



Mt. Zion Baptist Church

PRAYING AT THE CROSSROADS- PRAYERS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT •
THE PRAYER OF JOSHUA • JOSHUA 7:1-26 • 4/25/2020

MAIN POINT

We are always to turn to God in prayer, and there are times when He leads us to get up and get to work quickly.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever faced a difficult time when you couldn't figure out why God was allowing certain difficulties? Describe that experience. How did that situation impact your prayer life?

Is it possible to pray too much about something? Explain. Have you ever felt like you were praying too much about a situation?

This Bible study is about praying at the crossroads—at pivotal moments in life when our wisdom is insufficient and our power is weak. Seeking the face of God at those times is not only the right move but also the imperative move. To take a step at the crossroads without God's leadership can be foolish. On the other hand, sometimes it is more clear what God is calling us to do and the right move is to pray briefly and then act swiftly. That was the case with Joshua and the Hebrews after their battle for the city of Ai.

WATCH PRAYING AT THE CROSSROADS SESSION TWO—THE PRAYER OF JOSHUA.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| READ JOSHUA 7:1-15.

What tragedy was described in this account? What caused this tragedy?

God's Word tells us to "pray constantly" (1 Thess. 5:17). Jesus also taught us to pray before temptation rather than during or after it (Matt. 6:13). Dr. Lawless pointed out on the video, however, that much of our praying is reactionary praying rather than proactive praying. We don't know for certain, but it's possible that Joshua's prayer about the battle of Ai was reactive.

Reactive praying in itself isn't wrong, especially when life unexpectedly becomes a struggle. None of us plan for a defeat like the Hebrews experienced at Ai. On the other hand, offering only reactive prayers isn't a sign of a healthy prayer life.

Would you describe your prayer life as proactive or reactive?

If your prayer life is largely reactive, what changes can you make to pray more proactively?

The people of God suffered their first defeat in the promised land at Ai, and Joshua, their leader, didn't immediately know the reason behind the defeat. Both his grief and his questioning were apparent in his prayer in Joshua 7:6-9. It seemed to him that God had allowed the warriors of Ai to defeat the Israelites, and that prospect created a crisis of faith for him.

Are you comfortable talking to God the way Joshua did in verses 7-9? Why or why not?

When was a recent time you didn't understand why something happened, but you still didn't talk to God about it? Why is talking to God a crucial first step?

Joshua prayed with great passion over the loss at Ai, but God wouldn't allow him to stay on his knees. Sin had created the problem, and the leader and the people were to address that sin. Confrontation was in order. Sometimes our prayer might simply be preparation that's quickly followed by action, especially when we already know what we should do in the first place. But knowing when to pray and when to act isn't always easy.

In what situations might God say to us, "Pray, but then get up quickly and get to work"?

| READ JOSHUA 7:16-26.

What tragedy is described in this account? What caused this tragedy?

The account of the judgment of Achan and his family is a difficult one. The judgment may seem severe, but it's a reminder that God expects His people to be holy. Particularly when they first entered the promised land, He wanted them to know immediately that He expected them to be different from the other inhabitants. We see similar judgment on Nadab and Abihu when God first instituted the sacrificial system (see Lev. 10:1-3) and on Ananias and Sapphira in the early days of the church (see Acts 5:1-11). God graciously doesn't judge us all in this same manner, but He still demands our holiness. Taking our sin lightly isn't an option.

How can these truths affect the way you pray about your temptations and sin?

How important is it for other believers to pray for you as you respond to temptation?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Respond to the following statement made in the video message: "Sometimes it's easier for us to speak to God than it is to deal with the issues at hand." In what situation do you think this is true for you right now? How do you need to respond in light of Joshua 7?

What are some steps you can take to protect yourself from falling into sin?

What is one step you can take to restore or renew your commitment to obey the Lord?

PRAYER

Praise God for His holiness and His grace. Recognize that your sin affects others too, and genuinely confess any sin in your life. Commit to do whatever you know God expects you to do but haven't done yet. Ask God to help you be willing to confess and repent of your sins.

COMMENTARY

| JOSHUA 7:1-26

7:1-2. It started when the walls of Jericho fell. What a victory. And everything happened just the way God said it would. Israel was on a spiritual, emotional, and military high. Taking the promised land was going to be a piece of cake. A little marching, blowing trumpets, some shouting—and every city in Canaan would be theirs. They knew it wouldn't always be that easy, but they were full of confidence. Next stop, Ai—a small fortress city only 2 miles from Jericho but

in a strategic position for the conquest of the land. The people there had probably heard the crashing of the walls of Jericho and were already packing their bags. But just to be sure, Joshua sent out spies again.

As the chapter opens, our narrator tells us something Joshua does not know—God was angry with Israel because of the sin of Achan regarding the devoted things. The location of Ai isn't certain, but the importance of this defeat raises a huge flag in the text about God's attitude toward sin. Even the first word of the chapter gives us a warning—but.

7:3-5. Suffering from overconfidence, displaying no evidence of prayer before the battle, and operating with unknown disobedience in the camp, the Israelites had no chance in this battle. They were riding a positive high from the experience at Jericho. After all, Ai was much smaller and could muster only a few thousand warriors. But the text is clear: they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased them downhill to the stone quarries. The result when the report came back to Joshua was that the hearts of the people melted and became like water.

What could have happened here? They figured Ai was no bigger than Lake Wobegon and probably didn't even have a Wal-Mart. No need to take up a large group; three thousand troops could easily handle this one. Joshua's spies were surely growing in their confidence, and he trusted them explicitly. He hadn't received any battle plans from God, but the job sounded easy nevertheless. Perhaps this was small enough that God would let them do it by themselves. But Joshua learned that self-assurance can be dangerous. We are most vulnerable to spiritual defeat right after a great spiritual victory.

The stone quarries to which the Israelites fled are identified as shebarim, meaning "broken places." Archaeologists identify them with the next gorge north of the famous one at Michmash. The Israelites were ignominiously routed as they tried in panic to reach the descending trail on the south rim of the wadi.

Obviously the blame in this chapter goes to Achan, but Joshua seemed to make an error in judgment as well. He had at his disposal possibly as many as one-half million troops (Num. 26:51) including the forty thousand armed men from the two and one-half Transjordanian tribes (Josh. 4:13). They had no military excuse to treat this conquest lightly. The whole thing was a disaster.

7:6-9. Failure brought humility not only to the nation but especially to their leader, who tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. Days before his faith had been strong, but this defeat at Ai hit him so unexpectedly that he

crashed. He lost his perspective; he forgot God's promises; and worst of all, he began to doubt God's plan. Joshua seemed more concerned about Israel's reputation as a nation (and his own reputation as a leader) than he was about God's reputation and name. Imagine. He lost only thirty-six men out of three thousand with thousands yet in reserve, but he was ready to turn tail and run back across the Jordan River..

While we want to lift up the heroic and faithful side of Joshua and the book certainly does that repeatedly, let us understand that failure brings such humiliation and despair that even a leader like Joshua can be driven to blaming God for what happened.

7:10-12. God wasted no time in responding to Joshua, and his language was less than gentle. The problem was not God's abandoning Israel as Joshua presumed but sin in the camp. How often we try to blame God for our own problems and then realize they have arisen from our own failures and sins.

Now God told Joshua what he doubtless would've told him if Joshua had prayed earnestly about how to approach Ai. The law of the devoted things had been violated. Stealing and lying had made an entire nation liable to destruction. God's threat was downright frightening: I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. The covenant had been violated.

7:13-15. Why didn't God just tell Joshua who was guilty so he could take care of Achan and get on with the war? Why this whole process involving tribes and clans and families? Part of the answer lies in the fact of the collective sin of the group. Just as God's blessing could be removed from a church in which one or two people are sinning, so God's blessing was removed from an entire nation in which one man was guilty. All Israel needed to search their hearts and learn from this tragedy. Not a person was allowed to stand by without feeling the fear of God's pointing figure—tribe by tribe, clan by clan, family by family. And the word takes could be rendered "catches." This was a manhunt pure and simple, and the whole nation watched the process.

Joshua also realized that perhaps God was giving the guilty an opportunity to repent. As the people consecrated themselves, or even as lots were being cast, the guilty could confess and plead for forgiveness. But no one knocked on Joshua's door that night or the next day.

7:16-18. Finally it came down to the tribe of Judah, the clan of the Zerahites, the family of Zimri, and Achan himself. All this was done by the sacred ritual of drawing lots, perhaps inscribed potsherds from a jar (1 Sam. 10:20-24; 14:41-45; Prov. 16:33). This was also the method used in apportioning the land among the tribes (Num. 26:55). This slow, deliberate, and agonizing process stands in contrast to the constant failures of human courts in which the guilty often go

free and the innocent are detained, sometimes even executed. The family came forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi was caught. God had demonstrated omniscience, and it was time for discipline.

7:19-21. As Achan stood before Joshua, God's leader knew he deserved a chance to explain. So he said, Tell me what you have done. Then Achan explained the sin in its progress—he saw; he coveted; and he took. In this amazing scene God received glory through the public confession of sin. We should not miss the marginal note in the middle of verse 19 which indicates that give him the praise could be translated “and confess to him.” In this case they constituted one and the same. Achan's loot consisted of three items: a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels.

With Achan's confession, why didn't he receive forgiveness? Because there was no evidence of repentance and because the confession was forced, not volunteered (Ps. 32; 1 John 1:9). All during the long process of casting lots he had hardened his heart. Only when Joshua looked him straight in the face and commanded his confession did he admit his guilt.

Amazingly, the same three verbs that we found above—saw, coveted, took—appear in the story of the fall in Genesis 3. What happened to Adam and Eve had now happened to Achan. But in the case of Adam and Eve, punishment fell only upon the guilty and their progeny; here an entire nation suffered.

While it is wonderful to have an infinite God, this means we must take his omniscience into account in our daily lives. There is nothing we do that God does not know. There is no night so dark, no coal mine so deep, no astronaut so far out in space that God does not know it. God knows every single thought, every single action. He knew when Achan first coveted, and he knew when he carried out his covetousness.

7:22-23. Joshua's messengers ran to uncover the loot and found it exactly where Achan said it was. But this sin would not remain hidden any more than its public effects had been hidden. They brought the stolen items to the center of the camp and spread them out before the Lord. Why all this fuss about a petty thief? Because an important principle was at stake here. Verse 15 talked about “a disgraceful thing in Israel,” a phrase used elsewhere in the Old Testament only to describe violation of sexual ethics (Gen. 34:7; Deut. 22:21; 2 Sam. 13:12; Jer. 29:23).