

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
2-1-23

Joshua 7

Achan's Sin – Verse 1

But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, 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.

7:1 The “devoted things” were all the clothing, cattle, and other plunder that God said Israel should destroy when they conquered Jericho (see 6:17-19). It was not that they found a good use for something that was going to be thrown out anyway. This was a serious offense because it was in direct defiance to an explicit command of God (see Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

7:1 So the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel: Israel could not be defeated by the Canaanites, but they could defeat themselves by alienating themselves from God's plan and power.

Spies Report From The City Of Ai – Verses 2-3

² Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, “Go up and spy out the region.” So the men went up and spied out Ai. ³ When they returned to Joshua, they said, “Not all the army will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary the whole army, for only a few people live there.”

7:2 So the men went up and spied out Ai: The recommendation to send only two or three thousand men was either a response of faith or self-confidence. In the end, it did not matter; in their disobedience, they could have sent 100,000 troops and it would have made no difference.

7:3 Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few: Israel's success depended on their own state of being conquered by God; Achan's rebellion showed that in that respect, they were not conquered by Him — and therefore open to defeat.

Israel Is Defeated At Ai – Verses 4-5

⁴ So about three thousand went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, ⁵ who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted in fear and became like water.

7:4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people: Joshua, a wise military leader, commanded the larger number recommended by his military intelligence to be sent — but it made no difference. They fled before the men of Ai.

7:5 And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men: The thirty-six men killed were thirty-six more than were killed at Jericho, which was thought to be a much more difficult city to conquer. Though this number was small from a military standpoint, what it meant was staggering to Israel. It meant that Israel could be defeated in the Promised Land. The defeat at Ai showed that what mattered was not the strength of the opponent, but the help of God. Without God's help, all would be lost.

7:5 Therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water: The people of Israel had good reason to be afraid. Their panic was completely logical, because if God did not fight for them, they had nothing to expect but defeat.

Joshua Fears That It Was Unfaithfulness On God's Part That Had Caused The Defeat – Verses 6-9

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. **7** And Joshua said, "Alas, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! **8** Pardon your servant, Lord. What can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? **9** The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"

7:6 Joshua and the elders of Israel tore their clothing and put dust on their heads as signs of deep mourning before God. They were confused by their defeat at the small city of Ai after the spectacular Jericho victory, so they went before God in deep humility and sorrow to receive his instructions. When our lives fall apart, we also should turn to God for direction and help. Like Joshua and the elders, we should humble ourselves so that we will be able to hear God's words.

7:7 When Joshua first went against Ai (7:3), he did not consult God but relied on the strength of his army to defeat the small city. Only after Israel was defeated did they turn to God and ask what happened. Too often we rely on our own skills and strength, especially when the task before us seems easy. We go to God only when the obstacles seem too great. However, only God knows what lies ahead. Consulting him, even when we are on a winning streak, may save us from grave mistakes or misjudgments. God may want us to learn lessons, remove pride, or consult others before he will work through us.

7:7-9 Imagine praying this way to God. This is not a formal church prayer; it is the prayer of a man who is afraid and confused by what is happening around him. Joshua poured out his real thoughts to God. Hiding your needs from God is ignoring the only one who can really help. God welcomes your honest prayers and wants you to express your true feelings to him. Any believer can become more honest in prayer by remembering that God is all-knowing and all-powerful and that his love is everlasting.

The Real Reason For Defeat: Israel Has Sinned – Verses 10-13

¹⁰The LORD said to Joshua, “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? ¹¹Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. ¹²That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. ¹³“Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.

7:10-12 Why did Achan’s sin bring judgment on the entire nation? Although it was one man’s failure, God saw it as national disobedience to a national law. God needed the entire nation to be committed to the job they had agreed to do—conquer the land. Thus, when one person failed, everyone failed. If Achan’s sin went unpunished, unlimited looting could break out. The nation as a whole had to take responsibility for preventing this undisciplined disobedience.

7:10-12 Achan’s sin was not merely his keeping some of the captured plunder (God allowed it in some cases), but his disobeying God’s explicit command to destroy everything connected with Jericho. Achan’s sin was indifference to the evil and idolatry of the city, not just a desire for money and clothes. God would not protect Israel’s army again until the sin was removed and the army returned to obeying him without reservation. God is not content with our doing what is right some of the time. He wants us to do what is right all the time. We are under his orders to eliminate any thoughts, practices, or possessions that hinder our devotion to him.

7:13 “Consecrate yourselves” meant that the Israelites were to undergo purification rites like those mentioned in 3:5 when they were preparing to cross the Jordan River. Such rites prepared the people to approach God and constantly reminded them of their sinfulness and his holiness.

Instructions For Judgment Of The Sin – Verses 14-15

¹⁴“In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe the LORD chooses shall come forward clan by clan; the clan the LORD chooses shall come forward family by family; and the family the LORD chooses shall come forward man by man. ¹⁵Whoever is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done an outrageous thing in Israel!”

7:14 The tribe which the Lord takes: Though the identity of the sinning family was unknown to Joshua, it was known to God. Secret sin on earth is an open scandal before God. Therefore, we should live our lives with “one set of books,” with one kind of life that can be seen by anybody, anywhere.

7:15 Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire: Once God dealt with the one sinning individual, blessing could come again on the whole nation.

God Exposes The Identity Of The Head Of The Family That Had Sinned – Verses 16-18

¹⁶Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was chosen. ¹⁷The clans of Judah came forward, and the Zerahites were chosen. He had the clan

of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was chosen. ¹⁸ Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen.

7:16 Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken: This must have been an excruciating experience for Achan. How much better to simply walk in obedience to God!

7:16-18 Achan the son of Carmi: All this time, Achan certainly remembered exactly what he had taken, and how he wished he had not taken it. But he — and we — should remember the regret that sin brings before we sin, not after. Sin does have its pleasures. Taking those things gave Achan a good feeling. But the penalty of sin, both within us and upon us, outweighs any of the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Joshua Confronts Achan, And He Confesses – Verses 19-21

¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.” ²⁰ Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: ²¹ When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

7:19 My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him: Even when we sin and try to cover it up, we can still give glory to the Lord by openly and honestly confessing our sin. Hidden sin always has a special power over us.

7:21 A beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels: Measured against the lives of thirty-six men and the welfare of the entire nation, what Achan gained was insignificant. Truly, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10).

7:21 I coveted them and took them: Think of how Achan could have rationalized his sin: “No one will know.” “These things won’t be missed.” “Think of how I’ll be admired in this beautiful Babylonian garment.” “I’m not hurting anyone.” “I deserve this.” The excuses can go on and on, but they all fall short. When we are at the terrible place Achan is, we all feel terrible about our sin, wishing we had never done it — may God help us to see the truth about our sin before we do it!

The Confession Confirmed, And Judgment Executed – Verses 22-26

²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. ²³ They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD. ²⁴ Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵ Joshua said, “Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today.” Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. ²⁶ Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

7:22-25 Achan underestimated God and didn't take his commands seriously (6:18). Taking a robe, along with some silver and gold, may have seemed a small thing to Achan, but the effects of his sin were felt by the entire nation, especially his family. Like Achan, our actions affect more people than just ourselves. Beware of the temptation to rationalize your sins by saying they are too small or too personal to hurt anyone but you.

7:24-26 Why did Achan's entire family pay for his sin? The biblical record does not tell us if they were accomplices to his crime, but in the ancient world, the family was treated as a whole. Achan, as the head of his family, was like a tribal chief. If he prospered, the family prospered with him. If he suffered, so did they. Many Israelites had already died in battle because of Achan's sin. Now he was to be completely cut off from Israel.

7:25-26 Achan's entire family was to be stoned along with him so that no trace of the sin would remain in Israel. In our permissive and individualistic culture we have a hard time understanding such a decree, but in ancient cultures this punishment was common. The punishment fit the crime: Achan had disobeyed God's command to destroy everything in Jericho; thus, everything that belonged to Achan had to be destroyed. Sin has drastic consequences, so we should take drastic measures to avoid it.