

Achan: The Troubler Of Israel

“And the sons of Carmi; Achan, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the thing accursed” (1 Chronicles 2:7).

Israel Defeated

“But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of Yahweh was kindled against the children of Israel. And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few. So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.



Joshua Laments

And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of Yahweh until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord Yahweh, wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?

Israel Has Sinned

And Yahweh said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith Yahweh Elohim of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you. In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which Yahweh taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which Yahweh shall take shall come by households; and the household which Yahweh shall take shall come man by man. And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of Yahweh, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

The Troubler Of Israel Found Out

So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought the family 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: and 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. And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to Yahweh Elohim of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: when I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

Achan Stoned To Death

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before Yahweh. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? Yahweh shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So Yahweh turned from the fierceness of His anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day” (Joshua 7:1-26).

Introduction

1. The account of Achan (the troubler of Israel) can be divided into five parts:
 - a. Israel defeated. Israel, now under the leadership of Joshua, had been given a great victory over the great city of Jericho. They now sought to take the small city of Ai. Being confident, there went only about three thousand men against Ai. However, they were routed by the men of that city, and even thirty six men were killed (**Joshua 7:1-5**).
 - b. Joshua laments. Joshua and the elders of Israel are greatly distressed and bewildered by their defeat and lament greatly before the Lord. From their point of view, it would have been better to have dwelt on the east of Jordan than to have come over only to be defeated by their enemies. And what would become of God's reputation and great name when all His enemies see that He cannot defend His own people?! (**Joshua 7:6-9**).
 - c. Israel has sinned. The Lord now reveals the reason for their defeat: the city of Jericho and all that was in it was to be destroyed, and all its goodly things were to be devoted to the Lord (**Joshua 6:18-19**), but someone had taken some of the devoted things for himself (the name of the offender is not named at this time), and Israel would not be able to stand before their enemies until the offender had been removed from among them (**Joshua 7:10-15**).
 - d. The troubler of Israel found out. When Achan was confronted by Joshua, Achan confessed to his crime and revealed that the goods were hidden in his tent (**Joshua 7:16-21**).
 - e. Achan stoned to death. So, based on his confession and having found the goods in his tent, he was stoned to death (**Joshua 7:22-26**).
2. Paul says that the things written aforetime were "written for our learning" (**Romans 15:4**), and many things that happened are recorded for our instruction (**1 Corinthians 10:11**). So let us see what lessons we can glean from this account.
3. Lesson outline:
 - a. Achan's Desire.
 - b. Achan's Disobedience.
 - c. Achan's Detection.
 - d. Achan's Punishment.

1. ACHAN'S DESIRE

"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (**Luke 12:15**).

- a. God had placed a ban on the city of Jericho: the city and all that were in it were to be destroyed and all its spoil was to be dedicated to the Lord (i.e., put into His treasury). Achan would not have been ignorant of this ban (**Joshua 6:17-19**).
- b. Despite the ban, when Achan saw the spoils, he coveted them. He later confessed: "I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them..." (**Joshua 7:12**). Sin often begins with an unlawful desire brought on by what we see:
 - 1) Eve "saw that the tree was good for food" (**Genesis 3:6**).
 - 2) King Ahaz of Judah "saw an altar that was at Damascus", and arranged for one like it to be built at Jerusalem (**2 Kings 16:10**).
 - 3) David "saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon" (**2 Samuel 11:2**).
 - 4) Simon "saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given", and he attempted to buy the power of the apostles (**Acts 8:18**).

- c. Covetousness is unlawful desire. It is a “greedy desire to have more” (Thayer). Covetousness is an expression of one’s discontentment and unthankfulness.
- 1) When Achan **saw** the goodly Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, then he **coveted** them (**Joshua 7:12**). Remember, he knew such spoil was under the ban (**Joshua 6:17-19**)!
 - 2) Eve had, no doubt, seen the fruit of the forbidden tree before, but now she was **seeing** it in a new light. Satan had promised that by eating the fruit she would “be like God” (**Genesis 3:5**). And so **coveting** to be like God, she ate (**Genesis 3:6**). Remember, Eve knew that eating the fruit of that tree was forbidden (**Genesis 3:2-3**).
 - 3) When Ahaz **saw** the altar he had a copy made and set up in the Temple in Jerusalem (**2 Kings 16:10**). This was because he **coveted** the help of the Syrian gods (**2 Chronicles 28:22-23**). Remember, Ahaz knew that idolatry was forbidden by God (**Exodus 20:1-6**).
 - 4) When David **saw** Bathsheba bathing, seeing her form and beauty, he lusted or **coveted** her (**2 Samuel 11:1-4**). Remember, David was well aware that adultery was a sin (**Exodus 20:14, 17; 2 Samuel 12:13**).
 - 5) When Simon **saw** that the Holy Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he **coveted** the same power (**Acts 8:18-19**). Simon seemed to have a lust for power (**Acts 8:9-10**). Remember, Simon’s pretense and deceit testifies that he knew he was doing wrong.

2. ACHAN’S DISOBEDIENCE

“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (**Ephesians 5:6**).

- a. Achan “took of the accursed thing” (**Joshua 7:1**). After being found out, he confessed: “When I **saw** among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I **coveted** them, and I **took** them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it” (**Joshua 7:21**). Notice the progression: “I saw”, “I coveted”, “I took”. The covetous person is always an easy prey for the Devil. Although a person may sin in ignorance, Achan sinned in a willful manner. He knew he was disobeying God.
- b. All disobedience is serious.
- 1) God rejected Saul as Israel’s king because he was disobedient to His commandment (**1 Samuel 15:1-28**).
 - 2) A certain man of God was slain by a lion because he was disobedient to the commandment of God (**1 Kings 13:11-26**).
 - 3) The Israelites were taken into captivity because they were disobedient and rebelled against God, casting His law behind their backs, and they slew His prophets who testified against them (**Nehemiah 9:26-27**).
- c. Why did Achan despise the commandment of God? If we love God, then we will keep His commandments (**Deuteronomy 10:12**). Pride and selfishness make us “forget” God’s word and distort our thinking and attitudes, and allows Satan to blind us.

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and **every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward**; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?” (**Hebrews 2:1-4**).

3. ACHAN’S DETECTION

“But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out” (**Numbers 32:23**).

- a. All the spoils of Jericho were to be dedicated to the Lord, i.e., put into the Temple treasury (**Joshua 6:18**). But Achan stole a goodly Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, and hid in the earth, in the midst of his tent (**Joshua 7:1, 21**). It is amazing that a man that had just witnessed the power of God in the destruction of Jericho could conceive of stealing what the Lord had set apart for Himself! It is also amazing, in view of the Lord’s presence, that he thought he could get away with his theft.

b. God is all knowing (1 John 3:20).

- 1) God is fully aware of all that we do; there isn't anything that escapes the Lord's notice (2 Chronicles 16:9; Proverbs 5:21; 15:3; cp. Matthew 10:29).
- 2) Moses once said, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).
 - (i) Abraham lied about his wife's identity – he was exposed (Genesis 12:10-20),
 - (ii) The elders of Israel were secretly worshipping idols – they were exposed (Ezekiel 8:5-12),
 - (iii) and of course Achan was exposed.
- 3) But someone might say, "There are people that sin in secret that never get caught". Paul wrote, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to the judgment; and some men they follow after" (1 Timothy 5:24). So you may think you're getting away with it, but God will bring it to light on the Day of Judgment: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13).

c. It was through what seems to have been a long process that Achan was exposed: (i) The twelve tribes were brought and the tribe Judah was chosen, (ii) The clans of Judah were brought and the clan of Zerah was chosen, (iii) The families of Zerah came forward and the family of Zimri was chosen, (iv) Every member came forward until Achan was identified as the troubler of Israel (Joshua 7:16-19). Some people wonder why God made Joshua go through this long process: perhaps it was to give Achan an opportunity to come forward and confess his sin or perhaps it was to impress upon the congregation that God is omniscience and that "your sins will find you out".

4. ACHAN'S PUNISHMENT

"Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" (Lamentations 3:39).

- a. We must remember that God already knew who had brought trouble on Israel (Joshua 7:1) and had already determined his punishment: "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, **except ye destroy the accursed from among you**" (Joshua 7:12), and: "**And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath**: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel" (Joshua 7:15).
- b. Having been identified as the troubler of Israel, Joshua calls on Achan to "give... glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me" (Joshua 7:19). Achan promptly confesses that he has sinned against God and stolen what was dedicated to Him (Joshua 7:20-21). Some have wondered whether he was truly repentant. I don't know, but either way he still had to suffer the consequences of his sin. Don't forget, it was because of his greed that thirty-six men were killed (Joshua 7:5). Note how they gathered all the evidence – they went to his tent and brought them out for all to see (Joshua 7:22-23).
- c. The verdict was passed and Achan was stoned to death, all that he had was burned, "and they raised over him a great heap of stones" (Joshua 7:25-26).

Lessons

There are many lessons we can learn from this account and we have listed only four; one from each section. Perhaps you are able to see lessons of your own, in which case I encourage you to write them down.

1. From the very beginning Satan has sought to lead people into sin through three avenues: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). God has graciously set a limit on Satan's power so that we cannot be tempted beyond that which we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). However, we must do our part:

Contentment is the water that puts out the fire of covetousness; therefore learn to be content (1 Timothy 6:7-8; Philippians 4:11).

- a. By overcoming the lust of the flesh: (i) Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (**Galatians 5:16**), (ii) Do not make provision for fulfilling the flesh (**Romans 13:14**), (iii) put on the whole armor of God (**Ephesians 6:10-20**).
 - b. By overcoming the lust of the eyes: (i) be content with what you have (**1 Timothy 6:7-8**), (ii) learn to be content (**Philippians 4:11**), and make a covenant with your eyes (**Job 31:1; Psalms 119:37**).
 - c. By overcoming the pride of life. At its heart, pride is to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think (**Romans 12:3**). The antidote to pride is humility. “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (**1 Peter 5:5**).
2. Achan knew full well the commandment of God and yet still he disobeyed.
- a. Pride and selfishness is at the root of disobedience. Every time we disobey the Lord we reveal a love that is not yet perfect. Jesus said, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments” (**John 14:15**), and, “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (**John 14:23**).
 - b. John has much to say about love. We can only love as we ought when we understand the love of God toward us: “We love Him, because He first loved us” (**1 John 4:19**).
 - c. Each one of us needs to spend time studying the New Testament and learning about God’s love for us, which will then prompt us to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (**Deuteronomy 6:5**).
3. Achan, no doubt, understood that he could not hide his sin from God, but he thought he could hide it from everyone else. Achan’ pride and selfishness blinded him to the fact that he must give an account to God someday, and it was far from his mind that the “someday” would come quicker than he thought. Through what must have been a long process, Achan was identified as *the troubler of Israel*. You see, his sin had consequences that he didn’t foresee. It was because of his greed that thirty-six men were killed (**Joshua 7:5**). So three main lessons here:
- “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? Saith Yahweh. Do not I fill heaven and earth? Saith Yahweh” (Jeremiah 23:24).
- a. Pride and selfishness distort and cloud our thinking and blind us to what we are doing (**Psalms 10:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 2:11**).
 - b. Sin often has consequences of which we are unaware (e.g., **Exodus 20:5**).
 - c. Your sin will always find you out (**Numbers 32:23**); if not in this life, at the judgment (**1 Timothy 5:24**).
4. Achan was rightly punished for his sin. Come the Day of Judgment, it is an absolute certainty that each person will be punished for the sins committed in the body (**Romans 2:1-11**). The time to repent and seek forgiveness is now (**2 Corinthians 6:2**). Even so, there are sins we commit in this life of which we may still suffer the consequences, e.g., one might commit murder and afterward obey the gospel, but, nonetheless, will still have to serve a life sentence in prison.

Application

1. **Prevention is better than cure.** Ideally, of course, we do not want to sin in the first place. So what steps can we take to prevent ourselves from sinning? (i) Guard your heart (**Proverbs 4:23**), (ii) Let the word dwell in you richly (**Colossians 3:16; Psalms 119:3, 9, 11, 101, 133**), (iii) Pursue holiness (**2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; Hebrews 12:14**).
2. **Repent or perish.** We all sin (**Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8**), “and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (**1 John 2:1**). But here we are talking about (i) those sins in which we persist, our secret sins (**Psalms 90:8**) (some too shameful to mention!); sins in which we walk, and (ii) sins we occasionally commit and hide from others; sins that we have no intention of confessing. Achan is an example of one who committed a sin in secret and had no intention of confessing it. Don’t be a fool like Achan, repent of your secret sins today because your sins will find you out, if not in this life, then certainly at the Judgment (**1 Timothy 5:24**).

3. The consequences of sin are often far greater than we think. When Achan stole those treasures, I wonder what went through his mind regarding the consequences? I don't know, but it is often the case that we don't think about the wider consequences of sin. Perhaps because we convince ourselves that we won't get caught.
 - a. Sin and the often unknown, wider consequences:
 - 1) Could Adam and Eve have ever known all the consequences of their sin? They suffered personally (**Genesis 3:16-19**), all of mankind suffers (**Romans 5:12-14**), and the creation itself suffers (**Genesis 3:17-18; Romans 8:18-22**).
 - 2) Could David have ever have known all the consequences of sin? His sin caused the enemies of God to blaspheme Him (**2 Samuel 12:14a**), the child born to Bathsheba would die (**2 Samuel 12:14b**), and the sword would not depart from his house (**2 Samuel 12:10-12**).
 - 3) Could Eli have ever know all the consequences of sin (failed to discipline his sons)? Eli's son were very wicked (**1 Samuel 2:12-17**), but Eli failed to restrain them (**1 Samuel 3:13**). Now consider the consequences: "Therefore, Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: I promised that your branch of the tribe of Levi would always be My priests. But I will honor those who honor Me, and I will despise those who think lightly of Me. The time is coming when I will put an end to your family, so it will no longer serve as My priests. All the members of your family will die before their time. None will reach old age. You will watch with envy as I pour out prosperity on the people of Israel. But no members of your family will ever live out their days. Those who survive will live in sadness and grief, and their children will die a violent death. And to prove that what I have said will come true, I will cause your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to die on the same day! Then I will raise up a faithful priest who will serve Me and do what I desire. I will establish his family, and they will be priests to My anointed kings forever. Then all of your surviving family will bow before him, begging for money and food. 'Please,' they will say, 'give us jobs among the priests so we will have enough to eat'" (**1 Samuel 2:30-36**).
 - b. Do you harbor a secret sin? How do you justify it? Do you think you will ever get caught and be exposed? If you were to be exposed, what do you imagine to be the consequences?
 - c. One thing is absolutely certain: God will expose it on the Day of Judgment (**1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10**).

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