**Achan’s Sin**

Chapter 7 of Joshua begins in opposite fashion than the preceding chapter which ended with the Israelites’ triumph over Jericho. We read in verse 1 that Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted (accursed, KJV) things which kindled God’s anger against them. Joshua sent men to spy on Ai just as he had done before with Jericho. The men returned with a report that Ai could be easily defeated since only a few men were there. Based on their recommendation, Joshua sent a small detachment of only 3,000 men who were soundly defeated and chased out of Ai by the few men guarding it.

Joshua’s response to this defeat was to tear his clothes and fall face down before the ark where he remained till evening. He finally cried out to God, lamenting that they had ever crossed the Jordan. He said that their defeat would become known throughout Canaan which would embolden others to surround and utterly defeat them. God’s response to Joshua is similar to his response to Moses as the Israelites feared the Egyptian army closing in on them (see Ex. 14:15). God said to Joshua “Stand up! What are you doing on your face?” God told Joshua that Israel had sinned and that He would not go with them any longer unless they destroyed the source of the sin.

God told Joshua to consecrate the people and have them come before Him the following day. Joshua presented the people tribe by tribe, clan by clan and family by family until Achan of the tribe of Judah was identified as the man who had removed items of plunder from Jericho in violation of God’s order. At Joshua’s urging, Achan confessed that the had taken a robe, gold and silver from Jericho and had hidden it in his tent. Joshua sent men to retrieve the items and brought them to Joshua along with Achan’s family and all his belongings. Achan was stoned then burned along with all possessions. It appears that his family was also stoned and burned, perhaps because they were aware of his sin and complicit in hiding the plunder.

Because of the sin of one man, God determined that the entire nation of Israel was unfaithful so He meted out group punishment by allowing Israel’s forces to be defeated by a vastly outnumbered enemy (see Num. 25:6-9 and Gal. 5:9)

Notice how quickly the Israelites had forgotten that it was God who had won the battle of Jericho. They were so complacent and confident in their self reliance that they sent only 3,000 men against Ai. Since they did not consult God, they could have sent 100,000 and it would not have mattered. It did not occur to them that since God had used an unconventional method to defeat Jericho, he could do the same against them if they were disobedient. The few men guarding Ai were able to drive off a force of 3,000.

This was the first real test of Joshua’s leadership and his reaction was not pleasing to God. He complained that his army had been routed (they lost 36 men out of an army of 600,000) and that they would be wiped from the earth. He seemed to be asking what did God do wrong instead of what did the Israelites do wrong. He asked God “What will you do then?” as though God’s success depended on the Israelites. God told him “Stand up! What are you doing on your face?” Just as he told Moses, He was telling Joshua to act as a leader and eradicate the source of the sin. The novelist James Allen wrote that adversity does not build character, it reveals it.