

Joshua 07-04-20a

This is Friday the 20th of April 2007. We continue tonight our study in the book of Joshua. We're in chapter 6. Let's take a moment as we begin our study to follow our usual custom and spend a moment in silent prayer.

It gives us the opportunity to ensure that God the Holy Spirit will find us ready and teachable in terms of the truth of the Word of God. Shall we pray? Father we are grateful for another opportunity to spend time in fellowship in the study of your Word. We are blessed by the gifts that you have distributed to each one of us.

We enjoy the fruit and the benefit of those as we spend time together, particularly when it is focused on the truth that pertains to your plan and purpose and reflects on our understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask that you will bless us as we study this evening and we ask it in Jesus name, Amen. Joshua chapter 6, the destruction of Jericho we have covered.

The clear instructions for disposition of the spoils are known to us in great detail as they were known to the soldiers of the army of Israel and yet there is a trespass that is committed and as we move into chapter 7, the children of Israel trespassed a trespass. You remember there is a cognate of the noun and the verb there. Regarding the Karam things, not so much accursed as devoted, that spoil essentially is to be viewed sort of like a burnt offering.

It is to go up in smoke to the Lord and anything that survives fire is to be given to the Lord. The gold and silver and precious stones and so on is to be taken in. All of this belongs to God and if we don't grasp and remember for the long term any other principle from this story, when you think of Achan and you think of the Karam things, it is a clear and stark reminder that there are certain things that belong to God and we are enjoined, we are commanded and we are expected to render to God the things that are God's.

Sometimes the emphasis when Jesus looked at the Roman coin and said whose picture is on here, we tend to think well it's all about being respectful of the government, but the real point is render unto God the things that are God's and we ignore that principle at our peril. In the same way that children need to respect their parents and render to their parents what is just and what is expected, God is our Heavenly Father and we can expect that he will respond if we fail. This is a drastic and a graphic example that is set in the earliest days of Israel in the land.

We saw something similar to this happen when Moses brought the children of Israel across the Yom Suf, across the Sea of Reeds and they go to Sinai and they receive the Ten Commandments and the first guy that breaks the Sabbath law, remember, what was he doing? Very innocuous. Can you imagine the American Civil Liberties Union and the hue and cry that would be raised today if somebody got the death penalty for picking up

sticks? Many people like to go to that passage now and say your Old Testament God is a God of anger and vitriol and judgment. Why would God do that? He makes an example out of someone who commits a sin of the high hand has just been told.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Do your work on the six days that are available for that purpose. On the seventh, you rest and meditate on the work of God.

This man says, well, need some sticks? Let me get some sticks. A bunch of religious nonsense, sit around all day, waste time, sit here shivering, can't make a fire. I'm going to go get some sticks.

What's the harm? What's the hurt? It's a victimless crime. I'm going to go out and do this. Victimless crime.

Well, God made an example out of that individual and that example has resonated all down through the centuries, hasn't it? God takes his word seriously. In the same way, there are going to be many battles. There's going to be a lot of spoil.

There's going to be a great effort made over the course of the coming seven years while Joshua and the people of Israel take the land. Early on, God makes a point of saying, when you go and fight these battles and defeat these people, you'd better follow the rules. If you break the rules, consequences will come.

There's no better way to effectively make that point than to make an issue out of Achan in front of the entire assembled multitudes of Israel. And that's exactly what happens. Well, how does this come to the forefront of everyone's attention? It wouldn't be any big deal if Achan had sneaked these things and hidden them in his tent and nobody knew about it.

God knows about it. And God outs Achan. Achan isn't betrayed by his family.

He's not given away by a snitch. God himself sees this. God himself makes the point.

And what is the cost? What is the initial cost? Well, we found this when the men go to attack Ai and the men of Ai struck down 36 men. 36 men die because Achan committed a sin. Right? So you say, is this a victimless crime? Well, what about these three dozen men? What about their families? We had nearly this many people killed just this past week, didn't we? And the airways have been filled with the angst and the sorrow and the grieving of people who have suddenly and unexpectedly lost loved ones.

Well, in Israel, remember, for 40 years, they've not really fought that many battles. They haven't suffered that many losses. There were a few judgments early on.

But this is a very sharp loss. Jericho was a fortified city with a lot more people in it, and they didn't lose any men. And they go to this little village and three dozen men die.

So God makes this point in a very graphic way. Well, this brings us, having recognized the overarching principle and the principle of application, that we have to look at our own lives. We have to be sure that as our first priority, we render to God the things that are God's.

Now, what is that? What are our marching orders? You all can probably fill in that blank. You think about Romans 12.1, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you do what? Present your bodies, present yourselves as a living sacrifice to God. This is your reasonable service.

What is our service? Our day ought to be dedicated to God. Whatever it is that we do, you can dedicate mopping the floor to God. You can dedicate the performance of your daily vocational duties, or your child raising duties, or your student duties, or whatever it may be.

Dedicate that as a sacrifice to God. And it changes the atmosphere. It changes motivation.

It changes our attitude toward what we do. We find that we can be more patient. We find that we can be more diligent.

We find that we can be more enthusiastic if we make that commitment. And we say, I am going to dedicate my effort as a sacrifice to the Lord God. I want to do this in a way that he looks down and says, that's my servant.

There's someone that is aware of the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus Christ made and is motivated by it. Well done, good and faithful servant. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

This is your reasonable service. It's a great opportunity. It's not a heavy burden.

It doesn't require crawling on bloody knees up dozens of steps to some holy shrine like the Muslims think they have to do. It doesn't require a pilgrimage. It doesn't require a big monetary investment.

It's simply a matter of attitude. It's a matter of commitment. It's a matter of dedication.

It's a matter of recognizing an opportunity for service to the God of our salvation. And to fail to do so is not only ungrateful, but brings us into the category of judgment. God will find a way to bring our omission to our attention.

This is what he does for the nation of Israel, isn't it? Thirty-six innocent men who had been at Jericho didn't take any spoils, faithfully went in and followed the rules, died because Achan screwed up. Our failure to present ourselves as a living sacrifice will cost

others in our periphery pain. I know this from personal experience.

You know this from personal experience. When you screw up, other people suffer. Other people get sinned against.

And it is a sobering and an unhappy thought, but it's the truth. We wound each other. We cost each other when we fail to observe this injunction.

So that is the point of application. That is the principle that we want to remember primarily out of this story. Having said that, I want to address a rather less important issue.

It's less important in terms of application. It's less amenable to meditation and so on. But it is important.

And if I didn't think it was important, I wouldn't cover it. But it has to do with the integrity of Scripture. It has to do with attacks on Scripture.

It has to do with whether or not we can believe the Scripture. And it is related to a detail in this story in chapter seven. I've alluded to it before.

We've sort of brushed it aside before, but sooner or later we have to have to tackle this thing. And so we're going to attempt it tonight. If you take a look at chapter seven, it says that Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-Avon on the east side of Beth-El, to spy out the country.

They went. They spied it out. They returned.

They said, don't let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Two or three Elephs, if I can sort of pluralize a Hebrew word. And the word that's translated thousand here is Eleph.

E-L-E-P-H. Is it related to elephant? That question just now occurred to me, and I don't know the answer. So like some other things I mentioned tonight, you'll just have to look it up.

I'm only interested in the Hebrew for tonight. And Eleph is the word in question. Now, what's the problem? There's a relatively famous essay that has been put together on this by Dr. Ralph Klein, who is the professor of Old Testament at Christ Seminary and dean of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

And he has summarized very well this problem. And I am going to refer to his essay because it's a very succinct summary of this problem. What's the problem with thousand here? Well, it exists not only here, because remember Ai is an exceedingly small village, much smaller than Jericho.

And we've seen the archaeological details of Jericho and how many people likely live there. And it is unrealistic to believe that 3000 men went and attacked Ai. It is a village.

It's like bushy head Oklahoma. There were just perhaps 150 people at most at Ai. It's a very small, they can't even find the thing.

They can't even find any archaeological remains. It was so small. And 3000 men, if you've ever seen that many thousand people in one place, you know what a crowd that is.

And percentage wise, 36 men dying wouldn't create a sense of shock. If a battle was engaged where you had 3000 on one side, 3000 on another, and you only had 36 casualties, you'd like you got off light. Something is wrong.

Something is amiss here. We're not getting accurate numerical information. And this is evident when you look at some other passages.

For example, turn with me to 2 Chronicles 13. 2 Chronicles chapter 13. This is after the time of Solomon.

This is after the split, the northern and southern kingdoms split. And after a couple of decades, Abijah becomes king over Judah. He reigns three years.

His mother's name is given there. And there's war between Abijah and Jeroboam. Remember the kingdom splits and you have Jeroboam and you have Rehoboam.

Rehoboam is Solomon's son and he's a moron. My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. You remember that whole thing.

And so the kingdom splits. And so war erupts. Abijah sets the battle in order with an army of valiant warriors, 400,000 choice men.

400,000 choice men. Not 4,000, not 40,000, 400,000. Whenever I want to estimate the size of a large crowd, you can do this.

If you've been to a football stadium, they say, well, it seats so many thousand. I always think of Halsey Fieldhouse at the Naval Academy with the entire brigade of midshipmen assembled, 4,500 individuals. And I have a real good visual image of what 4,500 people looks like.

Four and a half thousand people. This is nearly a hundred times that many. We are talking about a great vast sea of individuals stretching to the horizon.

Think about St. Peter's Square when the Pope is out there and they've got these milling masses. Well, that doesn't even approach 400,000. I mean, this is just... And Jeroboam's army is 800,000.

He's just shy of a million-man army here. It goes on to tell us in verse 17 that there are a half a million casualties. 500,000 choice men of Israel fall slain.

There are similar large numbers elsewhere in Chronicles. Now, it's tough to know exactly when you try to study ancient Israel to figure out, you know, demographically how many people were likely to live in that area. But the population of Judah at this time in history has been estimated by the esteemed biblical scholar W.F. Albright as being about 250,000 total.

The entire population is about a quarter of a million. So these numbers of a couple million men and a half a million casualties and so on are really unrealistic. Roland Deveau is another very famous Bible scholar and archaeologist and so on.

He speculates that there were fewer than a million people at any time in the combined population of the northern and southern kingdom. And that's total people. That's men, women, children, the whole smear.

When you look at what the land can support in terms of agriculture, in terms of the flocks and herds and that sort of thing, this is what you would figure. The 500,000 casualties inflicted by Abijah are about the same as the number of deaths on both sides in the American Civil War and about the same as all American deaths in World War II. And so Dr. Klein here says armies of 400,000, 800,000 or a million are totally out of line with what we know about ancient military forces.

When Ramses II and the Hittite king Muwalladis fought, Muwalladis may have had as many as 30,000 troops. At the Battle of Karkar in 853 BC, Ahab contributed only 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry according to the Assyrian royal annals. And these records are not known for understatement.

Even that was probably an exaggeration. So people have tried to figure out what's going on here. Why does the Bible seem to have these inflated numbers? There's also been question, as you know, about the estimated 2 million people that participated in the exodus from Egypt.

Because when you look at the size of the land of Goshen, you look at the population of Egypt at the time and so on, it's possible but really a stretch to believe. You just look at the gap that had to have been created in the Sea of Reeds to get that many people across in one night. It had to be miles across just to physically move that many people.

Could God do that? Of course. But it's a stretch of the imagination. Let me give you a little bit different view.

This is from a book by a fellow named Humphreys. Not only do these literal numbers seem impossibly large, but they lead to internal inconsistencies with other statements made in the text. If you look, for example, at the first chapter of Numbers, it says there

are 603,550 fighting men in Israel.

This is where we get the estimate of 2 million in the exodus. If you've got 600,000 fighting men and they've got wives and children, you figure you're going to have four to five times that many total people. This implies a total population of between 2 and 3 million people.

Yet, according to Exodus 23, God says, I will send my fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. This is the phase we're in in the book of Joshua. God is fulfilling his promise, isn't he? He says, I will send hornets before you which will drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, the Hittite from before you.

I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you until you have increased and you inherit the land. In other words, you're not numerous enough to be able to take possession of the land in the first year.

You need to get in there and then multiply. And so gradually, little by little, I'll drive out these wild beast inhabitants before you. And as you multiply and increase, you'll have enough people to inhabit the land.

Now, this doesn't make much sense if you've got upwards of 2 million people. When the land itself, it's estimated that at no time did it ever even sustain a million people. So something's wacky.

Deuteronomy 7 verse 1 says, The Lord will drive out of the promised land seven nations larger and stronger than you. Archaeology confirms that there never were millions of people inhabiting these walled towns and villages like Jericho. God goes on to say in Deuteronomy 7.7 that the Israelites are the fewest of all peoples.

That means that the seven nations that are going to be driven out all have in excess of 2 million each. This would put the population in the land of Israel something like 20 million or more, far more than there even are today. You look at the modern population of Israel and all of these heavily settled urban areas, and there's still not 20 million people in the whole land.

So again, this indicates that we have got some sort of misunderstanding. So how do we resolve this? What do we need to look at to figure it out? Well, this all revolves around the word eleph, which is translated thousand. And if you do a word study of this, if you look it up in lexicons and dictionaries and so on, you find that it has several different meanings.

One of the primary meanings and one of the earliest meanings is cattle. It means herds, herds of cattle. And from this, it has come to mean groups, large groups, and eventually

comes to mean thousands.

So in wrestling with this, and it is a long and well recognized problem, people have decided that perhaps these numeric references have been misunderstood. So let's take a look at Numbers chapter one, and I'll give you an idea of how this idea works itself out. Turn with me to Numbers chapter one.

This is our seminal passage here, the primary passage. If we can get this one to make sense, a lot of the others will fall into line. Numbers chapter one, of course, the name of the book itself tells us we're talking about how many people there are in Israel.

And if you look at verse 21, the children of Israel, every male individually for 20 years old and above, all who were able to go to war, those who were numbered of the tribe of Reuben were 46,500. This is the tribe of Reuben, the first tribe that's enumerated in this chapter. So the tribe of Reuben, it says 46,500.

In Hebrew, of course, you don't have numerals in Hebrew. It's got to use some other method of giving numbers. And so literally in Hebrew, it says that there are 46,500.

Well, if you just say LF means thousand, you end up with 46,500. However, one proposed solution to this problem is to say this, and don't die on me. I know this is a little bit dry, but we're talking about the integrity of the biblical text.

If this is wrong, if the Bible actually contains mistakes and errors that have no explanation, we're in trouble all through the Bible. Here's one idea, and this has been suggested by several different people. I'll give you Humphrey's solution.

He interpreted this to mean that there are 500 men total, 500 men of fighting age in the tribe of Reuben. He said, okay, well, I see the 500 there, but what about the 46 LFs? What is that? Well, this would be 500 men divided up into 46 groups. Remember, Aleph originally meant cattle.

The letter Aleph, by the way, which comes across eventually as our letter A, if you've ever looked at a chart of how the alphabet came into being, if you've ever done this, you ever look and see where did the shapes of the letters come from? What does the letter A look like? It's an upside down V with a little line across, right? Well, originally that was upside down. It has rotated 180 degrees from its original shape. So if you turn the letter A over, what does it look like? Looks like a cow's head with two horns, and that's exactly what Aleph means.

Aleph means cow, and that's the way that through all of the ancient alphabets, if you go back and look, it has various ways, shapes, and forms. It looks like this cow head. So you come to talk about herds, you come to talk about groups, and that's where Aleph came to be used for.

So this could be, we've got in the tribe of Reuben, and keep in mind also that the ancient people, because counting was really difficult, they didn't have calculators, they didn't have, you know, photographs and digital things. You look and you say, I got a bunch out there. Here's a bunch, here's a bunch, here's a bunch, and actual individual counts weren't always that important.

So all of these numbers are rounded off. When you look at Numbers chapter 1, they're all rounded off to the nearest 100, all of them, except one tribe, which I think is a half a hundred, it says 650. But if you look at these numbers, they're all rounded off to hundreds, and perhaps they were initially given in bunches.

The tribe of Reuben has got 46 bunches, and it's a total of 500 men, each bunch is about 10 to 12 men, basically. So Aleph should actually be translated group or clan here. And remember now, this is not all the men in the tribe of Reuben, this is men of fighting age, men who are hale and hearty, they're between, you know, 20 and 50 or whatever, and they're able to go to war.

You could have three times that many men who are too young, too old, incapacitated, missing a hand or whatever. So it seems reasonable to think, well, in terms of the militia from the tribe of Reuben, you've got 500 guys, and they are going to follow their family leader. You've got Uncle Abihu over here, and he's got his dozen guys from his clan.

You've got Uncle Reuben the fifth over here, and he's got 10 or 12 guys from his, you know, and they want to follow the senior man out of their clan. And so when Israel thinks of its armies, it says, well, out of that tribe, we've got this many clans and a If you interpret it this way, and you go through Numbers chapter 1, the total number of fighting men in Israel comes to 5,550 men, if you interpret it this way. And this would imply a total population of about 20,000 people at the beginning of Numbers.

20,000. Now think about what God said. You're going into a land populated by people mightier and greater than you.

I'm not going to give it to you in the first year. You're going to have to go and move in and take it little by little. And as you multiply, you'll be able to expand and fill this land that can support up to maybe a million people total.

Then you go back and look at the size of the archaeological ruins, identified as Jericho, you go back and look at the size of these villages. You think about Joshua chapter seven, the spies come back and say Ai is a small village, we don't need to feel the whole army. Let's send two or three LFs, two or three clan groups, which would be 40 or 50 men, maybe, at this point.

If they are still groups of 10 to 12, then this would be two or three dozen. And evidently they went with the dozen and they got virtually wiped out. If they sent three dozen men

and there were 36 casualties, you know, this is like the little bighorn.

No survivors, except maybe Dustin Hoffman to come back and tell the story. You know what I mean? Now you've got a sense of shock. It's a disaster.

36 went out, nobody came back, maybe a few more. But you see what I'm saying? This, in my mind, has some traction. So going on with Humphrey's idea, and you can tell that the numbers have been rounded off to hundreds, except for the tribe of Gad, which has 45 LFs and 650 men.

And even that is evidently rounded off. And therefore it's not so hard to imagine. Humphrey introduces some lines of textual evidence to support this interpretation.

If you look at Numbers chapter 3 and verse 46, this is also something we talked about back during the building of the tabernacle and the sacrifices that were given. And you remember there was a redemption thing that was involved. Look at Numbers chapter 3 and verse 46.

The Lord spoke to Moses in verse 44, saying, Take the Levites instead of the firstborn among the children of Israel. Remember there was a redemption, all of the firstborn had to be redeemed. Take the Levites instead of the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock.

The Levites shall be mine, I am the Lord. And for the redemption of the 273 of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites. Now think about this.

All of the firstborn and the 12 other tribes in Israel. Remember you've got the double tribe of Ephraim and Manasseh there for Joseph. And then you look at the males in the tribe of Levi, there's only a difference of 243.

So Humphreys argues that we presume that the tribe of Levi would have been approximately the same size as the other 12. This figure makes sense only if the tribes each had several hundred men and not several tens of thousands. And if you sit down and think about this and do the math, the fact that there's enough Levites to redeem the firstborn with only a difference of 243, these have to be small tribes.

Likewise, the probability that all 12 tribes would have numbers ending between 200 and 700 with no even thousands, no 100s, no 800s and no 900s is extremely small. This is especially so since the census some 40 years later fits the exact same pattern. When you look at the numbers in the tribes, there are no even thousands.

There's always so many hundreds after the fact. And there aren't any 800s and there aren't any 900s. All of this statistically suggests that this idea is valid.

Finally, let me say this. With respect to the first census, if you add up all of the LS for each tribe, you get a figure of 598 with a total of 5,550 men in the other column. Numbers chapter 1 verse 46, however, turn back a page.

Because the objection to this idea, you say, well, that makes pretty good sense. Let's go with that. He's adding up groups and then giving the totals in hundreds.

But when you get to verse 46, it says, when you add all of these up together, all who were able to go to war in Israel were 603,550. And you say, well, see, that blows the whole theory out of the water because obviously they've made a total by adding together all of these tribal totals and getting the 603,550. You didn't have 603 groups that gave you a total of 550 men.

You got more groups than you got people there. Well, basically what happened here theoretically, probably, I would say, is that when these numbers were originally written down in Hebrew, later scribes were looking at them and no longer understood the difference between an eleph that meant clan and an eleph that meant thousand. If you go to some of the latest books of the Bible, the latest uses of the word eleph, it does, in fact, seem to mean 1,000.

So you have scribes from that time reading old, old texts where eleph was closer to its original idea of cattle and clan. And they're trying to make sense of these numbers. And they have gone in and basically edited the text and moved numbers over.

And all you have to do in this case is move two eleph or two thousands of the total number of men in the second column, which is the number of hundreds, over to the thousands column. I won't bore you with all the details of this. If you're interested, I'll give you a printout of this article.

But if you move two elephs, if one of the scribes decided to do this to make sense out of it, and you shift it over to the first column, and the same thing in the second census, the second census, there are 596 elephs total in Israel and 5,730 men. Then what they did was move four elephs, meaning thousand, transferred over from one column to the other, and then everything makes sense. And so they eliminated a second use of the word eleph there and added up the numbers.

And so these texts now are impossible to make sense of because someone early on couldn't make sense of them and totaled them up in a way that produces these exorbitant thousands. But if you go back to the original counts for each tribe, it does make sense. Eleph means clan, the hundreds are the total.

Then the words of God make sense. These people are mightier and more numerous than you. You're going to have to take the land gradually so that you can take time to multiply and fill up the land.

Everything then makes sense. The only thing that doesn't make sense are the grand totals given for both the first and second census. And there's a very easy transposition that a scribe would have made by moving thousands from the second column where you add up all of the hundreds of men, and he got elephim for that, and he would just stick that over in the group column, two in the first case and four in the second case.

And it made sense to him, but it screwed up what the text originally said. I think this is exactly what happened. It explains all of the anomalies.

So probably the original source, and this is Humphrey's suggestion, the original source that Moses recorded for the first census and passed down read something like five hundred and ninety and eight elephs, and five eleph and five hundred and fifty. Well, anyway, you can get bogged down in the details. But I say all of that to say this.

We know that numbers have gotten messed up in scripture. We saw this when we went through 1 Samuel. We saw when we don't know how many years Saul had reigned.

It has fallen out of the text. The later scribes who were copying the text, particularly during and after the time of the Babylonian captivity, where Hebrew began to be a lost language and they were working backward from Aramaic, it was easy for them to try to do us a favor by correcting the text instead of just leaving it be. We can resolve some of these by going to the Septuagint and so on.

But Humphrey's suggestion, this article concludes, is at least plausible. And his figure of 20,000 people in the Exodus is consistent with the details of the journey as described in the biblical accounts. And I think that this is probably the case.

So what I've given you is the best, what I consider to be the best theory for resolving these numbers. And again, this makes sense and bears on our understanding here in the book of Joshua. Think about it.

Ai is this tiny little village not far from Beth-Avon, not far from Jericho. And the spies say, we don't need to send the whole army. Well, my gracious, 3,000 men, you don't consider that to be an army against this little piddling village? But if it was three clans, three clan fighting groups that were sent, more like three squads or three platoons at most, this makes a lot of sense.

Thirty-six casualties now is shocking. It's a decimation, if not an annihilation. And it does put all of Israel on their knees before God.

How could this possibly happen? How could this horrible defeat take place? And that sets the stage for the judgment that we're going to see when we return from our break in Joshua chapter 7 regarding the sin of Achan. Let's pause here and take our break, and when we come back, we'll continue with the story.