

Achan - Joshua 7-8 I have sinned

Introduction Alabama Pastor Brian Atwood told this story

Once upon a time a rat looked through a crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife opening a package. What food might it contain? He was aghast to discover that it was a rat trap. Retreating to the farmyard the rat proclaimed the warning; "There is a rat trap in the house, a rat trap in the house!"

The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Rat, I can tell this is a grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it."

The rat turned to the pig and told him, "There is a rat trap in the house, a rat trap in the house!"

"I am so very sorry Mr. Rat," sympathized the pig, "but there is nothing I can do about it but pray. Be assured that you are in my prayers."

The rat turned to the cow. She said, "Like wow, Mr. Rat. A rat trap. I am in grave danger. Duh?"

So the rat returned to the house, head down and dejected, to face the farmer's rat trap alone. That very night a sound was heard throughout the house, like the sound of a rat trap catching its prey. The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see that it was a venomous snake whose tail the trap had caught. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital.

She returned home with a fever. Now everyone knows that you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient.

His wife's sickness continued so that friends and neighbours came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them the farmer butchered the pig.

The farmer's wife did not get well. She died, and so many people came for her funeral that the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide meat for all of them to eat.

So the next time you hear that someone is facing a problem and think that it does not concern you, remember that when there is a rat trap in the house, the whole farmyard is at risk.

This truth could not be more relevant than in our scripture for today. One household in Israel caused an entire battle to be lost - the Battle of Ai.

Ai – part 1

Chapter 6 ends in the triumph of Jericho. Chapter 7 begins, But.

Once Jericho was destroyed, it was off to the next destination. The village of Ai and Joshua commissioned some men to spy it out and survey its defences. Bolstered by their recent victory, the spies confidently boasted:

"Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there." (Josh. 7:3b)

Though Joshua had thirty thousand soldiers on hand (8:3), the spies recommended only "two or three thousand." If God had given them a great walled city in seven days, surely this village would take but seven minutes! So the Israelite forces marched up and engaged the enemy.

However, instead of returning after a swift victory, the soldiers fled Ai in defeat.

The effect on morale was devastating.

The hearts of the people melted and became like water.

How could God let this happen? Why had God apparently abandoned them?

Joshua prayed

Tearing their clothes and putting dust on their heads as a sign of grief, Joshua and the elders of Israel prostrated themselves before the ark until evening, thus showing the extremity of their concern. Joshua reasoned that when the Canaanites heard of this defeat, they would be encouraged to attack Israel openly and would destroy them (v. 9).

Joshua even blamed God for Israel's defeat. It never seemed to have occurred to him that he or his people could have been at fault. He questioned God's faithfulness rather than consider issues of loyalty and obedience.

In addition to what might happen to the Hebrew people Joshua was also concerned about the effect of such a defeat on the great name of Jehovah. God, as well as His people, would suffer humiliation.

God answered

Notice the intensity of the Lord's command: "Stop praying and get to your feet! It's time to act and face reality!"

Joshua should have prayed before he set out to conquer Ai.

The Lord does not single out one man, but the whole nation. One individual's secret sin brought great calamity upon his entire community.

Joshua had passed on God's command concerning Jericho; **Keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it.** 6:18

Having alerted a stunned Joshua, God instructed him on how to go through the camp and identify the guilty party (13-15).

With all of Israel looking on, Achan, whose name means trouble, was eventually identified as the culprit.

Achan's Response

As Joshua stared at Achan, no doubt the eyes of the whole community rested upon him as well. Achan felt not only the weight of his sin, but the burden of his nation's defeat. Perhaps the relatives of the thirty-six slain soldiers were angry as they looked at the man whose disobedience had caused the death of their loved ones. Maybe he also saw the tear stained faces of fatherless children.

The confession

"Give glory to God" was an idiomatic demand that people come clean before the Lord. Criminals about to be executed were challenged with these words to speak the truth' confess their sins and be prepared to die. It became an official oath in Israel (John 9:24).

Achan had not only sinned against his own people, he had sinned against the Lord; and had to confess his sin.

Achan replied, It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done:

When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.

He perfectly outlined the progression of temptation to sin. "I saw ... I coveted ... I took ... I concealed." Though his ears heard the warnings of Joshua, when his eyes alighted upon the glittering spoils, Achan sowed seeds of greed. While every other warrior walked by the treasures reserved for God, he coveted them.

Although he confesses his sin, he'd been found out anyway, some suggest that there is no evidence that neither he nor any of his family ever repented of this evil deed, as one commentator puts it, "Achan did not repent of his sin – he only regretted being found out."

Repentance is marked by action. The process of sorting through the whole nation from tribe to clan to family to individual must have taken some time. If he was really repentant it is argued, he should have come forward, repent and confess his sin not waiting to be singled out through that whole process. If Achan had responded in this way and thrown himself on the mercy of God he may have been pardoned

A person can confess to having sinned but not be repentant or have any intention of changing his or her behaviour.

True repentance leads a person not only to confess sin, but with God's help to forsake it and, when possible, to make restitution for it.

Alternatively Achan is held up by the rabbis as a model of the penitent sinner; because his public confession and subsequent punishment they say saved him from eternal doom. The Mishna, an old Jewish exposition of verse 25 where **Joshua said, Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today;** notes — "He said today, implying that he was only to be troubled in this life, by being stoned to death, but that God would have mercy on his soul, seeing that he had made a full confession of his sin."

Spurgeon writes of a physician who kept a record of a thousand people who thought that they were dying. On what they thought was their death bed they were penitents and the doctor wrote their names down in a book. He must have been a good doctor because these thousand people all recovered, but he writes that all but three returned to their sins again, and were as bad as ever.

We just don't know how serious Achan's confession was. All we can say is that we hope he was saved. No one should want their eternity to be as insecure and questionable as Achan's.

I saw

Achan's first mistake was to look at these treasures a second time. He probably couldn't help seeing them the first time, but he should never have looked again and considered taking them. A man's first glance at a woman may say to him, "She's attractive!" But it's that second glance that gets the imagination working and can lead to sin (Matt. 6:27-30).

He played word games in his mind calling what was wholly devoted to God simply as "plunder."

The reality of impending judgment, the threat of consequences, and God's disappointment dissolved in Achan's mind. Did he even rationalize the stealing by saying to himself: God has plenty. Surely this little bit won't matter. It's not for me; I am doing it for my family.

After many harsh years in the wilderness this seemed an opportunity too good to give up. Temporary financial gain replaced holiness. He believed the same lie the serpent told Eve: "Go ahead! It won't matter to God."

I coveted

Achan's next mistake was to covet.

"Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." James 1:14.

Instead of singing praises in his heart for the great victory God had given, Achan was imagining in his heart what it would be like to own all that treasure. As James puts it **after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.** James 1:15

I took

Achan yielded to temptation, and took the plunder himself.

I concealed

Then he thought that he could get away with his sin by hiding the treasure. Adam and Eve tried to cover their sin and run away and hide, but the Lord discovered them (Gen. 3:7ff). "**Be sure your sin will find you out**" was originally said to the people of God, not to the lost (Num. 32:23).

Achan disobeyed God just to possess some wealth that he couldn't even enjoy. Had he waited just a day or two, he could have gathered all the plunder he wanted from the victory at Ai!

"If only he had put first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33).

The judgement

Before Joshua could pronounce the Lord's judgment, he had to have the evidence that substantiated Achan's confession. They dug under Achan's tent and found what had brought defeat to Israel. The stolen goods were spread out before the Lord so God could see that all Israel was renouncing their hold on this evil treasure. The confession and the evidence were enough to convict the accused man.

Achan's family must have been guilty of assisting him in his sin. They knew about the plunder, and did nothing about it. Achan and his family had turned from the true and living God and had given their hearts to silver, gold, and an expensive garment.

God's law prohibited innocent family members from being punished for the sins of their relatives, as it says, **Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.** Deut. 24:16.

There could be no compromise with sin, so the family were executed by stoning in the nearby Valley of Achor. The death of Achan and his family was a dramatic warning to the nation not to take the Word of God lightly.

Ai part 2

Now the Achan affair was all over, The Lord immediately reassured Joshua:

Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land.

One significant difference between the conquest of Jericho and that of Ai was that in the latter case the people of Israel were allowed to take "the livestock and plunder" for themselves.

Conclusion

The effects of one person's sin can affect not only themselves, but their family, their community and even their nation. Just like yeast, a little folly can go a long way. The work of one fool can undo the work of many wise men. We are the body of Christ and if one part gets infected we can all suffer. Sin in the lives of a believer limits their effectiveness as an individual and can hinder the work of God.

Sin is not excusable – but it is forgivable.

What were the results after Achan, the troubler of Israel was completely removed from the scene?

God encouraged Joshua and Israel (8:1);

God promised and gave them a victory (1-2);

God said they could keep the plunder for themselves (2).

God is great and wise and can incorporate even our failures into his ultimate victory – as he did at the second battle of Ai.

"Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead-end street." (William A. Ward)

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