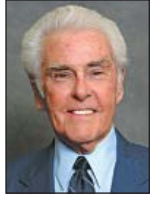


## Use Joshua's example to learn to move beyond failure



**John Howell**

The assigned lesson Scripture ends with Joshua 8:1. However, to move beyond failure requires continuing further into Scripture to observe how Joshua dealt with the initial defeat and his further attack on the site of his defeat.

**Defeat at Ai (7:1-15).** The men Joshua sent to spy out the forces at Ai came back with a report that minimized the threat and encouraged Joshua to send a small contingent to overcome the city. At this time, Joshua did not know that, in Jericho, Achan had stolen goods that were under the ban and that God was angry with the people.

Consequently, God did not support Joshua's plan for Ai. When they attacked, the Israelite forces were defeated "and the hearts of the people melted and became as water" (7:13-15).

Joshua and the elders of the people mourned over what had happened and Joshua placed part of the blame on God's failure to protect them from defeat. Only then did he learn that Israel had sinned by taking banned items and now had to acknowledge their sin (7:13-15).

**The sin of Achan (7:16-21).** Joshua arranged for the tribes to come before him so he could find out who had sinned against the Lord. Achan, from the tribe of Judah, was taken as the guilty person. Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I implore you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to him, and tell me what you have done. Do not hide it from me." Achan acknowledged he had sinned against the Lord by taking a beautiful mantle, 200 shekels of silver and a bar of gold and then concealing them in the dirt inside his tent. Messengers from Joshua found these

items and laid them before the Lord.

"Under the ban" (7:1). The ban (chorem) in Semitic theology generally is something that totally belongs to God and that men must not touch or use. Consequently, as will be seen later, when Achan stole some of the things in Jericho that were under the ban, he and his family became guilty of sinning against the covenant God.

"Hence arose the barbarous practice of 'devoting' them to Jehovah, i.e., utterly destroying them — men, women, children, cattle and goods.... Later to be 'devoted' meant not to be killed but to be excommunicated (Ezra 10:8) and to have one's property forfeited" ("A Theological Word Book of the Bible," p. 68).

**Joshua must deal appropriately with the sin that caused the failure and refocus on God's plan regarding Ai (7:25-8:23).** Punishment for Achan's sin involved his whole family being stoned and then, "the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger" (7:22-26).

"It follows from Hebrew psychology that a man is responsible for all his actions, for every action has its effect on the soul of the person who acts.... Unless it is laid down that a man bears his own sin, 'guilt' spreads and infects the group to which he belongs" ("A Theological Word Book," p. 227).

This theological perspective continued through most of the Old Testament descriptions of the consequences of sin since it is always a breach of covenant with God and with the social concept of community.

"In such a society, the whole group was held guilty for the sin of one of its members, whose punishment then devolved upon the members of his immediate family" (William Morton, "Broadman Bible Commentary," p. 331.)

## Bible Studies for Life

June 28, 2015

Scripture: Joshua 7:13-15, 16-21, 25-26; 8:1-23

This policy was modified to some degree in Deuteronomy 24:16, "Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin."

However, the most positive affirmation of the new policy is recorded by the prophet Jeremiah. He declares that God will establish a new covenant with Israel in which "everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes [sins against God and the community], his teeth will be set on edge.... I will put my law within them, and on their heart I will write it, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:30, 33).

From the New Testament perspective, the way to deal with sin is to confess it to Christ and receive his forgiveness. As Paul affirmed, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Forgiveness is a gift of God's grace given through Jesus Christ.

When we apply the implications of Joshua's experience as a leader, we see his failure but we also see his recovery of leadership in the conquering of Ai. In our contemporary responsibilities, we may fail in business, in marriage, in family life or in church life. We must seek to discover what influenced the failure and then take steps to correct those issues in our leadership position.

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*John Howell is academic dean emeritus at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.*