

Joshua 7

Catastrophe with AI

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Read Joshua 7

Remembering the structure of the Book of Joshua CROSS TAKE DIVIDE
SERVE

Elements of the story Israel has broken the covenant – Joshua sends spies to Ai – Encouraging report – Total defeat of Israel at Ai – Joshua’s prayer/lament – God’s response and remedy – Joshua faithfully executes God’s judgment

- Verses 1 and 26 form an *inclusio* for the story narrated in chapter seven
 1. Verse 1: *And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel (sons of Israel)*
 2. Verse 26: *Then the LORD turned from His burning anger*
 3. Thus we need to read and understand the events of chapter 7 within the context of God’s anger directed at the sons of Israel
 4. Verse 1 serves as a preview, an alert to the climate of the whole chapter; it arrests our attention akin to the dramatic opening scene of the show only to be followed by a note *three days earlier*

Israel at Ai Joshua sends spies to Ai and following a promising report, Israel embarks on conquering the city, but is soundly defeated

- Sending of the spies reminds us about the preparation for the conquering of Jericho
- But the rest of the endeavour at Ai is very much different – Israel is defeated and retreats in fear
- Children of Israel, the people of God who caused fear among the inhabitants of the land (Joshua 5:1; 6:1) became like the nations of the land *and the hearts of the people melted and became as water* (verse 5)
- There is a popular interpretation of this fragment that blames the disaster at Ai on the lack of prayer before the campaign and on Israel's overconfidence
- This, however, is not what the text implies – the context is the wrath, the anger of the LORD God directed at Israel; the people of Israel failed because they were under God's wrath (Dale Ralph Davis)
- Joshua and the elders of Israel are surprised and perplexed by the outcome at Ai – they just have been faithfully executing God's instructions and enjoying God's victory at Jericho and now this
 1. We need to understand that at this moment in the story, Joshua does not know the content of the verse 1; he does not know that God's wrath is directed at Israel
 2. Joshua and the elders of Israel fall down to their faces before the ark of the LORD with torn clothes and ashes on their heads (sign of brereavement)
 3. Joshua prays in desparation (NOT unbelief as in Numbers 14:1-3); Joshua complains to God about the recent events – complaining *to* God is not the same as complaining *about* God (Dale Ralph Davis)
 4. Joshua's plea or appeal in prayer is centered on the glory of God's great name (verses 8-9): *O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and will cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?*

God answers Joshua God reveals the reason for the defeat at Ai and commands the remedy

1. The reason for the catastrophe at Ai is Israel's sin – they have transgressed God's covenant (verse 11)
2. How did Israel sin? They have taken some of the things devoted to destruction and stolen some things that belong to the LORD God
3. What are the consequences of this transgression?
 - the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies
 - the sons of Israel became devoted for destruction
 - God's presence is no longer with them
4. God provides the remedy for the Israel's transgression and the consequences of their sin:
 - People of Israel are to consecrate themselves for the next day (the Day of Judgment) – verse 13
 - The things devoted for destruction must be destroyed – verse 12
 - He who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire – verse 16
5. God commands the procedure by which He will reveal the transgressor
6. Notice the interchange between *Israel broke faith; Israel has sinned, Israel has transgressed* and *Achen ... took some of the devoted things; I have sinned; I have coveted*
7. The sin of one affects all of Israel
 - Romans 5:12 *just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*
 - *a little leaven leavens the whole lump* – 1 Corinthians 5:6-7; Galatians 5:9
 - One act of righteousness makes many righteous

Joshua executes the judgement God's way of revealing who is responsible for the breaking of the covenant

1. Judgement consist of revelation and punishment
2. God commands Joshua to put the people of Israel through a sieve (tribe by tribe, clan by clan, family by family) – like separating the wheat from the tares
3. The sin of Achan is revealed before all the people of Israel
4. Achan's confession does not remove his just punishment
5. By keeping things that were devoted for destruction Achan and all his family became devoted for destruction
6. This is an example of *the intrusion ethics* applied to one of the people of Israel

After the execution of the judgment The effects of the hudgetment upon Achan and his family:

1. Destroying things devoted to destruction (those kept by Achan and Achan himself) cleansed the people of Israel
2. God's burning anger, His wrath against the people of Israel turned away
3. The Israelites could again enjoy the promise of God's presence
4. The people of Israel were commanded to erect a heap of stones to commemorate the Achan's breaking of the covenant

Things to consider What can we learn from Achan's fate?

1. Negative recapitulation (comp. Exodus 19:7-8a)
2. Seriousness of the sin necessitates severe penalty
3. The heap of stones is erected in the place called Achor (trouble) which is a play on Achan name
4. Previously we read about the twelve stones commemorating the miraculous transport across the Jordan river (chapter 4); in chapter 7 we have heap of stones reminding the people of Israel of the consequences of breaking the covenant