

Joshua 7 and 8

Aim of Lesson

To show that God sees everything and cannot be deceived.

Background study

Exodus 20:23; 34:10-17; Numbers 15:30-36; Joshua 6:18-19; Colossians 3:5; 1 John 2:15-17.

Suggested outline of lesson

The children will be happy to recall the magnificent and dramatic conquest of Jericho. Joshua and all Israel were full of confidence after that great victory. There would be no holding them now; all their enemies would tremble; victory would be easy; Canaan was theirs. Such was probably their thinking as they contemplated the taking of Ai. Spies were sent out who returned with an encouraging report. They said it would not even be necessary to send out the whole army; only two or three thousand would be required.

With the aid of a good map (preferably a relief map) show the hilly regions of Canaan. Ai was about ten miles to the west of Jericho on steeply rising ground, in a strategic position on the eastern edge of the central ridge, commanding the main route from Gilgal into the interior of Canaan. Out went three thousand soldiers to battle, while the rest of Israel remained in their camp eagerly anticipating news of another victory. Time passed, and instead of the exultant cries of triumph came the sight of a depleted army of disillusioned, wounded and defeated men, now in retreat and bearing the bodies of thirty-six of their companions who were slain on the rocky slopes around Ai.

The hearts of the people of Israel sank at the humiliation of this defeat. Had God forsaken them already? Had he withdrawn his power from them now that they had entered Canaan? Joshua was shocked and mystified. He feared that God's name would be dishonoured when the news of this defeat spread to the Canaanites. He prostrated himself before God and pleaded for understanding.

God showed Joshua the reason for their failure. Israel had sinned. Note how everyone was implicated in the sin of the one man; he had lied and committed sacrilege by stealing what belonged to God and concealing it. The people had been expressly forbidden to keep any of the treasures of the conquered city, and Achan had brought shame on Israel. It was Joshua's duty to cleanse Israel of this sin; the sinner had to be found and punished according to God's commands.

Imagine the feelings of the Israelites as, early in the morning, they were gathered together. With God's guidance, first the tribe of Judah was singled out and by a process of elimination Achan was found to be responsible for the sin. There is no indication as to the way in which this was revealed to Joshua but God guided him in finding the culprit. When Achan realised that his crime had been exposed in the presence of all, he could not sustain the deception. Human greed had caused him to ignore the vitally important divine ban on the pagan treasures. He had condemned himself, and he must die. All Israel witnessed the admission of sin, saw the goods restored to the Lord's treasury, and fulfilled the task of administering the punishment decreed. Harsh though the punishment was, we must remember that, if Israel were to survive as God's chosen people, obedience was essential. There could be no rebellion or half commitment to the Lord God of Israel.

God's anger was turned away; the sin had been removed. God reassured Joshua of his presence and guidance, and the people of Israel were able to advance with confidence. All the fighting men were assembled for the capture of Ai. This was not because such a large number was needed for a victory but possibly to restore the morale of the army and of the whole nation. This time God told Joshua exactly how to achieve victory. Describe the strategy employed, and illustrate the positions of the armies by means of a simple sketch or model. Convey the strong leadership of Joshua and his complete adherence to God's instructions. His wielding of the javelin not only gave the signal for invasion but also seemed to represent the authority vested in Joshua over the enemy. Note the interesting difference in the commands of God regarding the contents of Jericho and Ai. The people were to learn that whatever God's instructions, they must be obeyed. There followed a ceremony of rededication and gratitude to God. Joshua was as concerned, as Moses had been, that the people should have the Law always before them and that God should be glorified.

Relevance to the children's lives

Achan thought that no one knew that he had stolen the treasure. He had deceived everyone. But God, who sees everything, knew all about it. When we are tempted to take what doesn't belong to us, do we sometimes forget that, although we can deceive other people, we cannot hide our actions from God? If we always remembered this, would we behave differently?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, you know all that we think and say and do. May we always remember that you are angry when we steal or tell lies. Please help us always to do right and speak the truth. Amen.

Memory verse

"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight" (Proverbs 12:22).