

Joshua Generation, Part 3

The first headline I saw simply said “UNTHINKABLE” – the word uttered by our Prime Minister when he got the news. Seven basketball players from the Bathurst High School Phantoms and their coach’s wife killed in an instant as their school’s 15-passenger van fishtailed into the path of a transport truck early last Saturday morning. They were on the way home from a Friday night game in Moncton and were just four kilometers from the King Avenue exit that lead to their school. Their coach was driving.

Some parents were waiting at a nearby McDonald’s to pick up their kids; one boy had called his mom just a few minutes before the crash to let her know that they were almost home. They had just started to worry when the call came telling them to get to the hospital. As the ambulances brought in the four survivors they were relieved – broken arm, broken ribs, probably the worst case scenarios first – it couldn’t have been too bad. That’s when they realized that the ambulances had stopped coming because the others had died on impact. The town of 13,000 was shaken to its core.

Last Sunday, local businesses set up basketball nets at the crash site in a makeshift, impromptu memorial to those who died. Cars lined up and police escorts rolled by all day. The footprints of mourners gradually covered the frantic footprints of rescuers, as they left flowers and candles in the snow, and shivered and stared in disbelief. Debris, streaks of black rubber and spatters of red blood marked the crash area, scarring Highway 8 for a full 50 meters. The words “Rest In Peace” flashed across a sign in front of McDonald’s, where one of the students used to work.

On Tuesday, a wake for the students was held inside the arena at the K.C. Irving Regional Centre; on Wednesday, a community funeral for all seven boys was held there. Most of the city’s businesses closed their doors as cars started lining up more than three hours before the funeral, stretching more than a kilometer in each direction. The service was carried live on television and radio broadcasts across Canada, and even included a letter of condolence from Pope Benedict XVI. An Eric Clapton song that was played as part of the prelude music also became a striking headline this week – TEARS IN HEAVEN.

An UNTHINKABLE tragedy. One fateful decision to return home in a snowstorm. One moment of driver error that could happen to anyone. UNTHINKABLE.

Today I want to take you to another unthinkable tragedy, and another makeshift memorial raised in a valley in Israel some 4000 years ago. Not a basketball net, but a pile of stones. Not a team killed by tragedy, but an entire family wiped out by sin. **This time, however, it is NOT an accident.**

Joshua 7:24-26 And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.

That’s a pretty harsh punishment, don’t you think? We like to put it out of our minds that disobedience to God is SIN, and the penalty for sin is DEATH – in this case, even physical death. Achan had sinned. He didn’t think it was a big deal, but God did. But the entire camp of Israel paid the price, because he was one of them. They experienced their first and only military defeat in Canaan at the city of Ai – and it was all Achan’s fault. Never underestimate the amount of damage one person can do outside the will of God!

Ecclesiastes 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

1 Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

1 Corinthians 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

1 Corinthians 12:26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Joshua 7:1 But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.

Achan’s sin was so **STUPID!** He stole a garment that he could never wear in Israel and silver and gold that he could never spend in Israel. You can never serve God and sin at the same time. How sad it is that a Christian would let one little secret habit or attitude come between them and a victorious life! How tragic that people get sidelined by their own rebellion against God!

(And do you know where it shows up most? In an environment of worship! When Joshua said “give glory to God,” Achan couldn’t!)

Achan's sin was so **SELFISH!** He endangered the entire nation of Israel, slowed down their progress in conquering the land God had promised to them, and even cost the lives of thirty-six of Israel's soldiers. Have you ever been in a church service that felt like Jericho – a victorious miracle? But have you ever been in a subsequent church service that felt like Ai – an unexpected defeat? It should have been easy to carry on the momentum, but it wasn't. What happened? Someone is not being obedient to God, and it is affecting the entire church! Someone is hiding a sin or holding an attitude that is displeasing to God.

(The ironic thing is that some people are so twisted in their thinking that they almost enjoy it when they are being a hindrance! They cluelessly demand attention for the temporal instead of the eternal. They regularly get offended over trivia, but never have a twinge of conscience over Scriptural issues.)

Isaiah 5:20-21 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

(Do these people slow down the progress of the church? YES! Do they put extra strain on their pastors? YES! Do they hinder what God wants to do? YES! But those are not the questions we need to be asking. There is just one question that matters – CAN THEY PREVAIL? NO!)

Because it doesn't take everyone, just US! God will deal with THEM – forget THEM – just make sure YOU get on board! We will out-pray the doubters! We will out-give the stingy! We will out-worship the critics! And in some cases, we will just keep at it until we out-live the grumblers!

Achan's sin was so **SHORTSIGHTED!** He didn't destroy Israel, he only destroyed himself! Because just one chapter later, Joshua comes back with an **AMBUSH STRATEGY** and totally defeats Ai.

2 Kings 7:2 Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

Matthew 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Acts 28:30-31 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. (**AKOLUTOS – “UNSTOPPABLE”**)

A SOLDIER IN THE ARMY OF GOD

I am a soldier in the army of my God! The Lord Jesus Christ is my Commanding Officer! The Holy Bible is my code of conduct! Faith, prayer and the word are my weapons of warfare! I have been taught by the Holy Spirit, trained by experience, tried by adversity and tested by fire!

I am a volunteer in this army, and I am enlisted for eternity! I will either retire in this army at the rapture or die in this Army; but I will not get out, sell out, be talked out or pushed out! I am faithful, reliable, capable and dependable!

If my God needs me, I am there! If He needs me in Sunday School, to teach children, work with youth, help adults or just sit and learn, He can use me, because I am there! I am a soldier! I am not a baby! I do not need to be pampered, petted, primed up, pumped up, picked up or pepped up!

I am a soldier! No one has to call me, remind me, write me, visit me, entice me or lure me! I am a soldier! I am not a wimp! I am in place, saluting my King, obeying His orders, praising His name and building His kingdom!

No one has to send me flowers, gifts, food, cards, candy or give me handouts! I do not need to be cuddled, cradled, cared for or catered to! I am committed!

I cannot have my feelings hurt bad enough to turn me around! I cannot be discouraged enough to turn me aside! I cannot lose enough to cause me to quit!

When Jesus called me into this army, I had nothing! If I end up with nothing, I will still come out even! I will win! My God will supply all my needs!

I am more than a conqueror! I will always triumph! I can do all things through Christ! Devils cannot defeat me! People cannot disillusion me! Weather cannot weary me! Sickness cannot stop me!

Battles cannot beat me! Money cannot buy me! Governments cannot silence me and HELL CANNOT HANDLE ME!

I am a soldier! Even death cannot destroy me! For when my commander calls me from this battlefield, He will promote me to a captain and then bring me back to rule this world with Him!

***I'm a soldier in the army
And I'm marching, claiming victory
I will not give in, I will not turn around
I'm a soldier, marching Heaven-bound.***