

The Sin of Achan

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The Israelites are defeated at Ai due to the sin of Achan at Jericho
2. aim – To cause us to recognize the awesome holiness of God and to never trivialize our sin
3. passage – Joshua 7:1-26

b. outline

1. The Defeat at Ai (Joshua 7:1-9)
2. The Sin of Achan (Joshua 7:10-21)
3. The Judgment of Achan (Joshua 7:22-26)

c. opening

1. the **distractions** of the times
 - a. returning from KS; COVID and other health issues; preaching at Tibbie on Wednesday
 1. **i.e.** being *distracted* from concentrating on this chapter *as much as I would have liked*
 - b. however ... in many ways, the chapter *itself* is a *distraction*: a distraction in Israel of the people knowing and following Yahweh, and the **terrible consequences of disobedience**
 1. **i.e. an interruption that makes a significant point about what it means to obey the Lord**

I. The Defeat at Ai (Joshua 7:1-9)

Content

a. the summary of the chapter (read v. 1)

1. Joshua begins by explaining *why* the circumstances to follow occur – it is a summary statement that becomes the **context** for the rest of the entire chapter (**i.e.** “through” this statement)
2. specifically, the people (as a whole) are judged because *one individual* (specifically identified; **see below**) took some of the spoils of Jericho for himself *in direct violation of God’s command*
 - a. **remember**: the people of Israel were either 1) to destroy everything that could be destroyed in the city, or 2) take the “undestroyable” things and put them in the treasury (**6:17ff**)
 - b. nothing was to be kept for *personal use* – the utter destruction of the city was the judgment of God upon it, and to take anything from the city **would “stain” Israel with that judgment (6:18)**
3. thus, every question about what happens next *comes back to this summary statement*

b. the defeat at Ai (vv. 2-5)

1. **note: 6:27** is included at the end of the conquest of Jericho to make two (2) points:
 - a. that *all of Canaan* would know the awesome power of the Israelites, as they are *now* led by Joshua
 - b. that the *continuing* conquest of Canaan would be accomplished through “ordinary” means
 1. **i.e.** that God would not (in fact) *miraculously* destroy every city, but would use the ordinary means of armies of soldiers and human commanders to advance his purpose and promise
 2. true, God sometimes does use miracles ... but he *most often* uses ordinary means to his ends
 - a. **e.g.** doctors, nurses, medications, machines – working through our *ordinary* immune system
 - b. **e.g.** the ordinary means of preaching to bring people to faith in Christ (**Romans 10:14ff**)
 - c. **ITC**: Joshua will take the lead and use his *human forces* to advance the cause of Yahweh
 3. **principle: although we understand that God can (and does!) use the miraculous, we must be grateful that he has given us many “ordinary” things to accomplish good in and through us ... and these ordinary things force us to trust in him as he uses them**
 - a. **i.e.** the miraculous can become a “hindrance” to faith (**e.g. John 6:26**)
“Truly, truly, I say to you [the crowd seeking him out], you are seeking me, not because you saw signs [which pointed you to faith in me], but because you ate your fill of the loaves [miraculously].”
 - b. **what are we learning as we wait for God to use just ordinary means around us?**
2. Joshua (as the commander of Israel) now uses the *ordinary means* at his disposal
 - a. he sends spies to Ai (W of Jericho, about 13 mi.) to check on its military capability
 - b. the spies return to report that the city is small, and a simple force of about 2000-3000 men will do
 1. **i.e.** not all of Israel, nor all of the **~200,000** fighting men – the people can remain at Jericho
 - c. Joshua sends 3000 men to Ai – but, they are *repelled* by the forces of the city (36 Israelites die)
 1. which causes the people *to be demoralized* (**note** the parallel to Jericho in **2:11**)

3. **question:** was Joshua *wrong* to send “only” 3000 men to Ai – was his *strategy* miscalculated?
 - a. **no!** – it is reasonable to assume that the spies gave an accurate military report, and Joshua used his accumulated wisdom to make the “right” choice in how he would attack the city
 - b. **no!** – **7:1 (see above)** is the context through which this defeat must be understood
 1. **i.e.** Joshua did well (and he knows it; **see below**), but **something else is amiss**
- c. **the prayer of Joshua (vv. 6-9)**
 1. Joshua and the elders take a posture of *mourning and grief* before the ark
 - a. **i.e.** they know that their defeat *is more* than a military failure ... they *think* God has caused this ...
 2. Joshua then prays to the Lord ... and his prayer consists of a number of questions:
 - a. **v. 7a:** why have you brought us over the Jordan in order to *fall to the Amorites*?
 - b. **v. 7b:** why didn't you just allow us *to stay on the other side* of the Jordan instead?
 - c. **vv. 8-9a:** don't you understand that the Canaanites will now be *emboldened* to come against us?
 - d. **v. 9b:** don't you realize that *your name* is being besmirched in all of this?
 3. Joshua's prayer is a **lament** = *deep questionings* over the intentions of God in our circumstances
 - a. it is also **very bold** – to “question” the *motives* of God in allowing this defeat *when he has promised to give this land into the very hands of the people now running from their enemies*
 1. **i.e.** to question *why* God allows the righteous to suffer within the judgment of the unrighteous
 2. **e.g.** the Psalms of Lament (**x42 individual**) = psalms which document deep human struggle
 - a. **Psalm 22:** “*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”
 - b. **question:** have you ever prayed like this, asking God: *why me?*
 - c. **principle: the prayer of lament in the face of God's promises is utterly normal for creatures who cannot see the “bigger picture” of what God is doing – but, it must not “wander” into unbelief or disobedience – it must always be seeking God's will above all else**

II. The Sin of Achan (Joshua 7:10-21)

Content

a. the response of Yahweh (vv. 10-15)

1. the Lord begins with a **rebuke (v. 10)**: why have you fallen on your face?
 - a. **i.e.** why are you blaming *me* for what has happened? why are you assuming that *I* am responsible?
 - b. **IOW:** Joshua *should have known better* – if the Israelites have been defeated, *and God always keeps his promises*, then the fault *must lie* with the people
2. the Lord explains **the truth (v. 11)**: the people have *sinned* – they have taken stuff from Jericho
 - a. in *direct violation* of God's explicit command to utterly destroy (or surrender) everything in the city
3. the Lord lists **the consequences (v. 12)**: the people are destined to be defeated and forsaken
 - a. although ... this judgment *can be averted*, if the “*devoted things*” are found and destroyed
4. the Lord outlines **the means** to uncover the guilty (**vv. 13-14**): house-by-house inquiry
 - a. each tribe, clan, household, and person is to be brought before the Lord; he will point out the guilty
5. the Lord proscribes **the punishment (v. 15)**: the guilty is to be executed *in a very public manner*
 - a. **i.e.** he is to be stoned (**see v. 25**) and then burned, along with his stolen goods
6. **question:** why does God insist that *all of Israel* has sinned (**see vv. 1, 11**), and that *all of Israel* is to be rejected by the Lord (**see v. 12**) when *only one man* has committed an act of disobedience?
 - a. **IOW:** it doesn't seem *fair* (to us) that all the people should suffer for one man's actions; that the army should have to run away from Ai in defeat *and 36 should die* just because one man sinned
 - b. **answer:** ancient civilizations (all through Scripture) inherently understood the concept of **collective guilt** = that the guilt of *one man* became the *guilt of an entire nation*
 1. **BTW:** this is why God doesn't just name the individual, but forces all of Israel to appear before him until the guilty party is uncovered – the guilt is “universal” and they must *all* answer for it
 - a. it is also why they are required as *a people* to execute the guilty – they must drive it out
 2. in our (formerly individualistic) **narcissistic** society, we *utterly deny* (even many Christians!) that the guilt of an individual can be *imputed* to all (**e.g.** the loss of *original sin & guilt*)
 - a. **i.e.** we deny that we are *inherently guilty* before God *simply for being born* as a human
 3. but ... rejection of the imputation of *guilt* from one man implies (by definition) that you must also reject *the imputation of righteousness from one man* (**i.e.** if you deny guilt from Adam then you *also deny* a righteousness imputed from Christ; **Romans 5:18; 1 Cor. 15:22**)
7. God indicts the sinfulness of the people (through the one man) and commands that they *all* appear before him to “flush out” the guilty party, and to “make atonement” by bringing judgment upon him
 - a. **note:** no sacrifice will suffice *except for the blood of the guilty* – he cannot “substitute” his way out

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b. the appearance of the people (vv. 16-21)

1. although Joshua *has already given* the name of the guilty in **7:1**, the process is now documented:
 - a. the guilty is discovered within the tribe of Judah, the clan of the Zerahites, the household of Zabdi, and the family of Carmi = Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, from Judah
 - b. **note:** exactly *how* the guilty tribe, clan, etc. is discovered is unknown – some suggest that Joshua used the Urim and Thummim of the priests to “divine” the answer, or it may have been direct
2. so Joshua, *confronts* Achan and calls for him to “*give glory*” to God and “*give praise*” to him, which can actually be translated as “make confession” – **i.e.** tell *the Lord* what you have done
 - a. Achan confesses his sin: he took a beautiful cloak, 200 shekels of silver, and 50 shekels of gold, and buried them under his tent – he undoubtedly assumed *no one would see what he had done*
3. **principle: you cannot hide your sin from the all-seeing eyes of the Lord – all sin will be revealed before the awesome day of God’s judgment (Proverbs 15:3; Luke 8:17)**

“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good ... For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”

III. The Judgment of Achan (Joshua 7:22-26)

Content

a. the details of his execution

1. Joshua sends messengers to locate the stolen booty from Achan’s tent – which they find
2. Joshua takes Achan *and his entire family and all of his possessions* out to the Valley of Achor
 - a. **note:** all of Israel goes with him to this place – this is a ***national act of justice***
3. Joshua condemns Achan for bringing “*trouble*” upon Israel – the Lord now brings trouble on him
 - a. all of Israel stones and burns Achan and his family (note the plural “*them*” in **v. 25b**)
 1. **i.e.** all of Israel brings punishment down on the man; no one individual acted as executioner
 - b. all of Israel buries him and his incinerated possessions under a “great heap of stones”
 1. **i.e.** another stone-heap memorial for the people of Israel (as at the Jordan in **4:20ff**)

b. the reason for his execution

1. **question:** doesn’t it seem to you like a bit of an *overkill* to execute Achan (and his family!) and to burn all of his possessions *just for taking a few trinkets out of Jericho*?
 - a. **(again)** our *modern* sensibilities are (often) offended by the *severity* of such punishment
 - b. and, it causes many preachers (even!) to “rethink” the God of the OT: “well, that was for *another time* and doesn’t apply *to us*, especially since Jesus came to show God’s love to us”
2. **principle: there is no sin too trivial in the eyes of a holy God**
 - a. the revelation of God in Scripture, and the substance of the gospel itself, is fundamentally about the awesome and absolute holiness of our Creator – not about *us*, but about *him*
 - b. thus, the communal life of the church is to be absolutely about ***a pursuit of holiness***
 1. **true, we don’t stone the sinners in our midst!**
 2. **but, we must comprehend the awesome nature of a holy God, and seek to conform our lives to his absolute standards of righteousness – both in a continuing faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ and in the taking-up of our cross of obedience**
3. Achan is a *distraction* to the people following Yahweh, and an example of the terrible consequences of disobedience – **let us not be distracted!**