

# THE TRESPASS AND ISRAEL'S DEFEAT AT AI

**BIBLE TEXT:** Joshua 7:1-26  
LESSON 172 Junior Course

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you" (Joshua 7:12).

## BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

### Joshua 7:1-26

<sup>1</sup> But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which *is* beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.

<sup>3</sup> And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, 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*.

<sup>4</sup> So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.

<sup>5</sup> And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them *from* before the gate *even* unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to

## BIBLE REFERENCES:

### NOTES:

#### Spies

God had wonderfully helped the Children of Israel to destroy the city of Jericho. Their fame and that of Joshua, their leader, was known throughout the country. No doubt the Children of Israel were encouraged and desirous soon to possess more of the Land of Promise.

Joshua sent spies to view the city of Ai. They reported that it would not be necessary for all the Children of Israel to go against that city. At the suggestion of the spies, Joshua sent a small band of the Children of Israel (about 3,000 men) to take the city of Ai.

#### Defeat

We do not read that they asked God's advice about capturing Ai. Perhaps the Children of Israel were too anxious or overconfident. The spies had said that the 12,000 people of Ai (Joshua 8:25) were few. With God's help they easily could have taken the city, but we do not read that they asked God for help. Some people try in their own strength and wisdom to fight the battles against their enemy, Satan. Like the Children of Israel, they need the Lord if they would be victors.

Some people do not seem to enjoy being in the work of the Lord, and would like to sit back while others do the work. Of course, every one of God's people cannot be in every meeting that is held, or be in every battle and in all the work, but he can have a large part by praying. God expects His people, the children as well as the older ones, to pray for every meeting and all the work which concerns the spread of the Gospel. The spies asked Joshua not to make all the people "labour." There are many people in the work of the Lord who feel that it is a privilege and joy, not a labor. Those who ask for an easy way usually end in defeat. Instead of conquering the inhabitants of Ai, the Children of Israel fled before them, and thirty-six of their men were killed.

#### Separation from God

The defeat at Ai humbled the Children of Israel. There was fright in the whole camp. God had shown His displeasure by withholding His help. Had not God promised to be with Joshua (**Joshua 1:5** <sup>5</sup> There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.), that none would be able to stand against him? Had not the Children of Israel been told that the living God was among them, and that He would without fail drive out from before them the Canaanites? (**Joshua 3:10** <sup>10</sup> And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Gergashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.). Had not God said, "Ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword"? (Leviticus 26:7, 8). Where, then, was the

God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!

<sup>8</sup> O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!

<sup>9</sup> 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: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?

<sup>10</sup> And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?

<sup>11</sup> Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put *it* even among their own stuff.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

<sup>13</sup> Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, *There is* an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.

<sup>14</sup> In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, *that* the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families *thereof*; and the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households; and the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man.

<sup>15</sup> And it shall be, *that* he that is taken with the accursed thing shall

fulfillment of God's promise? The failure was on the part of the Children of Israel, not through any unfaithfulness on God's part.

Joshua did not accuse the spies of giving a wrong report nor the soldiers of showing cowardice. Joshua spread the matter before the Lord. He prayed and asked God what to do, lest the inhabitants of the land, hearing of the defeat, would no longer honor the name of the Lord. When Joshua had thus prayed, the Lord told him that it was time for action.

### Sin in the Camp

Usually the victors could claim the "spoils" (the valuable things) when a city was captured. It was different in the case of Jericho, which was the first victory after the Children of Israel had crossed the Jordan River into Canaan. Before they destroyed the city of Jericho, they had been told: "All the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD" (Joshua 6:19). They belonged to the Lord, perhaps like the firstfruits (**Exodus 34:26** <sup>26</sup> *The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.*). Every other thing had a curse on it and was to be destroyed.

The Children of Israel had been warned carefully not to take one thing of the spoils of Jericho. "And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it" (Joshua 6:18).

A man named Achan did not obey what Joshua had said and took some of the things from the enemy. He hid the things, thinking that no one would know what he had done. But God told Joshua that someone among the Children of Israel had sinned for they had taken that which belonged to the Lord. God said that they had stolen and that the accursed thing was among their own goods. The camp of Israel was troubled for it and could not stand against its enemies. God pointed out the sin but He also said that He would not be with them until they cleaned camp and destroyed the accursed thing from among them.

God's message to the Children of Israel is one that men should heed today. He said that they should prepare themselves — examine themselves — to stand before God. Neither in Joshua's day nor in ours will God be with men unless the accursed thing (sin) be destroyed. The person is cursed by the thing in his life which is an abomination unto the Lord. Sin separates one from God. It must be sincerely repented of, for only by personal repentance unto God can it be destroyed from the heart and life. Not all the Children of Israel did prepare themselves, for one was guilty and had to be punished.

### Sin Revealed

Just as easily as God named the sin, He could have named the sinner. God's way was best, for it gave Achan an opportunity to admit his sin before a confession was forced out of him in judgment, but he did not. As the Children of Israel stood before the Lord, tribe by tribe, the tribe of Judah was found guilty. Then they stood family by family, household by household, man by man, before the Lord. The guilty man, Achan, was discovered by a slow but certain process. "Be sure your sin will and you out" (Numbers 32:23).

Perhaps Achan thought that he had the accursed thing so well hidden that none would ever know. Some people today have sins that they think are hidden, but "there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known" (Luke 12:2). Some children as well as adults try to hide their lies, thefts, or deceit. Maybe they have not been revealed yet, but God knows about them. In His own way and time they will be uncovered, just as was Achan's sin. In I Timothy 5:24 we read, "Some men's sins are open

be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

<sup>16</sup> So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken:

<sup>17</sup> And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken:

<sup>18</sup> And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

<sup>19</sup> And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide *it* not from me.

<sup>20</sup> And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done:

<sup>21</sup> When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they *are* hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

<sup>22</sup> So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, *it was* hid in his tent, and the silver under it.

<sup>23</sup> And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord.

<sup>24</sup> And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his

beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." Achan was one whose sin followed him to judgment. There he stood, alone and guilty.

### Confession

Even though God had revealed that Achan was the guilty man, Joshua encouraged Achan to make a confession. Joshua did not call him a thief and robber. In kindness he said to Achan, "My son ... tell me now what thou hast done." It was required of Achan to make a full confession of his sin, rather than just to say "Guilty." Some people will admit that they are sinners. That is only one step. When man has to deal with God and stand before the Judge of all the earth, he will confess each one of his evil deeds, for not one will be overlooked.

Achan admitted that he had shined. He told that he was first tempted when he saw the garment, the silver, and the gold. No wonder we are warned in a song that the children often sing: "Oh, be oareful, little eyes, what you see!" Next Achan coveted and wanted them. How often one sin leads to another! "Thou shalt not covet . . . any thing that is thy neighbour's" is one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:17). When Achan was so tempted, he should have asked God to deliver him. No doubt, before Achan stole he looked this way and that way to see if anyone was watching him. If he had been wise, he would have looked up — in prayer to the Lord. Instead, he took the accursed things. Apparently he did not stop to think that he would never be able to wear or use the Babylonish garment. Anyone who saw it would know that he had stolen it at Jericho. Achan hid the stolen things so his sin would not be uncovered — he thought.

### Robbing God

The two hundred shekels of silver and the wedge of gold belonged to God. How could Achan expect to enjoy or use that which rightfully was God's? Yet there are people today who withhold from God that which belongs to Him. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Malachi 3:8). This means offerings of our earnings as well as those of our praise and testimony. Children should be taught to pay tithes — one tenth of what they earn and receive — as well as to give an offering. Many times it would amount to only a penny or two, yet they belong to Him. God expects offerings of praise and testimony from children as well as from the older ones. By robbing God, one can gain no more than Achan did.

We read of another disobedience. When Saul was king over Israel, he was sent to destroy the enemy, Amalek, and all that he had. Saul spared the best of the sheep and the oxen and all that was good (**1 Samuel 15:9** <sup>9</sup> But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all *that was* good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing *that was* vile and refuse, *that they destroyed utterly*.). He gave the excuse that he had spared them to sacrifice unto the Lord (**1 Samuel 15:15** <sup>15</sup> And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.). He was disobedient, for God's orders were to spare nothing. Saul was told that "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). Needless to say, Saul was not successful. He did not repent, and was rejected by God.

Achan and all of Israel suffered for his disobedience. This one sin caused a lot of trouble for Israel, and meant death for Achan. Sin

oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.

<sup>25</sup> And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

<sup>26</sup> And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.

brings trouble for the sinner, and often for all who are about him. One sin of disobedience by a boy or a girl can do much damage for the whole family or even the whole congregation, as did Achan's sin.

After Achan told where he had hidden the stolen things, messengers ran to his tent to clear Israel and to get rid of the accursed thing. There they found them, among Achan's own goods, just as if he were entitled to them and as if he had no accounting to give of them and no restitution to make.

### **Judgment**

The stolen things were laid out before the Lord, before Joshua, and before all the Children of Israel. In order for them to have the Lord in their midst, one more thing was necessary — to destroy the accursed thing. Some people will confess their sins but they want to keep them. God's remedy requires a forsaking of sins as well as a confession of them. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

The Children of Israel did not delay. Achan and all his family (who probably knew that the things were hidden in their tent) were put to death; and the Babylonish garment, the silver, the gold, and all that Achan had, were destroyed. Outside the camp they were stoned and then burned. Over the ashes were heaped stones to remind the Children of Israel, and us today, that one sin in a person's life will separate him from God.

### **QUESTIONS**

- 1 Why were the Children of Israel defeated at Ai?
- 2 How could they have prevented the defeat?
- 3 What is a trespass?
- 4 Why was the wedge of gold an accursed thing?
- 5 How was it found?
- 6 What were four steps to Achan's sin?
- 7 What was Achan's sin?
- 8 Who suffered because of Achan's sin?
- 9 How was Achan punished?