

Tonight we are looking at the need for holiness in spiritual warfare.

In Joshua’s day,

Israel was supposed to be the angel of death
bringing judgment upon the wicked,
as a picture of the final judgment.

If you are going to serve as a stand-in for Jesus,
then you had better be holy!

And that’s not just the case for the OT people of God!

After all, we are called to bring the message of salvation to the nations!

And so we are called to be holy as *he is holy!*

What does it mean to be holy?

In our text for tonight we see how it means to be faithful to God.

That *his ways* would be more important to us than our own desires.

Because when we seek first our own kingdoms,

the result is invariably that we harm others.

And we see this with Achan.

Introduction: The Covenant Broken (7:1)

But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.

It is somewhat unusual to have so much information up front as we get in verse 1.

The narrator does not give us the story, and then explain why.

We get the why first.

The people of Israel broke faith.

Achan, the son of Carmi, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things.

And so the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.

1. The First Battle of Ai and the Humiliation of Joshua (7:2-9)

² 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.” And the men went up and spied out Ai. ³ And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few.” ⁴ So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai,

⁵ and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

⁶ Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. ⁷ And Joshua said, “Alas, O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!”

But none of this was known to Joshua.

His spies told him that Ai was a weak and feeble town.

The very name “Ai” means “a heap.”

2-3,000 soldiers should be sufficient to take the town—
especially since God was with them!

So Joshua sent 3,000 men against Ai.

But they were quickly routed.

Whereas the hearts of the Canaanites had melted when puny little Israel
crossed the Jordan,

now the hearts of Israel melt before the puny little town of Ai.

This is spiritual warfare.

36 men die in battle – out of 2-3,000 – and Israel is falling apart!

And so Joshua asks the old question –

indeed, this was the question of his generation:

“Why did God bring us out of Egypt—

was it simply to give us into the hands of the Amorites?” (7:7)

This was asked in Exodus 14:11-12 at the Red Sea

And again in Exodus 16:3, when they were starving of hunger,

and again in Exodus 17:3, when there was no water,

and again in Numbers 14:22, when they were afraid to enter the Land,

and again in Numbers 20:5, when again there was no water,

and again in Numbers 21:5, when they complained about the manna.

But in all those instances, Joshua had remained faithful.

When the people complained against Moses, time after time,

Joshua alone stood beside him.

Has Joshua now succumbed to the grumbling and complaining of his generation?

If all you read is verse seven,

then it might appear to be so.

But then again, Joshua has a just complaint.
So far as he knows, Israel has been faithful.
Israel has believed God's promises, obeyed God's voice,
and the result should be the destruction of their enemies.
But God has not kept up his side of the covenant.
Why did you bring us here?
Joshua's question is not based on his own suffering,
but upon the Lord's promises.
You said you would go before our armies,
but now you are fighting against us! (Read v8-9)

⁸ O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! ⁹ For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?"

How can you do this, God?
How can you let your people die, when you promised us life!?

2. The Voice of the LORD Speaks in Rebuke (7:10-15)

¹⁰ The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?"

But God says, "get up!"
There is no mystery here.
The reason why I will not fight for you is because of your rebellion.
(Read 11-12)

¹¹ Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. ¹² Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. ^[a] I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.

Because Israel has taken things devoted for destruction,
therefore Israel itself has become devoted for destruction.

And so a second time God says "get up!"
¹³ Get up! Consecrate the people and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the LORD, God of Israel, "There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you."'

Go deal with your sin:
Consecrate the people
(involved washing with water and abstaining from sexual intercourse)
and then gather and draw lots to determine who has done this.

(Read 14-15)

¹⁴ In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes. And the tribe that the LORD takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the LORD takes shall come near by households. And the household that the LORD takes shall come near man by man. ¹⁵ And he who is taken with the devoted things 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 an outrageous thing in Israel.’”

3. The Public Revelation of Achan’s Sin (7:16-26)

¹⁶ So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. ¹⁷ And he brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought near the clan of the Zerahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. ¹⁸ And he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

And so Joshua did what God said.

Joshua is the faithful servant of the LORD.

When God speaks, Joshua obeys.

And so the next day Joshua brings the tribes of Israel before him,
and Judah is taken,

the clan of the Zerahites, the household of Zabdi—and finally Zabdi’s grandson,
Achan.

This usage of the lot was ordained by God to determine who had sinned.

But you will notice that it was not sufficient to convict Achan.

The lot has fallen to Achan,

and Achan now realizes that he cannot escape the judgment of God.

Joshua declares (verse 19)

¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise^[b] to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

And Achan replies (verse 20-21)

²⁰ And Achan answered Joshua, “Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: ²¹ when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels,^[c] then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

Achan confesses his sin.

He saw a beautiful cloak from Shinar – from Babylon.

And he saw as much money as a laborer would make in a lifetime!

Jesus tells us “do not be anxious about what you will eat or drink – or what you will wear

But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness,

and all these things will be added to you.” (Mt 6)

Achan gives us a clear view of why Jesus says this!
Achan has been told: trust God, and he will provide for you.
Give all the plunder from Jericho to God,
and he will give you an inheritance.

But Achan can't wait!
I saw – I coveted – I took.

This is the exact language that Genesis 3 uses of Eve.
She *saw* that the tree was good for food...
and a tree to be *desired* (same word, coveted) to make one wise...
she took...

Isn't this what gets us in trouble?
We see.
We covet.
We take.

We're not thinking about the kingdom of God!
We just want it, my precious!
Never mind where it leads...

Never mind that God's curse is upon the one who takes it!!

But when Joshua hears Achan's confession,
he makes sure to confirm his words (verse 22-23),
but having verified that he is indeed the one who sinned,
they take him out to the Valley of Achor, where he was stoned to death
and burned together with all his household and his belongings.

²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. ²³ And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the LORD. ²⁴ And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵ And Joshua said, "Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today." And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. ²⁶ And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

Death by stoning was reserved for the worst sins—especially blasphemy.
Achan is not simply guilty of theft and of lying,

he is guilty of blaspheming God, by stealing from Yahweh himself.
Many centuries later, Ananias and Sapphira will be struck down by God
for lying to the Holy Spirit.

Israel is coming into their inheritance.

In this inheritance, they are to remember that the first portion of all that they have
belongs to God,
because the whole inheritance is a gift from him.

Achan acknowledged that the root of his sin was coveteousness.
He coveted that which belonged to God, and so he stole from Yahweh.
And through his sin, judgment fell upon the whole of Israel.
Indeed, he was guilty also of murder,
because many Israelites died because of his sin.

The rebellion of the few—or even of the one—jeopardizes the inheritance of the many.
Therefore Israel must purge the evil from their midst,
and so Achan and his household are removed from Israel.

Just as God’s blessing comes to you and your house,
so also does God’s curse.

As Achan has brought trouble (achor) on Israel,
so now God will bring trouble (achor) on Achan in the Valley of Achor.
This is where the Valley of Achor gets its name—the Valley of Trouble.

The Valley of Achor was not forgotten in Israel’s history.

Isaiah 65:9-10 says that God’s blessing will come – even to the Valley of Trouble!

*I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my
chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. Sharon shall become a pasture for
flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me.*

The lesson of the Valley of Achor is that those who trouble God’s inheritance
will themselves receive trouble.

But Isaiah says that God will redeem even the valley of Trouble!

And the prophet Hosea (2:15) also speaks,
of a day when God will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

The Valley of Trouble will one day be a place of righteousness and peace.

But the Valley of Achor is not the end of the story.

2'. The Voice of the LORD Speaks in Promise (8:1-2)

And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land. ² And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it."

Now the LORD speaks a second time.

This time he echoes his words from chapter 1,
"Do not fear and do not be dismayed."

God's anger has been satisfied.
The wages of sin is death.
And Achan has paid for his sin.

The troubler of Israel has been put to death, and so now they may go back into battle.

But there is still a penalty for Achan's sin that falls upon the whole community.

They will not be allowed to preserve the infrastructure of Ai.

They must destroy the city and all of its houses and lands.

But they may take its spoil and livestock as plunder.

As with Jericho, so now Ai.

The rest of the Canaanite cities will be left standing.

All of the people will be killed,

but the cities and fields will become the inheritance of Israel.

1'. The Second Battle of Ai and the Exaltation of Joshua (8:3-29)

³ So Joshua and all the fighting men arose to go up to Ai. And Joshua chose 30,000 mighty men of valor and sent them out by night. ⁴ And he commanded them, "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you remain ready. ⁵ And I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out against us just as before, we shall flee before them. ⁶ And they will come out after us, until we have drawn them away from the city. For they will say, 'They are fleeing from us, just as before.' So we will flee before them. ⁷ Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will give it into your hand. ⁸ And as soon as you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire. You shall do according to the word of the LORD. See, I have commanded you." ⁹ So Joshua sent them out. And they went to the place of ambush and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai, but Joshua spent that night among the people.

¹⁰ Joshua arose early in the morning and mustered the people and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. ¹¹ And all the fighting men who were with him went up and drew near before the city and encamped on the north side of Ai, with a ravine between them and Ai.

¹² He took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. ¹³ So they stationed the forces, the main encampment that was north of the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. ¹⁴ And as soon as the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the men of the city, hurried and went out early to the appointed place^[a] toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle. But he did not know that there was an

ambush against him behind the city. ¹⁵ And Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness. ¹⁶ So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. ¹⁷ Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. They left the city open and pursued Israel.

¹⁸ Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹ And the men in the ambush rose quickly out of their place, and as soon as he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it. And they hurried to set the city on fire. ²⁰ So when the men of Ai looked back, behold, the smoke of the city went up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that, for the people who fled to the wilderness turned back against the pursuers. ²¹ And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city, and that the smoke of the city went up, then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. ²² And the others came out from the city against them, so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side. And Israel struck them down, until there was left none that survived or escaped. ²³ But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him near to Joshua.

²⁴ When Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to Ai and struck it down with the edge of the sword. ²⁵ And all who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000, all the people of Ai. ²⁶ But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction. ²⁷ Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as their plunder, according to the word of the LORD that he commanded Joshua. ²⁸ So Joshua burned Ai and made it forever a heap of ruins, as it is to this day. ²⁹ And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening. And at sunset Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day.

And God commands that the Second Battle of Ai be an ambush.
God himself takes command of his armies for this battle,
ordering the battle plan in order to show
that he alone is the one who gives Israel the victory.

And Joshua did all that the LORD commanded.
Again we see Joshua as the faithful servant of the LORD,
who leads the people in the ways of Yahweh.
Through Joshua, God will give the people their inheritance.

But now rather than a part of the army, the whole army will go together.
Joshua sent 30,000 men to lie in ambush behind the city, to the north,
and another 5,000 to the west of the city.
Then he and his men came against the city,
And when the men of Ai and Bethel saw Joshua come,

they came out to battle,
expecting to rout Israel once again.
And Joshua played into his hands,
pretending to be beaten, and fleeing back in retreat.
But when the men of Ai and Bethel pursued Israel,
Joshua stretched out the javelin in his hand,
and the ambushing forces quickly took the city.
Then Joshua and his men turned back against the armies of Ai,
and slaughtered the men and women of the city—12,000 in all.
And they captured the king of Ai and brought him to Joshua.

After the first battle of Ai, we saw the humiliation of Joshua.
Now we see his exaltation.

We see it in the comparison to Moses.

Moses had held up his staff in Exodus 17,
and whenever Moses held up his staff, Joshua was victorious.
Now Joshua is the one stretching out his javelin—
he is the warrior of God who devotes all the inhabitants of Ai
to destruction.

We also see it in his faithfulness to God's commands.

He is the faithful servant who does all that God commands.
King Saul will fail to destroy Agag the Amalekite,
but Joshua hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening.
And at sunset he orders that the body of the king of Ai
be cast at the gates of the city, and a heap of stones is placed there
as a monument to the faithfulness of Joshua's God.

And so Joshua is exalted as the one who brings Israel through trouble to glory.

You may notice that there are two heaps of stones in this passage:
one for Achan, and one for the king of Ai.

Two memorials by which to remember the faithfulness of God in judgment.

I mentioned earlier that "Ai" means heap.

But it means 'heap' in the sense of a "heap of rubble."

These monuments are not "heaps of rubble" –

they are heaps of stones – designed to stand as an enduring testament
to the power and faithfulness of God!

There is also another "heap" of stones.

Conclusion: The Covenant Renewed (8:30-35)

³⁰ At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, ³¹ just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book

of the Law of Moses, “an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.” And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings.³² And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.³³ And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel.³⁴ And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived^[c] among them.

Joshua has an altar built of uncut stones, in accordance with what God had commanded Moses.
(Dt. 11:29; 27:1-6)

As we are seeing, the conquest of the land is not just a military operation.
It is an act of worship.

And so Joshua remembers what God had commanded Moses –
and so he takes the people to Mt. Gerizim and Mt Ebal.

Half stand on Mt. Gerizim for the blessing – and half on Mt. Ebal for the curse.
The altar was built on Mt. Ebal –
because the reason why you *need* an altar,
is because of the curse!

And so now – before Israel takes possession of the land –
before they take cities that they did not build,
vineyards that they did not plant...

they worship God.

The people of the northern tribes of Israel would remember Mt. Gerizim –
and because they refused to worship at Jerusalem,
they chose to worship at Mt. Gerizim – the mountain of blessing.

And one day, many years later, as a Jew was traveling by Mt. Gerizim,
a local woman said to him,
“Our fathers worshiped on this mounting,
but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”

And Jesus replied:
“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming and is now here
where the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.”

She had had five husbands – and the man she was living with was not her husband –
you might say that she knew the Valley of Trouble really well!

Whether her five husbands had died – or whether they had divorced her –
or some combination! –
she had known trouble.

But she kept digging the hole deeper –
until Jesus came and said, “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him
will never be thirsty again.” John 4:14

You may be a permanent resident of the Valley of Achor!
You may feel as though you have just one trouble after another –
or maybe the same trouble, over and over and over!

But Jesus comes to you and offers you life – if you will simply believe in him!