

The Penalty of Rejecting God's Promise

Joshua 7:1-26

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Have you ever had this experience? Your favorite sports team opens the season by playing a really good team, and they win. I mean, they just don't win, but they mop the field or floor with them. You and all your friends begin to think, "*Man, just how good is our team? They are amazing. No one is going to be able to play with them.*" Then comes the next game, and it is a push-over game, and they lose. You are stunned. What happened? How could they lose to this second-class team? Now you are not so sure about your team. You don't know what to think.

This is kind of like what happened to Israel. Because they mopped the floor with Jericho, they thought they would simply do the same to Ai. But that did not happen, and it threw them into great mourning and confusion. It caused them to doubt and blame God for the defeat.

But what was the cause of Israel's defeat? If you said "*sin,*" you would be right but specifically, what was Israel's sin?

To answer that question, we have to look back at Joshua 6. In Joshua 6:17 and v. 21, Yahweh commanded Israel to devote all of Jericho to destruction. They were not to take any of the spoils of war for themselves. Everything was to be devoted to destruction: men, women, children, animals, and any spoils of war were to be burned with fire, except for the silver and gold and the vessels of bronze and iron. Those items were devoted to the LORD'S treasury.

Essentially, Jericho was the firstfruits of an offering to Yahweh. The city was to be devoted to Yahweh alone. To take anything from Jericho was to steal from Yahweh.

So, what specifically was Israel's sin? It was the sin of stealing from what was *devoted* to God. *That was the act of sin, but sin does not begin with the act; it begins with the heart.* The sinful motivation of the heart for Israel was covetousness.

I have five points that will help us move through Joshua 7 and examine what is so famously known as Achan's sin: The problem of sin, the confusion of sin, the war on sin, the confession of sin, and the penalty of sin.

I. The Problem of Sin (vv. 1-5)

When we read the story of Israel's sin and defeat, we are told in v. 1 what the problem was. Israel had broken covenant with Yahweh in regard to the *devoted things*. Not only that, Achan is the one who broke covenant with Yahweh. At this point, as the narrative unfolds, we know more than Joshua does.

Let's consider the story in vv. 1-5. Joshua and the men of Israel are still in attack mode. He sends out spies and gets a report that Ai is just a small place and that they can take it with a small force. Instead of consulting the LORD, they form a posse and send them to Ai. They arrive at Ai, and the men of Ai kill thirty-six of the men of Israel and chase Israel's brave warriors out of town.

Now the shoe is on the other foot. Notice what the last sentence of v. 5 says, "*And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.*" Now Israel is the one whose hearts have melted. Previously, this was the condition of the hearts of the people of Canaan.

Israel is about to get another lesson in holiness. God had been giving Israel lessons in holiness for many years. Since Moses took his shoes off at the burning bush because he was standing on holy ground, God had been teaching Israel important lessons concerning His holiness.

God's holiness defines His sheer *otherness*. He is not like any of the pagan gods of the land. His holiness not only includes His moral and ethical perfections but His holiness includes the infinite perfections of all of His divine attributes. Yahweh's holiness puts Him in a class completely by Himself. There is no god like Yahweh. He is completely holy and completely separate from His creatures. As Isaiah said in Isaiah 6, "*Yahweh is holy, holy, holy.*" Israel needed another lesson in holiness.

Not only was Yahweh holy, but His people were to be holy and separate from the other nations. Yahweh's people were His special people for His possession, and therefore they were to be a display of His holiness. They were not to join in the Canaanite sin.

However, what we learn in v. 1 is by one-man sin entered the nation of Israel, and it brought death. Achan's sin was kind of like Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Just as Adam's sin infected all mankind, so Achan's sin infected the nation of Israel.

Achan's sin had created a separation between God and His people. Israel was now in the same position as the Canaanites. They were separated from God by their sin and were about to be devoted to destruction.

Israel's problem in vv. 1-5 is all of our problem, right? We all came into this world under the curse of the sin of Adam. We were all born separate from God by our sin and devoted to destruction in hell for eternity under the wrath of God. This is our condition before we are not born again.

This is the problem of sin, and there is not one person sitting here that is not affected by it. If you are not a Christian, then you are still under the power and penalty of sin and devoted to destruction. You may not know it or see it or even believe it—but you are. This is the problem of your sin, and you must go to God to have this problem resolved.

If you are a Christian, then you know you still fight against your sin. You know you are in a battle each day to fight your sin. This is sin's problem for the Christian. The Christian is free from the penalty and power of sin, but there is still a struggle to fight for holiness. *Let's keep going.*

II. The Confusion of Sin (vv. 6-9)

Now let's consider the confusion that sin causes. Remember, Joshua still does not know that Achan is the reason for Israel's defeat so, he still does not know Israel's real problem.

Look again at vv. 6-9. We need to see the confusion sin causes.

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. ⁷ And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!" ⁸ O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! ⁹ For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?"

Joshua did the right thing with his despair. He took it to God. However, his prayer seems to blame Yahweh for Israel's trouble, *"Why have You done this to us? It would have been better if You had left us on the other side of the Jordan River."* This is the first confusion that sin caused. Israel had blamed Yahweh before after they sinned.

Has sin ever confused you and caused you to pray Joshua's *"Why Prayer?"* The better question is: *Who has not been confused by sin and prayed this prayer?*

It is not uncommon for Christians, or even unbelievers, to get stuck in sin, and when they get into trouble or begin to suffer or experience some kind of distress, they go to the Lord and ask: *"Why did You allow this trouble in my life? What did I do to deserve this? I have been faithful to You all these years. You called me to this situation, and I am trying to fulfill what You have called me to do, and You allow these problems to fill my life?"*

Sin blurs our perspective. Sin distorts our understanding. Sin keeps us from seeing our trials and troubles from God's perspective. Sin blinds us to God's providence. Sin keeps us from seeking God's plan. Sin causes us not to see our situation or condition correctly. Left unaddressed, sin brings death.

Yet, it is good to come to God with the confusion caused by your sin. We should take our frustrations, our wrong prayers, our misunderstandings of God's providence, and our mangled and even wrong words to God.

Joshua's understanding of the situation may have been wrong. His words may have been wrong, but His heart's desire was for God's great name to be exalted among the nations. Joshua was concerned with the glory of God.

We can pray this way even when sin has us confused. We should take our misunderstanding to God, lay it all out before Him and ask Him to make His name holy in the situation no matter how things turn out.

Bottom line: Sin may have caused confusion in our lives, so let's take our confusion to God and be more concerned with the glory of God in the situation than our agenda.

III. The War on Sin (vv. 10-15)

In vv. 10-15, we find the art of Yahweh's war on sin. Immediately, Yahweh corrects Joshua's understanding of the situation. Let's look at two characteristics of Yahweh's war on sin.

First: We must identify our sin (vv. 10-12)

The Lord said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?" ¹¹ Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. ¹² Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.

Yahweh essentially tells Joshua that the problem is not His ability to fulfill His promises but that Israel has sinned. Israel had broken their covenant with God. Sin's confusion is now cleared up.

As a result of their sin, Israel was in the Canaanite's shoes. Now they were devoted to destruction. They were just like the Canaanites; unless they removed the devoted things, they would be destroyed.

Israel was continuing to receive lessons in holiness and separation. They were continuing to learn the seriousness of their sin.

Israel had stolen from Yahweh. They had taken some of the *devoted things* that belong to God.

Remember, all of Jericho was to be devoted to destruction, and whatever gold and silver they found were to be put in the Lord's treasury as an offering devoted to the Lord.

What we know from the narrative is that Achan had stolen some of the Lord's treasures and to steal the *devoted things* was like stealing the offering of the firstfruits from Yahweh. The destruction of Jericho was to be a kind of firstfruits offering for Yahweh.

Achan took those things and hid them under his tent, thinking no one knew he had stolen from God. He thought that even Yahweh did not know he had kept *the devoted things* for himself.

But Yahweh did know he had taken them. Let me ask you a question. Do you have any sin you think you are hiding from God?

What SIN is it you think you are getting away with in life? Is it in your finances? Is it on the internet? Is it in some relationship? Are you keeping some of the Lord's offering for yourself and not giving?

I've got good news. You will not be able to hide it from God, and this is good news. He wants to help you make war on your sin. He will address that sin in your life.

This leads us to the second characteristic of Yahweh's war on sin.

Second: God's plan for making war on our sin (vv. 13-15)

¹³ Get up! Consecrate the people and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the Lord, God of Israel, "There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you." ¹⁴ In the morning therefore you shall be brought nearby your tribes. And the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come nearby clans. And the clan that the Lord takes shall come nearby households. And the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man. ¹⁵ And he who is taken with the devoted things 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 an outrageous thing in Israel.'

Notice what He does. First, He calls His people to *consecrate* themselves. It was a call to separation and holiness. It was a call to examine one's life. God was giving them another lesson in holiness.

Israel's call to consecration was a call to repentance. He was preparing them to identify their sin and make war on their sin.

Then in vv. 14-15, we find the means by which the sin will be rooted out. Joshua will start by tribe and keep drilling down into the heart of Israel clan by clan and then family by family to find the heart of the sin.

The war on sin requires us to drill down into our hearts and find the hidden motive or the hidden desire that is at the center of the bottom of our hearts. This is the place where we hide our sin. This desire is what needs to be identified.

Look at Yahweh's war on sin in vv. 14-18, the Hebrew word *takes or taken* is used eight times. This particular Hebrew word is primarily used to refer to the *taking of the spoils of war*. We should view Yahweh's identification of the person who stole from Him as His war on sin. Listen to how it reads in vv. 14-16:

"And the tribe that the LORD takes . . . the clan that the LORD takes . . . the household that the LORD takes . . . and he who is taken with the devoted things 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 an outrageous thing in Israel."

Friends, God is still making war on our sin. Nothing has changed. No, we do not cast lots and call others out by clan or family and stone them. Instead, we do gather with God's people around God's word, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we join God to make war against our sin. We work to drill deep down in our hearts so we can repent of our sin.

We read the gospel and study God's word so that we *live lives of repentance*. This how we join God to make war on our sin.

Brothers and sisters, God's war on sin is not simply an individual war. God's war on sin is also fought by the church.

One of the key tasks of the church is to preach repentance. When we preach repentance to ourselves and to a lost and dying world, we do spiritual battle with sin as a church. When the Apostle Paul preached to the Athenians, he told them (Acts 17:30):

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Then later in Acts 26:19-20, Paul told King Agrippa:

"Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

Repentance is us joining God to make war on sin. So, if there is going to be repentance, there needs to be the confession of sin. This is what we find in vv. 16-21.

IV. The Confession of Sin (vv. 16-21)

In vv. 16-21, we see the sin, and the sinner identified. Then we hear the confession of the sin. In vv. 16-18, Joshua carries out Yahweh's plan to make war on sin, and Achan is taken as the one who stole the devoted things of God.

Then in vv. 19-21, we hear Achan's confession of sin:

Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."²⁰ And Achan answered Joshua, "Truly I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I

did: ²¹ when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

After Achan is identified, he comes out with his hands up. He does not try to deny or deflect his sin. His response is straightforward, almost as-a-matter-of-fact. These verses are a clear example of the phrase, “*You may be sure your sin will find you out.*”

The parallels between Eve’s confession of sin in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:6-8 and Achan’s confession of sin here are striking.

Listen to the verbs Achan used to describe his temptation and giving into sin: “*I saw . . . I coveted . . . [I] took . . . they are hidden.*”¹

This is exactly the same anatomy of temptation and sin we find in the Garden of Eden. Listen to Genesis 3:6-8:

When the woman saw that the tree . . . was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate . . . and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God.²

Here is what we know about Achan’s sin. *Before those devoted things found their way to the bottom of his tent, through his corrupt desires, they first found their way to the bottom of his heart.*

Achan broke the tenth commandment; you *shall not covet*. And when he broke the tenth commandment, he broke the first commandment. He had put another god before Yahweh. His god was the treasure that rightfully belonged to Yahweh.

We are no different. If we are not careful, the sins of covetousness and greed will find their way to the bottom of our hearts. There they fester and ooze all kinds of poison in our hearts.

Then next thing you know, you are stealing the firstfruits from God. We will take our salaries and our wealth, and instead of honoring God with our firstfruits of the work, we invest in houses, cars, work, leisure, and pleasure. I am not saying we do not need houses, cars, work, and some measure of leisure, but when a good thing becomes an ultimate thing, then it has found its way into our hearts.

How do you know when a good thing has become an ultimate thing? I think one question is, do you tithe? Do you give a portion of what you make to your local church for gospel ministry? I know money is always tight. Finances are always an issue for most of us. That is why we must give so that that sin of greed and covetousness does not overtake us. Giving is one way of displaying that we trust God and that we value His kingdom work above all else.

We are not immune to Achan’s sin. If we are greedy and covetous and we think we are hiding it from God, we are not. He knows, and He wants us to make war on that sin that is hidden.

So, you see, as we examine Achan’s sin, it should humble us. We should not feel superior to Achan. First John 1:8-10 says:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

One of the amazing aspects of the deceitfulness of sin is our ability to deceive ourselves. You will tell yourself that you are not guilty. Or think you have gotten away with it. You will try to convince yourself that your sin is not so

¹ David Jackman, *Joshua: People of God’s Purpose, Preaching the Word Series*, R. Kent Hughes, editor, 84.

² Ibid.

sinful at all. When you lie to yourself like this, you make God out to be a liar. As Paul Tripp says, *no one lies to you about your own sinful condition more than you do.*³

If we continue to deceive ourselves, then we prove that the truth is not in us. This kind of deception means we will deceive ourselves right out of the gift of repentance. Our heart eventually becomes hard, and our ears become dull. If we continue in this condition long enough, God will give us over to our sin. This leads us to our last point.

V. The Penalty of Sin (vv. 22-26)

Verses 22-26 bring this whole story to a sad conclusion. The stolen goods are found under Achan's tent. He confessed his sin, and then justice is carried out. Everything is destroyed. Achan's wife, kids, livestock, all his belongings, and even the items he stole are taken to the Valley of Achor, and they are stoned and then burned with fire. Finally, Israel piles a heap of stones on top of all of his remains.

The judgment that was meted out on Achan and his family is difficult for our modern minds to comprehend. We are not used to seeing and hearing about this kind of judgment. We might even think that the punishment does not fit the crime, and this is where we are wrong. This is where we must have our minds renewed by God's word.

God is holy. God is not only holy. He is infinitely holy. He is holy, holy, holy.

Friends, we struggle to comprehend God's holiness. We may get an inkling of it, but we cannot fathom the magnitude of the holiness of God.

God is in a class by Himself, and His otherness is so altogether outside of our comprehension that we must go to God's word to have our minds renewed in order to begin to grasp the holiness of God. God must create in our hearts and minds a category of this kind of holiness for us to even begin to comprehend His holiness.

So, if you think Achan's punishment does not fit the crime, then *that does not reveal your superior understanding of justice but your lack of understanding of justice and God's holiness.*

When you say to God: *"Why have You done this? This is not fair. It is not right."* This only reveals that you do not understand the holiness and justice of God.

If God were to reveal to you why He has done what He has done, you would be like Job and put your hand over your mouth and cast your eyes to the ground, for you would see the infinite perfections of the wisdom of God. You would see your sin in regard to His holiness.

Yet, you can be sure of this. God always does what is right. He always does what is just. He never sins, nor does He make mistakes, so when He dispenses justice and judgment, it is always right and consistent with His holy character and nature. It is always for His glory and our good that He does what He does. You may not understand it now, but when the tapestry of God's providential plan is revealed, you will see the beautiful image He has created with you in mind.

Friends, Yahweh's war with sin ended with Achan's punishment. Make no mistake, Yahweh is still at war with sinners who do not repent of their sins. Yahweh is ruthless when it comes to dealing with the sin in our lives.

As I said last Sunday, there will not be one sin that will escape God's holy judgment. All sin will be brought into account before our Holy God. We may think we have gotten away with it, and in this life, you may escape judgment in this like, but you will not escape God's ultimate judgment. Every sinner will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give an account.

Everything that is hidden will be revealed. Nothing will escape Christ's judgment.

At this point, Achan's punishment for his sin is only a drop in the bucket of God's holy wrath that will be poured out on unrepentant sinners. Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death."* The death spoken of here is eternal death in hell.

If you have never trusted Jesus, sin should be identified, confronted, and rooted out of your life now rather than at the judgment. At the judgment, it will be too late. Repent and believe in Christ while there is time.

Achan's sin should cause us to run to the cross of Christ and embrace the glory of the Son of God who died on the cross for sinners.

³ Paul David Tripp, *Journey to the Cross: A 40-Day Lenten Devotional*, 56-57.

You see, God in His war on sin, Yahweh sent His one and only Son to live a sinless life. He kept the Law of God perfectly. He never sinned, not even once. On the cross God poured out all Hell on Jesus. This was His predetermined plan to save sinners from their sin. Jesus died as our substitute to pay the penalty for our sin.

When we look at Achan, we see how one man's sin brought death to the people of God. However, Jesus is the infinite opposite of Achan's sin. Jesus' holiness and righteousness are credited to those who repent of their sin trust in His life, death, and resurrection.