

Joshua

The LORD is Salvation

Chapter 7 *Achan's Sin*

Chapter 7 begins with the adversative conjunction "but" indicating what's ahead is not good. Followers of God (Jews and Christians alike) are most vulnerable immediately after victory. Consider Peter's greatest defeat ^{Matthew 16:21-23} following his greatest victory ^{Matthew 16:13-19}.

7:1 The LORD held all of Israel accountable for the sin of one man named Achan ^{v.10-12, Joshua 6:17-19}. His sin was the taking of some of the "devoted things" ^{1 Chronicles 2:7} (*cherem*: accursed things). The mention of Achan's ancestry ^{v.16-18} shows the multigenerational effect of sin ^{Numbers 14:18}, and probably also referring back to Judah's previous immoral sin with Tamar ^{Genesis 38:15-30}.

7:2-3 Unaware of God's anger, Joshua sent some scouts from Jericho to the next targeted city, *Ai* (ruin) (15 miles NW of Jericho, near *Beth Aven*: house/wickedness and *Bethel*: house/God). The spies returned from the small town of *Ai* (twelve thousand inhabitants ^{Joshua 8:25}) to tell Joshua of their confidence that it could be conquered with only "two to three thousand men".

In physical & spiritual battles, fear makes the enemy seem bigger, pride makes them smaller.

7:4-5 To their great surprise, the 3,000 men Joshua sent were defeated by the men of *Ai*, because the Israelites went into battle in their own human strength (i.e., without the LORD ^{Leviticus 26:17}). The men of *Ai* killed "about thirty-six" (the square of man's number) of the Israelite soldiers as they were chased out of and away from the city. The defeat created great fear throughout the Israelite camp ^{Genesis 42:28, Isaiah 13:7}, and "the hearts of the people melted" ^{Ezekiel, 21:7, Nahum 2:10} (humanly, confidence can change to uncertainty in the blink of an eye ^{Mark 9:24}).

This defeat is similar to an earlier setback against the Amalekites/Canaanites ^{Numbers 14:36-45}.

Why was Joshua unaware of "the Lord's anger" ^{v.1}? Was he right to continue the attack plans? Did God withdraw His promise that "No one will be able to stand up against you" ^{Joshua 1:5}? Earlier God informed Moses the promise was contingent on Israel's actions ^{Deuteronomy 11:22-23}. Also, Joshua failed to follow the Lord's directive that he must always "stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him" ^{Numbers 27:18-21}. Joshua was overconfident after

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successfully conquering Jericho, and continued his military campaign before consulting God. As a result, the Israelites were defeated at Ai, because the LORD withdrew from them.

7:6-7 After the defeat at Ai, Joshua went into mourning. He exhibited many of the typical Jewish acts of grief/humility: torn clothes ^{Genesis 37:29, Acts 14:14}, face on ground ^{2 Samuel 13:31, Luke 5:12} and dust on head ^{Job 2:12, Lamentations 2:10}. Joshua then questioned the “Sovereign Lord” ^{Numbers 14:3} like many people do in times of trial ^{Exodus 5:22}, and in a very similar way to the Israelites (e.g., when they were facing the Red Sea with Pharaoh’s army in pursuit ^{Exodus 14:10-12}). Joshua then questioned himself, which really illustrated a lack of trust in the LORD.

God honors coming to Him in genuine humility following a sin ^{2 Samuel 12:13,16-25, 1 John 1:9}, but His highest desire is for His followers to humbly come to him prior to facing a battle ^{Joshua 5}.

7:8-9 Coming to his senses, Joshua cried out to the LORD on what to do next. However, in another human thought, he realized their fear advantage ^{Joshua 2:9, 5:1} over the pagans was shattered. Joshua also recognized the Israelites had disgraced the name of God ^{Psalms 20:7, 79:9, Daniel 2:20}.

7:10-12 The LORD instructed Joshua to stand ^{Ephesians 6:10,13}, because it was not a time for grieving, but a time for addressing Israel’s sin. He told Joshua the reason for their defeat against Ai was their violation of His covenant ^{v.15, Deuteronomy 11:22-23}, by taking some of the “devoted things” (firstfruits ^{Exodus 23:16}). The LORD told Joshua the “destruction” of Israel would come at the hands of their enemies ^{Leviticus 26:17}, who they would not be able to face because their sin ^{Leviticus 26:37}, had separated them from God ^{Psalms 44:9, 60:10}. They must purge the sin of Israel. ^{1 Corinthians 5:6}

Ultimately, Achan’s sin involved his stealing what rightfully belonged to the LORD ^{Acts 5:1-10}.

The sin of one man can damage the lives of many. For example, David’s disobedience in his unauthorized census of the Israelite military led to the death of 70,000 men ^{2 Samuel 24}.

7:13 The LORD commanded Joshua to have the Israelites redo their preparations, by consecrating themselves ^{Leviticus 11:44, Joshua 5:1-12}. God’s soldiers cannot prepare in the midst of a battle, they must get ready ^{Ephesians 6:10-18}, then they can fight for God successfully, without worry.

7:14-15 The LORD instructed them on what to do after their consecration. Each tribe was to come to Joshua ^{1 Samuel 10:19}, who would receive discernment from the LORD ^{Proverbs 16:33, Jeremiah 17:10} on which clans and families would come forward, until the sinful man was revealed. The man of disgrace and “all that belong[ed] to him” would be destroyed by fire ^{Jeremiah 43:12, Hebrews 12:29}.

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7:16-18 The LORD's instructions were carried out. Under the omniscient guidance of the LORD, the guilty man was revealed: "Achan son of Carmi/Zimri/Zerah ^{Numbers 26:20}, of the tribe of Judah".

Judah was the tribe of royalty ^{Genesis 49:8-12}, but they also had a history of disgrace ^{Genesis 38}.

7:19 Being guided by the LORD, Joshua confronted Achan, instructing Achan to give God "praise" (could also be translated: "confess" to God). Joshua then commanded Achan to 'come clean'.

The main purpose for mankind is to glorify God ^{Psalms 86:12, Luke 2:20, Romans 1:5-6}. Man's life in this creation is a test ^{Hebrews 12:7-11} - providing an opportunity to accept ^{1 John 3:16} or reject Jesus.

7:20-21 Having watched the procession of all of the tribes, and then seeing Joshua follow his lineage right down to him, Achan knew he was caught, and proceeded to tell what he had taken and where it would be found, hoping for mercy. (Note: *Shinar* is Hebrew for Babylon ^{Genesis 11:2}).

Achan's actions followed the normal progressive steps of sin ^{James 1:14-15} that can be seen in other Biblical stories and in life today: (1) he saw, (2) he coveted, (3) he took and (4) he hid. Eve's garden sin ^{Genesis 3} and David's sin with Bathsheba ^{2 Samuel 11} also followed the pattern.

Eight men in the Bible are quoted as having said "I have sinned": Pharaoh ^{Exodus 9:27, 10:16}, Balaam ^{Numbers 22:34}, Saul ^{1 Samuel 15:24,30, 26:21}, David ^{2 Samuel 12:13, 24:10,17}, Shimei ^{2 Samuel 19:20}, Judas ^{Matthew 27:4} & the prodigal son ^{Luke 15:18,21}. Can you tell who was sincere and who was not?

7:22-23 Joshua sent messengers to Achan's tent to check the truth of his story, to recover the stolen articles from the tent and to return them to God, by spreading "them out before the LORD".

7:24-26 All of Israel, led by Joshua, executed the judgement of God, because they would also have being held accountable had they not purged the sin from their nation. However, before carrying out the sentence for violating the covenant of the holy LORD, Joshua asked the rhetorical question: Why? Stoning was the prescribed sentence for this type of sin ^{Leviticus 24:23}; therefore, Achan and all that lived in his household were stoned and their bodies, the stolen articles and all of their belongings were burned up, in order to completely purge the sin. All of Israel made a large rock monument on top of the ashes as a reminder ^{Joshua 4:4-7} of what had happened; the place was named the Valley of *Achor* (meaning trouble, but later a "door of hope" ^{Hosea 2:15}).

This is not the only example of a sinner being destroyed along with everyone and everything associated with him. Other examples include: the rebellion of Korah ^{Numbers 16:25-34}, the fall of Haman ^{Esther 9:13-14} and the men whose false testimony put Daniel in the lions' den ^{Daniel 6:24}.

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