

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

## the PROMISED *land*

### GOD THE SAVIOR

#### *Tainted by Sin*

The word tainted can be defined as a trace of something bad, corrupted, polluted. For some reason when I think of being tainted, I think of tainted meat. I worry about contamination of meat in my own refrigerator when the power goes out for any length of time. Today's study takes us to a place called Ai where the 'power' was turned off and contamination began before anyone considered what had occurred.

Alexander the Great was probably the greatest military genius who has moved armies across the pages of history. There has been no one like him. Before the age of 35 he had conquered the world, but he died a drunkard. Yes, he had conquered the world, but he failed to control himself. He was destroyed by the enemy from within.

As we walk with the Lord, we need to remember that there is a short step between victory and defeat. Going from the mountaintop of victory to the valley of despair will happen when we carelessly step over the side of a cliff. Such was the case for Joshua and the people of Israel.

The sin of one man affected all of Israel.

**Read Joshua 7:1-6 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi...of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.* <sup>2</sup> *Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, ... and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai.* <sup>3</sup> *And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few."* <sup>4</sup> *So about three thousand men went.... And they fled before the men of Ai,* <sup>5</sup> *and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them... and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.*

Last week we studied that ordinarily the soldiers shared in the spoils of war but that was not to happen at Jericho. The LORD specifically commanded that the things taken at Jericho were to be devoted to the LORD as the firstfruits of victories to come. Nothing was to be taken for personal use. To do so, would be disobedient. As this chapter opens we are given 'behind the scenes info' that Achan, a man whose name literally means trouble, took some of those things at Jericho that were to be devoted to God.

Disobedience in the spiritual realm is defined as refusal to follow God's will. The sin of disobedience is an ongoing problem for all of us and one man's sin can have disastrous results. The first act of disobedience occurred when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and death came to the human race. In scripture, we find even King David's disobedience in taking an unauthorized census led to the death of 70,000 people. Never

underestimate the amount of damage one person outside the will of God can cause. Because of Achan's disobedience at Jericho, Israel was defeated at Ai not from without but from within.

I mentioned that the sin of Achan was 'behind the scenes info' when Joshua moved on to his next conquest. Joshua, our wonderful hero of faith, Joshua, got so exhilarated with victory he made the mistake of not consulting the LORD before he made his next move. He assumed the Commander of the LORD's Armies was pleased with His people and would give them victory over the small city of Ai – thereby failing to connect to the Power Source. All it took was one victory and he and his officers began walking by sight instead of faith. In our own personal decisions, we need to consult and heed our LORD in our daily walk. Jesus taught us to pray in **Matthew 6:11 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *Give us this day our daily bread,*

Jericho had been a spiritual victory. Ai would be a fleshly defeat. Since Ai was a smaller city than Jericho, victory seemed inevitable from the human viewpoint. But instead of seeking the mind of the LORD, Joshua accepted the counsel of his men; and failed to consult the true Commander of the Army in prayer. Are you ever guilty of such a thing personally? We may consult the LORD before making large purchases or major events. However, it is easy to act 'on a whim' at times and forget to trust in the LORD for direction. Try to avoid situations where you find yourself praying 'after the fact.' That never works out as well.

If we compare the defeat of Ai with the victory of Jericho, some striking differences appear. Never do we read that the LORD told Joshua to attack Ai. The decision did make human sense. Jericho was the eastern entry into Canaan, but the Israelites needed to move from the valley to the highlands and Ai was in a strategic place in the highlands. There is one 'telling sign' in the difference between the spy reports of Jericho and Ai. Both groups emphasized that the places could be taken. The Jericho spies said in **Joshua 2:24 (ESV)** <sup>24</sup> ... **“Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.”** However, note in **Joshua 7:3**, they made no mention of the LORD this time. After only one battle, they became confident in self! How quickly we forget! When Joshua gave the command to attack Ai, he was trusting in his fighting men while forgetting the LORD if only for a moment. A moment of trusting self is all it takes to bring on the agony of defeat.

**Read Joshua 7:6-12 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads.* <sup>7</sup> *And Joshua said, “Alas, O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan...to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!”* <sup>8</sup> *O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies!* <sup>9</sup> *For the Canaanites ... will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?”* <sup>10</sup> *The LORD said to Joshua, “Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?”* <sup>11</sup> *Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.* <sup>12</sup> *Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.*

Joshua and the elders tore their garments, put dust on their heads, lay on the ground, and cried! This is the way Jewish people behaved whenever they experienced great distress in those days. Joshua took the right attitude, but he said the wrong thing. He put the blame of the defeat upon Jehovah! He came to a hasty and wrong conclusion. We often do the same when we get into difficulties. The LORD did not bring the people over Jordan to destroy them. Destruction of Abraham's descendents was not His work. Neither was it His will that Ai should triumph over His redeemed people. The LORD allowed Joshua and his leaders to stay on their faces until the time for the evening sacrifice. He gave them time to 'stew awhile' and then He spoke to Joshua. Thankfully for Joshua's sake, the LORD ignored Joshua's whining comments about wanting to return to the other side of Jordan. The LORD came straight to the point and told Joshua the root of the problem was sin in the camp. Although not included in today's focal passage, it appears that the sin of Achan was discovered by the casting of lots. Casting lots is not something we know much about. The practice is mentioned approximately 70 times in the Old Testament and seven times in the New Testament. The casting of lots gradually disappeared after the coming of the Holy Spirit to direct our lives. In this situation with the theft of the devoted things, the Presence of God singled out Achan.

Throughout the process Achan remained silent in his sin. Let's read what happened when Achan was finally singled out.

**Read Joshua 7:19-23 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." <sup>20</sup> And Achan answered Joshua, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: <sup>21</sup> when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath." <sup>22</sup> So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. <sup>23</sup> And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the LORD.

Notice the steps of Achan's sin. He saw, he coveted, he took. These are the steps of the sin of the flesh.

I have felt sorry for Achan at times. "After all," I conclude, "he did confess." However, H.A. Ironsides explains, "Unhappily, this confession came too late. Had Achan come to God of his own accord and acknowledged his sin and brought a proper offering, doubtless there would have been forgiveness for him. But the confession wrung from him only after the lot had indicated who the wicked one was, could not avail to shield him from judgment."

W.J. Hocking explains it this way, "But Achan steeled his heart, and refused to admit even to himself that he was responsible for the catastrophe at Ai. The night passed, and Achan did not confess his sin. Jehovah had ordered that on the morrow lots should be cast, and by His own disposing of the lots, the secret sinner would be discovered. Accordingly, the twelve tribes assembled before the Lord in the morning. Surely Achan is now trembling in his shoes. Surely, he knows he will be soon detected, that the lot will fall upon him. "Oh, Achan, why not even now confess thy sin? why not acknowledge thy guilt?..."

But look, Achan's tribe, the tribe of Judah, is taken by lot. Will he not confess now? No, his mouth is closed. Then, his family is taken; and then his household; but he still refuses to come forward. Then the lot falls upon him. His opportunity for confession is lost. All Israel knows that he is the offender. His was the sin that brought disaster upon the nation." The penalty for sin is death.

**Read Joshua 7:24-26 (ESV)** <sup>24</sup> *And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor.* <sup>25</sup> *And Joshua said, "Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today."* *And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones.* <sup>26</sup> *And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.*

There was a law in Israel that prohibited innocent family members from being punished for the sins of their relatives. **Deuteronomy 24:16 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *"Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.* Achan's family must have been guilty of assisting him in his sin. Achan and his family had turned from the true and living God and had given their hearts to things –silver, gold, and an expensive garment. In the long-run, it was not worth it!

At the beginning of a new period in Bible history, God sometimes revealed His wrath against sin in some dramatic way. After the tabernacle had been set up, Nadab and Abihu invaded its holy precincts contrary to God's law; and God killed them because there was a warning to the priests not to treat God's sanctuary carelessly (**Leviticus 10**). When David sought to restore the Ark of the Covenant to its place of honor, and Uzzah touched the Ark to steady it, God killed Uzzah because he was not supposed to touch the Ark (**2 Sam. 6:1-11**). At the beginning of the Church Age, when Ananias and Sapphira lied to God and God's people about their giving, the Lord killed them (**Acts 5:1-11**).

God's enemies are overcome only after sin is dealt with.

**Read Joshua 8:1-2 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land."* <sup>2</sup> *And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it."*

Our God is an Encourager. After this sad defeat at Ai where lives were lost because of sin, the LORD said: *Do not fear and do not be dismayed.* The ungodly city that had beaten them would now be given in their hand. If Achan had waited, he would have plenty spoils to enjoy and with God's approval and blessing but greed took his life. We need to learn from Achan's failure knowing that God gives His best to those who wait upon Him. Don't get impatient, rush ahead of God and become tainted by sin. Instead stay connected to your Power Source. Wait on the LORD!