

Joshua 7:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

Analysis

Joshua's response to defeat was to tear his clothes and fall on his face before the ark—profound grief and intercession. Tearing garments (*qara'*, עֲרָא) expressed deep mourning in Israelite culture. Joshua models godly leadership: responding to crisis with prayer rather than panic, with humility rather than blame-shifting. He and the elders put dust on their heads, another mourning ritual signifying humiliation before God. They remained until evening—sustained, earnest intercession. This contrasts with presumptuous confidence at Ai's outset. Defeat drove them to the prayer they should have begun with. Joshua's position 'before the ark of the LORD' acknowledges God's centrality—he doesn't merely pray generally but approaches God's covenant presence. The sustained duration 'until the eventide' shows perseverance. This models proper crisis response: immediate, sustained, humble prayer before God. Yet Joshua's prayer (verses 7-9) will reveal he doesn't yet understand the defeat's cause, assuming God has abandoned Israel rather than recognizing Israel's covenant violation.

Historical Context

The ritual actions—tearing garments, putting dust on heads, falling prostrate—were standard ancient Near Eastern expressions of mourning, grief, or entreaty. These weren't empty gestures but embodied prayers expressing genuine emotion. The ark's centrality reminds us it represented God's throne—approaching it meant approaching God Himself in His covenant presence. The duration 'until evening'

suggests the entire afternoon spent in intercession. Ancient Israelite leaders understood that military defeat indicated divine disfavor. Unlike pagan nations who might blame their gods' weakness, Israel's theology understood Yahweh as supreme; therefore, defeat must mean covenant breach. Joshua's immediate turn to prayer, rather than strategic reassessment, shows proper priority. Yet even godly leaders can misdiagnose problems—Joshua will blame God ('wherefore hast thou brought this people over Jordan?') before understanding Israel's sin caused the breach. This teaches that even sincere prayer requires discernment about root causes.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Joshua's immediate turn to prayer in crisis model proper leadership priorities?
2. What is the difference between genuine intercession and blame-shifting prayer that accuses God?
3. How can defeat drive us to the prayer we should have begun with—and what might this teach about spiritual disciplines?

Interlinear Text

לִפְנֵי אֶת רְצָחָה לִפְנֵי אֶת רְצָחָה
before to the earth before to the earth
רְצָחָה עַל הָרָקָב עַל הָרָקָב
before rent
H6440 H776 H7167
Shemäláth II yihosh' u' qəb u'
his clothes and fell
H8071 H5307 H5921
And Joshua
H3091

לִשְׁכָא לִזְלָגִים אֶת אָרֶן אֶת אָרֶן
of Israel he and the elders until the eventide
H3478 H2205 H1931 H6153 H5704
יְהֹוָה עַד בְּעֵבֶר וְאֶת אָרֶן אֶת אָרֶן
of the LORD until the eventide of the ark
H3068 H727

רְאשָׁמָם עַל רְעַפְתָּם עַל רְעַפְתָּם
upon their heads upon their heads
H7218 H5921 H6083 H5927
and put dust

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 37:29 (Parallel theme): And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes.

Genesis 37:34 (Parallel theme): And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

Lamentations 2:10 (Parallel theme): The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground.

Numbers 14:6 (Parallel theme): And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

2 Samuel 13:31 (Parallel theme): Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent.

Revelation 18:19 (Parallel theme): And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

Acts 14:14 (Parallel theme): Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

Job 1:20 (Parallel theme): Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,

Job 2:12 (Parallel theme): And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

Esther 4:1 (Parallel theme): When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry;

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