

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 7

- Vv. 1-5 *The Israelites beaten.* Achan, a man of Judah, took some of the material which was placed under the ban; and the anger of the Lord was kindled against His people. As a consequence, when they went up to fight against Ai, the men of Ai defeated the men of Israel. This was a severe blow to the morale of the people. They had crossed Jordan in high spirits, and they had overthrown Jericho completely. Any feeling of strength was drained from them as they were driven away from Ai.
- Vv. 6-15 *Joshua's complaint and the Lord's answer.* Joshua fell on his face before the Ark of the Covenant and cried to the Lord. He was distressed by the defeat which they had suffered. God told him that the defeat had come because there was sin in the midst of the people of Israel. They could not march to victory under God's leadership until they had removed the sin from among them.
- Vv. 16-21 *Achan's confession of sin.* God pointed out the sinner, and the man was confronted by his accusers. He confessed that he had coveted the Babylonish garment, shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold. He had taken them and had hidden them in the midst of his tent.
- Vv. 22-26 *The sin purged from Israel.* The men of Israel took the spoils from the tent of Achan and "laid them out before the Lord" (verse 23). The people then took Achan and stoned him to death. A great heap of stones was raised

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over the place and the spot was called the Valley of Achor — meaning the valley of trouble.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Sin is a reproach to any people* (Proverbs 15:34b). Even the victorious armies of Israel could not continue to win their battles when sin came among them. Israel had gone against Ai in great confidence. They felt they would be able to take the city without throwing all their forces against it. They had ordered only two or three thousand men to go up and smite the city. When they were utterly defeated, they learned they could not sin and walk with God. The same thing is true with nations and individuals today.
2. *Covetousness is idolatry*. Achan said he had coveted the Babylonish garment, the two hundred shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold. Covetousness is an overwhelming desire to possess something. Achan's desire to have these spoils of war led him to disobey the plain prohibition of God which stipulated nothing was to be taken as spoils of war by the people of Israel. Even today many people make shipwreck of the faith as they are lured into sin by covetousness, "which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5b).
3. *The wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23a). In these days of spiraling inflation when one round of price increase brings a round of wage increase and a round of wage increase brings a round of price increase, there is still one man whose wage is the same. That man's name is sinner, and his wage is death. Achan was stoned to death because of his sin of stealing the spoils which belonged to God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Israelites Beaten 7:1-5

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 the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel.

2 And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.

3 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 labor thither; for they are but few.

4 So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.

5 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.

1. Who was Achan? 7:1

Achan is described as the son of Carmi. The head of his family was Zabdi, who was an heir of Zerah, a leading man in the tribe of Judah. Achan is called Achar in I Chronicles 2:7, and Zabdi is called Zimri in I Chronicles 2:6. These names are very similar and are evidently forms of the same names. By this one sinful act, Achan fell into disgraceful infamy. His name became synonymous with covetousness and sin. It was especially shameful for the man to be of the tribe of Judah, the leading tribe among the people of Israel, and set this bad example. Judah led in the order of march. If Achan were a soldier and

marching in the forefront of the host of Israel, he would have access to the spoils of war before many others would reach them. Hence, as a leader, he had greater temptation. Although the value of the materials which he took were not great, the fact that his sin was committed after God had granted wonderful victories to the people and promised them full use of the land of Canaan makes it especially despicable.

2. *Where was Ai?* 7:2

This town was situated east of Bethel. Bethel was originally called *Luz* (Genesis 28:19), a place on the border of Ephraim and Benjamin (16:2; 18:13). It is frequently mentioned and was well known at a later time as the city in which Jeroboam established the worship of calves. The site was inhabited again after the captivity. Ai has been preserved in the very extensive mound called *et-Tell*, about one and one-half miles from Bethel, and on the east of the road which leads from Jerusalem to Sichem (Nablus).

We may say this of Ai:

1. It dominated the road to Jerusalem
2. It commanded the approaches to the country
3. It involved the fate of Bethel

Of the name we may say Ai means "the heap." "An everlasting tounge," says Wycliffe; in Hebrew, "*Tel*," always appears with the article, *the Tel*, or *the Heap*. For a long time modern archaeologists sought in vain for the site of Ai. A likely location was excavated in 1933 by Mme. Judith Marquet-Krause, and most recently Dr. Joseph Callaway of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. After two seasons of excavations at *Khirbet et-Tell*, a height near Deir Dibwan, Israel, Dr. Callaway reported it is now possible to dismiss speculation about locating Ai at a site other than this one ("Evidence on the Conquest of Ai," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Volume LXXXVII, Part III, September, 1968, p. 315).

3. *Where was Bethel?* 7:2b

Bethel was ancient Luz (see Genesis 28:19; cf. Genesis 12:8; 13:3, 4; 35:7). It was named by Jacob (see Genesis 28:19; 35:14, 15). This was the name used after the conquest (Joshua 16:1, 2; Judges 1:22-26). Bethel lay about one and one half miles west of Ai. The location was about twelve miles north of Jerusalem. Near here Abraham had camped (Genesis 12:8; 13:3). The name means "house of God." Bethel belonged to the Benjamites as they settled in the land, but its history was dominated by the people of Ephraim. The area is dominated by ruins now called Beitin, excavated in 1934 by a joint expedition of the Pittsburgh Zenia Theological Seminary and the American Schools of Oriental Research under the direction of William Albright.

4. *Why did the spies suggest sending only a few warriors?*
7:3

Once again Joshua had used the usual military strategy in spying out the city to be attacked. These men had gone up and looked over the situation at Ai. When they came back, they suggested it would be unnecessary to send all six hundred thousand soldiers of Israel against the city. It was their recommendation that only two or three thousand soldiers would be a sufficient force to take Ai. The basis of their suggestion was the fact that there were only a few people in the city. They were also flushed with victory at Jericho and must have felt invincible.

5. *What was the result of the attack?* 7:5

Following the advice of the spies, Joshua sent about three thousand men to attack Ai. They fled from before the people, and the men of Ai smote about thirty-six of them. They chased them away from the city and attacked them all the way down from the heights to which they had ascended. The hearts of the people of Israel now

melted and became as water even as before the hearts of the Canaanites had melted for fear of the approaching invaders.

6. *Where was Shebarim?* 7:5b

Shebarim was the name of the place where the Israelites were beaten by the men of Ai. The name comes from the root which means "to break to pieces" or "destroy." The area has not been definitely located in modern times, but it must have been somewhere near Ai on the slope which went down to the east from the height on which Ai was located.

Joshua's Complaint and the Lord's Answer 7:6-15

6 And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

7 And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, 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!

8 O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!

9 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?

10 And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?

11 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.

12 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.

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.

14 In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households; and the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man.

15 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.

7. *Did Joshua murmur against God?* 7:6-9

Joshua and the elders of the people were affected because Israel, who was invincible with the help of the Lord, had been beaten; and therefore the Lord must have withdrawn His help. In the deepest grief, with their clothes rent (Leviticus 10:6) and ashes upon their heads, they fell down before the Ark of the Lord (Numbers 20:6) until the evening. Joshua's prayer contains a complaint (verse 7) and a question addressed to God (verses 8, 9). The complaint almost amounts to murmuring and sounds very much like the complaint which the murmuring people brought against Moses and Aaron in the desert (Numbers 14:2, 3). It is very different from the murmuring of the people on that occasion, however, for it by no

means arose from unbelief. Joshua was simply asking God why Israel had been beaten.

8. *What answer did God give to Joshua? 7:10*

God told Joshua to get up off the ground. He asked him why he was lying in that way on his face before the Ark (verse 6). The time was not a time for prayer; it was a time for action. The sin had to be purged from the midst of the people. Although Joshua did not know it, the sin of Achan was the cause of Israel's defeat. When God revealed this to him, He gave him instructions about how to proceed in getting rid of this sin from the midst of the people. When this sin was removed, Israel would be strong again.

9. *What was Israel's sin? 7:11*

The whole nation was cursed because one man had sinned. For that reason God said the nation had sinned. The specific sin was Achan's taking the material which had been placed under the ban. Things which had been devoted to God to be put into the treasury of the house of the Lord had been taken by one of the men of Israel. They had stolen. Worse than this, they had stolen from God. Achan had practiced deception. The first three clauses describing this deed—their sinning, their transgressing, and their taking of the cursed thing—depict the sin which had been committed against God. The latter three statements—they had stolen, they had dissembled, and they had put the spoil in their own stuff—described the sin they had committed in the eyes of society. It was indeed a grievous crime.

10. *What was the result of their sin? 7:12*

Because they had sinned so grievously, Israel was not able to withstand the attacks of their enemies. They turned their backs before the men of Ai. All of this occurred because God had forsaken them. A spirit of defeat and terror had evidently come upon them as they fled from

before the Canaanites. What had given promise of being an easy victory was turned into an utter rout for the people of Israel. Such a surprising turn of events makes it clear that a nation needs more than munitions in order to win a victory. They must have the knowledge that they are waging a *Bellum Justum*, and they must have the will to win. Even a small number of people with this conviction and will on the field of battle can bring total victory out of a situation which would otherwise be total defeat. When God forsakes a people, they are forsaken indeed. God had forsaken Israel on account of their sin. For this reason they were chased by the men of Ai.

11. *How were the people to sanctify themselves?* 7:13

As the people of Israel stood before Mount Sinai, they were told to sanctify themselves. At that time Moses told them to wash their clothes and to interrupt their normal way of life (Exodus 19:10-15). As Joshua prepared the people for crossing the Jordan, he commanded them to sanctify themselves. On that occasion they were told to prepare victuals for the journey (Joshua 1:11). The sanctification after the defeat of Ai was something more than any of these former periods of sanctification. Israel had sinned, and it was necessary for the cursed thing to be taken from among them. The sinners had to be punished. All of this would be implied in the sanctification of the people.

12. *Into what groups were the people divided?* 7:14

The tribes, families, households, and men formed the four classes into which the people were organized. As the tribes were divided into families, so these again were subdivided into houses, commonly called fathers' houses, and the fathers' houses again into men, i.e., fathers of families. Each of these was represented by its natural head. We picture the affair as conducted in the following manner: in order to discover the tribe, the twelve princes came

before the Lord; and in order to discover the family, the family heads had to be taken; and so on through the household until the individual was selected.

Achan's Confession of Sin 7:16-21

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

17 And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarahites: and he brought the family of the Zarahites man by man; and Zabdi was taken:

18 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.

19 And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, 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.

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

21 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.

13. How were the selections made? 7:16-18

In what manner the selections were made we do not know. In all probability, little tablets or potsherds were used. The names may have been written upon them, and these drawn out of an urn. This may be inferred from a comparison of Joshua 18:11 and 19:1 with 18:6, 10. Some commentators feel it was not proper for the man to be selected by lottery, but the sacred lot involved no

chance. It was under the special direction of God. This is made clear by the statement that he was the one "which the Lord shall take" (7:14).

14. *What is the meaning of the expression "give glory to God?" 7:19*

This is a solemn formula of adjuration by which a person was commanded to confess the truth before God (see John 19:24). Joshua said also, "And give him praise." His meaning was not that he should make confession, but that he should actually give praise to God by his admission of guilt. Through his confession of the truth, Achan was to render to God, the righteous Judge of all the earth, the praise and honor which were due His name.

15. *What were the materials which Achan had taken? 7:21*

Achan had taken a garment that had been in Babylonia. He had also taken silver of two hundred shekels weight and a wedge of gold. The fact that the garment was of Babylonian style indicates the exchange of commerce between Canaan and the land to the east. The fact that it was a foreign garment would also make it more valuable. Silver was the common form of medium of exchange along with the more precious ingots of gold. Abraham had bought the field and cave of Machpelah from Ephron, the Hittite, for two hundred shekels of silver (Genesis 23:15), giving us some idea of the things which Achan could buy with the fifty shekels of gold and the two hundred shekels of silver which he had stolen. His prize was of some value, but nothing to be compared with the shame which he brought upon himself and his people.

The Sin Purged from Israel 7:22-26

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it.

23 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 the Lord.

24 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.

25 And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

26 And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.

16. *In what way were the spoils laid out "before the Lord"?*
7:23

The messengers which were sent by Joshua ran to Achan's tent and found the items in the place where he had buried them. They brought these out and put them on public display. In this way they were said to be laid out "before the Lord." They were in plain sight of all. Since these items were to have been dedicated to God and put in the treasury of the Lord, this open displaying of the items would indicate they were now to be directed towards their proper use. Since God was directing the purging of the sin from Israel, it was indeed "before the Lord" that this was done.

17. *Where was the valley of Achor? 7:24b*

The valley of Achor is located southwest of Jericho and identified with Wady Deber and Wady Mukelik. The name was given to the area on account of the sin and subsequent punishment of Achan. The word means

"trouble," and the term "valley of Achor" has become proverbial for describing a situation of distress. This expression is used by Hosea (2:15) and in this setting describes the good results which comes from discipline.

18. *Was only Achan stoned?* 7:25

The singular pronoun is used to designate Achan alone as being the principal person concerned. It is obvious enough, however, that his children and cattle were stoned from what follows in the very same verse. It is true that in Deuteronomy 24:16 the Mosaic law expressly forbids the putting to death of children for their fathers' sins; and many have imagined, therefore, that Achan's sons and daughters were simply taken into the valley to be spectators of the punishment inflicted upon the father so that it might be a warning to them. But for what reason then, were Achan's cattle (oxen, sheep, and asses) taken out along with him? Certainly for no other purpose than to be stoned at the same time as he. The law in question only referred to the punishment of ordinary criminals and therefore was not applicable at all to the present special case in which the punishment was commanded by the Lord himself.

19. *Could Achan's family have participated in the crime?*
7:24-26

Achan had fallen under the ban by laying hands upon what had been banned and consequently was exposed to the same punishment as a town which had fallen away to idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:16, 17). The law of the ban was founded upon the assumption that the conduct for which a man was to be punished was not a crime of which the individual alone was guilty, but one in which the whole family of the leading sinner and everything connected with him participated. Thus, in the case before us, the things themselves had been stolen from the booty by Achan alone; but he had hidden them in his tent, buried

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them in the earth, which could hardly have been done so secretly that his sons and daughters knew nothing of it. By doing this he had made his family participators in his theft. They, therefore, fell under the ban along with him, together with his tent, his cattle, and the rest of his property, which were all involved in the consequences of his crime.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 7

1. What town did Israel attack after destroying Jericho?
2. What was the name of the man who sinned?
3. Of what tribe was the man who sinned?
4. How many men had Joshua sent against Ai?
5. How many men of Israel were smitten in the battle?
6. What items had been stolen from the spoils?
7. Where had these stolen items been hidden?
8. What name was given to the place where the sinner was punished?
9. Were the sinner's wife and family destroyed with him?
10. Were the sinner's oxen, sheep, asses, and tent destroyed with him?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 8

Vv. 1- 8 *Plans for attacking Ai again.* After God encouraged Joshua, he laid plans for attacking Ai a second time. On this occasion he decided to use ambushes behind the city. The main attacking force was instructed to retire from before the city expecting that the men of Ai would come out to chase them. When the men of Ai were out of the city, those who had been set in ambush would be able to go in and take the city.