

Setbacks that Move Us Forward

Joshua 7:6 -Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. 7 And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all--to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan. 8 O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

Have you ever experience sudden hardship in the workplace, home, or school? Have you suffered a setback with your clients, co-workers, or an employer? Ordinary reactions and attitudes during these moments of suffering are often characterized by rebellion, defensiveness, or self-pity. We seldom analyze the situation. We have a natural tendency to focus on the problem; rarely do we look to God or at our own shortcomings.

When Israel suffered a stunning defeat at Ai, Joshua and the rest of the elders were completely dishearten. They were focus on the loss and not what God was showing them about their own lives. Joshua and company were so distraught that their prayers were filled with complaints, not retrospect or self-examination. God had promised the Children of Israel a land of milk and honey! He had instructed them about their need to obey His commands! Yet the people of Israel had violated this code of conduct. These same transgressions often occur at our place of work, yet we merely overlooked them. Every trespass against God's "Employment Manual" [the Bible] will have a consequence in our life.

The setback was Israel's fault; sin and disobedience was the cause. It was not God's plan for them to fail. God revealed the problem to Joshua only after earnest prayer!

Joshua 7:10- So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? 11 Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant, which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff.

Israel could not stand before their enemies

There are times God will lift our protection from us because of sin. The conflict around us will be greater than we can bear. If we do not take care of the issue of sin in the workplace, we will not be able to stand. It is easy to focus the blame on our co-workers, employees, and even our clients. Yet God may be stirring up things around you because of unconfessed sin.

Joshua 7:12- Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.

Israel had broken God's commands in the desert. God had overlooked their transgressions in the desert [the waters of Mara and Meriba -Exodus]. However, now God was raising the bar. He was raising their standard of conduct for their new lives in the Promise Land. In the Promise Land, there was a higher expectation and more responsibilities. In our own lives, the Lord often extends a measure of grace and mercy because of our ignorance and immaturity. God will allow certain unrighteous attitudes and conduct for a season, however there comes a time when God will require a higher standard. **We must grow in godliness and righteousness! We cannot operate our lives at our workplaces making the same mistakes we did three years ago! Laziness, lying, cheating employers or customers, backbiting co-workers, unforgiving hearts, pride, insubordination, and dishonesty do not have a place in the life of a child of God.**

These are very common practices and attitudes found in today's businesses around the world, even among Christian workers, yet the Bible call them a sin! When there is unconfessed sin, we cannot see the pitfalls around us. We will make strategic mistakes in our decision making process. This will lead to manifold problems, yet in many instances we *are* the problem! The consequence can be a stunning defeat or setback in our career, or business, or finances.

Joshua could not see the problem that he was going to face at Ai. He underestimated his task: *Joshua 7:2- Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai. 3 And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "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." 4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. 5 And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.*

God wants Israel to clean up their code of conduct before He could give them victory in the Promise Land. God wants us to clean up our act in the workplace before we can move forward. It is imperative that we understand that our places of work are holy. Your office or shop is as holy as the church you attend on Sunday morning or Wednesday night. We should not lift up our hands in reverent worship to God on Sunday and act like the children of the Devil on Monday. The great apostle Paul tells us that we are the Temple of God "*1 Cor 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are*

God's." The message is clear; we are God's ambassadors everywhere we are. Thus our business practices and demeanor must reflect the God who dwells in us.

Sanctification and repentance was the cure for Joshua and his people, *Joshua:7:13* " *Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you."* " Joshua immediately obeyed God's instruction and swiftly removed the accursed thing from the camp. As a result Israel not only went on to defeat the people of Ai but never lost another battle! *8:1* *Now the LORD said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. 2 And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it."*

We can not move forward until we deal with the sin issue. God will not give us the victory we are seeking until we humble ourselves and mend our ways. However, once we are obedient, I assure you there is no situation or person in your life that can ever defeat you; "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." As we begin this week let us remove every obstacle [sin] that has been hindering God's blessing upon our lives and workplaces!

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