

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 7

Israel Defeated at Ai

But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel. 2 Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” And the men went up and spied out Ai. 3 And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few.” 4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, 5 and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water. 6 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?”

7:1–26 The tragic story of Achan, which stands in sharp contrast to the story of Rahab. In the earlier event a Canaanite prostitute, because of her courageous allegiance to Israel and her acknowledgment of the Lord, was spared and received into Israel. She abandoned Canaan and its gods on account of the Lord and Israel, and so received Canaan back. In the present event an Israelite (of the tribe of Judah, no less), because of his disloyalty to the Lord and Israel, is executed as the Canaanites were. He stole the riches of Canaan from the Lord, and so lost his inheritance in the promised land. This is also a story of how one man’s sin adversely affected the entire nation. Throughout this account (as often in the OT) Israel is considered a corporate unity in covenant with and in the service of the Lord. Thus even in the acts of one (Achan) or a few (the 3,000 defeated at Ai) all Israel is involved (see vv. 1, 11; 22:20). (CSB)

7:1 broke faith. These two words have the same Hbr root: “broke faith (by doing) a breaking of faith.” Conscious act of treachery or unfaithfulness against the Lord in direct violation of His covenant with Israel. (TLSB)

devoted things. The “devoting” is carried out either by destroying them or by placing them in the treasury of the Lord (6:17–19). (TLSB)

anger of the LORD burned. God’s fierce anger that acts “as a consuming fire” (Dt 9:3) against Israel’s enemies now flares at His own people. It will not cool until appropriate judgment is carried out. (TLSB)

7:2 from Jericho to Ai. An uphill march of some 15 miles through a ravine to the top of the central Palestinian ridge. Strategically, an advance from Gilgal to Ai would bring Israel beyond the Jordan Valley and provide them a foothold in the central highlands. Ai in Hebrew means “the ruin.” It is usually identified with et-Tell (meaning “the ruin” in Arabic), just two miles east of Bethel, but some dispute this precise identification. *Beth Aven.* Means “house of wickedness,” a derogatory designation of either Bethel itself or a pagan shrine nearby (see 1Sa 13:5; Hos 4:15; Am 5:5). (CSB)

Lit, “the ruin.” Site may have contained a heap of ruins already before this time. (TLSB)

spied out Ai. From Jericho at 800 ft below sea level, the spies ascend to Ai on the central ridge of mountains that form the backbone of Canaan. (TLSB)

7:4 Even the higher number of recommended troops is forced to flee in defeat. The disaster is not due to faulty intelligence from the spies. When God is opposed to human plans, they fail. (TLSB)

7:5 *about thirty-six.* Any loss would be shocking after the collapse of Jericho and the spies’ recommendation about Ai. (TLSB)

Shebarim ... at the descent. Shebarim may refer to stone quarries. A stone quarry c 1½ mi SW of Khirbet-el-Maqatir and descending c 220 yd below it may be the site of biblical Ai. (TLSB)

hearts of the people melted. In the past, Canaanite hearts had melted in fear and discouragement (2:11; 5:1). Now, the hearts of Israel, God’s own covenant people, melt. (TLSB)

7:6 *Joshua tore his clothes.* A sign of great distress (see Ge 37:29, 34; 44:13; Jdg 11:35). Joshua’s dismay (and that of the people), as indicated by his prayer, arose from his recognition that the Lord had not been with Israel’s troops in the battle. And without the Lord the whole venture for which Israel had crossed the Jordan would be impossible. Moreover, the Canaanites would now judge that neither Israel nor her God was invincible. They would pour out of their fortified cities, combine forces and descend on Israel in the Jordan Valley, from which Israel could not escape across the flooding Jordan. (CSB)

Signs of distress or mourning; cf Gn 44:13. In the ancient Near East, grief and distress were dramatized rather than internalized. (TLSB)

Before the ark. Location of Joshua’s action at the ark of the covenant shows that he knows that something related to Israel’s covenant relationship with the Lord has gone wrong. The Lord will confirm this in v 11. (TLSB)

elders. First reference in Jsh to the “elders” in Israel (cf 8:10, 33; 23:2; 24:1, 31). (TLSB)

7:7 Words of Joshua come dangerously close to those of the Israelite grumblers in the wilderness (Ex 14:11–12; 16:3; 17:3; Nu 14:2–3). (TLSB)

7:8–9 Joshua and the elders expected quick and complete victory with no loss to Israel. But now, Israel was defeated at Ai, right in the heart of the land. “Melted” Canaan had won half of the battles and could take heart from the recent defeat of Israel. (TLSB)

7:9 *your great name.* Joshua pleads, as Moses had (Nu 14:13–16; Dt 9:28–29), that God’s honor in the eyes of all the world was at stake in the fortunes of his people. (CSB)

Israel’s name would be lost to history if the Canaanites were allowed to wipe out the nation. (TLSB)

from the earth. Or, “from the land.” From the early victory at Jericho, it seemed that the name Israel would be associated with the land. Joshua wonders now if that will continue. (TLSB)

what will You do for Your great name? Joshua knows that the Lord has attached the name Israel to His own name by making a covenant with the Israelites. The implication is that there will be great

harm to the Lord's own name if He lets the name Israel drop from the land He promised them and allows the name Canaan to prevail. (TLSB)

7:1–9 The sin of one man, Achan, results in defeat and death for the Israelites at Ai. Likewise, the sin of one man, Adam, resulted in death spreading to all men, because all men have sinned. But one man, Jesus Christ, has brought righteousness and eternal life as a free gift that is received through faith. (Cf Rm 5:12–21.) • We praise You, Lord, that in Christ “the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost.” Amen. (TLH 511:5) (TLSB)

The Sin of Achan

10 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. 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 near by your tribes. And the tribe that the LORD takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the LORD takes shall come near by 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.” 16 So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. 17 And he brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought near the clan of the Zerahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. 18 And he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. 19 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.” 22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. 23 And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the LORD. 24 And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. 25 And Joshua said, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today.” And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. 26 And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

7:11 *Israel has sinned.* One soldier's theft of the devoted goods brought collective guilt on the entire nation (see 22:20). (CSB)

Irony. Same Hbr word is used often in Jsh to refer to “crossing” the Jordan. The nation that the Lord caused to cross over the Jordan has now crossed over or transgressed His covenant. (TLSB)

transgressed my covenant. See v. 15. This is the main indictment; what follows is further specification. (CSB)

stolen and lied. Israel/Achan stole what belonged to God. Covering up the action made it a lie. (TLSB)

7:12 Contrast with God’s promise in 1:5. (TLSB)

cannot stand. In the sense of “stand up against, prevail.” (TLSB)

they have become devoted for destruction. Cf 6:18, where Joshua warned this would happen if Israel took for private use the things devoted to the Lord. (TLSB)

7:13 *Consecrate yourselves.* A series of purifications to be undertaken by every Israelite in preparation for meeting with God, as before a solemn religious feast or a special assembly called by the Lord (see note on 3:5). Here God summons his people before him for his judgment. (CSB)

7:14 *brought near by your tribes... that the LORD takes.* When the lots are cast, one of the tribes is “taken by the LORD” so that the search is narrowed until the Lord exposes the guilty persons. The lots may have been the Urim and Thummim from the ephod of the high priest (CSB)

Lists four categories of Israelite social structure:

(1) *tribe.* Achan is from the tribe of Judah. (TLSB)

(2) *clan.* “Family”; Achan is from the clan of Zerah, son of Judah (Gn 38:30). (TLSB)

(3) *household.* Broader term than “nuclear family”; Achan is from the household of Zabdi, son of Zerah. (TLSB)

(4) *man by man.* Individuals. (TLSB)

brought near. Most likely to the ark of the covenant, where Joshua was (v 6). (TLSB)

by lot. The Hbr does not say explicitly “takes by lot,” but only “takes”; likely this involves lots or the high priest’s Urim and Thummim. See notes, 1Sm 14:39–42. The drawn-out process will give the culprit time to step forward. No one can hide sin (Heb 4:13). (TLSB)

7:15 *outrageous thing in Israel.* An act that within Israel, as the covenant people of the Lord, is an outrage of utter folly (see Dt 22:21; Jdg 19:23–24; 20:6, 10; 2Sa 13:12). (CSB)

shall be burned with fire. What was done to Jericho as a city set apart for destruction (6:21, 24) is to be done to an Israelite who broke the covenant. Cf 6:18. (TLSB)

all that he has. Could mean all his possessions or all his family members. Phrase is repeated in v 24, where it stands closer to the list of his possessions than to the references to his sons and daughters. (TLSB)

outrageous. Same word refers to incestuous rape in 2Sm 13:12 and to a request for homosexual relations in Jgs 19:23–24. (TLSB)

7:19 *My son.* Joshua took a fatherly attitude toward Achan. (CSB)

Joshua displays a fatherly attitude toward the transgressor. (TLSB)

give glory to the LORD. Solemn charge to tell the truth (cf Jn 9:24). *give praise.* Largely synonymous with “give glory”; the two expressions together say the equivalent of “tell the whole truth, so help you God. (TLSB)

7:20 *I have sinned.* In Hbr, the pronoun “I” is emphasized. What the Lord in v 11 said Israel had done, Achan personally confesses. (TLSB)

7:21 *robe from Babylonia.* A valuable import. (CSB)

Robe from a distant land was probably very expensive (the same Hbr word describes the robe worn by the king of Nineveh in Jnh 3:6). (TLSB)

Shinar. Near Babylon. (TLSB)

earth inside my tent. The very dirt of the Promised Land, on which his tent rests, was used for the dirty work of covenant violation and cover-up. (TLSB)

two hundred shekels ... fifty shekels. Such detail reveals that Achan is now confessing his personal, specific guilt without excuse. (TLSB)

7:23 *before the LORD.* Who is here the Judge. (CSB)

These items belonged to the Lord; resolution of the sin involved their presentation to Him (probably before the ark). (TLSB)

7:24–25 *Achor ... trouble.* Achor means “trouble” or “disaster.” (TLSB)

7:24 *Joshua and all Israel.* Joshua and all Israel were God’s agents for executing his judgment on both the Canaanites and this violator of the covenant. (CSB)

all that he had. As the head of (and example for) his family, Achan involved his whole household in his guilt and punishment. This is in accordance with the principle of corporate solidarity—the whole community is represented in one member (especially the head of that community). (CSB)

sons and daughters. Either as witnesses or to be executed, if they were willing participants in the covenant violation (see note, v 25). Law strictly forbade putting to death children for the sins of their father (Dt 24:16). (TLSB)

7:25 *trouble on you.* His just execution. The text, however, is silent about Achan’s eternal destiny. Repentant believers who are taken from death row to their execution by civil justice are ushered into paradise (Lk 23:43). Faith in the saving Lord may have been present in Achan at the time of his honest confession and just execution. (TLSB)

stoned him. Because he had been found guilty of violating the covenant of the holy Lord (see Ex 19:13; Lev 24:23; Nu 15:36). Afterward the bodies were burned to purge the land of the evil. (CSB)

Commanded method of capital punishment for a number of crimes, as stated in the Law of Moses. Two Hbr terms for “to stone” used here, and two objects of the stoning. (1) “Stoned him” refers only to Achan. (2) “Stoned them” may mean “pelting with stones” the ashes of Achan, his animals, and his goods (or “them” may refer to his family). Cf v 26, where the singular “him” is used in reference to stones being raised. (TLSB)

burned. Accomplishes the Lord’s direct order in v 15, in keeping with the Lord’s words in 6:18. Achan himself became devoted to destruction. (TLSB)

7:26 *a great heap of stones.* A second monument in the land to the events of the conquest—alongside the memorial at Gilgal (4:20). (CSB)

The first two stone memorials in the land praised the Lord for His miracle at the Jordan (4:9, 20); this memorial shouts stern warning about disobedience. (TLSB)

the LORD turned. His anger cooled, and reconciliation was achieved when judgment was meted out against the transgressor. (TLSB)

Achor. Achor was also another form of Achan’s name. (CSB)

Cf vv 24–25 and 6:18, where wordplay involves the Hbr word for “to bring trouble,” the name of the valley where Achan is stoned, and the similar sounding name of Achan. Thus, God brings trouble on the troubler of Israel in the valley of trouble. Cf Hos 2:15, where the prophet Hosea reveals that even the earth’s most troubled locations, like the Valley of Achor, will enjoy the hope that the Messiah brings.

7:10–26 Guilty Achan is caught by the Lord, confesses before Joshua, and is stoned at the Valley of Achor. Since Adam and Eve hid in the foliage of Eden, people have imagined that they can keep their sins hidden from God. But “all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jn 1:9). • We thank You, dear Lord, that we can confess freely before You and receive Your free and faithful forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. Amen. (TLSB)