

The Sin That Troubles You

Joshua 7:1-26

Introduction

Joshua and the people were called to occupy the Land. They were called to live lives of repeat victories; but would now suffer their first devastating setback in the new Land. What happens when Christians sin?

Joshua wanted to divide Canaan—beginning at Jericho—continuing with Ai, proceeding to Bethel, and Gibeon and Beth-horon (chapter 10). When the southern cities were subdued, Joshua could turn his attention to the northern strongholds and possess the land. Joshua would suffer a set back at Ai and experience deception by the leaders of Gibeon that would cost Israel dearly.

But the strategy was sound. Divide and conquer. Make sure the enemies could not unite and form a coalition of forces against Israel.

In war—almost everything depends on strategy and resources. Each battle is critical.

Possessing the land meant conquering those who occupied the land. **I thought the Promised Land was supposed to be a place of rest and peace! Yes—but it is also a place of campaign and conflict.** The Christian life has conflicts—battles! A battle is a single engagement. A campaign is a series of engagements. What if the Christian life—was determined by loss in a single battle? We may lose battles—but we will win the war.

The Lord had spelled out the terms; promises of repeat victories; “no man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life” (Joshua 1:5); “I will be with you” “I will not leave or forsake you” (v.6); be strong and of good courage (vv.6,7,9); do not depart from the Book of the Law (1:9). The spoils of Jericho were dedicated to the Lord and were to be placed in His treasury (6:18-19). Achan disobeyed the Lord and his disobedience would have profound effects on everyone.

Sin will sometimes do that. Sin can effect an entire nation; a community; a church; a family. We may sin alone—but are sin rarely remain alone.

Sin brings judgment. It brought immediate judgment on Satan (Rev.12:7) and will someday doom Satan in hell forever (Matt.25:41; Rev. 20:10). Sin brought physical death to Adam and Eve and all their offspring (Gen. 5:5; Psalm 90:10). Sin brings disorder and pain to nature. The Bible teaches that for the Christian sin results in a loss of light (1John 1:6); joy (Psalm 51:12); and then righteousness slips away, love erodes, fellowship suffers, confidence is shaken and there is even the possible loss of health and physical life (1 Cor.11:30).

Suffering Defeat (vv.1-5)

Joshua 7:1–5 (NKJV) But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel.

Sin does not go unnoticed by God. People recoil from an angry God. The holiness of God requires a deep and abiding animosity towards evil.

2Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, “Go up and spy out the country.” So the men went up and spied out Ai.

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3And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.”

Some have suggested that perhaps Joshua acted prematurely.

Joshua sent the spies and the spies reported on their observations. They saw a small settlement. Limited numbers. What looked like an easy target. Ai likes its name was small.

Remember Jericho fell through faith and miracle. It could be there was a touch of self-confidence, a reliance on human wisdom, impatience a lack of proper spiritual preparation; the absence of prayer and the absence of specific instructions from the Lord.

But there was something else. There was secret sin in the camp. Something was terribly wrong. Not to known to all—but known to some!

4So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai.

5And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.

What’s happening? Instead of fear gripping the hearts of the enemy as in Jericho, fear gripped the hearts of the children of Israel. Their hearts melted and became like water!

They suffered an embarrassing defeat. All battles are either won, or lost or there is a draw—a stalemate. When we win—it is exciting—invigorating—encouraging inspiring. When we lose it is depressing and discouraging and disappointing. To draw is dangerous—we must seek to win.

In Jericho there was a great victory. In Ai there was a devastating defeat. Heights are dangerous places. After the Dove comes the Devil (the Holy Spirit Baptism and the temptations in the wilderness). We are given clues in this first failure in the land. Self-confidence and covetousness are twin terrors that feed failure and insure defeat.

Self-confidence is placing self at the center of the solution. This becomes a denial of having Jesus as the center and the solution.

Sensing Discouragement (vv.6-9)

6Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads.

How does Joshua respond? He tears his garments (a sign of deep distress); he falls to the earth (a sign of deep humility) before the ark of the Lord (the presence of God) until evening (he literally devoted the whole day to prayer).

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Joshua is not alone. A united leadership participates in acts of repentance. They put dust or ashes on their heads.

The weapons of our warfare remain spiritual and not carnal. The armor we wear has been worn down the centuries. Our enemy has always been the world and the flesh and the devil. Our equipment has always been truth, righteousness, peace and faith and salvation.

Paul wore this armor and the apostles; Augustine and Bunyan and Calvin and Luther and Wesley and Spurgeon and Gurnall. There is a reason Bunyan called his allegory “The Holy War” and Gurnall “The Christian in Complete Armor.”

The metaphors of combat are lost on the current culture and this generation. Our fathers fought a revolutionary war, and a civil war and two world wars.

Paul told Timothy (2:3) “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

7And Joshua said, “Alas, Lord God, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!”

Joshua’s statement is a sign of deep discouragement. Joshua intimates a retreat and a return to the other side of the Jordan. A willingness to settle for less. A lot less.

8O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies?

9For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?”

To Joshua’s credit an appeal is made to the reputation of God and the glory of God and the testimony of the surrounding nations than his own discouragement or defeat.

Wiersbe writes; “It is a mark of true spirituality when God’s glory is what motivates a servant’s life” (*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines of the Old Testament p. 218*).

Sin Discovered (vv.10-18)

10So the Lord said to Joshua: “Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?”

11Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff.

The Lord speaks to Joshua. And reveals to Joshua that Israel has sinned.

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It is interesting that the Lord does not at first reveal the individual but rather states plainly “Israel has sinned”. How could one man’s sin have such corporate consequences? Once again we are reminded of the heartbreaking truth that one person’s sin and transgression can have catastrophic consequences for the community.

1 Corinthians 12:12; “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many are one body, so also is Christ.”

The sin incorporates transgression of the covenant; possession of that which is forbidden; and deception in the camp.

12Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.

Transgression of the covenant, possession of that which is forbidden and deception in the camp results in judgment and destruction.

13Get up, sanctify the people, and say, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the Lord God of Israel: “There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.”’

The Lord is clear—there is an accursed thing in your midst—O Israel—and therefore no victory for Israel until the sin in the camp is discovered and judged.

There’s a Jewish proverb that says—‘there are three men who receive no pity—an unsecured creditor, a hen-pecked husband and a man that does not try again.’

The Lord God provides a remedy for sin!

14In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the Lord takes shall come according to families; and the family which the Lord takes shall come by households; and the household which the Lord takes shall come man by man.

15Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing 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 a disgraceful thing in Israel.’ ”

16So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.

17He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites; and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken.

18Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

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Achan thought he could hide his sin. God saw what happened.

What exactly is happening? The possession of the accursed thing was defiling the whole camp. God refused to dwell with His people in peace. Ai was a huge loss. It may be that Joshua and the priests sought God's guidance and Word—but it may have been through the instruments known as the Urim and Thumim—that God spoke and revealed in a supernatural way the presence of something wrong. They may have cast lots.

In the New Testament some of us are familiar with the story of Ananias and Sapphires. The Lord supernaturally revealed to Peter that there was sin in the new and growing church.

Sin Destroyed (vv.19-26)

19 Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."

20 And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done:

21 When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

Achan's confession is a kind of anatomy of sin. "I saw" "I coveted" "and took" and "hid" the spoils of Jericho.

It follows the pattern of the first sin. Eve in the Garden of Eden—saw and desired and took and did eat and gave (Genesis 3:6). It is the pattern of sin—in the stories of Lot and Sampson and David and Judas! The diagnosis and prognosis of sin is given in James 1:14-15; "Each person is tempted (tested) when he is lured, and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it full-grown, brings forth death."

The sin is not in the test—but in yielding to the lie. The outward object has no power to make us fall—it is the inward lust—the internal affection for that which is forbidden. And so it is since the sun first rose and set in Eden—human beings seek out that which is hidden—desire what is forbidden—and yield or submit to satisfy their curiosity or lust.

The presence of the Babylonian garment indicates the presence of trade with Babylon by the people of Jericho. But the sin again is twofold—not simply taking what was forbidden—but in that very act Achan robbed God (it was dedicated to God's treasury).

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it.

23 And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord.

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24 Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor.

Achor means trouble.

In Hosea 2:15-16 another mention is made of this valley: “I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, As in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.”

The Valley of Trouble will become the door of hope—in what way? The trouble Israel experiences will become the door or the threshold of restoration!

The children of Israel have experienced great trouble for her rejection of Christ. But one day Israel will return to Christ and find in Jesus hope (see Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines of the Old Testament p. 219).

What is the sin that troubles you?

25 And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day.” So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

26 Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day.

Critics are disturbed with God’s radical dealing with sin. Critics see the harm caused by human anger. Henry Ward Beecher said, “A man who does not know how to be angry does not know how to be good. And a man that does not know how to be shaken to his heart’s core with indignation over things evil is either a fungus or a wicked man.”

The question is asked; “Why does everyone have to die?” Why kill Achan’s wife; his children; his live-stock? Why burn and bury everything? Clearly the whole family knew about the sin and conspired with Achan to disobey God. The garment, the gold and the silver were buried in the tent. Achan may have been the one who stole the goods but his whole family became complicit in the crime.

All of them were to be judged for their sin. Again someone might say; In proverbs 28:13 we read “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

Why didn’t Achan receive mercy? He confessed his sin. Yes he confessed his sin but only after his sin was revealed. His sin resulted in the deaths of 36 men (see verse 5).

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Conclusion

Don't hide your sin.

You can repent and return.

Joshua suffered defeat. So did David and Peter and Mark.

Joshua will attack again.

What was the cause of the failure? Sin. In this instance self-confidence—and secret sin.

What are the consequences of sin? Discipline and sometimes death.

What is the remedy for sin? A confrontation with the Lord—confession, repentance and restoration.