

Prayers

Opening prayer

All praise be to You, Living Lord, for from the darkest of depths, You have lift my soul; and from the deepest of despair You have raise me up. Remind me daily of Your power to save, Lord God, so that I never forget the wonder of Your grace and the powerful provision You have made for my life. Thank You, Lord Jesus, Thank you from the bottom of my heart. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: The Future

1. For yourself

As you read God's Word today, listen for what He is saying to you about what is happening in your life and where it is heading, and then speak to Him about it in prayer

2. For your friends and family

As above, and listen for what He is saying to you about your relationship with your family and friends, and then pray in the light of this

3. For the church and its work

Pray for the work of your own church and pray especially that it will encourage people to meet Jesus, the Lord of all and great Shepherd of the Sheep

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for barriers to be broken down between people so that God's love on Jesus can be shown to all people. Pray for those involved with any headline news in your own country

Meditation

The freshness of each new day reveals the blessings

And the gifts of God given to those who will receive them:

The cost of precious moments spent in reading the Word;
The challenge of sustaining the work we have been given to do;
The chance to be creative in the path of discipleship and service;
The excitement of knowing that Christ has more for us each day;
The valuable moments of quiet peace which refresh the soul;
The privilege of living the life of Christ, and helping the poor;
The freedom of prayer to bless other people and the whole world;
And the opportunity to love again, where yesterday we failed;

What can we possibly do to give thanks for all of this?

We can turn to the Lord of all and give Him credit for it!

Bible Study

Bible passage – Joshua 7: 1-9

¹ But the Israelites were extremely unfaithful concerning what should have been given to God: Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of what belonged to God; and so the LORD's anger burned against the Israelites.

² Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and told them, 'Go up and spy out the land.'

So the men went up and spied out Ai, ³ but they returned to Joshua and advised him,

‘Not all the people need go; let two or three thousand men go and attack Ai. You do not need to make all the people put in the effort to go up there since there are only a few of them.’

⁴ So about three thousand men went there. However, they fled before the men of Ai, ⁵ and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of them. They chased them from outside the gate as far as Shebarim and killed them on the slope, so the people’s hearts melted and turned to water.

⁶ Then Joshua together with the elders of Israel tore his clothes, and fell with his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD until the evening, and put dust on their heads. ⁷ Joshua said,

‘Alas, Lord God! Why did you bring this people across the Jordan, only to hand us over to the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to settle beyond the Jordan! ⁸ O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been turned back by its enemies!

⁹ The Canaanites and everyone living in the land will hear about this, surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will you do for your great name?’

Review

Chapter seven of Joshua is a sad story. The beginnings of it are recorded in our passage today and the remainder is in the next two studies. After the great success at Jericho, they encountered their first failure in the Promised Land at Ai, the next town they sought to take. Although they did not realise it at the time, the root of the sin lay with one person, a man named Achan, who stole from what was dedicated to God. After all the expectations of the people of Israel about coming into God’s promises, they had to learn quickly that even when trying to walk with the Lord, sin still stalks. Even the holiest people know that they must stand guard against the enemy or he will disrupt communication between the Lord and His servants.

The story of Ai is told in masterly fashion, and the victory at Jericho should be read together with the defeat at Ai (7:2f.) and the sin of Achan (7:1 and 10f.). Together, they give a balanced picture of the entry of Israel into Canaan, and it was appropriate that the one should follow the other as a warning to God’s people that they could not take God for granted. The difficulty we have with the story in this chapter is about what happens at the end, where Achan is stoned to death for his sin (7:22-26). The full horror of this is recorded, and many people find it hard to accept that this is God’s will. We will deal with these difficult issues when we reach that part of the chapter, but we should not allow this difficulty to blind us to other spiritual truths in the passage, because they are considerable, and what we have read today is a carefully presented discussion of the nature of sin

Firstly, scripture records that Achan, an Israelite whose pedigree was immaculate (see 7:1), took for himself some of the plunder at Jericho that had been strictly set aside as God’s. As we saw in the previous study (6:22-27), these were mostly destroyed, though some valuables were taken for storage with the ‘holy things’ of the tabernacle. Achan’s sin was grievous, as the text says clearly by repeating the word for ‘unfaithful’, a classic literary device in Hebrew for indicating emphasis.

Notice how scripture records Achan’s sin, but then moves on to tell the story of the defeat at Ai. We imagine that the record of wrongdoing is incidental, but we would be wrong! Everything that happens now takes place against this background. The ark of the covenant is not mentioned in the story of the first battle at Ai, and the Lord is clearly not with His people, for, ‘The Lord’s anger burned against the Israelites!’ (7:1) Nevertheless, the story of the battle at Ai is a catalogue of sins that now affected Israel. The spies thought that because the battle at Jericho was easily won, Ai would require only a small force to overcome! Notice how human logic replaced divine logic in comparison to the defeat at Jericho! The spies said they would not ‘weary’ the troops with going up to the town (7:3), when they had done no work at all in capturing Jericho! Secondly, the spies had not consulted the Lord and Joshua is barely mentioned; so who was commanding the army? Everything was chaotic and done on presumption. The attack on Ai was a disaster, and the report spelt it out (7:5). Three companies went to Ai, twelve from each were killed, and the people were horrified and their hearts ‘melted’.

Moreover, we now read about Joshua’s somewhat pathetic response. He appears here for the first time with the ‘elders’ of Israel, and they perform the proper acts of repentance (7:6), but Joshua’s words in verse 7 (‘alas, Lord God ...’) were a form of complaint, not repentance! He complained that God had brought the people from Egypt, echoing the complaints heard earlier in Numbers 14 and 15, a taxing period of the wanderings in the wilderness that forced Moses to intercede to prevent the Lord from destroying Israel (Num. 13:13, 14:2,5, 20:3,5)! The truth was that Joshua and Israel were entrapped by their own petty sins because

of the fury of the Lord at the far greater and more serious sin of Achan, unknown to Joshua. In ignorance, they did not have the spiritual maturity to perceive the source of the problems or account for what really happened at Jericho and at Ai.

How often do we fall into a similar trap of agonising over secondary issues when we have not perceived the real one through immaturity? Sin is difficult enough to discern and uproot, so our first recourse can never be to complain to God with old complaints. We need His help, as Joshua did, to find and deal with the root issue.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Which 'sins' identified in this story are similar to those we commit today, especially whilst attempting to do the Lord's work?
2. What can we learn about 'spiritual warfare' here in this passage, and how can we learn from this?
3. What are the root sins that prevent God's people from doing the work of the Gospel in some places today?

Discipleship challenges

- *Ask the Lord to help you consider the open question of what 'root' sins affect God's people in your country today. Discuss this with some others and try to decide what you feel can or should be done to deal with this. Is a plan of action possible?*
 - *Pray for those who like Joshua in this circumstance, do not know what to do, and cannot discern what is right either for themselves or others, largely because the problems seem insurmountable. Pray that God will give them clarity and discernment.*
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Final Prayer

Listen to us, Lord Jesus, and help us listen to You. Speak to us, Lord Jesus, and help us speak to You. And then, when we really begin to communicate, share with us the deeper things of faith and of the Kingdom of God, so that we might live our lives to the full and for Your praise and glory. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN.
