

Joshua

Lesson 7

Chapter 7

Sometimes in life, we have the rare opportunity to share in a once-in-a-lifetime event. Everything seems to go perfectly from start to finish. But then, not long after the fact, news comes that not everything done in the event was up to snuff. In fact, the news comes that some things were terribly wrong. That is the case with the Nation of Israel and the first campaign in the Promised Land when they took the city of Jericho. Something was done terribly wrong.

2. The Tragic Campaign in the Promised Land (7:1-26)

a) The Reason for the Tragedy - Unfaithfulness at Jericho (7:1)

On the surface, the battle at Jericho was a triumphant campaign in the Promised Land. But in reality, it was a tragic campaign in the Promised Land that led to a great tragedy in the next campaign to take a small village called Ai. The reason for the tragedy was unfaithfulness at Jericho by one man. We find the tragedy story told beginning in chapter 7, verse 1. *“But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerab, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel.”* (7:1)

Sin was in the camp of Israel. This man, by the name of Achan, had taken things from Jericho that were supposed to be melted down and put in the treasury of the nation. But Achan coveted the things for himself, brought them into the holy camp of Israel, and tainted the whole camp and all its people.

b) The Research for the Tragedy – Spies Sent to Ai (7:2-3)

Not knowing the sin that resided in the camp, Joshua proceeded with his strategy to take the village of Ai. Not knowing, Joshua ordered the research for the tragedy by the spies sent to Ai. The LORD let Joshua do this, knowing it would lead to a tragedy in battle. Verse 2. *“Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” So the men went up and spied out Ai. ³They returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not let all the people go up; only about two or three thousand men need go up to Ai; do not make all the people toil up there, for they are few.”* (7:2-3)

We could have expected Joshua to send spies to inspect the next target. He had learned to do that forty years before under the command of Moses. It had worked at Jericho. Why would it not work at Ai? The spies saw the little village and its meager means. Not many men would be needed to take this target. Two or three thousand would be enough. Surely six hundred thousand would be overkill. But it did not matter how many men were taken; Israel was going to lose.

c) The Result of the Tragedy - Defeat at Ai (7:4-5)

Joshua trusted the spies. After all, why should he not? The LORD allowed Joshua to lead the campaign on his own without the His help. We come to the result of the tragedy with the defeat at Ai. Verse 4. *“So about three thousand men from the people went up there, but they fled from the men of Ai. ⁵The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men, and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them down on the descent, so the hearts of the people melted and became as water.”* (7:4-5)

Ai had the upper hand. Israel did not even get through the gate. Israel had to retreat. Three dozen men were killed right off the bat. In Israel's retreat, more were killed at the place Israel named

“Shebarim.” The name means *broken to pieces*. It was where Joshua and the nation were broken into pieces. It was Israel’s turn and caused their hearts to melt like water.

d) The Remorse of the Tragedy – Mourning Over Ai (7:6-9)

The result of the tragedy led to the remorse of the tragedy, especially with Joshua's morning over Ai. Verse 6. *“Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. ⁷ Joshua said, ‘Alas, O Lord GOD, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan!’ ⁸ O Lord, what can I say since Israel has turned their back before their enemies? ⁹ For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and they will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will You do for Your great name?”* (7:6-9)

Joshua felt like the entire reputation of the nation was lost at Ai, the Amorite village. It was the reputation built when Moses led the nation across the Red Sea, as was the testimony of Rahab in Jericho. Now, all of the nations that were afraid of Israel would no longer because the little village of Amorites defeated the nation selected by the LORD to be His. As we will see, at this point in the story, Joshua and the men did not stay at the temporary camp outside Ai. They returned to Gilgal, about 15 miles away.

e) The Revelation of the Tragedy – Sin in the Camp (7:10-13)

Back in Gilgal, the LORD did not let Joshua mourn too long. It was time for the revelation of the tragedy and the sin in the camp. Verse 7. *“So the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? ¹¹ 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. ¹² Therefore the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, for they have become accursed. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst. ¹³ Rise up! Consecrate the people and say, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, for thus the LORD, the God of Israel, has said, ‘There are things under the ban in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you have removed the things under the ban from your midst.’”* (7:10-13)

The LORD had promised that He would not help the nation if it and all its people broke the covenant. The ban was given through Moses just a few months before on the other side of the Jordan River, as found in the last pages of Deuteronomy. Joshua had warned of the ban in Gilgal before the nation marched around Jericho.

f) The Remedy of the Tragedy – Punish the Sinner (7:14-15)

The LORD spoke to Joshua and gave him the instructions for the remedy of the tragedy if Joshua would punish the sinner. Verse 14. *“In the morning then you shall come near by your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes by lot shall come near by families, and the family which the LORD takes shall come near by households, and the household which the LORD takes shall come near man by man. ¹⁵ It shall be that the one who is taken with the things under the ban shall be burned with fire, he and all that belongs to him, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has committed a disgraceful thing in Israel.”* (7:14-15)

Lots were to be cast by the twelve tribes. In the miraculous direction of the LORD, the guilty tribe was selected. I have yet to find a commentary that speaks of my opinion on how these lots were cast, but what I am about to suggest makes perfect sense. It seems that the Urim and the Tummin would have been used by the High Priest to indicated the right tribe. In that case, if it were the case, the question would be asked, which would be the casting of the lot on each tribe, and the High Priest would interpret the answer from the Urim and Thummim on the breastplate worn by the priest. The stones would glow, by the power of the LORD, when the answer was yes. It seems that the use of the Urim and Thummim would have been the surest way to discover the tribe. That is not to say that a stone for each tribe could not have been thrown in the hat, and Joshua would

pull out the correct stone. He could. But the glow from the Urim and Thummim would be the surest way to hear from the LORD.

(1) Joshua Finds the Thief (7:16-21)

(a) What Joshua Does (7:16-17)

In whatever way, the lots were cast, and the revelation was discerned, Joshua finds the thief. We see what Joshua does to find the thief. Verse 16. *“So Joshua arose early in the morning and brought Israel near by tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.¹⁷ He brought the family of Judah near, and he took the family of the Zerahites; and he brought the family of the Zerahites near man by man, and Zabdi was taken.”* (7:16-17)

The process selected the tribe of Judah, the family of the Zerahites, and the family of Zabdi.

(b) Who Joshua Finds (7:18)

With the family of Zabdi, Joshua is looking at all the men belonging to Zabdi. The lot is cast, and we see who Joshua finds. Verse 7. *“He brought his household near man by man; and Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, was taken.”* (7:18)

The man who caused the sin in the camp was one man – Achan. The name *“Achan”* in Hebrew means *troubler*. The LORD knew Achan would be the *troubler* of Israel and caused him to have that name from birth. The troubler caused more than three dozen men to die.

(c) What Joshua Says (7:19)

Joshua was stern with Achan. Here is what Joshua says. Verse 19. *“Then Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, I implore you, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.’”* (7:19)

Joshua feels for the troubler. He begs for the truth. Only the truth will set Israel free from the trouble this man brought on the nation. Why did Joshua call Achan *“My son?”* He did so with a genuine and sincere parental care and regard. Joshua reached out to Achan as if he was his son. But every father knows that every son must be punished for evil deeds.

(d) What Joshua Hears (7:20-21)

From that, Achan speaks, and we hear what Joshua hears. Verse 20. *“So Achan answered Joshua and said, ‘Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did:²¹ when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it.’”* (7:20-21)

Achan confessed his sins. This troubler had sinned in two ways. First, there was the mantle from Shinar that he coveted and took. This mantle was a beautiful shawl from Babylon with stitching of pictures such as animals or men, sometimes woven in the fabric, sometimes embroidered with the needle. Most of the time, these pictures were of Babylonian deities, and that is the reason it was banned. It would tempt Achan, as long as it was in his possession, to wonder about that idol pictured on the shawl. According to Moses’ instructions concerning the battles in all the cities and villages of the Canaanites to be taken in the Promised land, the shawl should have been burned. Deuteronomy tells us that.

“Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God; and it shall be a ruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt.

¹⁷ Nothing from that which is put under the ban shall cling to your hand, in order that the LORD may turn from His burning anger and show mercy to you, and have compassion on you and make you increase, just as He has sworn to your fathers....” (Deuteronomy 13:16-17)

That was Achan’s first sin.

Achan's second sin was his taking of the silver and gold. Had Achan collected the silver and gold and deposited them in the treasury of Israel, all would have been fine. That is what all the rest of the men did, as we discovered in the last chapter. But Achan did not. He took it for himself. It belonged to the LORD and the treasury of Israel. Achan wanted it for his own, and he hid it in his tent, in the dirt.

You might wonder why Achan says the items are stored "*with the silver underneath.*" Achan had probably wrapped the one bar of gold in the shawl. Once the hole was dug, he put the two hundred silver shekels in the hole first. Then he carefully laid the shawl with the gold on top of the shekels.

(e) What Joshua Instructed (7:22)

Joshua heard Achan's confession. Now we see what Joshua instructed. Verse 22. "*So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was concealed in his tent with the silver underneath it.*" (7:22)

Just as Achan had reported, the men found them in the dirt, in his tent, the shawl and the bar of gold resting on the mound of silver shekels.

(f) What Joshua Retrieved (7:23)

We see next what Joshua retrieved. Verse 23. "*They took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD.*" (7:23)

The banned shawl and the gold and silver was laid at the feet of Joshua as they were "*poured out before the LORD.*" In verse 6 of this chapter, the writer told us that Joshua was in front of the Ark of the Covenant. More than likely, it was still covered as required for traveling. It was taken around Jericho that way for seven days. We do not know if it was carried to the disastrous battle of Ai, but surely it was not. Being just a small campaign, the Ark was probably left in the camp of Israel in Gilgal. From Gilgal to Ai is about fifteen miles. Joshua was by the Ark during the discovery of the thief and the punishment. Achan did not carry the stolen banned items to Ai. He had them buried in his tent at Gilgal. We do not even know if Achan was on the campaign for Ai. How much worse would it have made his sin if he was not at the battle but safely at home when the men lost their lives because of him?

(2) Joshua Punishes the Thief (7:24-26)

(a) Where Joshua Went (7:24)

Joshua had no choice. Achan had sinned greatly and his sin led to the deaths of many men. Joshua punishes the thief. We see where Joshua went. Verse 7. "*Then Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor.*" (7:24)

The writer does not tell us, but a map helps understand where Joshua went. Joshua is about fifteen miles away from Ai across the mountains. He is about thirty-five miles by the roads. He is just outside the camp of Israel in Gilgal. To the valley just south of the ridge of Jericho and Gilgal Joshua took Achan, all the banned items, all Achan's family, his tent, and all that belonged to him in any way. Although the writer tells us that the name of the valley is Achor, it was not the name at the time Joshua will arrive with Achan. However, after Israel completes the punishment of Achan in the valley, the nation will name it Achor. Achor means *trouble*. Achan means *troubler*.

(b) What Joshua Said (7:25a)

In the valley, we hear what Joshua said. Verse 25a. "*Joshua said, 'Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.'*" (7:25a)

Joshua asked the question of Achan, but he did not expect an answer, nor, according to the writer, did he allow Achan to answer. "*Why have you troubled us?*" If Joshua had used his name at the end of the question he would have said, "*Why have you troubled us, you troubler?*" But the writer does not tell us that. But he might as well because that is the context of the Hebrew word pictures

being spoken by Joshua. The LORD was about to trouble the troubler. Joshua knew the penalty was death by stoning. The law made that clear.

(c) What Joshua Ordered (7:25b-26a)

We come to what Joshua ordered. Verse 25b. *“And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. ²⁶They raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger.”* (7:25b-26a)

Why was Achan stoned? The answer is found in Leviticus. It falls under the instruction to stone the one who curses and blasphemes the name of the LORD. Here is the passage.

“If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death. ¹⁸The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. ¹⁹If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him. ²⁰fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. ²¹Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. ²²There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God.” ²³Then Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, and they brought the one who had cursed outside the camp and stoned him with stones. Thus the sons of Israel did, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.” (Leviticus 24:17-23)

Achan had not cursed, but he had injured his neighbors by his theft, more than three dozen had died. With what happened to his neighbors, *“so it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth ... the one who kills a man shall be put to death.”* How did they put the person to death in this Leviticus passage? By stoning. It was to apply to Achan also.

We come to a strange quandary with Achan. All of his family members were stoned with him. The quandary comes from Moses' summary of the law in Deuteronomy.

“Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” (Deuteronomy 24:16)

Why then were the family members stoned for the sin of their father? Did that not break the LORD's law to stone them for Achan's sin? The quandary can be settled when we realize that all of Achan's family lived in the tent of Achan. All of Achan's family surely knew what Achan had buried in the dirt in his tent. How could he hide the covered hole? The families had little space in the tents save for their few articles of clothing and their mats for sleeping. They knew.

To prove that they knew, we only need to look at the response of the LORD when Achan's family and possessions were buried in the great heap. Verse 26a says, *“... and the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger.”* Translation, the LORD approved the punishment. All of it.

(d) What Joshua Proclaims (7:26b)

The writer tells us what Joshua proclaimed by using the words *“trouble and troubler”* in respect to Achan and the valley. Verse 26b. *“Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day.”* (7:26b)

The name stuck with the place. In the future, the prophets Hosea and Isaiah will still call it Achor. (Isaiah 65:10; Hosea 2:15) It is but twelve miles from Jerusalem. It will later prove to be Achan's Achor – that is to say, the place of the *troublers' trouble*. That story will have to wait for another day.