - i) That is often how God works on us. We turn the focus on Him and He turns around and says in effect, "I (God) know what I promised you, but I never promise to work on your timing, but only on My timing. With that said, "Here is the problem". This leads us to the next set of verses.

11. Verse 10: The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"
  - a) Let me paraphrase what God is saying here: "I am well aware of My promises to the nation of Israel. However, that is not the issue right now. The issue is "sin" that has to be dealt with among the Israelites and I (God) want you to deal with it right now."
  - b) There is a saying in Christianity that it is always, "our move". Think of playing a chess game. God is saying in effect, "Stop looking at Me for answers. It is your move." In other words, when we seek God, He says to us in effect, "I can't take you to the next step in life as it is "your (turn to) move". The "move of the moment" is for Joshua and the Israelites to deal with a specific sin issue, which is coming up in the next set of verses.
    - i) That is God's point here: Joshua, I can't move you forward to victory, as right now it is "your move" and your move is to deal with a sin issue.
12. Versed 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. <sup>12</sup> 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.
  - a) We now get to the specific sin that was committed. God is telling Joshua that somebody among the Israelite soldiers has taken some "stuff" from Jericho and kept it for himself.
    - i) When the Israelites conquered Jericho, God made it clear that everything was to be burnt up and whatever cannot burn (metal objects) was to be dedicated to God. That act is symbolic of the fact that the first of our earnings belongs to God.
    - ii) The whole point of these two verses is that God announced that somebody in Israel had taken some things from Jericho. If you recall from Verse 1, the person's name was given, which was "Achan". We'll read a lot more about Achan later.
  - b) Does this mean that if a believer fails to give the first of his or her earnings, the rest of their church or group will be punished? No, but their group or church will suffer in the sense that God wants us to trust Him with the first of our earnings so that the money can be used to help others grow in their faith in God and help lead others to Jesus.
  - c) Meanwhile God is still pretty angry at Israel. He announces in effect, "I (God) can't lead you until you deal with this sin. I commanded earlier that everything from Jericho is to be destroyed or put in the "church treasury". Until you destroy those items that are hidden by a specific Israelite, you (Israelites) cannot move forward."
  - d) Here's something else to think about: This problem of the "stolen items" didn't just happen five minutes ago. It has now been (a good guess) at least a few days since the Israelites have destroyed Jericho. My point is God did not announce this issue the moment it occurred while Jericho was being destroyed. It was not announced until Joshua and the elders of Israel sought God in prayer (for a good length of time too!) as to how to deal with the defeat.
  - e) Does this mean that every time some Christian group fails to accomplish a goal, it is due to the specific sin of one or more people in that group? No.
    - i) First of all, we don't know if that specific goal was God's will of the moment. A possibility of why that group failed to accomplish their goal is it was not God's will for that moment for that specific goal to be accomplished.
    - ii) Going back to what I stated earlier, it is a good idea for individuals to confess sins to God and to confess to one another sins that we are dealing with. Some churches do this very formally as in times of confession and some deal with it less formally. The point is not so much the method of confession but the fact that we do clear our conscious and turn from sin issues that can and do block our relationship with God.

13. Verse 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.
- a) In case you've forgotten, God is still pretty "ticked off" at the Israelites. Here, God tells Joshua to go tell the Israelites to "consecrate themselves" in preparation for tomorrow.
  - b) Remember it was only one man that committed this sin. Yet, here is God announcing that all the Israelites are to prepare for this event where God singles out the man.
    - i) On a literal aspect, it means that the Israelites are to organize themselves by tribes and by families so the leaders in Israel can figure out who was responsible for this.
    - ii) The idea of "consecrating oneself" also means to inwardly focus and think about one's life and what needs to be confessed to God.
  - c) A key point of Verse 13 is that God announces that the Israelites cannot win any battles until this sin issue is dealt with. In other words, winning "battles" for God has nothing to do with battle strategy or army size, but it is about obedience to God in all things.
    - i) Again, "The Promised Land" represents the rich, full life that comes from trusting God in every aspect of our lives. Therefore, our success in life as a Christian has nothing to do with the "size of our army or our battle strategy". It has to do with our trust in God and yes, dealing with the sin issues of our lives.
    - ii) I like to think of it this way: How can we defeat "external" foes unless we first deal with the "internal" issues of sin in our life?
    - iii) God does not expect perfection, but He does expect confession and the desire to turn from sin in our lives. That is what is going on at the moment among the Israelites and that is what we have to be aware of in our walk with God.
    - iv) In "life", the nonbeliever is concerned about their "battle strategy". The believer in God on the other hand, should primarily be concerned with pleasing Him and then letting Him work through us to deal with whatever we are facing in life.
    - v) I am convinced that if one grasps the idea of living to please God and working to eliminate sin from one's life, then God will lead us in victory for Him. Remember that victory is about "God's will" getting done and not our will.
14. Verse 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. <sup>15</sup> 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!" "
- a) In these verses we have the specific method by which God will make it known to the Israelites who is the guilty party.
    - i) First notice what is not done: There is no giant hand coming out of the sky pointing toward the guilty person. ☺ There is no angel from heaven circling the sky and then touching down on the guilty person. ☺ Why did God use the method used? I suspect because it is because God didn't want to "touch" what is evil, but wanted the Israelites to deal with it themselves.
  - b) Meanwhile, the Israelites are lining up by tribes and by "families". In other words, there are not just 12 big lines with everyone jumping in whatever line was for their ancestors.
    - i) They were divided up by tribe, and then by families within the tribe.
    - ii) I wonder what the guilty person was thinking at this point. Was he considering running away? Did he think, "Maybe God will pick someone else and I could get away with this?" The guilt must have been eating at him in this process.
    - iii) I can also imagine the fear the average Israelite had at this point: "Was it someone from my family or my tribe? Is God going to wipe out my entire tribe or family if someone from my group was guilty? After all, God did wipe out all of Jericho and maybe God will do the same with everyone in my tribe or family.

15. Verse 16: Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken.  
<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.
- a) Here we have the actual process taking place of finding out the guilty party. Know that God knows who the person was, but no one other than the guilty man knows who it is.
  - b) What is not stated is the method used to find this guy. Some speculate they cast lots, which is sort of the equivalent of "rolling the dice". If the same dice number came up over and over again, it is a sign that God is pointing in that direction. Since the method was not stated is a clue that God does not want us to focus on the method, but the results.
  - c) We discover through this process that the guilty person was from the tribe of Judah. It was later determined that it was from the "clan" of Zerahites. This is a family within the tribe of Judah. It was then narrowed down to the family of Zimri. Finally, it was narrowed down to a man named "Achan".
  - d) An interesting side note is that the word "Achan" means, "trouble" in Hebrew. It is like saying that guy named "trouble" is causing all the trouble in Israel. Having children, I understand why someone would call their child "trouble". ☺
  - e) In the next set of verses we will deal with the confession and punishment of Achan.
16. Verse 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."
- a) One has to remember that Joshua was significantly older than anyone else in Israel. The generation that crossed the Jordan was all under 40. Joshua was in his 80's at this point. Therefore, don't read too much in the fact that Joshua said "my son" to Achan. It is like saying "You, young man, tell me what you did."
  - b) At this point all Joshua knows is that this guy was guilty of taking "something". We don't know the extent yet of what this guy did wrong. Asking the young man to "give God the praise" is essentially the same idea of saying, "Confess what you did wrong".
17. Verse 20: Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: <sup>21</sup> 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 coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."
- a) First, let's give Achan a little credit. He did not deny he stole anything. I suspect the guilt must have eaten him up. He confessed that he has sinned before God and listed the items that he stole. What he stole was a robe from Babylonia, some silver and gold.
  - b) What intrigued me is how did he know the robe was from Babylonia? The Israelites had lived all of their lives in the desert. Their parents lived in Egypt. Maybe there was a tag on the robe that said, "Made in Babylon". ☺ More likely, the Israelites had some contact with Babylonians during their years in the desert.
  - c) Here is something to catch: Achan called the stuff "plunder". When one group raids another group, what they keep is called "plunder". However, God did not consider any of this plunder. Everything was to be burned and the metal objects were to be given to the "Lord's treasury". Therefore, Achan's first mistake was calling this plunder.
  - d) The second mistake was that Achan said he "coveted" them. That means he desired these items for himself. We know we are in trouble with God when we take what belongs to Him. It is a violation of the 10th Commandment that says in effect, "You shall not desire what does not belong to you". (See Exodus 20:17.)
  - e) Achan states where those items are located: Buried under his tent. I believe the Israelite's tents did not have floor coverings. They were just "over our head" tents. Therefore, the items were inside the tent coverings, but they were also underneath the ground.
  - f) If you recall from earlier in the chapter (Verse 15), God said that the Israelites are to stone whoever did this and burn the "plunder".



18. Verse 22: So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath.<sup>23</sup> They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.
  - a) The next step is "verification". Joshua sent messengers over to this guy's tent and brought back the items that were underneath the tent.
  - b) In any sort of investigative process, one should not be convicted based on one's own testimony or without witnesses. Therefore, it was essential that people needed to be sent to his tent to verify that all of this is true. (The American judicial system includes the idea that a person cannot be condemned solely based on one's own testimony.)
19. Verse 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.
  - a) I have to admit that of all the bible verses in this lesson, these are the verses that I feared teaching. Let me explain why: Here was this guy named Achan. He definitely confessed to God that he took the goods and said where they were located in his tent. After his confession he was stoned to death and the stuff was burned up. Further a big pile of rocks was placed over where he was killed for the Israelites to remember this event.
    - i) So what makes these verses so difficult? For starters, if a person confesses a sin, God is supposed to forgive that person and move on. Further, the Old Testament penalty for stealing was not death, but to repay what one has stolen plus an additional penalty to the person that they stole from. (Exodus 22:1-4).
  - b) With that said, why did this guy get the death sentence for stealing? Isn't this a case where the punishment does not fit the crime? Is God being fair here?
  - c) To answer this, let's start with the issue of "Is God fair?" Think of it this way: Is it fair that young children die of cancer? Is it fair that a person with a promising career ahead of them dies if he or she is hit by a drunk driver? Is it fair that a thief gets away with taking away one's life savings from someone?
    - i) God never promises that life will be "fair". God does promise that He will judge all individuals based on how they lived and what they did with their lives. God promises that His judgment will be fair. You can't find a bible verse that says that directly, but the idea does get communicated that God judges the world, and it should be assumed that a perfect God would judge people perfectly.
    - ii) My point is God never promises that things will be "fair" in this lifetime. Some people suffer tremendously in this lifetime due to no fault of their own. Some people will die young for reasons that were beyond their control.
    - iii) This leads us back to the issue of the death penalty given for Achan:
  - d) The question essentially is, "If God does not call for a death penalty for stealing (again see Exodus 22:1-4 on this point), is it fair of God to require Achan to be stoned to death?"
    - i) The point is "If God is God" then He makes the rules for us and has every right to make an exception to those rules, as again, He made the rules in the first place.
    - ii) The point is Achan was made an example of when it came to the issue of stealing from God. It does not mean that we have to say, kill anyone who steals from the church treasury. It does mean that if God wants to apply a different standard (in other words, make an example out of somebody), it does not mean we have to apply that same standard to our lives that God applied to Achan's life. We are to use the standards God gave for us (i.e., set up a penalty for stealing, that fits the crime), but God has the right to apply a higher standard if He sees fit to do so.

- e) We read that God was satisfied with the death of Achan. The text clearly says that his death satisfied God's anger. How the Israelites knew this fact is not stated in the text. The point is the death of Achan meant that the Israelites were now free to go back and conquer the rest of the land as the sin had been dealt with.
- f) Does this mean we have the right to violate God's laws? For example, the Old Testament clearly lays out the punishment for stealing and it is not a death penalty. The New Testament clearly states that if a person confesses their sins, that person is forgiven. That person may still have to suffer the consequences of that sin for the sake of society, but by God's standards, that person is forgiven. In other words, that person still may have to go to jail, but they are forgiven. If someone harms themselves with say, some sort of drug abuse, God does instantly forgive that person if they sincerely ask for it, but that person is still going to suffer the physical damage done by abusing oneself.
  - i) Getting back to the laws on stealing, it does not mean that the Israelites were now to kill anyone and everyone that stole. The Israelites were still required to keep God's laws. So what about Achan? Let me explain further:
  - ii) In the New Testament, there was a husband and wife who lied to the church about how much they were donating. God fairly quickly struck that couple dead. The point was the couple was made an example, not so the "church could do likewise" and kill everyone who lies to the church, but as an example to take God seriously and not mess around with what God requires of us. (See Acts 5:1-10.)
  - iii) Since God's laws are well, "God's" laws, He has every right to apply a "higher standard" in order to make an example for us to learn from. In the New Testament, God made an example of the husband and wife who had their life taken away for a sin (again, see Acts 5:1-10.). Here in this chapter, God required the Israelites kill Achan (Verse 15), not because the law says so, but because God wanted to make an example of Achan in terms of not "messing with" God and taking His commandments seriously.
  - iv) In other words, Achan was killed not because the Old Testament law required Him to be killed, but because God wanted to make an example of Achan.
  - v) So, are there ever cases where we are to do likewise? No. The bible is our guide of how to live a life and we have no right to go over and above what that bible teaches for our life. Can God take a life today as an example for others? He is God, and therefore has the right to do whatever He wants. Does He do that today? I don't know and I never want to get close enough to find out. ☺
- g) Let me give a few technical notes before I wrap this up:
  - i) Scholars debate over whether or not Achan's whole family was killed or just Achan himself. Some scholars suspect that just Achan was killed and his family had to watch the event. Others believe the whole family was killed, as they went along with what Achan had done.
  - ii) The main lesson has to do with the fact that Achan was judged for the crime of stealing what belonged to God and Achan was made an example of in terms of teaching the Israelites to take God's laws seriously.
  - iii) (You know considering how much fear I had of teaching these verses, in hindsight, I sure had a lot to say. ☺)

20. So, back to the lesson theme. This lesson is a tough one, and deals with a lot of negative issues in our lives. The main idea is that when things are going wrong in our life, it is important every now and then to take "internal inventory". It may require the confession of any and all sins of our lives to God. It may require telling God of the fact we know we are sinners and we know that we need His help in order to turn from that sin.

- a) Even if we are saved and trust in God, there are times where we still desire the things of the world more than the things of God. That does not mean we can't have hobbies or interests. It does mean that if God did ask us to give up "something" for Him, we have to be willing to say yes in order to show God that He means more to us than any "thing" in our lives.
  - b) As I stated in the introduction, not every time that things fall apart means that there is some sin issue that has to be dealt with. It may just mean that God does not want us to have that "thing" or accomplish that goal at that time. Still, since we don't know the reason why things are falling apart at that time, it is always a good idea to take an internal inventory of any sin issue to be confessed prior to moving on past that issue.
    - i) I usually find that if there is a sin issue, God is more than willing to make it clear to us that the specific sin needs to be confessed and "turned from".
  - c) God does not call us to murder anyone (including ourselves) over some sin issue. He does want us to kill that sin and bury it dead, which is symbolically what happened when the Israelites killed this man named Achan in this chapter.
  - d) In other words, it is not about killing a human, it is the idea of killing the desire for sin. We can only do that through God's help. Putting that sin issue to death is what God desires for us. We all know that it is a lifelong struggle over sin issues, but that desire to sin does not mean we should never try eliminating those things in the first place.
21. If this lesson is a "downer", know that in the next chapter, the Israelites successfully conquer the city of "Ai". My point is there is a happy ending, but that it comes in the next chapter. Therefore, I ask that you hang with me at least one more week.
22. Let's pray: Father, Help us to deal with the sins in our lives. Help us not to ignore them and bury them behind our "walls". We cannot deal with sin without Your help. Help us to know what it is about our life that is displeasing to You, and confess those issues and sinful desires as we become aware of them. Then help us to let go of those issues knowing that we are forgiven of those sins. Help us in our lives to make a difference for You knowing that You have forgiven us of all of our sins. Finally, we never know how long we have to live in this life. You never promise that this life will be "fair". Help us to make a difference for You in the time that You do give us in this life. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.