

Title: Garbage In, Garbage Out

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Every time I hear the media comment on something I know about I hear them get the facts wrong. An example of this would be the story concerning the US Navy personal who had to land their injured plane on a Chinese occupied island. The plane in question is known as the PC3 Orion. The media has been constantly referring to the Orion as a “spy” plane. The Orion is about as much a spy plane as an tug-boat is and air-craft carrier.

The Orion is a propeller driven plane. (Much like the KC 130 planes my Marine squadron flies.) The Orion can be said to be a plane which flies “low and slow”. But for the Orion, low and slow is perfect. The Orion is an observation platform. The Orion is not trying to cloak its location. Its major mission is to find, harass, trail and if need be destroy enemy submarines. The cold war may have been over for some parts of the military but not for the submarine and anti-submarine forces. The Orion keeps our enemies honest.

The Orion is filled with electronic gear which can measure and listen to the running of submerged submarines. So good are the electronics that they can usually tell the individual hull number and sometimes the name of the actual commander of the sub they are chasing.

When they want to let the sub know they are following it they can drop out buoys or mini-charges which really cause a lot of excitement for the enemy sub. The mission is not “spying” orientated.

An example of a spy plane would be the Air Force’s U2 plane. From that platform which flies at Mach 3, and flies at 70,000 feet true spying can be accomplished. But not the Orion.

I bring up the issue of spying because there were times when the Bible shows that spying — true spying — hiding from the enemy type spying — was sanctioned by God. We have the first incident when the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt and were supposed to move directly into the Promised Land. Moses took a spy from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Let me read from Numbers 13:17-20

When Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the Negev; then go up into the hill country. 18 "See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many. How is the land in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are they like open camps or with fortifications? How is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes.

This is fairly straight-forward spying type activity. They were to reconnoiter the land, and bring back information which would be important in the impending battle. Actually, the information they would bring back would help the people respond before the battle. In other words, the information would be a test of their faith in God. Because if the spies came back with information which made it sound impossible to take the land, but the people responded with faith in God — all would have been well.

The spies returned with an adverse report. They reported that the land was indeed good, but there were giants in the land and they would never be able to cross the Jordan River and take possession of the Promised Land.

The fact they forgot was that the land had indeed been “promised”. God had made the promise to Abraham, Isaac and to Jacob. They had believed and it was accounted to them as righteousness. Now the children of Jacob stood on the brim of the Promised Land, and through the faithless leadership of 10 spies they would not go in. God rejected that faithless generation, but kept the hope open for a new generation. The new generation was led by Joshua, son of Nun.

Joshua had been one of the 12 spies. He with his friend Caleb had brought back a report of faith. God could give them victory. Joshua was a man of faith. It is Joshua who says in Joshua 24:15 “. . . *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*” This was the theme of his life.

Under the leadership of Joshua the new generation of Israel crossed over the Jordan River on dry ground. It was on the west bank of the River that they renewed their covenant with God by keeping the Passover, and the males were circumcised.

It was prior to crossing over that Joshua send spies out again. Joshua sent them to their first target, Jericho. The spies brought back a report of faith. Notice what they said to Joshua — Joshua 2:24 — *“Surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us.”*

Their spy report was a psychological profile of the people. Jericho were a defeated foe already. They learned this through their discussion with one of the inhabitants of the city — Rahab. Rahab tells how she and the rest of the people had heard the stories of Israel’s conquest over the king of Egypt, how they had defeated the Amorites.

For forty years this mass of people had been moving through the wilderness on the eastern bank of the Jordan. For forty years the inhabitants of the land of Canaan must have wondered when Israel would strike. The forty years of waiting had been debilitating to the people of the land. They were a vanquished foe. And the spies brought back a positive report. The people of God would move forward with faith — this time.

The battle of Jericho is a well-known Bible story. We know about the marching around the city once a day for six days. But on the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times, the trumpets were blown, the people shouted and the walls came tumbling down.

What is missed, sometimes, is that the Battle for Jericho — or any of the campaigns to take the Promised Land — were not battles as we think of them. When you are reading the story, take note of the prominence of the Priests in the Battle plan. Take note of the positioning of the Ark of the Covenant. The battles over the Promised Land were not just a land grab but it was the Great Controversy being fought in mini-form. It was the God of Israel who was establishing His authority and preeminence over the gods of the land. It was God saying — as He will demonstrate at the end-time battle of Armageddon — the earth is Mine! The land is the inheritance of My people.

Did the people of the land have a chance to repent and worship the God of Israel? The story of Rahab demonstrates they did.

The same faith that moved the children of Israel to follow God over the dry river bed of the Jordan, was the same faith that had won them the victory at Jericho. Notice what Hebrews 11:30 states:

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days.”

The battle of Jericho was a rout of major proportions. The defeat was a crushing defeat. It was a victory of faith. Jericho was taken, and the booty of the city was dedicated to God. By having the rich materials of the city dedicated to the Lord, the Lord again was testing their faith. Were they forward looking? Were they content with just this one prize? Could the children of Israel wait on the Lord?

So massive was the defeat of the well fortified city of Jericho that the people as well as their leader pushed forward to the next city. Let us read what happened — [Read Joshua 7:2-4]

“Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Bethaven, east of Bethel, and said to them, ‘Go up and spy out the land.’ So the men went out and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, ‘Do not let all the people go up, only about two or three thousand men need to go up to Ai; do not make all the people toil up there, for they are few.’ So about three thousand men from the people went up there, but they fled from the men of Ai.”

Again Joshua employs similar tactics. He sends out spies. They report on the conditions of the city. They recommend a plan of attack. But this time it fails. The rout is on the other foot. The king of Ai killed and chased the force of Israel back to their camp.

The story of Ai is simply amazing when contrasted to the story of Jericho. How could one be such a crushing rout of the enemy, and the other such a crushing rout for the enemy?

Let us consider a few things:

First, let us read Joshua 7:10, 11 — “So the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? Israel has transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things.’”

We learn the reason for the defeat. The Lord had not gone to battle with the children of Israel because “they” had broken the covenant. We learn that they had stolen from God.

Secondly, the word “Ai” means “a pile, or a heap of garbage”. Do you realize what this means? That when the people of God do not show faith, even a pile of garbage is impossible to defeat. We may want to slay dragons, but without faith a mouse would be a victor over us!

Thirdly, it is significant to note the location of the camp of Israel before they embarked upon

their defeat at Ai. From the information given in Joshua 7:2 we know they were somewhere between the city of Ai and the city of Bethel. We know Ai is the “Garbage Heap” and Bethel means the “City of God”. Wasn’t this their spiritual condition? The people were not all in the garbage heap, but neither were they all in the city of God. They were in the spiritual wasteland in between.

Their defeat shows that even though we can be close to the city of God, even though we can show some commitment to God, to be not fully committed is no commitment at all.

Fourthly, if the defeat of Jericho was an act of faith by the people of God then the defeat of Israel at the hand of Ai was an act of faithlessness by the people of God.

God said “they” broke the covenant by stealing from the booty of the battle. Let us read the specific command given by God to the people before they went to do battle. Joshua 6:18 reads,

“But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, lest you covet them, and take some things under the ban, so you make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it.”

The Lord defines the sin of taking the war booty from Jericho as covetousness. Covetousness is a way of defining selfishness in a person. At its inception, coveting is a private sin. Selfishness can grow in the heart without anyone else knowing it. Covetousness leads to pride, and arrogance, and a complete lack of humility. Covetousness makes us dull to the invitation of God. Remember the story of the Rich Young Ruler. He was so close to the Kingdom of God, but he had a heart which coveted. His selfishness made him dull to love of Jesus. Jesus invited him to serve God with his wealth, and he rejected Jesus.

In Joshua 7, after the defeat at Ai, we learn how the guilty one was discovered. We learn that a man by the name Achan had taken some of the spoil. Achan had taken a imported coat from Babylon, some gold, and some silver.

In the story of Achan we learn about the responsibility we have for one another within the family of God. At other times, when I have spoken about worship, or fellowship I have talked about our individual responsibility to the entire body. For us as individuals to be absent is not harmful to us alone, but is injurious to the entire church family. The body needs all of its parts working together.

Do you remember how God phrased the offense which caused the defeat at Ai? The Lord had said to Joshua, “Israel has transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things.”

God knew that the individual Achan was responsible for the act. We do not even know if Achan was among the soldiers who had gone up to Ai to do battle. But God phrases the sin of Achan as a sin of the entire people. The defeat at the hands of the King of Ai was a defeat for Israel, not a defeat of the individual Achan.

We see very clearly that God views us as having responsibilities not only to ourselves, but

to the entire family of God. The well being of the people who sit to the left and to the right of us, rests upon our shoulders.

Today is not a day for the family to start hunting out Achans in the camp. Instead this is a call today to let not the spirit of Achan enter our own hearts. As a church family we have just come through a Jericho-like experience. We had a tremendous challenge placed before us. By faith a tremendous victory was won for God. The team work and sacrifice demonstrated by this church family over the past year is to be praised to God.

But let us not become complacent. Let us not take pride in self. Nor let us become idle. For the story of Jericho teaches that one city does not a Promised Land make. We still have a goal on the other side of eternity. There are still many, many more people who need to hear and see the gospel. There are still more battles for God to fought and won. George and his personal ministries department will soon be sending more spies out into the land to search out new objectives.

So quite the contrary — today is not a day to search out for Achans. Instead today is a day to refocus our attention upon Christ and let Him lead us. Let Him lead us as individuals. Let Him lead us as a church family. Let us recommit ourselves to study His word. Let us recommit ourselves to pray. Let us recommit ourselves to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us recommit ourselves to be living examples of the humble Jesus.