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Israel's Downfall at Ai Joshua Welch

Joshua 6 and 7 provide an interesting contrast. Chapter six describes a pinnacle moment in the history of Israel as God gives Israel the victory over the fortified city of Jericho. Chapter seven describes a pitfall moment as Israel loses 36 men to the small town of Ai as a punishment and wake-up call from God. What was Israel's downfall at Ai?

Pride. One of the most dangerous moments in the life of a Christian is our victories. Victory tends to inflate our ego, fill us with over-confidence, and causes us to forget the real source of our strength. Satan tends to attack the over-confident believer because over-confidence is a weakness. Israel's victory over Jericho may have led to such prideful thinking. Proverbs warns, "*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling*" (16:18, NASB). Paul would warn, "*For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment...*" (Romans 12:3, NASB). The arrogant person, nation, or group lacks "sound judgment."

Presumption. Israel's pride results in their presumption. They assume since God has given them victory at Jericho, he will automatically grant victory at Ai (Joshua 7:2-3). They presumed wrong for they did not realize God was displeased with Israel because sin was in the camp with Achan (see Joshua 7:1). God's blessings were conditional upon Israel's obedience and Achan had been disobedient. So, they needed to deal with those acting outside of God's will before He would work on their behalf again (7:11-25). Only after they dealt with the sin did God give them the victory at Ai (7:25-8:1). David once wrote, "*Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me*" (Psalm 19:13, NASB). Likewise, Paul writes, "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Prayerlessness. A third downfall of Israel at Ai was their prayerlessness. Joshua prays after the defeat instead of before the battle. In Jericho, Joshua received instructions prior to the conquest (Joshua 6:2). Yet, at Ai, Joshua sends men to spy out and attack Ai before consulting with God (Joshua 7:2-5). His prayer to God comes after it is too late. He would make the same mistake with the Gibeonites (see Joshua 9:14). We need to learn from Israel's mistakes and pray for God's wisdom before, during, and after the trials (James 1:5). James tells us sometimes we fail to be equipped for victory "*because you do not ask*" (James 4:2). So, may we pray daily for God's strength, as Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matthew 6:13).

This example is instructive. May we be on guard against pride, presumption, and prayerlessness in our own lives so we can be victorious in our spiritual battles.