

JOSHUA BIBLE STUDIES

CONQUERING: JOURNEYING WITH JOSHUA

LESSON#8

JOSHUA CHAPTER 7

“THE DANGER OF DERAILMENT” - OR - “A COVER-UP UNCOVERED”

“But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.” (Joshua 7:1 nkjv)

“But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.” (Joshua 7:1 niv)

Detective Stories are the stuff of much of the fiction in the average book store. I must admit that I have read quite a few of the “who-done-it’s” myself. However, here in Joshua chapter seven is a true detective story! It is the account of a thief who got caught and was sentenced to death. Drastic punishment for a petty thief, you say? Not if you know the whole story.

Here’s what happened: Joshua and the people of Israel had just seen the city of Jericho, the strongest fortress in Canaan, miraculously demolished. Walls thirty feet high came tumbling down. When they plundered the city they were warned not to confiscate certain items of treasure for themselves. The ban is stated in chapter 6:18,19 “Keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.”

NOTICE: In Joshua 7:1 – The word “devoted” is the Hebrew word “cherem” and means the act of devoting or banning.” When it was devoted to God, it was banned from being put to common use.

In Joshua 6:18 – “charam” means “to make accursed by wrong use” – “The various renderings are due to the fact that “accursed” in Hebrew suggested “separating” or “devoting to God.” (ISBY)

In spite of the ban on confiscating that which had been expressly devoted to Jehovah, there was one culprit among the soldiers who took some of the forbidden loot. Chapter seven opens with these words: “But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.”

Achan stands in contrast to Rahab - Rahab was focused upon giving up Canaan while Achan was focused upon gaining Canaan. It seems that Achan was just “ache’n” for some of the riches of Canaan! While others were fighting he was filching; while others were soldiering he

was stealing. From his perspective, he had committed the perfect crime. What Joshua did not know would not hurt him, was Achan's attitude.

So, with the city of Jericho now laying in rubble, the Israelites move on in their conquest of Canaan. The next obstacle in their path was an insignificant little town named "Ai" - that's right, just two letters – "Ai". In Hebrew "Ai" means "*the ruin*". Keep that in mind!

Meanwhile, Captain Joshua, ignorant of what Achan had done, sent spies ahead to check out Ai and they returned with this report: "Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few." (Joshua 7:3 - Compare 8:1)

Joshua listened to their advice and as verses 4 & 5 record, "So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water."

The overcomers of Jericho were overcome at Ai. Yesterday the thrill of victory, today the agony of defeat! The impregnable fortress of Jericho had crumbled yesterday, today Israel crumbled, defeated by the improbable, small rural town of Ai! What's going on?

Joshua was totally traumatized. Falling on his knees he called out to God, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?" (Joshua 7:7-9)

Joshua's prayer was interrupted – it was interrupted by none other than God Himself! Here is an occasion when God stopped a man from praying. Listen to what God said, "The LORD said to Joshua, "So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you." (7:10-12)

How Not To Respond To Setbacks OR Joshua At His Lowest Point

1. Question God. Josh. 7:7a
2. Look back and doubt. Josh.7:7b
3. Lose sight of God's plan and purpose for the future. Josh.7:9

The result? God told Joshua to arrange a police style line-up – verses 13-18. Tribe by tribe, family by family paraded past Joshua until God fingered Achan. I use my sanctified

imagination and see Achan beginning to sweat and the closer he got to Joshua the more nervous he became. Then he heard Joshua say, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me." Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath." (Joshua 7:19-21)

Caught red-handed! The cover-up is uncovered! That pretty much sums up the story except the ending, which we will get to later. Now,

Lessons We Can Learn From This Ancient Detective Story:

Lesson #1 – Sin Gradually Becomes Worse

There are many Bible illustrations of this statement. Recall:

- Eve – she saw, she took and she ate the fruit forbidden by God in the Garden of Eden.
- Lot – he looked toward Sodom, he moved toward Sodom, he lived in Sodom.
- David – he saw Bathsheba, he took Bathsheba, he sinned with Bathsheba.
- Samson – saw a Philistine girl, lusted for the girl, became enslaved by the enemy.
- Apostle Peter – walked afar off, warmed at the enemy's fire, denied, cursed.
- Achan by his own admission, in Joshua 7:21, followed the same pattern:
His Gaze: "*I saw*"; His Greed: "*I coveted*"; His Grasp: "*I took*"; His Guile: "*I hid*".

The fruit on the other side of the fence may look enticing but it is extremely poisonous! One writer put it this way:

- "Sin makes all that is beautiful ugly;
- all that is high is made low;
- all that is promising is wasted" until "life is like the desert – parched and barren. Sin, then, is not wise, but wasteful. It is not a gate but a grave." – C. Neil Strait

WHAT IS SIN?

Man calls it an accident; God calls it an abomination.

Man calls it a blunder; God calls it blindness.

Man calls it a defect; God calls it a disease.

Man calls it a chance; God calls it a choice.

Man calls it a fascination; God calls it a fatality.

Man calls it an infirmity; God calls it an iniquity.

Man calls it liberty; God calls it lawlessness.

Man calls it a trifle; God calls it a tragedy.

Man calls it a mistake; God calls it madness.

Man calls it weakness; God calls it willfulness.

A soft view of sin is the result of a low view of God. One of the 14 indictments by God against the sinner in Romans 3 is this: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." That was Achan's

basic problem. It is the problem of all of us if and when we sin. Sin, unless confessed and abandoned, gradually becomes worse.

Sin is an infection and left to its own natural course always spreads its unholy tentacles. To harbor a single unconfessed sin is to harbor a poisonous viper in your life. Sin is analogous to leprosy in the Bible.

ILLUSTRATION: Charles Swindoll writes about the malady of sin as follows: “During my hitch in the Marines, I was stationed on Okinawa where there was a leprosarium. At the time I was playing in the third division band in the Marine Corps and we went to do a performance. I had read about leprosy, but I had never seen a leper and I wasn’t really prepared for what I saw. I saw stumps instead of hands. I saw clumps instead of fingers. I saw half faces. I saw one ear instead of two. I saw in the faces of men, women, and even some teenagers an anguish crying out. ... We could play music for them, but we could not cleanse them of their disease..... In Scripture leprosy is a picture of sin.....Only Jesus’ blood has the power to cleanse us of our condition of sinful corruption.” Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes)

LESSON #2 - SIN ULTIMATELY AFFECTS OTHERS.

Achan committed the actual sin but it affected the whole congregation of Israel. We do not live in isolation. Romans 14:7 reminds us that “none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.” We are social beings and in living a normal life come into contact with others. Everyone has influence – some are a good influence, some a bad influence. Achan was certainly a bad influence. Notice how others suffered because of Achan’s sin:

- The battle was lost at Ai. v.4 (“Ai” in Hebrew means “the ruin.”)
- Thirty-six Israeli soldiers were killed. v.5
- Progress was stopped. V.12a
- The blessing of God was withheld. V.12b
- Achan’s countrymen and family suffered. Joshua 22:20

How To Be Assured Of Defeat

1. Let down your guard after a big victory.
2. Underestimate the enemy. (Josh.7:2,3)
3. Overestimate your ability. (Josh.7:4)

Sin holds back the people of God today. Let us keep our lives free from all known sin for “one sinner destroys much good” as Eccles. 9:18 says.

LESSON #3 – SIN EVENTUALLY IS DETECTED.

Joshua said, “Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.” Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned.....” (Joshua 7:19-20)

A coerced confession is not a sincere confession. Achan had plenty of time to come forward voluntarily and confess and throw himself upon the mercy of God. This he did not do. Even after Joshua had initiated the investigation Achan yet stone-walled it right up to the end!

Finally, when he was singled out as the culprit, when all Israel was looking at him, when there was no way to escape, he confessed. God has provided forgiveness for the repentant. However, Achan did not repent. Only when caught and confronted did he admit his sin.

Although Achan had hidden the evidence divine detection caught up with him. There was an eternal principle at work which is written in Num 32:23 “be sure your sin will find you out.”

The All-Seeing eye of omniscience is never blinded by human stealth. Let us never forget the following scriptures:

- Jer. 23:24 “Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD.”
- Luke 8:17 “For nothing is secret that shall not be revealed.”

Achan’s secret sin was not so secret after all! His cover-up reminds me of a story I heard about a lazy farmer who would not work his fields like his industrious neighbors. One day he told his little boy to pull his wagon and follow him. Down the country lane they went. They came to a neighboring farmer’s corn field and the father left the lane and went into the corn field. He pulled ears of corn from his neighbor’s corn field and put them in his son’s wagon. Returning to the country lane, he paused on the edge of the corn field and looked up the lane and down the lane and seeing no one said to his son, “come on son, let’s go home.” The son replied, “Dad, you looked to your right and to your left but you forgot to look up!” Achan failed to look up.

LESSON #4 – SIN SURELY BRINGS PUNISHMENT

Joshua 7:24-26 records Achan’s punishment: “Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day.”

Achan’s punishment was severe. Some may be inclined to say “why did his family have to suffer as well?” Or, “doesn’t Moses say in Deut 24:16 ‘Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin’?”

Yes, however, God told Joshua that “Israel has sinned, and **they** have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And **they** have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, **they** have also put them among **their** own things.” (Joshua 7:11) Achan’s family evidently aided and abetted in the confiscation of the goods. Maybe they had helped to carry off the banned goods or they assisted in hiding them. Living under the same tent, they would have become accomplices if they knew what Achan did and kept quiet about it. If they did they were accessories after the fact and as such shared in the guilt as well as the punishment.

Let us be clear about this: “the wages of sin is death.....” (Rom.6:23); And, as Eccles.12:14 says, “God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

Illust.. The humorist and infidel W.C. Fields was on his death-bed. A friend came to visit him and he later reported that when he entered the room W.C. Fields had an open Bible resting on his chest. The friend was an unbeliever as well and when he saw the Bible he laughed and said, “Why the Bible?” W.C. Fields replied in a subdued voice, “Just looking for loopholes, just looking for loopholes.” Achan found out that there are no loopholes! Sin surely brings punishment.

CONCLUSION

Joshua 7 is about the damning and damaging effects of sin among God’s people. The morals of the story? At least five-fold:

- Don’t disobey God! Sin is disobedience.
- Keep short accounts with God. If and when we sin, confess immediately.
- Don’t treat sin lightly. Sin is not a toy – it is not a play thing! “Fools make a mock at sin.” (Prov. 14:9)
- There is no progress when we transgress! “He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whosoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy.” (Prov.28:13)
- Don’t try to cover up your sin, let Jesus do it! The only covering for sin is the blood of Jesus Christ. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9)

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