



defeated

TEACHING SUMMARY

The morning after Jericho fell, the air still carried the echo of that mighty shout. The walls had crumbled at the Lord's command. The people had walked straight into the city in obedient faith. Victory pulsed through every heart. Joshua's name spread across the land, and the Lord was clearly with him. But the very next word in the scroll changes everything.

“But.”

Joshua chapter 7 opens with a warning. The Israelites broke faith. One man, Achan, took some of the devoted things that belonged to the Lord. He saw, he coveted, he took. And because of that single act of disobedience, the entire camp stepped out of the flow of God's blessing.

Let us go back for a moment to the clear instructions given before Jericho. The Lord had said everything in the city was devoted to Him. The gold, silver, bronze, and iron were to be set apart for the Lord's treasury. Everything else was to be burned. Jericho was the firstfruits of the land, a tithe offered entirely to God. The spoil always belongs to the Victor, and in this first battle the Victor was the Lord Himself.

With the taste of victory still fresh, the people looked toward the next city, Ai. Ai means “heap of ruins,” but to the Israelites it looked small and easy. They did not stop to pray. They did not seek the Commander of the Lord's army. No one inquired of the Lord. Momentum felt enough. “We've got this,” they said. “Ai is no trouble at all.”

They sent only a few thousand men, confident and relaxed. But the men of Ai came out, chased them, and struck them down. Thirty-six Israelites fell that day. The hearts of the people melted. Their forward movement stopped cold. Defeat had come in the very land of promised victory.

Joshua tore his clothes and fell on his face before the ark. In his zeal and the rush of recent success, he had forgotten the posture that had carried them this far: prayer, seeking, inquiring. He cried out in confusion, “Why, Lord? What will the nations say when they hear we were defeated?”

The Lord answered plainly.

“Get up! Why are you lying on your face? Israel has sinned. They have taken some of the devoted things. That is why you cannot stand before your enemies.”

If Joshua had begun with prayer, the Lord would have revealed the hidden sin right away. But sin in the camp had broken the fellowship. The rule had been simple: “Jericho, and all that is in it belongs to Me. Do not take it. Do not touch it.” One man's secret choice had brought defeat on the whole nation.

Early the next morning Joshua brought the people forward tribe by tribe, clan by clan, family by family. The lot fell until Achan stood alone. When Joshua urged him to give glory to God and tell the truth, Achan confessed.

"I saw a beautiful robe from Babylon, two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold. I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent."

Notice the three verbs that appear: he saw, he coveted, he took. The same pattern marked Eve in the garden, David with Bathsheba, and many others. James warns us that each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire gives birth to sin, and sin brings forth death.

Achan spoke in the singular: "I saw... I coveted... I took." Yet the Lord had said, "Israel has sinned." One man's hidden choice touched the entire community. Thirty-six soldiers died. Their families grieved. Achan and his household were judged. The whole nation felt the weight. The forward march halted. As Paul would later write, if one member suffers, all suffer together. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

The place where Achan was judged was named the Valley of Achor, which means "trouble." His name, the place, and the verb all carry the same root: to stir up, to disturb, to bring trouble. Sin always troubles more than the sinner.

From this sobering story, the Lord speaks two clear truths to our hearts.

First, the flesh will never win spiritual battles.

At Jericho, every step followed the Lord's divine plan. The people walked in covenant obedience. The Lord fought for them. At Ai everything was different. They relied on their own assessment. They moved without seeking counsel. Sin hid in the camp, and the Lord stood back.

This was their only military defeat in the entire conquest. Zechariah reminds us, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord." Victory flows only when we stay attached to the Source, abiding in the Vine, keeping step with the Spirit's cadence. When we run ahead on human strength, defeat is assured.

Second, only what is devoted to the Lord will survive.

Jericho was burned, but the gold, silver, and precious metals passed through the fire and were placed in the Lord's treasury. Achan had taken something tagged for destruction, a Babylonian garment that belonged to the flames. Jesus teaches us the same principle: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

How do we send treasure ahead? The New Testament gives us a beautiful picture. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul describes our works being tested by fire on the day of judgment. Wood, hay, and stubble burn up. Gold, silver, and precious stones endure. Anything done in the power of the Spirit, for the glory of Christ, and in simple obedience survives. The fire reveals what sort of work each one has done.

We care about this because those enduring treasures become crowns. One day we will have the unspeakable privilege of casting our crowns at the feet of the Lamb and saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power." The spoils always belong to the Victor. Jesus saved us, He graced us, He gave us tasks, He supplied the faith to complete them, and then He crowns even our obedience with reward. All of it returns to Him.

Achan saw, coveted, and took. In trying to gain a little of this world, he lost everything. May we learn from his ache. Let us open our hearts daily and pray with the psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." Let us walk in the light, confess quickly, and cast off every work of darkness. Then the blood of Jesus keeps cleansing us.

Beloved, the same Lord who crumbled Jericho still fights for us today. Stay close. Keep nothing back. Devote every part of your life to Him. Send your treasure ahead. And when the fire comes, may only gold, silver, and precious stones remain, ready to be laid at the feet of the One who is worthy of it all.

Your Jericho moments will come again. But so will the choices that either open the door to victory or invite defeat. Choose devotion. Choose obedience. Choose to walk in the light. The Victor is worthy, and the reward of a devoted heart is sweeter than anything this world can offer.