

The Enemy Within



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 1:4, Joshua 7, Ps. 139:1–16, Ezra 10:11, Luke 12:15, Josh. 8:1–29.*

Memory Text: “‘I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds’” (*Jeremiah 17:10, ESV*).

Joshua 7 is the first instance where, through a tragic experience, the people of Israel learned the far-reaching consequences of the covenant and its deep meaning. While obedience to the stipulations of the covenant secured victory, disregarding the terms of the covenant brought defeat. Israel's military success depended not on their numbers, battle strategy, or clever tactics but on the presence of the Divine Warrior with them.

During the appropriation of the Promised Land, the Israelites had to learn the difficult lesson that their most dangerous enemy was not outside their camp but within their own rank and file. The greatest challenge that stood before them was neither the fortified walls of the Canaanite cities nor their advanced military technology but the obstinate will of individuals within their own camp to ignore the instructions of the Lord.

Waiting for our heavenly inheritance (*1 Pet. 1:4, Col. 3:24*), we face similar challenges. While we are on the border of the Promised Land, our faithfulness is tested, and we can be victorious only through surrender to Jesus Christ.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 8.

Breach of the Covenant

Read Joshua 7. What were the two major causes of Israel's defeat by the inhabitants of Ai?

It is interesting to observe that the reader knows, from the outset, the reason for Yahweh's anger as well as the name of the offender. Thus, the suspense of the story of uncovering the trespass of Achan is provided by the tension between the perspective of the reader and that of Joshua and the Israelites. Like many other chapters of the Old Testament, Joshua 7 has a chiasmic structure. The central, climactic segment within it answers the question of why the Israelites were not able to conquer Ai on their first attempt.

There were two main reasons for Israel's defeat by the inhabitants of Ai: Achan's sin and the Israelites' overconfidence in their own strength. The latter resulted in their neglecting to consult the will of the Lord before the attack against Ai and their underestimating the force of the enemy.

Based on Joshua 7:1, 11–13, we can see that, although Achan is responsible for the treacherous act of breaking the ban, the whole nation is held responsible and suffers for what he did. God describes the sin of Achan by gradually showing its gravity through the cumulative use, in verse 11, of the adverb “even,” or “also” (Heb. *gam*). First, the most common term for sin is used: “*kḥata*.” Then the act of transgression is described by five more specific sins introduced by the adverb *gam*: (1) ‘*abar*, also “to cross over, to transgress,” (2) even taking (*laqakh*) from the things devoted to destruction (*kḥerem*), (3) also stealing (*ganab*), (4) also deceiving (*kakhash*), and (5) even putting (*sim*) the stolen *kḥerem* among their possessions.

The covenant between Yahweh and Israel involved the people at both individual and corporate levels. In the light of the covenant, Israel is treated as an indivisible unity of the chosen nation of God; therefore, the sin of one, or even some, of its members incurs guilt upon the whole covenantal community. As the Lord said, “ ‘Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them’ ” (*Josh. 7:11, NKJV*).

What are ways whole communities can suffer, and have suffered, from the bad acts of individuals within the community? What examples can you think of, and how was the community impacted?

The Sin of Achan

Read Joshua 7:16–19. What does the entire procedure tell us about both God and Achan?

Instead of unveiling the identity of the transgressor, God sets up a procedure that reveals both His justice and grace. After explaining the reason for Israel's defeat and calling for the sanctification of the people (*Josh. 7:13*), He allows a time span between the announcement of the procedure and its application, which gives Achan time to think, repent, and confess his sin. Similarly, his family (if they knew what had happened) has the opportunity to decide whether they want to be involved in the cover-up or refuse to be accomplices, like the sons of Korah, who avoided destruction by refusing to side with their father (*compare with Num. 16:23–33, Num. 26:11*).

The solution to the predicament follows the opposite direction to how it entered and plagued Israel: corporate guilt is eliminated and narrowed down from Israel to one tribe; from tribe to family; from family to household; and from household to individuals. Besides revealing the offender, the investigative process also cleared the innocent. This was an equally important aspect of the meticulous juridical procedure, where God Himself acts as witness to the unseen acts of Achan.

The reader almost can feel the tension as God zeroes in on Achan. Who cannot wonder at the man's obstinacy in hoping that he could go undetected? Nothing is concealed from the penetrating eyes of the Lord (*Ps. 139:1–16, 2 Chron. 16:9*), who knows what is hidden in the heart of a man (*1 Sam. 16:7, Jer. 17:10, Prov. 5:21*).

It is important to notice the way Joshua addressed Achan: "My son." This expression shows not only the age and leadership role of Joshua but also reveals the spirit in which this great warrior approached justice. His heart was full of compassion for Achan, even though he was called to execute judgment on the offender. Through his attitude, Joshua was again foreshadowing the sensitivity, kindness, and love of the One who "was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. . . . He [Jesus] fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

How does the realization that God knows all that you do, even your hidden things, impact how you live? How should it impact how you live?

Fateful Choices

Read Joshua 7:19–21. What is Joshua asking Achan to do? What is the significance of such a request? How do we understand his confession?

Joshua asks Achan to do two things: First, to give glory to God and honor Him. Second, to confess what he had done without concealing it. Achan was supposed to give glory to God by admitting what he had done. The term used here (*todah*) can refer to thanksgiving (*Ps. 26:7, Isa. 51:3, Jer. 17:26*) but also to the confession of sin (*Ezra 10:11*).

Unfortunately, the biblical text gives no indication that Achan showed any sign of real repentance. He hoped until the end to remain hidden. His defiant attitude qualified him to be regarded as a high-handed offender, for whom there was no atonement according to the law of Moses (*compare with Num. 15:27–31*).

The words of Achan in Joshua 7:21 are reminiscent of the fall of Adam and Eve. Eve saw (*ra'ah*) that the tree was desirable (*khamad*) and finally took (*laqakh*) from its fruit (*Gen. 3:6*). In his confession, Achan admits that he saw (*ra'ah*) in the plunder a beautiful mantle of Shinar, 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold. He then coveted (*khamad*) and took (*laqakh*) them. Just as in the case of Adam and Eve, the choice of Achan reveals that the sin of covetousness is the sin of unbelief. It suspects God of not wanting the best for His creatures and of hiding some exquisite pleasures from them, which belong to the realm of divinity only.

Besides the allusion to the primordial human fall, the text highlights a stark contrast between the attitudes of Rahab (*compare with Josh. 2:1–13*) and that of Achan. The one took the spies to the roof and hid them from the soldiers; the other took forbidden things and hid them from Joshua. The one showed kindness to the Israelite spies and helped them secure victory; the other brought trouble on Israel by his greed and secured defeat. The one made a covenant with the Israelites; the other broke the covenant with Yahweh. Rahab saved herself and her family, and they became respected citizens in Israel; Achan doomed himself and his family to death and became an example of ignominy.

Think about the sin of covetousness. How can we avoid succumbing to it, no matter how much we have or don't have?
(*Compare with Luke 12:15.*)

The Door of Hope

Read Joshua 8:1–29. What does this story tell us about how God can transform our most abysmal failures into opportunities?

The strategy of Yahweh converts Israel's initial defeat into a tactical advantage, thus transforming the Valley of Achor (Hebrew word for "trouble") into a door of hope (*compare with Hos. 2:15*). Having gained too much self-confidence by their first victory over the Israelites, the citizens of Ai repeat their strategy in attacking the Israelites, who feign retreat and defeat. Once the inhabitants of Ai are lured out of their stronghold, the 30,000 Israelites, positioned not too far behind the city (*Josh. 8:4*), will capture the empty city by setting it on fire. Joshua 8:7 makes it clear that it is not the strategy that brings victory, but it is the Lord Himself who will grant the victory and hand the city of Ai over to the Israelites. Even in a chapter in which the military aspects dominate the narrative more than in any other chapter of the book, the text highlights the underlying truth that victory is the gift of Yahweh.

The decisive moment of the battle occurs when the men of Ai leave the city and start pursuing the Israelites. This is the second time that God speaks in the whole chapter after He gave the strategy in Joshua 8:2, signaling that He oversees the battle. Until this moment, we don't know the outcome of the battle. From this point onward, it becomes clear that the Israelite army is victorious.

The weapon in the hand of Joshua was a sickle sword, or scimitar, rather than a sword or javelin. In the time of Joshua, it may not have been used as an actual weapon, but it had become a symbol of sovereignty. And, besides giving the signal for attack, it expresses God's sovereignty in the defeat of Ai. By stretching out the sickle sword until the full victory is won, Joshua is shown to have fully assumed the leadership role Moses exercised at the crossing of the Red Sea (*Exod. 14:16*) and in the war against the Amalekites (*Exod. 17:11–13*), where Joshua personally led the combat.

This time there is no visible, miraculous intervention of God, yet the victory over Ai is no less divinely assisted than that over the Egyptians in the first generation or in the recent victory over Jericho. The key to success is in Joshua's faith in the word of the Lord and his unwavering obedience to it. The principle seen in this story remains valid for God's people today, wherever they live and whatever their challenges.

A Witness to God's Power

As we have learned, God had given the pagan nations an opportunity to know about Him and to turn from their evil ways (see Lesson 5). They, however, had refused and were ultimately facing the judgment of God.

Read Joshua 7:6–9, which deals with Joshua's initial reaction to the calamity that befell them. Focus especially on Joshua 7:9. What important theological principle is found in his words?

At first, Joshua sounds like the children of Israel in the midst of their hardships after leaving Egypt: “ ‘Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger’ ” (*Exod. 16:3, NKJV*).

And here's Joshua: “ ‘Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!’ ” (*Josh. 7:7, NKJV*).

Soon after, however, he shows his great concern for the damage that the name and reputation of God will take from this defeat. “ ‘For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?’ ” (*Josh. 7:9, NKJV*).

This reveals a theme and principle that was central to God's purposes with Israel. Though He wanted the pagan nations around them to see what great things God would do for His people who obeyed Him, they could also, as Rahab did, learn about Israel's God by the power of His people's conquests. On the other hand, were things to go badly, as they did here, the nations would deem Israel's God weak and ineffective (*see Num. 14:16, Deut. 9:28*), which could embolden Canaanite resistance.

In other words, even in the context of the Hebrews' taking the land, great issues and principles were involved, which included bringing honor and glory to God, who was also the only hope for the pagans, as well as for Israel.

Read Deuteronomy 4:5–9. In what ways can we see a parallel here between Israel and their witness to the world and our witness as Seventh-day Adventists today?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Fall of Jericho,” pp. 493–498, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The deadly sin that led to Achan’s ruin had its root in covetousness, of all sins one of the most common and the most lightly regarded. . . .

“Achan acknowledged his guilt, but when it was too late for the confession to benefit himself. He had seen the armies of Israel return from Ai defeated and disheartened; yet he did not come forward and confess his sin. He had seen Joshua and the elders of Israel bowed to the earth in grief too great for words. Had he then made confession, he would have given some proof of true penitence; but he still kept silence. He had listened to the proclamation that a great crime had been committed, and had even heard its character definitely stated. But his lips were sealed. Then came the solemn investigation. How his soul thrilled with terror as he saw his tribe pointed out, then his family and his household! But still he uttered no confession, until the finger of God was placed upon him. Then, when his sin could no longer be concealed, he admitted the truth. How often are similar confessions made. There is a vast difference between admitting facts after they have been proved and confessing sins known only to ourselves and to God. Achan would not have confessed had he not hoped by so doing to avert the consequences of his crime. But his confession only served to show that his punishment was just. There was no genuine repentance for sin, no contrition, no change of purpose, no abhorrence of evil.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 496–498.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the implications of the tenth commandment (*Exod. 20:17*) in a world dominated by advertisements and consumerism. How can we practically distinguish between a want and a need, and why is that distinction important?
- ❷ Read Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9:4–19. Why is it significant that Daniel, in confessing Israel’s sins, kept on saying “we” did all these bad things, even though we have no record of Daniel himself ever doing evil?
- ❸ Think about the question at the end of Thursday’s study. Why was the Israelites’ obedience to all the “statutes and judgments” so important to their witness? How does this same principle apply to our church today? That is, how much more effective would our witness be if we actually followed all that we have been given by God?

Returning God's Things: Part 1

Frank Mukube ran short on money after moving to a new town in Namibia and furnishing his rented home with many things bought on credit: a bed, a couch, a stove, a radio, a television, a rug, and even kitchen pots.

That hadn't been the plan. Frank had a new job as an accounting teacher, and he had calculated his monthly budget carefully. At first, he faced no trouble giving tithe and offerings and making loan repayments. But then unexpected expenses crept up. There didn't seem to be enough money for everything, and he stopped giving tithe and offerings. Frank felt terrible. He prayed, "What should I do?" It would take two years to repay the debt. But Malachi 3:8, 9 said, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithe and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me" (*NKJV*).

Two years passed. Frank felt a heavy burden until the day he repaid the loans. But instead of joy, he felt more miserable. He decided to return everything bought on credit. The first person to learn of his plan was his boss at the state institution where he taught. He asked for permission to leave campus for a few hours. "I need to return my belongings to the store," he said.

"Haven't you paid for them?" his boss asked.

"I've paid fully, but I want to return them," Frank said.

"Why?"

"They're standing between me and my God because I failed to return what belongs to God."

Mocking laughter filled the room. "You can't do such a thing," his boss said. "Are you crazy?" But he allowed Frank to leave campus.

Frank went to his rented home and announced his decision to his brother, who had moved in. His brother also questioned Frank's sanity.

"It's good not to sleep with things that are cursed," Frank replied. "I used God's money to pay for these things."

Then Frank went to the store and spoke with the manager, who looked up the purchases on the computer and saw that everything had been paid for.

"Are you out of your mind?" he asked.

Frank assured him that he was fine.

"But we can't buy them back from you," the manager said.

Frank didn't mind.

The manager printed out a document. "Sign here," he said. "It says you've paid for everything but are returning them without compensation."



Read the rest of the mission story next week.