



Study Series

Joshua: Week Six

Bible

Joshua 7 (NIV)

Achan's Sin

1 But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel.

2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and spy out the region." So the men went up and spied out Ai.

3 When they returned to Joshua, they said, "Not all the army will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary the whole army, for only a few people live there."

4 So about three thousand went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, **5** who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of

the people melted in fear and became like water.

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. **7** And Joshua said, "Alas, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! **8** Pardon your servant, Lord. What can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? **9** The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"

10 The Lord said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"

11 Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them

to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. **12** That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

13 “Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.

14 “In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe the Lord chooses shall come forward clan by clan; the clan the Lord chooses shall come forward family by family; and the family the Lord chooses shall come forward man by man.

15 Whoever is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the Lord and has done an outrageous thing in Israel!”

16 Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was chosen. **17** The clans of Judah came forward, and the Zerahites were chosen. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was chosen. **18** Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen.

19 Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

20 Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: **21** When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath.

23 They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Lord.

24 Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. **25** Joshua said, “Why have you brought this trouble on us? The Lord will bring trouble on you today.”

Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.

26 Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

Sermon Summary

The contest began with a bang in Joshua 6 with a famous victory at Jericho. The chapter concludes with this note, “So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.” Things have gone well for the people of Israel, so we are taken aback by the ominous note that sounds to open the next chapter. “But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things.” One man, Achan the son of Karmi, had taken some of the things that were to be given over to the Lord and the Lord’s anger was aroused against Israel. Joshua and the people, however, are not aware of this reality and prepare for the next battle as if nothing has changed. Their overconfidence makes us wince. Joshua does not lead the army out. In fact, most of the army stays behind since the spies feel Ai is hardly worth the effort. Everyone is shocked when the men of Ai rout the Israelites, killing 36 of them and chasing them all the way to the quarries. Joshua’s response is instructive. He doesn’t rethink his strategy or send more men, but comes before the Lord where he is told by the Lord that the people have taken some of the devoted things and the people are liable for destruction. To make matters worse, the Lord will no longer be with the people until the devoted things are destroyed. The abandonment of the gods was one of the worst things that could happen in the ancient near east and Joshua and the people take swift action. The next morning, at the command of the Lord, all Israel gathers and the tribe of Judah is selected (probably by lot), the clan of Zerah, the family of Zimri and finally, Achan is selected. He admits to taking a Babylonian robe, some silver and some gold. In a move that shocks us, the people took Achan, his family, his flocks and herds and everything he owned, stoned them to death, burned them and piled stones over them that stand ‘to this day’. This might strike us as barbaric, and by today’s standards it is, but in the ancient world it was normal practice. Furthermore, Achan’s actions had cost the lives of 36 soldiers and the presence of the Lord. Without the Lord’s presence the people of Israel would not be able to stand before their enemies and would be wiped out (see Lev. 26:8 and Deuteronomy 32:30 for positive and negative examples of the importance of God’s presence in battle).

With the sin purged from their midst the Lord’s anger turns away and they attack Ai a second time. This time, the whole army goes out and, in a classic ruse, ambush the city. The victory, however, has nothing to do with a superiority in numbers or in a clever strategy, but because the Lord is with them.

This story reminds us of two things. First, the importance of the presence of God in the completion of his mission. For Israel and for us, the presence of God was crucial and we are foolish if we think we can do anything of lasting value without him. Second, it highlights the significance of sin and of what Jesus has done. Because Jesus has taken the wrath of God for our sin, the presence of God is never jeopardised. We are always assured of the presence of God because we are in Christ. Third, our holiness still matters. Not because it allows a holy God to dwell with us, but because it is the heart of our testimony and witness. We live out what it means to follow Jesus and, in so doing, we show the world the kingdom.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: What in your life holds the position of 'most important'? The answer to this may genuinely be your relationship with God, but take a moment to discuss whether this is truly a reality in your day to day life. (Answers may include, your job, your status, your wealth, your family, your health...) This question is not about judgement, but about honest reflection with each other.
2. Take a some time to read Joshua 7. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
3. The sin of one man (Achan) jeopardised the whole conquest for Israel. What does this tell us about the significance of sin?
4. The punishment on Achan and his family may strike us as barbaric or perhaps unfair, but highlights the importance Israel placed on the presence of God. How important is the presence of God in your life?
5. We can tend to do things in our own strength rather in the the strength of God. How do you know that you are relying on yourself rather than God? How can you rely on God more regularly?
6. Our corporate faithfulness to the Lord is important for our testimony to the world. What sort of testimony does your group have? What sort of testimony does GBC have? How would the world describe us?

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. Where do we see differences between our actual testimony and the testimony we believe God is calling us towards? Pray for each other and for our church, that we might greater reflect the plans and purposes of God in this world.