

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 7

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 7

Joshua 7:13 – *“Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the LORD God 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.”*

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 6, the Israelites experienced a splendid miraculous victory in Jericho. It was great. But in chapter 7, the Israelites had a different and an unexpected experience. Their attempt to take Ai, which was the next city, was in marked contrast with the experience they had in Jericho. At Ai, they suffered a humiliating defeat. How could there be a defeat? Was not God with them? Had God gone back on His covenant promise with Abraham? Did the Israelites not have “the ark of the covenant of the LORD”? What went wrong? We will learn that the victory in the previous

chapter, which the Israelites had enjoyed, could be quickly impaired by disobedience on their part, even if the disobedience was committed by just a single Israelite. This teaches us something about the corporate unity of the people of God.

Broadly, chapter 7 neatly falls into the following parts, namely, a) The Anger of the LORD (v.1); b) A Humiliating Defeat (vv. 2-5); c) Wrong Prayer (vv. 6-9); d) Sanctification is the Key (vv. 10-15); e) Sanctification Exercised (vv. 16-23); and f) Punished For Sin (vv. 24-26).

We shall learn the danger of being overconfident in moments of apparent success. We are most susceptible to sin against God in times of success. The consequences of sin are terrible. It affects not only the sinner but the people in which the sinner is enjoined with by way of a covenantal relationship.

However, we shall also learn that sanctification is the key to the restoration of a broken fellowship with the LORD.

COMMENTARY

The Anger of the LORD – 7:1

The opening verse of this chapter reveals the omniscient knowledge of God. Israel was totally oblivious of the great sin that existed in the camp. They were brimming with confidence due to the ease of the conquest of Jericho.

Its opening conjunction “but” is significant. It highlights the contrast between the accounts of the previous chapter and those of this chapter. Right at the outset, the inspired writer declared that the children of Israel committed a treacherous act against God. It concerns the “accursed thing”, which was devoted or consecrated to God, and no Israelite should appropriate it for his own possession (6:18). This was stealing from God!

God deliberately named the culprit for our learning. Joshua and the people of Israel needed the entire process of elimination to find him out but not with the LORD. This is to demonstrate that all of man’s sins are known to Him. No one can hide his sins from God. The specificity of the identity of Achan was listed so that the wrong Achan would not be punished.

Achan was the son of Carmi, whose name means “vine-dresser”¹. His grandfather was Zabdi, whose name means “gift or endowment”. His great-grandfather was Zerah, whose name means “rising of the sun; brightness”. Having such beautiful ancestral names, it is strange that his father should name him “Achan”, meaning “a troubler”. He lived up to his name for he brought trouble to Israel! He took the devoted things and

the LORD was angry with the children of Israel. Although it was the sin of one family, the whole Israelite community suffered punishment for his treacherous act. What happened?

A Humiliating Defeat – 7:2-5

The next city to take was Ai, which was situated on a higher ground than Jericho – “the men **went up** and viewed Ai” (v. 2b).² Ai provided a gateway to the cities on the hills in the north and south of the land. As usual, Joshua sent men to spy the city. They returned and reported to Joshua that they could take Ai with only three thousand soldiers because the inhabitants in Ai were few. It was not necessary to involve all the people. It was true that Ai was not a big city compared to Jericho; the population was only 12,000 men and women (8:25).

The recommendation of the spies appears reasonable. But they were probably very elated by the resounding victory in Jericho (observe that Joshua sent the spies from Jericho instead of Gilgal). Bear in mind that the recommendation of only 3,000 against 12,000 would still be one against 4 enemies. These were not very good odds. But the confidence of Israel must have been strong for them to provide such a great advantage to their enemies. It is

¹ The vineyard was a dominant concept in Israel symbolizing blessing, wealth, joy, and prosperity (Dict. of OT Theology & Exegesis, vol.2, p.723)

² Abraham once pitched his tent and built an altar to the LORD near Ai (Genesis 12:8).

safe to assume that Joshua or the priests and the elders sought the guidance and direction of the LORD before this attack on Ai. For after the defeat then they sought the LORD and He readily answered them. If they had sought the LORD's will BEFORE the attack, instead of acting presumptuously, those men would not have died for the LORD would surely have answered them and told them to sanctify Israel. They were basing their military strategy purely on human judgement. Moreover, their expression, "make not all the people labour thither" (v.3) seems strange because their victory of Jericho was not at all stressful and difficult. Anyway, Joshua agreed with them, and they attacked Ai.

The warriors of Israel suffered a humiliating and shameful defeat. The men of Ai killed thirty-six Israelites as they fled from the gate of Ai running down the slope. They fled as they were chased down the slopes of the hill to Shebarim, a town nearby. They must have stumbled and tumbled on their flight downhill back to the base camp as some of them were killed. They reached the base camp, "wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (v.5).³ How ironic! It was the very same expression which Rahab said of the inhabitants of Jericho (2:11). The

tables now turned against Israel. From confidence to great fear within the heartbeat of a second was Israel's experience. How swift man changes! How transient is man's confidence!

Wrong Prayer – 7:6-9

Now Joshua was unaware that Achan had sinned by taking the things which had been consecrated to God. But Joshua knew of the LORD's promise to him from the beginning of his ministry of conquest. The LORD had promised him that he cannot fail. The LORD said in **Joshua 1:5** – "*There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*"

Joshua's prayer before the LORD should be examined in this light. Achan's sin had not only brought death and humiliation to the people of Israel but also caused Joshua and the leaders to fall into spiritual despair. When he sent the three thousand to take Ai, Joshua did not expect his men to die and be disgraced. Joshua ripped his clothes and prostrated himself on the ground before the ark of the LORD; and together with the elders of Israel, they sprinkled dust on their heads. These were expressions associated with mourning. The elders of Israel were the decision-making leadership which represents the whole nation. The ark of the LORD

³ The expression "became as water" enhances the image.

symbolized the presence of God. Joshua prayed to the LORD.

He asked the LORD three questions and interspersed them with two statements. In his first question, he complained whether God had brought the Israelites over Jordan River so He could deliver them into the hands of the Amorites to destroy them. Joshua used almost the same words as the children of Israel used when they murmured in their wilderness in the desert of Sinai (Numbers 14:2-4). He followed with a statement saying that they would have been contented to settle on the other side of Jordan. He asked the LORD the next question about what he should say to the children of Israel when they had to flee from their enemies. And again he interjected with a statement, saying that the Canaanites and all the tribes of the land would wipe out Israel's name, and connected it with the question of what would happen to the LORD'S name. These are bold words and they tell us that Joshua was deeply grieved and despondent.

Joshua was being transparently honest and spoke his mind and heart to the LORD. He and the children of Israel knew that by attacking Ai, they were doing what God wanted them to do yet why were they defeated? They failed to pray and asked the LORD for guidance before they attacked. This was a spiritual warfare and not a

carnal one. It might not be wilful disobedience in the manner which they attacked Ai, but a failure to pray and ask God for guidance. The guidance Israel needed from the LORD was not so much whether to attack Ai, for this was already part of God's revealed will, but rather the manner in which they ought to have attacked Ai. They failed because there was sin in the camp and Israel failed to pray BEFORE the attack. They were full of self confidence rather than God's confidence.

Sanctification is the Key – 7:10-15

God spoke frankly with Joshua by commanding him to "stand up" telling him that Israel had sinned. They had "transgressed" the LORD'S covenant which He commanded them for they had taken, stolen, carried away, and added them into their own possessions (v.11). That was the reason why the children of Israel "could not stand" before the enemies, and had to flee because of their sin of taking the devoted things. God would not be with them until they had destroyed "the accursed" from among them (v.12).

The questions and statements Joshua posed to the LORD might be legitimate, but the LORD did not address them. The LORD went straight to the point and pointed out that Israel's failure was because of their sin. Joshua's prayer was useless and unacceptable. Sin was the

impediment to prayer and it had to be removed before God would accept his prayer. One natural objection by most people is that why did Joshua and the children of Israel have to suffer because of the sin of one individual. But this is not how God deals with His people. There is a collective responsibility on the part of the whole community when one individual sins. Achan's sin of disobedience would have a profound effect on all the children of Israel. It was due to the covenantal relationship that every Israelite belonged to. In other words, a person's sin cannot be held in isolation and others be freed from its effect. That was how God saw the sin of Achan for it would affect the rest of the children of Israel if it was not dealt with. Israel had to be taught the seriousness of rebelling against God.

God also taught Joshua how fellowship with Him could be restored. God commanded Joshua to "sanctify the people". The first step in sanctification was to remove the sin before restoration could take place. The person who took the "accursed thing" also became "accursed" himself, and had to be punished. God instructed Joshua the process of finding out the culprit. He should group the people according to their tribes, clans and families. The LORD Himself would indicate which tribe, clan, and family. How it was actually done is not shown. When the culprit had been

identified, he and his family including all that they had would have to be destroyed by fire. The reason was because he had broken the covenant of the LORD, and had acted disgracefully in Israel. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God for God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 10:31; 12:29).

Sanctification Exercised – 7:16-23

Having heard the LORD'S instructions, Joshua obediently carried out what the LORD had told him to do. The next day, Joshua got up early in the morning. He called out all the tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. From the tribe of Judah, the clan of Zarhites was taken. Then from the clan of Zarhites, each man at a time was called out, and the families of Zabdi were taken. The same was done to the families of Zabdi, one man by one man, and then Achan, the son of Carmi was taken. Precisely how the LORD showed Joshua in identifying the culprit family is not given.

Joshua then spoke to Achan. He counselled Achan to "give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto Him" (v.19). Joshua talked to Achan like a father to his son. He called him to confess his sin and in so doing give glory to the LORD. He should not hide anything from Him. Achan willingly confessed his sin specifically. He began with a general confession that he had sinned

against the LORD God. Then he confessed precisely what he had done. He described how he sinned: “I saw,” and “I coveted,” and “took them.” He took a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels. Then he told Joshua that he had hidden them in the floor of his tent. Joshua sent men to investigate. They found them as Achan had said, and they brought them to the people, and laid them out before the LORD. It confirmed everything.

Punished for Sin – 7:24-26

Achan had committed a terrible sin. It costs the death of thirty-six Israelites, and sorrow and pain to their families. Moreover, it caused Joshua to complain to God in a moment of deep grief, and brought about humiliation and shame to the nation. Achan’s sin was not as simple as some would think. He was aware of what he did. Those things which he appropriated belonged to God. His taking of those things was tantamount to stealing from God. That was very serious. At the time when he took the things, he could have reasoned to himself that no one would know, and his taking would not hurt anyone. It is understandable why he took the silver and the gold because they had monetary value. Achan was greedy. But why did he take the Babylonian garment? In those days, Babylonian clothes were the in-thing. It was up-

market stuff and stylish, and heads would turn when he wore them. He had a taste for luxurious things. So, Achan took them because it would make him look important. His sin was just simple theft and pride. Achan was not poor, but a rich man for he had sons and daughters, and cattle, donkeys, and sheep.

Achan hid the stolen things and thought that no one would know. But God knew. He forgot that. There was nothing that he could do that God would not know. All his deeds done in darkness would be daylight to God. He was found out and he had to be punished. The soul that sins against God must surely die. All Israel stoned him and his family, and after their death, they burned all of them including their possessions. The children should not be punished for the sins of their father, and the father for the sins of his children.⁴ Apparently, his wife and children had knowledge of the theft. They could have been his accomplices by carrying and hiding the stolen goods. The Israelites then heaped a huge pile of stones over them. The place was named “the valley of Achor” (the valley of trouble). This pile of stones reminded the Israelites that hidden

⁴ Deuteronomy 24:16 The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

sins would not go unnoticed and unpunished. God was just and righteous, and would not, and could not have made a mistake in judging and punishing all of them. He could not and would not break His word.

PRACTICAL VALUE

There are practical lessons which we can learn from the study of this chapter.

In the case of Achan, God teaches an important principle about confession of sins, forgiveness and restoration of fellowship. Every person who sins must honestly confess his sin. If there is no confession of sin, there will be no forgiveness and restoration of fellowship. God has clearly declared that if we confess our sins, He is just and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). God is always forgiving but many people would rather reject God and refuse to confess and repent of their sins. They therefore will be in Hell not because God is unforgiving but because they reject God's prescribed way for cleansing of their sins and restoration of fellowship with Him. And God's way is to confess and repent, trust and receive Jesus Christ into their hearts as Lord and Saviour. Every Christian must have the spirit of forgiving as the Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:22; Luke 17:4).

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin. Achan yielded to temptation. How did he yield to temptation? He confessed that he *saw*, he *coveted*, and he *took* the "accursed thing". It was the same with Eve in the Garden: she *saw*, she *desired*, and she *took* the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6). And we know that it was the same with David when he was tempted: he *saw*, he *desired*, and he *took* the woman who was Uriah's wife (2 Samuel 11:2-4). Satan has not changed this method of tempting men, and many men have fallen prey and their lives destroyed. Paul warns (1 Timothy 6:9-12): *But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.*

Our hidden sins always bring defeat and discouragement to God's people. Hidden sin has an ill effect on our character and conduct. It leads to a deterioration of character. It dulls our sense of truth and reality of what we

say and do. We lose our integrity and truthfulness. It will affect the church. Our children will be the first to fall away. God does not bless the person who has a hidden sin. God does not bless the church, which has a hidden sin. The church has many members but they are of one body, so also is Christ. By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, whether we be rich or poor, we are one body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

An eminent Old Testament theologian says: "The Bible properly understood does not teach individualism anywhere; Old Testament continuously affirms the solidarity of God's people, the New Testament carries the same idea." The over-riding lesson learned in this chapter is that hidden sin affects the whole community of God, resulting in broken fellowship with God and the flow of His blessings. But everything can be restored if we sanctify ourselves – confess our sins, repent, fear God and walk in His ways; and thus shall God's people be blessed.

AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Joshua 7:1-9; Malachi 3:8-10.

TUESDAY: Joshua 7:10-15; Psalm 139:24; 142:1-3.

WEDNESDAY: Joshua 7:10-26; Isaiah 59:1-4; 1 Corinthians 5:6.

THURSDAY: Joshua 7:1-26; Genesis 3:6; 1 John 2:15-16.

FRIDAY: Joshua 7:1-26; 1 Corinthians 12:26; Proverbs 15:27.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do sinners hide their sins from God even though God knows all sins? Why do Christians follow suit?

2. What is the main difference between self and God's confidence? Is it wrong to have confidence in self? Explain.

3. What do you think was wrong with Joshua's prayer?

4. What did Achan the son of Carmi do? Do you think the Lord over punished Achan and his family? Explain.

5. How do the different steps in Achan's sin illustrate to us the workings of sin in our life?

6. Why does Achan still need to die AFTER he has repented of his sins? Could his life not be spared?

7. God is righteous in all His judgments. How would you explain the correctness of the punishment which God required in verse 15, and which Israel carried out against Achan and his family in verses 24-26?
