

Enter at Your Own Rest

Studies in the Book of Joshua

"Full blessing in the Christian life is not bestowed except to eager, hungry people who press in to receive it"

Alan Redpath

Text

Joshua 7:1-26

Topic

Defeated at Ai, Joshua identifies Achan as the person who has sinned by taking some of the accursed spoil of Jericho for himself

Title

"A Case of 'It's Achan!' Identity"

Joshua 7:1 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 7:2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which *is* beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai.

Joshua 7:3 And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "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 7:4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai.

Joshua 7:5 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.

Joshua 7:6 Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads.

Joshua 7:7 And Joshua said, "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!"

Joshua 7:8 O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies?

Joshua 7:9 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 7:10 So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?"

Joshua 7:11 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.

Joshua 7:12 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.

Joshua 7:13 Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "*There is* an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you."

Joshua 7:14 In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be *that* the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man.

Joshua 7:15 Then it shall be *that* he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.' "

Joshua 7:16 So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.

Joshua 7:17 He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites; and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken.

Joshua 7:18 Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

Joshua 7:19 Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide *it* from me."

Joshua 7:20 And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done:

Joshua 7:21 When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

Joshua 7:22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it.

Joshua 7:23 And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD.

Joshua 7:24 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.

Joshua 7:25 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.

Joshua 7:26 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.

Introduction

The rebel gladiator army is defeated and await their fate. The Roman general announces he will spare their lives if they will identify their leader. Just as he rises and says, *"I'm Spartacus,"* so does another and another and another until all of the rebels claim to be Spartacus. In a sense they each were 'Spartacus' and thus they identified themselves as one man.

In our text Joshua wants to know who has sinned. He keeps narrowing it down until he gets to Achan. **None of the other Israelites identify with him by shouting out, "I'm Achan!"**

You don't expect them to. What stuns us in the account, though, is that God treated them as if they *were* all Achan until his sin was exposed. Only Achan sinned when he **took of the accursed thing** (v1). But in describing Achan's actions God says (in verse one) **the children of Israel committed a trespass**, and (in verse eleven) **Israel has sinned**.

God refers to **they** and **them** throughout, identifying the nation as one man. Thirty-six soldiers who seem to have no connection with Achan's sin nevertheless die as a result of it.

Ah, but there **is** a connection. There is always a spiritual connection between God's people on the earth.

You see this most profoundly in the illustrations used to describe believers of the New Testament era. We are described, for example, as if we formed a single human body. Jesus is our head and each individual believer is a 'member' of His one body on the earth.

Another example: We are described as each of us a living stone in a single spiritual temple God is building with Jesus as the foundation.

Because of this spiritual connection the actions and attitudes of even a single member of the church can affect, for good or for bad, the progress of the entire body on earth.

I therefore need to start thinking differently about my disobedience and sin. No one ever sins alone. What I do affects you and vice-versa.

The consequences of Achan's disobedience were so severe I've chosen severe words to discuss them.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Start Thinking Of Disobedience As If You Were Committing Negligent Fratricide, and #2 Start Thinking Of Disobedience As If You Were Committing Assisted Suicide.

#1 Start Thinking Of Disobedience
As If You Were Committing Negligent Fratricide
(v1-12)

Is there any doubt in your mind that Achan's disobedience was what killed those thirty-six soldiers? It led to their deaths and to the nations' defeat.

Achan was guilty of fratricide – of killing his brothers.

In Achan's case his brothers were literally killed. In ours it's more likely to be a spiritual defeat.

Does the disobedience of one believer always result in the defeat of the whole body? No, it doesn't. In the case of the Israelites, they created a climate in which defeat was more likely. That, coupled with Achan's disobedience, was a lethal combination.

We want to be careful to not create that same climate in our fellowship.

Joshua 7:2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which *is* beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai.

Joshua 7:3 And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "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.*"

The advice of the two spies puts the emphasis on the fighting abilities and resources of the army of Israel. It is all *natural*; there are no *supernatural* insights. They do the math and think a superior force of two or three thousand cannot possibly be defeated by the army of Ai.

God gives us abilities and resources to further the Gospel. We are never to count on them or trust in them. If anything, God is better glorified when we are small and weak.

Joshua 7:4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people...

No prayer. No seeking the Captain of the Lord's hosts as Joshua did before Jericho. This was not the Lord's strategy.

In chapter eight we will read God's strategy for taking Ai. He will say, **Take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai** (v1). It was crucial they all be involved. God wanted participation from them all. He was working *in* their lives as well as *through* them.

One equivalent of this today in the church would be to think you are not needed if it's not your week to be serving - that the others can take-on the enemy while you rest. Obviously you can't be at every meeting of the church. We're not like that – with attendance requirements. But we can and should all have our heads in the game. We can and should conduct ourselves at all times as if we understood our spiritual connection to the body and building of Jesus.

Joshua 7:4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai.

Joshua 7:5 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.

When you engage your spiritual enemies without God's strategy you lose every time. I think so many believers remain defeated against the world, the flesh, and the devil because they too quickly abandon the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, and fellowship for some seemingly 'superior' strategy suggested by ungodly men with their ungodly philosophies.

Joshua 7:6 Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads.

Joshua 7:7 And Joshua said, "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!

Joshua 7:8 O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies?

Joshua 7:9 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?"

They **fell to the earth**. *Nothing like a resounding defeat to bring you back to earth!*

Even on their faces their attitudes needed adjusting. Their prayer reads as if it were God's fault – as if God had somehow tricked them. There is no thought that the fault might be among them.

We are not to heap condemnation upon ourselves, but we should look first to ourselves when defeated and **never** blame God.

Joshua 7:10 So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?"

The Lord told Joshua to quit praying! The time for prayer was before he sent men to Ai, not after. Now was the time for action.

Joshua 7:11 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.

Joshua 7:12 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.

We are not to heap condemnation upon ourselves, but we should look first to ourselves when defeated and never blame God.

There was no sugar-coating to make this pill easier to swallow. You might even say God was blunt. There was a problem among them that needed dealing with. *Deal with it!*

Achan had sinned. But Joshua and the elders had created a climate within which the disobedience of one person could bring defeat upon all of them. They started seeing things from a natural, rather than supernatural, perspective. They started trusting in their strengths rather than glorying in their weakness. Within such a spiritual climate

the disobedience of Achan was amplified. It led to negligent fratricide.

Leaders, take note. You need to continue to be led by the Lord.

And all of us need to start thinking more about how our disobedience – however slight – might affect our brothers and sisters. It might hinder their progress; it might stumble them; it could lead to their backsliding.

#2 Start Thinking Of Disobedience As If You Were Committing Assisted Suicide (v13-26)

Once discovered Achan was sentenced to death and his capital punishment carried out. But there is a sense in which this was more like assisted suicide. The long process of discovering exactly who the guilty person was seemed to be giving Achan opportunity to come forward on his own. If he had, perhaps God would have shown mercy. Instead, knowing he would certainly be found-out and executed, he did nothing. It was suicide-by-congregation.

Why punish his entire family? We know from Deuteronomy that God prohibited family members from being punished for the sins of their relatives. It leads commentators to conclude that Achan's family was complicit, that they knew about the accursed thing. *They should have ratted him out!*

Yes, sometimes your responsibilities to the household of believers take priority to those of your earthly household.

Rather than stumble over whether or not God was being 'fair' towards Achan's family, you should get the point. Your disobedience never affects just you. You never sin alone. We've seen how it can affect an entire congregation. Closer to home, it always affects your family. It brings defeat, destruction, and even death home.

God went slowly through the tribes, families, and households narrowing it down to one man. Achan must have understood he would be discovered. The long elimination process seemed to be encouraging Achan to repent.

Our fellowship, our congregation, should be a place that encourages repentance and restoration.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

James 5:19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

I'm frequently asked if our church 'does' church discipline. Yes, we do, but we see it as church restoration. It only becomes discipline when there is a continued, hard-hearted refusal to repent. And even then the goal would be reconciliation.

Achan, by the way, showed no signs of repentance. He acknowledged his disobedience but that's all.

Repentance is a powerful spiritual discipline. We should practice it more – at home and in the household of faith, the church.

The apostle Paul commended the church at Corinth for repentance when he said,

2 Corinthians 7:11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what* clearing *of yourselves*, *what* indignation, *what* fear, *what* vehement desire, *what* zeal, *what* vindication! In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Their repentance is here called **godly sorrow**.

Is there disobedience in your life? Are you committing some secret sin? If the answer is “Yes,” then you, too, are committing assisted suicide. God will find it out and deal with it.

We are God’s body. We are God’s building. What each of us does or doesn’t do affects all of us. We’re in the trenches, fighting a spiritual warfare for the hearts of lost men and women. We’re getting ready to mount a couple of new assaults – *Reach Lemoore* and *Friday Night’s Light*. **Each of us is involved – whether we volunteer or not. There’s no time for personal covetousness; for worldliness; for secret sin.**

Let’s take every Ai together and give God His glory until the Lord takes us home.

