

Joshua 7

What was Achan's sin (v. 1)? After the victory at Jericho, Achan took some of the devoted things (the prohibited spoils of victory), and because of it, God's wrath burned against the entire nation. He considered the Israelite nation collectively responsible and withheld His blessing until the matter was made right.

Even though Achan was the individual who sinned, and even though his sin was private, God regarded what he did as the action of the whole nation ("*the Israelites acted unfaithfully*"). Achan had not simply taken some things that did not belong to him. This would have been bad in itself. But he stole what was "designated for destruction," and he robbed the whole nation of its innocence before God.¹

What was Joshua's next strategic move (v. 2)? He sent spies to Ai, the next objective on Israel's path of conquest.

What did the spies report to Joshua (v. 3)? They returned with the confident report that the city was poorly defended and that it would not be necessary to send more than two or three thousand soldiers against it.

What happened to the Israelite army of 3000 that Joshua sent against the people of Ai (vv. 4-5)? They were routed. Many times defeat comes after victory; that's when we least expect it. That's when we feel strongest in ourselves. But, the people didn't pray before going against Ai, nor did the Lord command them to go, as He did when they destroyed Jericho. Consequently, they learned painfully that all was not well; something had changed.²

The spies believed the Israelites were strong enough in themselves to defeat their enemies. They disregarded their need for God's help. They were trusting in her own strength rather than in the Lord.

How did the Israelites react to defeat? As the report of the defeat spread rapidly through the camp, the people were utterly demoralized: "*The hearts of the people melted, and became like water.*" Even though this was Israel's only defeat in the seven-year conquest of Canaan, the significant matter was not the loss itself or even the deaths of the 36 soldiers. Israel was suddenly filled with terrible misgivings that the Lord's help had been withdrawn. They knew of no reason why it should have been. Had God changed His mind?³

How did Joshua and the elders react to defeat (v. 6)? Joshua also was stunned by the defeat. In keeping with ancient rites of mourning, the leader and the elders tore their clothes and the elders put dust on their heads (cf. Job 1:20, 2:12). They fell on their faces before the ark of the Lord ... till evening.

What did Joshua do next (vv. 7-9)? He prayed and asked the Lord three questions: (1) Why did You ... bring us here—to destroy us? (2) What can I say, now that Israel has been defeated? (3) What then will You do to protect Your reputation?

Joshua seemed to blame God for the defeat and did not even consider that the cause might have been elsewhere. Joshua's greatest concern was that the news of this defeat might somehow reduce the respect of the heathen for God's own great name. Consequently, *their name* would be wiped out, that is, they would be destroyed and never remembered.⁴ God's honor in the eyes of all the world was at stake in Joshua's eyes.

How did the Lord respond to Joshua's prayer (v. 10)? The Lord's reply to Joshua was brusque. "*Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?*" The LORD told Joshua that this wasn't a time for prayer but a time for action.⁵

What did God reveal to Joshua (vv. 11-12)? Joshua learned that the defeat was caused by sin in the camp. Someone had disobeyed the Lord in the conquest of Jericho by looting. The grim announcement came from God, I will not be with you anymore unless this sin is judged and the devoted things are destroyed.⁶

What specific command did the Lord give to Joshua (vv. 13-15)? The Lord then revealed the steps to be followed in the purging process. First, the people were to consecrate themselves. No victory over their enemies was possible till this problem was dealt with. Second, they were to gather on the next day to identify the offender, presumably by casting lots, exposing first the guilty tribe, then the clan, then the family, and finally the individual. Third, the culprit and all his possessions (not merely the stolen goods) were then to be burned. This sin was

considered by God a disgraceful thing. Achan's sin was in deliberate disobedience to God's instruction and it made the entire nation liable to destruction (6:18). If the Israelites did not destroy the Canaanites' goods, God might destroy the Israelites!⁷

What did the nation do the next morning (vv. 16-18)? All Israel was assembled for the ritual of determining the offender. This was probably done by drawing lots. **But since God knew who was guilty, why did He not simply reveal his identity to Joshua?** The answer is that this dramatic method would impress on the nation of Israel the seriousness of disobeying God's commands. Since the method took time, it would also give the guilty person an opportunity to repent and confess his sin. If Achan had responded in this way and thrown himself on the mercy of God, perhaps he would have been pardoned as was the guilty David centuries later (Psalm 32:1-5; 51:1-12).⁸

It's easy to imagine..... the grim silence as the process narrowed from the selection of the tribe of Judah to the clan of the Zerahites, to the family of Zimri, and finally to the trespasser himself, Achan. This was no quirk of fate; it was the direction of God's providence. Solomon described the process well: "*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD*" (Proverbs 16:33).⁹

How did Joshua address Achan (v. 19)? Strangely, Achan had remained silent throughout the entire procedure, though surely fear gripped him and his heart may have pounded furiously as each step brought his discovery nearer. At length Joshua addressed Achan tenderly but firmly, for though Joshua hated the sin he did not despise the sinner. A public confession confirming the supernatural exposure of the guilty person was necessary.¹⁰

How did Achan respond (vv. 20-21)? Achan's response was straightforward and complete. He confessed his sin and gave no excuses. But neither did he express remorse for disobeying God's order, betraying his nation for booty, and causing the defeat of Israel's troops and the death of 36 men.

Achan's confession clearly revealed the process involved in yielding to temptation: he saw; he coveted; he took. He first allowed the sight of something attractive to grow into covetousness. Then he took the step from covert mental sin to overt physical sin. Finally, he sought to cover up his action, rather than confessing it. Eve took the same tragic steps in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6), as did David with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2-4).¹¹

What did Joshua do next (vv. 22-23)? Achan's confession was quickly verified; the stolen objects were found where he said they were. They were then spread out before the Lord to whom they belonged.

What were the consequences of Achan's sin (vv. 24-25)? Then the wretched man was led out to the Valley of Achor with the spoil, all his family, his animals, and all his other belongings. The fatal stones felled Achan and his family, and fire consumed their bodies and belongings.

How did the Lord respond to Joshua's actions (v. 26)? Because Israel was willing to deal with the sin problem in her midst, God's burning anger (v. 1) was turned away and He was ready to lead them again to victory.

The final stroke was accomplished by the raising of a historical marker, a large pile of rocks, over the body of Achan. It served, in this case, the purpose of warning Israel against the sin of disobeying God's express commands.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Joshua, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 70.

² William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 245.

³ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 344.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 246.

⁶ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 344.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 345.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.