

Prayer

Lord God of love and compassion, bless those who are hurting today. Give comfort especially to those who are struggling with personal difficulties and do not know which way to turn. Show them that Your love is dependable even in the midst of their troubles; and for all who turn to You or cry out to You for help, bless them with that true spiritual peace which You alone can give. Hear our prayer, Lord God; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Banking

At the moment, the world is not happy with its bankers, who have disgraced themselves. However, the banks still function and its staff need our prayers at these difficult times.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to the Lord for rest on the Sabbath day
- Pray for the development of technologies that save lives
- Pray for those who grieve the loss of young children

Meditation

Lord God, You are a worker of miracles.

We need the miracle of grace that opens people's hearts,
And by Your Spirit, reveals the truth of Your Word.

We need the miracle of hope that shows the world
That true love comes from You and never ends.

We need the miracle of healing that cures the body,
And shows the world that You care, and fulfil Your Word.

We need the miracle of wholeness that cures the soul
And in 're-creation', breathes Your Spirit into tired lives.

We need the miracle of love that brings real happiness,
To married men and women who truly love each other.

We need the miracle of faith repeated over and over again
Within our churches, until we know that revival has come!

Lord God, You are a worker of miracles!

Bible Study - Joshua 7:10-15

¹⁰ The LORD said to Joshua, 'You, stand up! Why are you prostrate like this? ¹¹ Israel has sinned. Look, they have disregarded my covenant that I imposed on them. They have taken what was given to me to be destroyed; so they have stolen, been deceitful, and have hidden it in their own possessions. ¹² The Israelites cannot stand before their enemies and turn their backs to them, because they have given themselves over to me to be destroyed! I will be with you no more, unless you remove and demolish the things given to me for destruction.

¹³ *Get up and sanctify the people, and say, "Dedicate yourselves for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel says, 'There are among you things that are mine for destruction, O Israel; you cannot face your enemies until you take away these things from among you.'* ¹⁴ *So, in the morning you will approach tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD takes will approach by clans, the clan that the LORD takes will approach by families, and the family that the LORD takes will approach one by one.* ¹⁵ *And the one who is taken as having the objects for destruction will be burned with fire, together with all that he has, because he disregarded the covenant of the LORD, and done something disgraceful in Israel!"*

Review

This is a fearsome and terrible text; one which can only be read with great care. The consequences of the tragic defeat at Ai are drawn out in this passage, and if we recall the spiritual nature of the defeat, this will help us interpret the passage and find an understanding of it. The beginning of chapter 7 tells us that a man named Achan had taken some of the spoils of war from Jericho that should have been given to God for destruction. The story of the defeat at Ai is told then with horror, as Joshua and Israel attempted to work out 'what went wrong', but the truth was they did not know what was wrong because it was hidden, quite literally, in Achan's baggage! The offence of one individual meant that the whole of God's people suffered the ignominy of defeat!

In our passage, God appears amazed that Joshua should grovel before Him in penitence, when none of this was his fault. Joshua had indeed failed to consult before the action at Ai, and many other failings could be identified; however, the only issue at stake during the battle at Ai was that the Lord was not with His people because they were tainted by the sins of one man and they did not know it. It was only when they came to listen to the Lord that He could tell them why He was angry (7:10f.). With a note of irritation in His voice clearly observable in the Hebrew, the Lord told Joshua to 'Get up' (7:10), and told him immediately what was happening; his repentance was of no consequence. The Lord Himself had been robbed; His covenant had been violated (7:11) by someone who had taken what was His. As long as it was held, all Israel were liable and could not function as if their God was with them. The offending items must be found and disposed of (7:12).

As we read this passage, it has a profoundly disturbing message for us today. Surely if things appear to go wrong for us, then like Joshua, we naturally come to the Lord in repentance. What if we were to learn from Him that our minor sins were not the 'problem', but that one greater sin lay at the root of our problems? Supposing the Lord then told us that He could not act in power amongst us because one person or group of people had sinned, and that unless this was removed, then God would not be able to bless His church again. Now, this is tough love from God, but the second half of the passage tells us more.

The Lord told Joshua to deal with the problem by informing the people they must do a number of things, to prove their obedience to their covenant God and isolate the sinful person. Firstly, they had to be 'sanctified' and made holy again. Mostly, when scripture tells us this, it goes on to say what this 'sanctification' entails. Some say that this does not happen here, but it does. The People of Israel had to sanctify themselves by submitting to a process whereby God would take back what was His, using a nerve-wracking process of elimination, until the culprit was found and eliminated (7:14,15)!

It is relatively easy to understand the principle at work here, but can we make sense of it spiritually, or is there any point in trying to apply it? The message is that if we have taken from God what is His, we must return it, indeed, not only is this robbing God of what is His,

but it is a form of idolatry. When Achan took what was God's, he gave those things a higher priority than God; he 'broke' the covenant with God, and this is what affected everyone. In the same way today, if people in authority in the church question His existence, then human intellect has been idolised and placed above God; or if we construct worship according to musical fashion, we take what is God's (worship) and make it in our own image, not God's, and this is idolatry. Could it be that it is only when we return to God what is God's and eliminate the sin from our midst, that God can bless His people again?

We must consider whether there is some merit to this way of understanding the text, but there is one further stage we must travel to understand this text. In the last verse, we read the uncomfortable truth that the rectification of the problem involves the life of the one who sinned. It is only if we can find a spiritual understanding of this that we can say we have a full explanation of this powerful story; and we will look for this next time.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group whether this text connects with the life of God's people today, and how.
2. From a personal point of view, is it possible that the problems you experience in your spiritual life stem from one source? Do you know what this is?
3. How can we get to know what God thinks about the root of the problems we find within the church today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The logic of this passage seems straightforward, and I have attempted to make this clear within the study. We need to understand the way in which the background of this passage is presented, for we might not simply be studying a passage about 'spiritual warfare' in general, but a passage about the taking of the Promised Land, which means that it is a passage about the nature of salvation. Looking at the text in this way, of course, could yield other results. I feel that we must learn from this text, but ultimately, it has more to say, so although some things seem to stand out, I feel that I must stand back before reaching some final conclusions about its meaning.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What does this passage make you 'feel'? Explore this issue in conversations, in prayer, by looking at other related scriptures, and by general reflection. Use the opportunity to see if the Lord will show you something that lies hidden in your life, and its exposure will help you see things more clearly.*
- *Read through a newspaper and see if you can find a story similar to this one, where people have searched and searched, and found many things wrong, but not solved a problem until one basic issue is identified and dealt with completely. Ask the Lord whether this story has any truth to reveal to you.*

Final Prayer

Almighty God; pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us as we open our hearts to You in faith. May we have every confidence in what You do with us and what You give us, and may we never to fear the call you have placed on our lives, knowing that You love us and want the best for us. Almighty God, we praise You for the gift of the Holy Spirit; AMEN