

Joshua 7

The Consequences of Hidden Sin

NKJ 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.

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.

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."

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

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.

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.

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!

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

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?"

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

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.

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.

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."

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.

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.' "

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

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.

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.

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."

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

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."

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

Let us for a moment imagine a scenario where a major operation against Jihadists in an Iraqi city has just been completed, rather like the Marines clearing out of Fallujah. The operation which involved a massive commitment of forces was judged to be completely successful, and very few if any casualties were taken. It was all in all a massive loss for the Jihadists. Then another piece of intelligence comes in, close to the original city there is small terror cell operating. The intelligence indicates that another massive operation is hardly necessary, the cell in question is small and its resources are limited, all that will be necessary is a relatively small detachment of troops. The troops advance towards the city confident of victory when all of a sudden, there is a massive explosion, an Armored Personnel Carrier is flipped, and suddenly the force is engulfed in small arms fire and it is quickly apparent they had driven into an ambush. What had seemed like a simple operation, against a small force has suddenly become a chaotic nightmare and the commander decides to quickly withdraw and reassess. When everything is totalled up, it is discovered that 36 soldiers have lost their lives, a greater number than fell in the operation against the much larger city.

Such a nightmare scenario is almost exactly like what happened here at Ai. What were the reasons for it?

Well many have asserted that it was a result of the overconfidence of Israel, they should not have sent out such a small force, sending only 3000 they contend, smacked of arrogance. But that wasn't the reason at all. Let us face facts, in military campaigns you do not actually always need to use the entire army to deal with a small enemy force. Sometimes all you need to swat a fly is a fly swatter and not a sledgehammer. Had God been with them, the 3000 men sent by Joshua to Ai would have been more than enough to take it. For that matter, with God on their side, the grandmothers of Israel could have taken the city of Ai. And Joshua understands that their loss wasn't a result of insufficient men, in Joshua's lamentation before the lord in verses 7-9 it is clear that Joshua understands that if the Lord has decided that they will be defeated, sending the whole army won't make any difference at all. They will be defeated regardless of the size of the force.

Then there are those who assert that it is because Joshua failed to pray between the battles. Perhaps this is closer to the truth, but from his point of view Joshua was still continuing to do what the Lord

had commanded them to do. God had said to them *"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses."* And he had told them that all that was necessary for them to gain the inheritance was to be strong and of good courage and to be faithful to keep his covenant.

You see therein lay the real reason for the disaster, it wasn't that they were cocky or that they failed to pray, it was that they had failed to keep the covenant, that they had sinned by transgressing the law of God. Now when they were preparing to do battle with Ai, Joshua didn't know that. We as readers coming to verse 1 know something that he doesn't, that Achan had failed to believe the Lord that taking from the things in Jericho devoted to destruction would bring curses and disaster upon the people, and filled with greed he had put forth his hand and taken what the Lord had commanded he must not.

Because of his secret sin, the army of the Lord was doomed to disaster before they even began the operation. They could have sent the entire Army and a legion of elephants and the men of Ai would have still beaten them.

David seeing the defeat, is horrified, he can't understand it. When the Lord was with them, they prevailed, but now all is lost. The Lord however, tells him to get up, the defeat was not arbitrary or capricious, it is the result of the transgression of Israel:

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.

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.

What do God's people need to do, they must purge out the sin from amongst the camp.

Now we know what happened, lots are taken and the Lord exposes Achan as the evil-doer. The amazing thing is that Achan allowed all the lot taking to take place even as it was narrowing down to him (you can just imagine how he felt) without simply confessing his sin. It is not until the final lot is drawn and he is set apart and Joshua urges him to confess, gently calling him "Son" that he finally owns up to what he has done.

Now what many people object to at this point, is the supposed "harshness" of the penalty that fell on Achan and his family for their sin. This fails to take into account two factors:

- 1) ***First the simple issue of Justice amongst the people of God:*** Because of Achan's treason there were now 36 families that had suffered the loss of their son, or their, husband, or their father. Women who had lost their provider, children who had lost their daddy. And why, because one man was greedy and had hoped to cover up his sin. Even after the defeat at Ai, Achan did not come forward. How many more disasters could have been visited on the camp with him never coming forward and admitting his sin?

Let me take the previous scenario about a hypothetical disaster in Iraq. What if it were to be discovered that the unit was ambushed because one soldier had taken a bribe to let a few Iraqis into the command tent and they had copied down the movement orders. Do you think there would be a major outcry to show him mercy? Especially amongst the families of those who had lost their sons and fathers? Not

likely. Let us call what Achan did what it really was: Treason. He had rebelled against the commands of his Lord for the sake of mammon and it had resulted in disaster for the people of God.

- 2) ***The seriousness of the transgressing the Covenant:*** Part of the reason that we don't understand the seriousness of the punishment that befell Achan is that by and large, we don't understand the seriousness of sin. We don't often frame it in terms of "Cosmic treason" we do everything we can to downplay it, especially our own sin. But sin is in fact so serious that Jesus spoke about it this way:

Matthew 5:29 "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

30 "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

But even that strong language doesn't show us the true dimensions of how serious sin is. It is so serious that the only way it could be paid for is by God himself becoming an Achan for us, and paying the full penalty for it. We will discuss that more in a moment.

There is yet one thing that still disturbs many people, why was Achan's family destroyed as well.

Achan, his family, and all his property are destroyed. The crime was impossible without the complicity and agreement of the family; therefore they share the penalty. The drastic punishment communicates a powerful lesson to the nation at this early, critical period of their history.

Who brought destruction upon Achan's family? Achan. Critical stage in their history, this becomes a memorial to the necessity of believing God and obeying his commands..

Connection between Adam and his sin imputed to his posterity.

Applications:

1) Necessity of Church Discipline

We have seen the effect of secret sin in destroying the ability of the church to carry out the mandate given her.

Sometimes we ask, why is the modern church so ineffective in carrying out her own great commission mandate.

Well I think part of that is the fact that by and large we have lost the third mark of the church.

People I have spoken to have been horrified that we would actually carry out church discipline.

Ananias and Saphira

1 Cor. 5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

2) The Seriousness of Sin:

How serious was Sin? The breaking of the covenant with Yahweh? So serious that it required Jesus to stand in our place and undergo the punishment for it.

2 Cor. 5:20 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.