

## Aim of lesson

To show that, even though we make a mess of things when we forget about God, he will not turn from us when we reach out to him.

## Bible background

Joshua 7 & 8; 1 John 2:15-17; Luke 15:11-32.

## Outline of lesson

### After Jericho

Question your group about the feelings of the Israelites after Jericho had been defeated. Discuss the confidence they would have, and the source of that confidence. Help the group to see how they would view their enemies in Canaan. Surely no-one could stand in their way after the miraculous victory at Jericho.

Help the group towards the conclusion that there must have been a tremendous vigour and confidence as the Israelites contemplated the forthcoming siege at Ai.

### Digging a hole

Introduce the workbook at this stage. Make the point that, amazingly, after Jericho, the nation failed to seek God's guidance about Ai and paid the penalty. It was as though they were digging a big hole for themselves and the deeper they dug, the further they moved from God.

Achan started the hole by his theft of the treasure from Jericho. The events of the Exodus were many years ago, and Achan had perhaps lived all his life in the wilderness. The sight of fine robes and a lot of money would have been tempting to him, but he was losing his sight of God's purpose. Think of the rich young man who could not follow Jesus because he loved his possessions too much (Matthew 19:22).

The spies that Joshua sent to Ai continued to dig; Joshua 7:2-5 sees them carrying out their task badly, offering Joshua foolish advice. Not a mention anywhere of their seeking God's guidance. Disaster followed. The small army was routed with about 36 people killed.

Joshua dug deeper in his response (Joshua 7:6-9). There is no indication that he had consulted God in the preparations for the battle, and now he blames God for their defeat. Instead of asking God 'what did we do wrong?' he complains that God has brought the defeat upon them. Even Joshua, who had seen God's majesty in so many ways, pitifully echoed the people's complaint 'Why didn't we stay on the other side of the Jordan...'

### Helped out of the hole

God begins to lift first Joshua, then his people, by bringing them face to face with their guilt (Joshua 7:10-12).

The next big step out of the hole comes with the command to consecrate the people (Joshua 7:13). Obtain the group's views on the meaning of the consecration of Israel and the lessons for themselves. Lead them to understand that although God was angry with his people, he was prepared to give them the opportunity to turn to him again. The people were given until the next day to prepare for the judgment that God had promised. They were clearly given time to repent if they had sinned. A careful reading of this passage shows that many of the Israelites may have done as Achan did, but at God's command to Joshua to 'consecrate the nation', all but Achan disposed of the stolen treasure. Only Achan and his family remained unrepentant and God's awful judgment passed on them.

The repentance of the nation was the next step out of the hole as those who had stolen the treasure from Jericho carried out God's command. It may be interesting to discuss why God required the wealth of a pagan city to be given to him. The consecration was completed and the nation restored when the Israelites carried out God's judgment on Achan and his family (Joshua 7:24-26). They were the only ones who would not repent and who therefore rejected God's mercy.

### Ai is destroyed

Turn to Joshua 8. Note that God guided Joshua precisely in his battle plan. You may wish to use the sketch map of the siege of Ai which will help the group to see what happened. Take the class through Joshua 8 and show how the city was taken.

Help the class to compare God's instructions at Ai with those that he gave at Jericho. Discuss with them the reasons that God may have had in allowing the city's wealth to be taken (Joshua 8:1-2).

### The Covenant renewed

The lesson concludes with Joshua's building of the altar at Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:31). Guide the group to see his care in the building 'as Moses, the servant of the Lord had commanded, he builded...'. The Law was copied on to the stones and presented to the nation, just as Moses had done years before. Draw the group to the conclusion that Joshua and the people had learnt the hard way that just as God's love, care and guidance are constant, their response and service had to be constant too.

### Digging deeper

#### The settlement of the land

The next lesson is about Gideon, so to complete the story this section goes briefly through the conquest of the land to its eventual settlement.

### Relevance to our lives

Ask the group to say, honestly, if they ever feel in need of God's guidance. Help them to see that there is no part of our lives which should be closed to God. If there are such parts, they should not be there.

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, we know that there are times when we act and speak without thinking about what you want of us. When we do this, bring us back to yourself and help us to see your guiding hand in our lives.

## **Other suggestions for activities**

The next two lessons are about Judges – Gideon and Samson. You may like to sketch the background to the judges and mention those who came before Gideon – children particularly enjoy the story of Ehud!