

JOSHUA 7:1-9
BUT . . . !

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Joshua chapter 7 as we continue our study through the book of Joshua and we look at victorious Christian living, and, as we will see this morning, the defeats that happen in our lives and why they happen.

Remember, the children of Israel are in the Promise Land, the land of Canaan. This is the land that the Lord promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and now that promise has come to pass.

In fact, as Moses passed off the scene and Joshua now took over, we are told in Joshua chapter 1, beginning in verse 2, **“Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them - the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.”** Joshua 1:2-6.

God had given this land to them, but they were going to have to walk into that land by faith and do battle with the enemies that were there in the land. It was truly a walk of faith on their part! They had to trust in the promises of God, they had to live what they said they believed!

By faith they had to cross over the flooded Jordan River, obeying the Word of God to them. And they did.

We are told in Joshua chapter 3, beginning in verse 14, **“So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.”** Joshua 3:14-17.

But the battles had not begun yet. And their first enemy was a fortified city, the city of Jericho. The battle plans for taking this city were not that great, from a human perspective.

Imagine these plans for battle that were told to Joshua and then Joshua told the priests, and then the soldiers and the people of Israel.

For six days they would march around the city of Jericho with seven priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and the rest of the soldiers, blow the trumpet and return to base camp. They were not to say a word. No matter what the enemy said to them, shouted to them, mocked them, made fun of them, they were to be silent!

Then, on the seventh day they would go around seven times, the priests would blow their trumpets, they would shout, and the walls would come down!

What a crazy plan! Why would God give them plans like this? Make no mistake about it, God knew what He was doing. Think of what God was saying to them, ***“I want to show you from this initial battle against the strongest the enemy has to throw at you that I don’t need you at all. The issue is not your determination, it’s not your human effort, it’s not your ingenuity. The issue is My power and you having faith in Me.”***

They were going to see the power of God to give them this victory and it would strengthen their faith for future battles that they would face!

Now, the next battle they will face are the people of Ai, which literally means, ***“heap”*** or ***“ruin.”*** It was a small town compared to Jericho, located approximately 10 miles northwest of Jericho.

Even though this was a small city, an easy victory, by defeating Ai the children of Israel will have control of the “ridge route” that ran north to south along the central highlands.

Thus, this was another strategically located city for the nation of Israel to defeat as they made their conquest to the south and the north.

But this victory over Jericho was impressive and I am sure it gave them this false sense of security, of invincibility.

That is never a good thing because what it is saying is that we are secure in the battles we are facing and we forget about God, we forget about what we are doing and who gives to us these victories.

Interestingly enough, and I don’t think I am giving away the end of the story, I think you know what happens. But Ai would be their first and only defeat in what God had promised would be a land of victory.

Think about that. The conquest of Canaan lasted seven years and during that time Israel only lost one battle - the battle of Ai. Why?

That is what we will be looking at this morning in a message I have called, “**But . . . !**” And, as you will see, that is how Joshua chapter 7 opens up for us.

And, as we have seen when we looked at *Destroying Fortresses*, we need to be obedient to God’s instruction. We need to keep ourselves from accursed things. And if we do, we will see the victory that the Lord has for us.

But, if we don’t, then we will see defeat and that is what we will see here this morning as we look at this battle against Ai.

Make no mistake about it, we need to follow the Lord.

Think about it like this. When our kids were young and we went to a crowded shopping mall, or maybe a Christian concert, they really could not see where we were going because the people blocked their view.

But they would hold onto our hands and we would lead them to where they needed to go. All they had to do was continue following us, holding onto our hands and we would get them there safely. They had to trust us.

And the same is true with the Lord. We, in a sense, need to hold His hand and follow Him. He knows the way. He knows what is best. He will not lead us down a path we should not be on. He will keep us safe. But we need to follow Him!

And, if we don't, well - then there are those defeats we face in our lives, not for our destruction, but for our learning. God wants restoration, He wants what is best and sometimes He will let us go down a path that is not good and when we reach that point, we can turn around and grab hold of His hand once again and follow Him. And, as I have said, in doing so, we will see the victory that He has given us over those things that have us in bondage, those things that are clinging to our lives and we need to let them go, to destroy those fortresses!

I have broken these verses that we will be looking at this morning into these main points.

They are:

DISOBEDIENCE – JOSHUA 7:1

BATTLE PLANS – JOSHUA 7:2-3

DEFEAT AT AI – JOSHUA 7:4-5

THE BLAME GAME – JOSHUA 7:6-9

So, let's begin reading in Joshua chapter 7, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us this morning as we look at Israel's defeat at Ai!

JOSHUA 7

VERSE 1

When a chapter or verse opens up with the word, "**But,**" it is usually not a good thing and the same is true in our own lives.

Think about it. When your kids were growing up and you told them to do something and they said, "**But . . . !**" In other words, they would come up with a reason why they could or couldn't do what you were asking them.

And I think that is true here. God instructed them not to take the accursed things, to stay away from them, as we will see in a minute, and Achan said, **“But . . . !”**

That is what we see here, and as I have said, it is not good.

You see, Achan took some of the spoils of their victory in Jericho when Joshua told them, **“And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord.”** Joshua 6:18-19.

In other words, the spoils of this victory at Jericho, the firstfruits, belonged to the Lord and not Achan. And Achan, by his actions, stole from the Lord!

Interestingly enough, the name **“Achan”** means ***“trouble.”*** And, if they did not watch out for trouble, then they would bring upon the camp of Israel trouble!

And notice how the Lord felt about the disobedience of Achan. We are told that **“the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.”**

Now that is interesting to me. God was angry with the children of Israel, but what about Achan? He was also responsible for his actions and will be held accountable, but keep in mind that sin not only affects the person involved in the sin, but it affects their family, their friends, believers and unbelievers alike!

Here we clearly see that the sin of Achan would affect the entire nation and, like I have said, the same is true in our own lives.

Look at alcoholism, adultery, drug abuse and-so-on. Yes, it does affect the one doing it, but it reaches farther than that. It touches family and friends and it is destructive, it can even be deadly!

Some of you may not remember this play, *The Music Man*, and one of the songs was called, *YA GOT TROUBLE*. It goes like this,

Harold sings,

Well, either you're closing your eyes
To a situation you do now wish to acknowledge
Or you are not aware of the caliber of disaster indicated
By the presence of a pool table in your community.

Ya got trouble, my friend, right here,
I say, trouble right here in River City.

Why sure I'm a billiard player,
Certainly mighty proud I say
I'm always mighty proud to say it.

I consider that the hours I spend
With a cue in my hand are golden.
Help you cultivate horse sense
And a cool head and a keen eye.

Never take and try to give
An iron-clad leave to yourself
From a three-rail billiard shot?

But just as I say,
It takes judgement, brains, and maturity to score
In a balkline game,
I say that any boob kin take
And shove a ball in a pocket.

And they call that sloth.
The first big step on the road
To the depths of deg-ra-Day-
I say, first, medicinal wine from a teaspoon,
Then beer from a bottle.
An' the next thing ya know,
Your son is playin' for money
In a pinch-back suit.

And the people sing back,

Trouble, oh we got trouble,
 Right here in River City!
 With a capital "T"
 That rhymes with "P"
 And that stands for Pool,
 That stands for pool.

We've surely got trouble!
 Right here in River City,
 Right here!
 Gotta figger out a way
 To keep the young one's moral after school!
 Trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble . . .

- <http://bit.ly/2Ti43Yf>

Things have changed a lot since that play was put on back in 1957. But sin is sin and if you go down that path, death and destruction will come upon your life, not might!

Now people laugh at that, but you look at how sin, like cancer, will eat away at your life and finally destroy you!

We need to be wise, we need to be careful, because **TROUBLE** is out there and if we are not careful, we will fall prey to it!

Achan knew what Joshua said. Achan knew what the Lord desired.

And think about this. Could taking these accursed things help him and his family?

Absolutely, from a human perspective. But that prosperity, you might say, would be short-lived! It never lasts because the excitement of sin is not lasting but the joy of the Lord is!

And that is how sin works. Satan whispers in our ear, “You are not really cheating the government from your taxes, it is your money in the first place. And they are only going to use it for evil things. So don’t tell the truth when you report your taxes and yes, you will be getting money back that you would not or should not be getting back if you hadn’t lied. But again, it is your money, not theirs!”

We can justify any sin. And we are open to what Satan is whispering in our ear when it benefits us.

But then you are caught! You are either going to have to pay back a large sum of money to the government or you will have to go to jail!

And then Satan whispers in your ear, “I thought you were a Christian? That was not a very Christian thing to do! You lied to the government! You cheated the government! And you are a Christian? I don’t think so!”

Isn’t that interesting. The very thing that Satan tempts us with, and we take a bite, is the very thing he condemns us with! Be careful. Be wise. ***TROUBLE IS OUT THERE!***

Now, is this only going to affect you? Absolutely not!

If you have to go to jail, what about your wife, your children?

What about your unsaved family and friends, what are they going to think when this happens?

You see, your sin will affect many people and it will give the enemies of God a chance to mock the God you say you love and serve! Be careful. Be wise. ***TROUBLE IS OUT THERE!***

And make no mistake about this. What Satan used in the Garden of Eden, that ploy, that plan, he still uses today against us.

What is it? This is very simple. It is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. It is what John warned us of in I John 2:15-17, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”**

And that is exactly what Satan tempted Achan with and he took bite of this bait and was hooked! Listen to what we are told in Joshua 7:21 as Achan confesses what he had done, **“When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.”**

He saw that they were beautiful – lust of the flesh.

He saw with his eyes their beauty – lust of the eyes.

He took them – pride of life.

One writer put it like this in regard to what Achan was doing and thinking. He wrote, “Completely convinced that his deliberate disobedience was morally justified, Achan smiled softly to himself - his future was totally assured. This was a secret store of wealth that would stand him in good stead - little did he know it would soon see him dead!” (Phillip Keller)

God warns us, He tries to direct our lives, but it is up to us who we will listen to.

Remember what James told us in James 1:13-15, **“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”**

God does not tempt us to sin, but He will test our faith to see if we will listen to Him. If we do, there are the blessings. And, if we don't, the consequences will not be good!

And think about this. The Canaanites couldn't defeat the children of Israel, but the children of Israel could defeat themselves by quenching the work of the Holy Spirit, by quenching the work of God in their lives.

And thus, they will alienate themselves from God's plan and God's power!

And folks, the same is true in the battles we face, we are defeated only when we turn from God! Disobedience to what God has told us will lead to defeat in our lives. And we will see that in a few minutes.

DISOBEDIENCE - Be careful. Be wise. ***TROUBLE IS OUT THERE!***

VERSES 2-3

I have called these verses – ***BATTLE PLANS*** but you may get the wrong idea with that title. It would probably be better titled – ***SELF-CONFIDENCE*** and you will see why in a minute.

We have to keep in mind that the children of Israel have just defeated a mighty enemy, the people of Jericho.

And, on the heels of this great victory that God had given to the children of Israel at Jericho, they were very self-confident.

How do I know that they were self-confident?

First of all, we see Joshua send out spies to check out Ai, it was very small in comparison to Jericho, and thus, this should be an easy battle.

In fact, they told Joshua not to bother sending all the men of war in, but just a few.

Why weary everyone when this is such an easy battle!

Listen again to what is said in part of Joshua 7:3 as the spies reported back to Joshua, and we are told, “**... ‘Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.’**”

Apparently, even though God had gone to great lengths to ensure that Israel could not take credit for the victory at Jericho by giving them a foolish strategy for defeating it, they seem to forgot God gave them the victory and started thinking that they obtained the victory at Jericho and thus, this should be an easy victory for them!

But remember Jericho and how God told them to defeat this city!

For six days they would march around the city of Jericho with seven priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and the rest of the soldiers, blow the trumpet and return to base camp. They were not to say a word. No matter what the enemy said to them, shouted to them, mocked them, made fun of them, they were to be silent!

Then, on the seventh day they would go around seven times, the priests would blow their trumpets, they would shout, and the walls would come down!

And the whole reason for doing it this way was to show them that this battle and all the battles they faced belonged to the Lord and they would have to walk by faith to see the victory! We just don't see that here because, I believe that they were self-confident!

Now, it is easy to come down upon the children of Israel for their self-confidence, but don't we do that as well? Of course we do.

As God gives us a great victory over some sin or problem in our lives, we soon forget that He has given to us the victory.

And it doesn't take much for us to start taking credit for that victory. We start to get prideful in our actions, thinking maybe we are so spiritual.

And God reminds us in His Word, "**Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud.**" Proverbs 16:18-19.

God clearly warns us of this danger and yet, self-confidence tends to get our focus on self rather than God!

Alan Redpath reminds us of this very thing as he wrote,

There is no moment so perilous as when, for the first time in his Christian life, the man of God has experienced deliverance from sin. At such times we begin to take pride in ourselves, and to boast that our own arm has saved us. We so easily imagine that because we have achieved victory once, God has imparted to us some new strength which will see us through all our earthly journey.

Alas, how utterly contradictory to the truth that is! The fact is that, apart from the grace of God and the blood of Jesus, the smallest temptations will be too powerful for us. The victories we win in fellowship with a risen Christ impart no strength to us. The victory you won yesterday will not bring you power today.

The greatest lesson that the child of God has to learn is the lesson learned by Paul, that “in my flesh dwells no good thing,” and that “when I am weak, then I am strong”; for the greatest cause of failure in Christian living is just this: imagining that the victory God has given us has imparted strength to us to win every battle, when it has done nothing of the kind. Remember, fellow Christian, the first reason for failure at Ai was self-confidence.

- Alan Redpath

Remember, **“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud.”** Proverbs 16:18-19.

Not only do we see this self-confidence, but when we are so sure of ourselves, we won't be in prayer because we got this!

Look at Joshua and the children of Israel. You don't see any mention of Joshua praying, you don't see the children of Israel praying, seeking God's direction in this battle and that is not a good thing.

Paul tells us in Galatians 3:3, **“Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”**

In other words, are you going to rely on your own strength or on God?

And for the most part, when we face difficult situations, when things are a mess in our life, when there is some great challenge or crisis in our life, no one really tells us or reminds us to pray because we are already doing that!

It is almost automatic in our lives during those times!

But what about when we come to the Ai's in our life, things that are not too difficult to handle. Situations that are really no brainers you might say and thus, we don't pray, we don't seek direction from God!

We then tend to lean on our own understanding of the situation and when things fall apart, when they get worse instead of better, we wonder what on earth is going on!

And, as we will see as we read on, Joshua is going to do that very thing, wonder what is going on, how God can do this or allow this to happen!

And let me say this. I don't care how spiritual you think you are. And if you feel that way, that you are spiritual, you are probably not too spiritual, just prideful.

Now let's look at this a little closer. What do you think would have happened if Joshua called a prayer meeting?

I don't think the Lord would have given him battle plans for Ai but He would have told Joshua that there was sin in the camp that needed to be dealt with.

And Joshua could have dealt with that sin and in doing so, some thirty-six soldiers' lives would have been spared in this defeat at Ai!

Why do we want to handle situations that we feel are easy with our own wisdom and human understanding when God warns us not to? Self-confidence, pride is the reason!

Remember what Solomon said in Proverbs 3:5-6, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”**

I think that is very clear and yet, how many times do we rely on our own understanding of a situation instead of trusting in what the Lord is telling us? I think it is more than we would like to admit.

And think about this, the word **“Ai”** means ***“heap”*** or ***“ruin.”***

And I think that is what happens in our lives if we take these things lightly. Our lives will become a ruin, they will be a heap of a mess if we don't seek direction from the Lord!

Let me show you how easily this can happen, that we can let pride, we can let self-confidence ruin our lives.

King Asa was a godly King in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He was a good man.

And in II Chronicles chapter 14 we see an army gather against Asa and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them and here is the problem. Judah had some 580,000 men for war and the enemy was almost twice as large. They were outnumbered around 2 to 1!

And notice what we are told in II Chronicles 14:11, **“And Asa cried out to the Lord his God, and said, ‘Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!’”**

King Asa did not rest in his might, his strength, but he brought it before God in prayer! That was the right thing to do.

And we see what happened in II Chronicles 14:12-13, **“So the Lord struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people who were with him pursued them to Gerar. So the Ethiopians were overthrown, and they could not recover, for they were broken before the Lord and His army. And they carried away very much spoil.”**

God gave them this great victory over the Ethiopians. They trusted in the Lord and the Lord directed this victory for them.

How awesome. And yet, notice what happens next in II Chronicles 15:1-7, **“Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: ‘Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For a long time Israel has been without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; but when in their trouble they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!’”**

I don’t know about you, but after a great victory like that, I would probably be thinking, “Are you kidding me? This is a celebration and you come with this warning! Of course we will follow the Lord. Thanks for your input, but we are good!”

But as Asa hears these words he responds in a godly manner. He does not get mad at Azariah for what he said, but Asa listens and then responds to the words of Azariah the prophet.

And folk's, like I have said, it was not easy. The nation had embraced idolatry. There were those spiritual forces that were trying to keep them in this idolatry.

And don't forget that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was heavy into idolatry.

Maybe he was struggling with his own fleshly desires in regard to idolatry.

So it was a battle but Asa did what was good and what was right before the Lord and it brought not only the Southern Kingdom of Judah back to God, but when those in the Northern Kingdom of Israel heard of this revival breaking out, they joined in, they went down to the Southern Kingdom of Judah so they could reap those blessings of God!

And we can say, "It's all good!" But be careful. God does not warn us for nothing and that was true for Asa as well!

As we get into II Chronicles chapter 16, we see a battle getting started between the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Keep in mind that Baasha was the King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and he is trying to stop the flow of his people from going into the Southern Kingdom of Judah and to block the trade route to Judah. You see, word got out how God was blessing Asa and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and that caused many to come and be part of what God was doing.

I know, you are thinking, "I bet Asa brings this before the Lord and God gives him the victory!"

Not exactly!

Instead of crying out to the Lord, he cries out to Ben-Hadad the King from Syria for help.

What a contrast we see in what Asa did here versus what he did when the Ethiopians had him outnumbered. Then he trusted in the Lord, but now we see him trust in man. He is in trouble and he has no place to turn, so he turns to man.

What happened? During those years of peace Asa did not cultivate a deep relationship with the Lord but focused on his outward strength. Thus, his actions are born out of an empty spirit. Because of that Asa takes the treasuries of God and gives them to Ben-Hadad, King of Syria, an unbeliever, to help him with his problems.

Spurgeon sums this up like this, “The power of Ethiopia was broken before him, and Judah’s armies returned laden with the spoil. You would not have thought that a man who could perform that grand action would become, a little after, full of unbelief; but the greatest faith of yesterday will not give us confidence for to-day, unless the fresh springs which are in God shall overflow again.”

Here is a lesson for us. You never make an alliance with the enemy, you never ask them to assist you, no matter how bad the situation is. Asa started out strong, his reforms were good, but he faded at the end of his life. That tells me that it doesn’t really matter how long you have walked with the Lord, the enemy never gives up, and thus, we cannot let our guard down, even at the end of our life!

This is what happened. First of all, Ben-Hadad had a treaty with Baasha, but he was bought out and comes to the aid of Asa. Now Baasha is down in Ramah, in the southern part of his kingdom, so Ben-Hadad strikes Israel at its northern borders. In doing so it caused Baasha to stop his work down in Ramah and go and protect his northern borders from this invasion.

What a great plan and it worked! Asa was free of Baasha, and you may think, “Great, this must be of God, it worked!”

Wrong! Just because something works does not mean it is of God.

In fact, when King Asa was rebuked by the prophet for his actions, we are told, “**Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time.**” II Chronicles 16:10.

He was mad at this rebuke and got mad at the seer. Interesting, because that does happen when you try to correct people. And believe me, over the years, I have had a lot of people get mad at me. And you really can't get mad at God and win, but you can get mad at His messenger! And they do!

Morgan put it like this, “Things which appear successful may be in the life of faith most disastrous.”

And Spurgeon made these remarks, “Now, many people in the world judge actions by their immediate results. If a Christian does a wrong thing, and it prospers, then at once they conclude he was justified in doing it; but, ah! Brethren, this is a poor, blind way of judging the actions of men and the providence of God. Do you not know that there are devil's providences as well as God's providences?” May we learn the lesson!

And we see that “**Asa became diseased in his feet**” (II Chronicles 16:12) and even in that he did not seek the Lord but sought help on his own. What does that mean? It means his walk with the Lord was lame, it was not good and that is how he ended his life.

For Joshua, he is going to move out in the flesh instead of continuing what God has begun in the Spirit and he will fail miserably!

Keep in mind that yesterday's victory does not make a believer immune to being defeated today.

And folks, like I have said, it is usually the small things, the easy things, the Ai's that cause us to stumble because we try to accomplish in the flesh what must be done in the Spirit.

Those big things we pray, we seek God's direction because we know we can't do it on our own and thus, it usually is the little things that cause us to stumble!

We must continually, in all things, depend on the Lord. It is as Paul said in Ephesians 6:10, "**Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.**"

May we not forget that!

BATTLE PLANS – SELF-CONFIDENCE - Be careful. Be wise. ***TROUBLE IS OUT THERE!***

VERSES 4-5

This next section focuses on their ***DEFEAT AT AI!***

This is crazy. They went up with three thousand men against this little city of Ai and "**they fled before the men of Ai.**"

And in this battle some thirty-six men lost their lives in Israel! Think about that for a minute.

How many men did the children of Israel lose in their battle against Jericho?

They lost none, not even one!

And maybe you are thinking that maybe Joshua should have sent in 100,000 men, then they could have defeated Ai!

They could have sent a million men into this battle and they still would have lost.

You see, this defeat here at Ai showed that it was not a matter of the strength of their opponent, nor the number of soldiers the children of Israel had!

It was the help of the Lord!

That means, no matter what, without the Lord, they would not, could not win! They would never obtain the victory that God had for them!

That is important for us to understand. That sin, those accursed things in our lives will rob us of the victory that God has for us.

And if we don't take this battle that we face each and every day seriously, we will be defeated!

But they did not take this battle seriously and from a military standpoint, only losing 36 men in battle is not bad, but 36 men could have been saved and the children of Israel could have been victorious if they would have sought the Lord in this matter.

You see, the sin of one person had consequences on the innocent and because Joshua did not seek the Lord, they were defeated!

And notice what happened in the camp of Israel, “**... therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.**”

Think about what is going through their minds. If they could not destroy this little city of Ai, how in the world could they defeat anyone?

The reality is for them as well as for us, we won't be able to defeat anyone apart from the Lord, apart from God's help!

Jesus said in John 15:5, “**I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**”

May we understand that truth! It is as the Lord told Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:6, “**... 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts.**”

And with sin in our camp, you might say, we will grieve the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, and we won't attain those victories that God has for us.

Remember their **DEFEAT AT AI** - Be careful. Be wise. **TROUBLE IS OUT THERE!**

VERSES 6-9

The last point I want to look at this morning is what happens many times when we experience defeat in our lives. We go to **THE BLAME GAME!**

What Joshua and the elders of Israel did was good. They tore their clothes, they put dust on their heads, they fell down before God, and then it got bad! They blamed God for losing this battle. You see, the word, “**Alas**” we might paraphrase and say, “We’ve had it!” And again, notice how Joshua is blaming God here!

Also notice that there is no mention of their sin, their failure, seeking to see if maybe they were doing something wrong.

It was more, “**Lord, this is your fault. Why did you bring us to this place if you were not going to keep your promise? You failed us! We might as well have stayed in the wilderness than to be defeated by a city as small as Ai! You made a promise and now you let us down!**”

Now, did God fail them? Did God let them down? Not at all!

Let’s put this into perspective because we probably have done the same thing when things don’t go the way we think they should go in our lives.

God is holy. God is righteous. There is no darkness in Him at all. God does not lie.

Now we know that is all true. And yet, instead of coming before God and asking, “**Lord, what did I do wrong that caused you to act this way?**” we blame God, as Joshua and the elders of Israel were doing!

And when things fall apart for us, we not only blame God, but we drop out, we stop serving, we just leave! Why in the world do we call it quits?

Because we lost the battle and what is the use.

But think about this.

Was the battle too strong for God to give you that victory?

Absolutely not!

But what about my drug situation, it has a hold of my life and there is no way to get out of it?

What about my lusting after all kinds of things, I just can't stop?

What about my addiction to pornography, I just can't let it go?

What about **WHATEVER YOU WANT TO PUT HERE?**

Are these battles too strong for the Lord to give us the victory, to destroy those fortresses in our lives?

Absolutely not! He is the creator of heaven and earth. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, He is in total control and thus, whatever battles we are facing, He can give us the victory if we are willing to obey His voice and follow Him!

Folks, if you are blaming God, you have a wrong perspective of the situation. Do a heart check on yourself because it is not His fault!

Remember your walk with the Lord and return to Him. Repent of your sin and walk accordingly. That is what Joshua and the children of Israel needed to do. Sin needed to be dealt with, but they needed to remember who God was and then repent of their sin and then walk with Him! It is as simple as that.

Remember their **BLAME GAME** - Be careful. Be wise. **TROUBLE IS OUT THERE!**

Before I close this morning, I want to finish up by looking at this idea of **"but"** for man and when we read **"but God!"**

In Ephesians 2:4-10 listen to what we are told of God and then I will expound on this. We are told, **“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**

As I said when we opened up our study this morning, when God tells us something and we say, **“but”** it is never a good thing.

The reason being is God is telling us something and we are challenging what He is saying, thinking we know better. We don't!

But, when we read, **“But God”** it is a wonderful thing for us because God is interceding for us, and that is what we see here in Ephesians chapter 2!

One writer, John Stott, put it this way. He wrote,

“These two monosyllables [‘but God’] set against the desperate condition of fallen mankind the gracious initiative and sovereign action of God. We were the objects of his wrath, but God out of the great love with which he loved us had mercy upon us. We were dead, and dead men do not rise, but God made us alive with Christ. We were slaves, in a situation of dishonour and powerlessness, but God has raised us with Christ and set us at his own right hand, in a position of honour and power. Thus God has taken action to reverse our condition in sin.

- John Stott, God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians, pp. 79-80

Here are a few examples of verses in the Scriptures that remind us of God's righteous intervention in human affairs:

"You meant evil against me; **but God** meant it for good, in order to . . . save many people alive." (Gen. 50:20)

"Their beauty shall be consumed in the grave . . . **But God** will redeem my soul from the power of the grave." (Ps. 49:14-15)

"My flesh and my heart fail; **but God** is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Ps. 73:26)

"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. **But God** demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:7-8)

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard . . . the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. **But God** has revealed them to us through His Spirit." (1 Cor. 2:9-10)

". . . who were dead in trespasses and sins . . . **But God**, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:1, 4-6)

Whenever you feel discouraged, look up some "**but God**" verses and be reassured of God's involvement in the lives of those who love Him.

And please understand that God loves us so much He is not going to leave us in this condition of sin. He will deal with us so that we will repent and return to Him.

Yes, He will wait until we come to the end of ourselves, but He has what is best for our lives and that is what we will see here with the children of Israel!

Again, look at what sin did in their lives:

DISOBEDIENCE – LETTING THE ACCURSED THINGS, SIN CAUSE THEM TO TURN FROM GOD!

BATTLE PLANS – CAUSED THEM TO HAVE SELF-CONFIDENCE IN THEIR OWN ABILITY TO WIN THIS WAR AND THEY DID NOT EVEN SEEK GOD, THEY DID NOT PRAY!

DEFEAT AT AI – BECAUSE OF THEIR DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD’S WORD AND THEIR SELF-CONFIDENCE, THE ENEMY DEFEATED THEM, THEY LOST THE BATTLE THEY SHOULD HAVE WON!

THE BLAME GAME – AND WHEN YOU ARE NOT WALKING WITH GOD, YOU WILL BLAME GOD FOR ALL THE PROBLEMS THAT COME YOUR WAY INSTEAD OF REMEMBERING WHERE YOU CAME FROM, REPENTING OF YOUR SIN AND RETURN TO HIM!

Remember, “**But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things . . .**” Don’t say, “***But***” to God, say “***Yes Lord!***” and let Him finish the story in your life as He says, “***But God . . . !***”

