

# Not So Secret Sin

## Joshua 7

The conquest of Canaan has gone flawlessly thus far. Joshua and the leaders of Israel have been unified. Rahab showed great faith hiding the spies. Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground, kept covenant with God and were circumcised, and marched around Jericho to take the city. Murphy's Law has not been an issue. The "But" that begins chapter seven abruptly halts the progress of inheriting the promise land. Achan's sin was known only to him, him and almighty God.

### Summary of the Text

Israel acted unfaithfully when Achan from the tribe of Judah took of the accursed things the Lord told them to abstain from, which cause the Lord to burn with anger (v. 1, cf. 6:17-19). Joshua sends spies who survey Ai and their reports determines that only 3000 men are necessary to take the city (vv. 2-3). But the men of Ai defeat the army and kill 36 Israelites, chasing them out and demoralizing them (vv. 4-5). Joshua tears his robe and falls on his face before the ark all day with the elders, asking the Lord if He brought them over the Jordan to destroy them by the hand of the Amorites (vv. 6-8). He says the Canaanites will hear about what happened, surround and cut off their name from the earth: "Then what will You do for Your great name?" (v. 9). Yahweh tells him to get up. Israel has sinned, transgressed the covenant, stolen and deceived (vv. 10-11). By taking the accursed things among themselves, they have become accursed and will be devoted to destruction unless they devote the perpetrator to destruction (vv. 12-15). In the morning the tribes assemble and Achan is identified and confesses his sins of taking the Babylonian garment, silver, and gold, both coveting and hiding them in his tent (vv. 16-21). The evidence is brought and confirmed. Achan is executed possibly with the rest of his household, and the Lord turns away from the fierceness of His anger (vv. 22-26). They raise a monument and name it the Valley of Achor, meaning "Trouble."

### Known to God

The wrath of God is revealed against Israel and Achan can unsettle those who without knowledge of sin and the holiness of God. Rather than provide an example of a capricious and petty tyrant, the waited 400 years until the iniquity of the Amorites was complete before sending Israel in to devote them to destruction (Gen. 15:16). His justice is perfect and as the judge of earth, He will do right. The conquest in Joshua is called "Holy War" meaning that Israel would devote entire cities to destruction, and this was God's just sentence for their idolatry, ritualized murder, sexual perversion and abuse, and so on. It's not an ethic war because peaceful tribes like the Gibeonites are spared, and those calling on God like Rahab become heroes. Some like to attack the Bible for these "atrocities", but without a fixed standard of justice imposed on all nations, why should an ancient Semitic tribe care what anyone thinks? Will they be judged at death for their actions? If there is no fixed standard of justice, should a modern communist lament his ideology that caused over 100 million deaths in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? When you hear John Lennon's line "Imagine there's no heaven..." you don't have to use your imagination to know that the governments that actually believed it led more people to the slaughter than any other in human history. While some deny God's existence and His holiness, everyone acts like it's true when condemning anyone or anything. Yahweh does not setup one standard for Israel and one for Canaanites. The big lie Achan tells himself is that no one knows. This quiet but high-handed sin finds him out (cf. Num. 32:23). Note the circumstances. Israel has a massive advantage over Ai and they rightly send a small army of 3000. Numerically, militarily, and they may have thought, ethically and covenantally, they couldn't lose. By faith they've seen so many victories they couldn't win but did. Now they can't lose. "What's the big deal," Achan reasons, "if I take this little thing? Will God even know, and if so will He care?" Well, yes and yes. Without the Lord's blessing, you can't win. Without it, you can't lose.

### The Gift of Consequences

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Many interpreters rummage through this passage to find unstated reasons why Israel is defeated. “Notice Joshua doesn’t pray.” “The spies convince him they can win with 3000 soldiers. His pride must be ruining the nation.” Paul tells us that the works of the flesh are evident and include selfish ambitions (Gal. 5:19-20). The Lord’s anger burns against Israel because Achan took the things devoted to destruction and that’s why He allows them to be thwarted by a weaker enemy (v. 1). This sin is obvious to God and will be to Israel soon enough. Let it be obvious to you. If the Lord hated Israel then He would be happy to see them fall into the same life-destroying sins that reigned in Canaan. Like Achan, He could pretend it’s fine and sit idly by. But He love Israel: “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls... My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12:3,5-6). God will not let them become Amorites, hating Him and one another. Because He is patient, the Amorites had 400 years. But their sin had developed into all kinds of violence. Because of Achan’s sin 36 soldiers just died and Joshua is rightly concerned that without repentance, the Canaanites will come and wipe Israel off the map (v. 9). Joshua sees that something grievous occurred to lose this battle; he knows the defeat is not random. He doesn’t assume what is wrong, but seeks the Lord. We would be foolish to assume every trouble we have is for specific sin and that we can always know. God has positive discipline for us as well and allows His us to suffer like Job. Remember the work of the flesh are evident. So we should avoid morbid introspection—worrying about spiritually jaywalking—and let Holy Spirit reveal and convict us through Scripture of presumptuous sins (Ps. 19:13). Jesus said to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1). They held others to higher standards than themselves and demanded outward religiosity while neglecting the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. Paul asks the Corinthians, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). What many saw as just two consenting adults having a sexual relationship, he saw as a tumor in the body. Ronald Reagan said, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream.” So it is with our faith.

### Pleading the Covenant

In an act of faithful repentance, even when isn’t sure of what, Joshua pleads the covenant. What will they say about the Lord when they destroy Israel (vv. 7-9)? The Lord also cites the covenant—their breaking of it. A covenant is a solemn bond, administered by the Lord, with blessings and chastisements. If they walk in God’s ways and forsake sin by His grace, they will prosper in the land. If they rebel, He will discipline them up to and including exile from the land. Joshua also pleads with Achan to come clean and confess his sin to God, which he does (vv. 19-21). While it’s clear that Achan died for his sin, it’s possible he died forgiven. He is still an example of covetousness, rebellion, and the folly of thinking sin can be secret (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Pet. 2:7). Sin appeals to people who believe lies: this won’t matter; I’ll get away with it; I would look nice in this Babylonian garment; my security comes from money/fame/power/relationships; I’ll never be happy unless I do this, *ad infinitum*. On the cross Jesus who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). He was devoted to destruction. On the third day He rose from the dead having defeated death and then poured out the Spirit so that we can walk in the newness of life, free from covetousness, and prosper in the earth.