



*A Systematic Expository Study on the book of JOSHUA*

## **Study 12: THE TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCE OF SIN AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE Joshua 7:1-26**

The story in this chapter is well known to many readers of the Bible but the object lessons have not been well learnt by most Christians. Israel, that is, the new generation of the Israelites in the book of Joshua, had been privileged to receive special favours from God. God had been systematically fulfilling His promises to His people, to assure them **“that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites”** (Joshua 3:10). God had given them a great victory over Jericho, the stronghold of the enemy. It was known throughout the land. **“So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country”** (Joshua 6:27). And then a strange perplexing defeat came on them at Ai!

Israel had been commanded not to take anything for themselves in Jericho. **“All the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are CONSECRATED UNTO THE LORD: They shall come into the treasury of the LORD”** (Joshua 6:19). They had been plainly warned that if any one of them took of **“the accursed thing”**, they would **“make the camp of Israel a curse and trouble it”** (Joshua 6:18). That solemn warning did not restrain selfish, rebellious Achan. He stole what was wholly consecrated to God and brought defeat, trouble and anguish upon Israel, death and judgment upon himself and his family.

### **SOURCE OF THE DEFEAT OF AN UNCONQUERABLE ARMY**

Joshua 7:1-5; 9:14; 6:18,19; 22:17,18,20; 1 Chronicles 21:1,7,8,14,17; 1 Corinthians 5:6; Jonah 1:1-7,12.

Unconquerable, yet they were defeated! After the glorious victory at Jericho, Israel suffered humiliating defeat at the much weaker town of Ai, having only 12,000 men (Joshua 8:25). A member of the tribe of Judah had committed a grievous sin, and the whole nation suffered in consequence. The defeat came as a great surprise to Joshua and the children of Israel because they were ignorant that there was sin in the camp. And it had a weakening effect on the people of God. **“Wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water”** (Joshua 7:5).

Actually, a number of things had gone wrong. After the notable victory at Jericho following the policy of striking the iron while it is hot, **“Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai”** (Joshua 7:2) to view or spy out the town. They returned and instead of simply giving their report and leaving Joshua to be led by God in taking a decision, they said, **“Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few”** (Joshua 7:3). Their advice might seem reasonable but it was different from God's plan. God later instructed Joshua to **“take ALL the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai”** (Joshua 8:1). Joshua should have enquired from the Lord at the beginning. At Joshua's commissioning, God had said that **“he (Joshua) shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ASK COUNSEL for him BEFORE THE LORD: AT HIS WORD shall they go out, and AT HIS WORD they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him even all the congregation.”** (Numbers 27:18-21). If Joshua had asked counsel from the Lord, he would have been given spiritual perception, would have known of the sin of Achan, would have dealt with that sin before moving on to fight against Ai.

**“But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan... took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel”** (Joshua 7:1). Joshua was ignorant of the heinous sin of one of the members in his army and of the consequent anger of God against the whole assembly. If any of the **“soldiers of Jesus Christ”** in the Army of God's people has sinned secretly, disobeying and dishonouring the Lord and the sin is not discovered and dealt with, the Church can lose the privilege of **“the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following”** (Mark 16:20). **“Israel hath sinned,... therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies ... neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you”** (Joshua 7:10-12).

God dealt with Israel as a unit. The hidden sin of one member caused the defeat of the whole body. The Church that condones sin in any of her favourite members will lose God's favour and the manifestation of His presence and power.

## SEARCH FOR THE DISOBEDIENT IN THE UNSUSPECTING ASSEMBLY

Joshua 7:6-15; 1 Samuel 4:10-12; Psalm 42:3-6; Isaiah 57:15; Joshua 23:16; Isaiah 59:1,2;  
1 Corinthians 5:1,2,11-13.

When things go wrong with the local church; when forces, weaker than the ones we have conquered, conquer us; when God's power is withdrawn and His promises are not being fulfilled; when spiritual death and backsliding of our men of war occurs on the battle field; when we experience mysterious deaths among God's people; when the hearts of members of the church melt and they become afraid of the Canaanites, diligent and solemn examination is necessary.

"And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, HE AND THE ELDERS of Israel, and put dust upon their heads" (Joshua 7:6). The conduct of Joshua and the elders of Israel is different from that of so-called Christian leaders who allow sin in the camp and yet march on with foolish "**vision**" and fatal "**optimism**". Such leaders refuse to face reality and fail to recognize the fact that when God is displeased, He withholds His blessing and the fulfillment of His promises is suspended. Joshua and the leaders went before the Lord to seek His face and to find out why Israel was defeated before Ai. "**And Joshua said, O LORD GOD**". He poured out his heart before the Lord. He knew there must be a reason for the defeat. He knew that it was not because Ai was so strong to defeat Israel. "**O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!**" (Joshua 7:8). He expressed fear of the consequence of such defeat: it will weaken the people of God further and it will strengthen their enemy and make them more determined to gain more victory over Israel. "**For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth**" (Joshua 7:9). The continued consequence of the withdrawal of divine presence and divine power from a church is unimaginable and unbearable. Joshua was also concerned about the glory of God. "**And what wilt Thou do unto Thy great Name**" if the heathen continue to conquer and defeat us?

As Joshua and the elders of Israel prayed and poured out their hearts before God, God revealed the cause of the defeat and showed them how to reverse the situation. "**Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies. NEITHER WILL I BE WITH YOU ANY MORE, except ye destroy the accursed from among you**" (Joshua 7: 10-12). Neither in Joshua's day nor in ours will God be with men unless the accursed things (sin) be destroyed. A church that had preached and practiced holiness and had experienced revival and enjoyed the miraculous through divine power and supernatural exploits will become weak, powerless and defeated if Achans remain undiscovered and untouched in her midst. God instructed Joshua to find out the man who had sinned who "**hath wrought folly in Israel**" (Joshua 7:15) to discipline him and remove him from their midst before He would begin to fight their battles for them again. God could have revealed and mentioned the name of Achan to Joshua but he did not. He wanted Joshua and the elders of Israel to go through the process of searching to discover who the "**troubler of Israel**" was. A church that is truly desirous to have and retain God's power in her midst will give quality time and attention to searching, examining, discovering and disciplining any Achans within the fold causing defeat and death in God's Army.

## SUFFERING AND DISCIPLINE OF UNREPENTANT ACHAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES.

Joshua 7:16-26; Job 20:27; Daniel 2:20,22; Luke 12:2; Acts 5:1-11; Zechariah 5:3,4; Deuteronomy 13:17,18.

"So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken" (Joshua 7:16). A thorough investigation began immediately. Though it was a painful assignment, Joshua rose up early to search and investigate to find out who the sinner and troubler of Israel was. To procrastinate in such a case is like playing with fire. Delay in such a matter is a sure sign that our hearts are not right with God. Though it was a long process, the time spent in making a diligent search gave the guilty person enough chance for repentance if he wanted to repent. But his heart was hardened and he refused to come forward and voluntarily confess that he was the cause of the whole trouble. The tribes of Israel were brought before the Lord and the tribe of Judah was taken – identified as the tribe to which the culprit belonged. The tribe of Judah? That would have come to them as a painful shock. Judah was to be the royal and ruling tribe (Genesis 49:10). From it sprang the faithful and respected Caleb (Numbers 13:8). Judah was the tribe which took the lead when the nation was on their march across the wilderness (Number 10:14). His was to be the largest portion of Canaan (Deuteronomy 34:2). "**And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarahites; and he brought the family of the Zarahites man by man; and Zabdi was taken. And he brought his household**

**man by man; and Achan,... of the tribe of Judah was taken**" (Joshua 7:17,18). God is no respecter of persons, neither did Joshua and the elders of Israel play favoritism in dealing with sin. The status of the offender and troubler of Israel did not make the leadership to minimize the gravity of his sin.

When Achan was taken, that is, identified as the man who **"took of the accursed thing"** and made **"the anger of the LORD to be kindled against the children of Israel"**, **"Joshua said unto Achan, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto Him; and tell me NOW what thou has done; hide it not from me"** (Joshua 7:19). Achan had remained silent so long. He delayed the confession until it was impossible any longer to conceal his guilt. The confession was eventually forced from him after a long process of investigation.

Judgment came. He had covered his sin and he did not receive mercy. He had "sinned against the LORD", taken **"a goodly Babylonish garment and two hundred shekels of silver"**. **What he stole were "hid IN THE EARTH in the midst of (his) tent, and the silver under it"** (Joshua 7:21). No one can hide sins from God. **"Be sure your sin will find you out"** (Numbers 32: 23). **"And Joshua and ALL Israel with him took Achan and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons and his daughters ... and all that he had ... And ALL Israel ... stoned them with stones ... and burned them with fire"** (Joshua 7: 24, 25). There was unity of action. **"All Israel"** took part in punishing the troubler of Israel who brought the wrath of God on the nation. Even the members of the family who saw Achan digging the ground and hiding the "accursed thing" in the earth shared in his punishment for not reporting the sinner. Just so, members of the church who protect Achan and hide his sin will share in his punishment, now and in eternity.

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