

Joshua 7-8 – “Lessons Learned at Ai”

Israel has just come off a great victory in Jericho. A miraculous work that God clearly did on behalf of the Israelites.

I think about Rahab who has brought her family in her home for safety as the two spies instructed (Joshua 2:18). Imagine as the walls of Jericho came crashing down, Rahab and her family needed to stay in their house (which was in the wall) and trust the Lord for protection.

- It's the same for us. We need to remain in Jesus for safety, protection, and salvation ultimately. We may see things unraveling and crashing down all around us, and our temptation may be to take action in self-preservation. But we're called to trust the Lord and remain steadfast in Him. Our only hope of salvation comes through staying in Christ.
- **Hebrews 3:6**, *"but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."*

Now as Israel receives this great victory, this can be one of the most dangerous places to be. What? Don't we want victory? Yes!

But it's when things are going well that we can begin to be a little self-reliant. We can find ourselves moving away from God or outside of God and are no longer finding ourselves locked into the safety and blessing of abiding in Christ. When that happens, trouble comes.

We're going to be introduced to Achan in this chapter. He's not going to be around long, but he's going to leave his mark and a warning for us all. You see, Achan means 'trouble' or 'vexation'. And Israel is going to find themselves in a whole lot of trouble due to some actions taken that are outside of God's commands.

Remember, this whole journey of entering into the Promised Land is a picture of the Spirit filled life; a life walking in the abundance and fullness of life that we have as a surrendered person to Jesus.

And this chapter illustrates for us a couple things that will quickly hinder us from walking in this fullness of life:

- 1) A Dependence on self
- 2) A Desire for self

7:1 - *But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel.*

This verse sets the stage for us. Achan, the troubler (so his name means), is going to bring some aching to the camp of Israel because of his disobedience. He committed a trespass.

- Now the Bible uses a couple different words for what we would generally just call sin. Sin is missing the mark. But then we have this word trespass, which also speaks of sin and disobedience.
- But a person can sin not because they are willfully rebelling, but simply because they are coming up short of behaving like Jesus in any given moment. It's not that they're rebelling against Jesus, but they're just falling short and allowing the flesh to win out. You've missed the mark. You may be close to the target, you're trying to hit the bullseye, but you're just off.
- A trespass however is a willful act of disobedience. You see the sign, no trespassing, but you say, I don't want to follow that, I'm going to ignore that and do my own thing. It's not that you failed to hit the target, it's that you took down the target and had no intention of trying to hit it.
- This is what is said about Achan, he ***committed a trespass***.

Now what really hurts is that it says the children of Israel committed a trespass. This was one man's act, but it affected the whole nation. How so? Let's read on.

7:2-5 - *Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai. ³ And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few." ⁴ So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. ⁵ And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.*

What's interesting is we do not see the name of the Lord mentioned once in these verses. That's not an uncommon thing over a few verses, but since this was covering such an important campaign and endeavour, you'd hope to see the Lord brought into it. But that's not the case.

- Every step of the way so far Joshua has received counsel from the Lord of what to do. But now fresh off a victory and feeling good they think they can just handle it all on their own now. They've taken down mighty Jericho, Ai should be a cinch. But who took down Jericho? God! And though Ai may not have been as formidable as Jericho, they still needed God to work on their behalf to secure the victory.
- This is the danger we can all face in life. As we go along, we can get more and more comfortable and begin to think we can handle whatever comes our way. Been there done that! And instead of living daily with a dependence on the Lord we can start to get a little confident in self.
- Paul had to warn those in Galatia: **Galatians 3:3**, *"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"*
- We're not going to get any better or stronger by moving away from the Lord. Just because things have been going well does not mean you can relax and let up in your dependence on the Lord.
- **1 Corinthians 10:12**, *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."*

7:6-9 - Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. ⁷ And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord God, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! ⁸ O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? ⁹ For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

Joshua was humbled and went to the Lord with great grief and concern. Now if this had been his posture before attacking Ai, it wouldn't have had to be done this way after Ai.

- The idea of tearing their clothes was a sign of a torn heart. Dust on their heads was a sign of mourning. Joshua is exemplifying a heart of repentance and mourning over sin.
- However, Joshua is not exactly sure what the real issue is at this point. He's wondering why God would have led them here to just be defeated and embarrassed. They could have just remained on the other side of the Jordan if this was in their future.

But we see Joshua's heart here. He's not sure why this happened, but he's concerned for the name of the Lord. He doesn't want to give any occasion for the name and character of God to be slandered.

- We need to see this as a great concern in our lives. We're to live for the glory of God. In other words, everything we do should contribute to making the Lord's name great.
- But when we entertain sin, our concern should be that we will bring slander to the great name of God.
- Joseph said in Genesis 39:9 when tempted by Potiphar's wife: *"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"*
- We'll see in this chapter that sin has consequences and it cannot be hidden. Our biggest concern should be the defamation of our sweet Saviour.

So Joshua takes this posture of prayer. It should have happened earlier, but now God says to him **Get up!** Why? Because it's not time for prayer, it's time for action! It's time to deal with the sin impeding the work of God.

7:10-15 - So the Lord said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? ¹¹ Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it 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 have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. ¹³ Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the Lord God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you." ¹⁴ In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the Lord takes shall come according to families; and the family which the Lord takes shall come by households; and the household which the Lord takes shall come man by man. ¹⁵ Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing 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 a disgraceful thing in Israel.' "

God clarifies now what has led to this surprising defeat: Israel has sinned. Again, it was one man, but this affects everybody.

This is why Paul would say when dealing with a sinning brother in the church at Corinth that he needs to be removed, because “...*a little leaven leavens the whole lump*” **1 Corinthians 5:6**.

Permitted sin in the body will affect the whole body, even if it’s one guilty individual.

- **1 Corinthians 12:20**, *“But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.”*
- Don’t think that your sin can remain hidden or that your sin will only affect you. Sin has a collateral effect. Others are hurt, offended, or led astray by our actions of sin. We need to be aware that sin never pays out what Satan says it will. It not only leads to your ruin, but sadly the ruin of others too.

Again, notice the use of the word **transgressed** (vs. 10+15). Achan knew that what he was doing was wrong. This was not an accidental sin, this was a deliberate sin. He knew what God said, and he chose to go against it.

- **Joshua 6:18–19**, *“And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. ¹⁹ But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord.”*

What’s interesting is that God says this is what shall be done in the morning. I wonder if Achan caught wind of this and had a very sleepless night?

- It’s been said: “a clear conscience makes a soft pillow.”

7:16-19 - So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. ¹⁷ He brought the clan 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. ¹⁸ Then 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 Now Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

This is the weeding out process. God knew exactly who did this, but I wonder if he’s just giving Achan a chance to step up and step out in confession and repentance before he’s forced to do it.

- It's the Lord's will for every knee to bow before Him in submission and praise. Some want to hold out and live life on their terms. But one day every knee will bow. You can do so now in gratitude of the One who has saved you, or you will do it in a future time when it's too late to be reconciled to Him.

We can think that we're getting away with sin when really God is being merciful and giving us time to repent before His judgment comes. Don't mistake His patience for permission.

I can just see Achan standing out here, sweat dripping from his forehead, legs are shaking, he's nervous as can be, and he's whispering under his breath: *'Please don't call Judah. Oh no. Don't let it be the Zarahites. Uh oh! Just don't name Zabdi! Shoot, I'm toast.'*

Achan was called out. And he's called out to make confession. If he had stepped up first, it may not have gotten to this point. But now his confession becomes his verdict of judgment.

7:20-23 - *And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: ²¹ When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it." ²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. ²³ And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord.*

The first mistake of Achan's was to view these items as spoils. These were not spoils of war for his taking, they were the Lord's.

Secondly, Achan coveted these things. He saw them (which he can't help) but then he desired them.

- We need to be so careful that we don't entertain sin. The first look is a pass, sometimes can't be helped. But the second and third look, the gaze of desire, that's on us. That's what gets us into trouble and leads us to sin. That's when you'll start to be achin' like Achan.

Thirdly, Achan took what was not his. His desire turned to action. This was the trespass.

- One thing to note, what good is something that you just have to end up burying? That's a solemn reminder for us that sin may be pleasurable for a season, but it ultimately robs you of blessing and joy.
- It becomes that which brings shame and displeasure and we end up trying to hide it.

Achan buried it because he tried to hide it from others and perhaps from God. But here's the problem: we serve an all knowing and all seeing God! Nothing is hidden before Him.

- **Psalm 69:5**, *"O God, You know my foolishness; And my sins are not hidden from You."*
- **Numbers 32:23**, *"But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out."*

Notice this progression we see in Achan's fall. He **saw**, he **coveted**, he **took**. This is very reminiscent of Eve's fall to temptation in the garden of Eden, and it certainly follows the general pattern of temptation.

- **1 John 2:16**, *"For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world."*
- It's the same way both David and Jesus were tempted (2 Samuel 11:2-4 / Matthew 4:1-11).

* **James 1:14–15**, *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

This is the sad outcome for Achan.

7:24-26 - Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵ And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. ²⁶ Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day."

Sadly all of Achan's family suffered along with him. Rahab's faith spared her family, Achan's sin condemned his family.

- Most likely they were a part of concealing this sin as well and suffered the consequences.

You might think these are heavy consequences. This doesn't seem like a gracious forgiving God. Well, we know He is. But we also know sin must be dealt with. And God often gave some serious warning signs to the seriousness of sin at new junctures in Israel's history. We have street signs to keep us alerted to potential danger, and God gave some warning signs as to potential danger when we don't obey. He warns us because He loves us.

The examples are:

- A) Nadab and Abihu, Aarons sons who were killed for not coming into the holy tabernacle on God's terms (Leviticus 10:1-3). This was at the juncture of God establishing the tabernacle and the means of worship before Him.
- B) Uzzah was killed for touching the ark and not treating the sacred things as he should (2 Samuel 6:6-7).
- C) Ananias and Sapphira were killed for lying against the Holy Spirit (Acts 5). This was a special juncture in time as the church age was beginning.

These are reminders for us of the seriousness of sin and how we are to live before a holy, almighty, and all knowing God.

You see, Israel had to be conquered by God before they could go and conquer. God's conquering comes by our dying to the flesh. When we die to the flesh and live in the Spirit, we can walk in victory. That's the book of Joshua.

This death took place in the **Valley of Achor**. Achor is linked to Achan and it means trouble. Yet look at what God has in store here:

Hosea 2:14–15, *“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Will bring her into the wilderness, And speak comfort to her. ¹⁵ I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there, As in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt.”*

This place of judgment will become a door of hope. There will come a time when God will draw Israel into the wilderness to call her to repentance and restoration.

I'm so thankful that Jesus has become that door of hope for us. It's through the death of Jesus that God has now **turned from the fierceness of His anger** that we deserved. But we need to come clean. We need to confess and repent and turn to Jesus the only hope that we have for life and salvation.

“I cannot trifle with the evil that killed my best Friend. I must be holy for his sake. How can I live in sin when He has died to save me from it?” - Spurgeon

8:1-2 - "Now the Lord said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. ² And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it."

Henry Ford defined a mistake as “an opportunity to begin again more intelligently.”

That’s pretty accurate, at least it certainly was for Joshua and Israel. Here they are hearing from the Lord and being directed by the Lord. That’s a much more intelligent and wiser way to move forward.

Are you taking time to hear from the Lord and allow Him to direct your steps?

I’m thankful that God is a God of second chances. We might experience failures, but those failures are not meant to finish us. Don’t let setbacks hold you back. Keep going forward but move forward in the Lord’s way.

Now what’s ironic is that the spoil of Jericho was hands off. But the spoil of Ai would be free for the taking. If Achan could have only held off for a couple more days he could have had all his heart desired and had it with God’s blessing. Following in obedience always produces the blessed life.

8:3-9 - So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night. ⁴ And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. ⁵ Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. ⁶ For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, 'They are fleeing before us as at the first.' Therefore we will flee before them. ⁷ Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand. ⁸ And it will be, when you have taken the city, that you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the Lord you shall do. See, I

have commanded you.”⁹ Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people.

Now if I'm leading the way, I'd be thinking ok, let's get ready to march around Ai for 7 days and on the 7th day we're going to walk around it 7 times. But God does something different than Jericho, something much more conventional for battle.

- We need to remember that we never need to put God in a box. He is not limited to one method or way of working.

So God has three divisions set up. This is going to be a covert night operation. One group of soldiers will hide out west of the city between Bethel and Ai (8:12). One group of soldiers will be behind the city (8:4). And one group led by Joshua will come marching toward the city and draw out the people of Ai. Then Joshua and his group will flee as they did at the first, and the people of Ai will think they have them just as they did before. Then the other groups will be able to ambush the people of Ai.

And I love that ***Joshua lodged that night among the people*** (8:9). We may be up against some battles, but remember that there is One who is with you and goes before you. Remember, Joshua is the Hebrew form of the name Jesus, which means Jehovah is salvation. If we're going to walk in victory, may we be sure we're dwelling and abiding in Christ!

8:10-29 - Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai.¹¹ And all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley lay between them and Ai.¹² So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.¹³ And when they had set the people, all the army that was on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.¹⁴ Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city.¹⁵ And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.¹⁶ So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the

city. ¹⁷ There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel. ¹⁸ Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.” And Joshua stretched out the spear that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹ So those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire. ²⁰ And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers. ²¹ Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. ²² Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were caught in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape. ²³ But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. ²⁴ And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. ²⁵ So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. ²⁶ For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. ²⁷ Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the Lord which He had commanded Joshua. ²⁸ So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. ²⁹ And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day.

We must be sure we don't allow anything else in our lives to rule other than the King of kings. We can wipe out 90% of opposition, but if 10% remains, it can easily begin to take control. Deal with everything that is not of God. Deal with every area so that Jesus can reign entirely and exclusively.

8:30-35 - Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal, ³¹ as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the children of Israel,

as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: “an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool.” And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. ³² And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. ³³ Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. ³⁴ And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. ³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.”

Joshua now follows in obedience with what Moses stated earlier in Deuteronomy 27:4-10.

The altar was to be built with uncut stone so that no man would get any praise or glory for it.

Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim was to be the places for Israel to pronounce blessings and curses. Mt. Ebal was to be the place where curses were pronounced, yet here now is an altar. God’s provision for all condemnation.

We also see a copy of the law written down (8:32). It’s a reminder that they were to be people of the Word.

- We too are to be people of the Word. Not written on stone tablets, but written now on our hearts.
- **2 Corinthians 3:3**, *"clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart."*

Now you think this was long tonight, look at what Joshua did, he read all that Moses commanded them in one sitting – with the children present!

That’s a miracle.