

God's Burning Anger

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we turn now to our Bibles for our reading. If you turn to Joshua chapter 7, Joshua chapter 7, which in the Church Bibles is page 183.
- This chapter we're about to read has the effect of an ice-cold bucket of water being thrown over your head.
- In light of all we've been seeing in Joshua, this is rather sobering and shocking. So chapter 7 of Joshua. But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things.
- For Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel.
- Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-Avon, east of Bethel, and said to them, Go up and spy out the lands.
- [1 : 1 9] And the men went up and spied out Ai. 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. So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai.
- And the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate, as far as Sheberim, and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of all the people melted and became as water.
- 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. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all? To give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us?
- [2 : 2 1] Would that we have been content to dwell beyond the Jordan. O Lord, what can I say when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land 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? The Lord said to Joshua, Get up, why have you fallen on your face? 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.
- 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. Get up. Consecrate the people and say, Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow.

- [3 : 31] For thus says the Lord, God of Israel, There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you. In the morning, therefore, you shall be brought near by your tribes.
- And the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the Lord takes shall come near by households. And the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man.
- And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire. He and all that he has. Because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord.
- And because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel. So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe. And the tribe of Judah was taken.
- And he brought near the clans of Judah. And the clan of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought near the clan of the Zerahites man by man. And Zabdi was taken. And he brought near his household man by man.
- [4 : 37] And Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah was taken. 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. And Achan answered Joshua, truly, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel. And this is what I did.
- When I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar. And 200 shekels of silver and a bar of gold wearing 50 shekels. Then I coveted them and took them.
- And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath. So Joshua sent messengers and they ran to the tent. And behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath.
- 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. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the gold 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.
- [5 : 53] And they brought them up to the valley of Achor. 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. 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.
- This is the word of the Lord. If you were at Calvin's grave this morning, you would have sung that before the hymn, before the sermon even.
- It's not a rule. We don't always sing that before the sermon. But Josh and I should have worked that out better. We're in the same office. We've got no excuse. Please do turn to Joshua chapter 7, which we read earlier.
- [7 : 02] And do have that open in front of you. Now, this whole episode, chapter 7, comes as a bit of a bolt out of the blue.
- It feels like a bit of a punch to the stomach when you're looking the other way and completely unprepared. As we've been reading Joshua about the conquest, things have gone very well.
- God's people have witnessed astonishing miracle after astonishing miracle. They've crossed the Jordan. They heard amazing reports from the spies that all Canaan were quaking in their boots.

They walked around Jericho for a week, and the walls came tumbling down. And Jericho was defeated with remarkable ease. Just amazing.

God really was keeping his promises. The people are doing just as he says. The rest of Joshua is just going to be a breeze, isn't it, we think? However, the dust hasn't yet settled from the collapsing walls of Jericho before things go very badly indeed.

[8 : 11] Things go rapidly off the rails. Chapter 7 begins with a resounding stop-in-your-track sort of word. But.

But. But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things. For Achan, the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things.

And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. Achan took some of the very things that Joshua, just a few verses earlier in chapter 6, told them not to take.

Just look over the page to chapter 6, verse 18. Joshua here on the.

Is that working? Joshua here on the brink of battle in Jericho says this in verse 18. But you, speaking to the army, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction.

[9 : 17] Lest, when you have devoted them, you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction. And bring trouble upon it. The warning could not have been clearer.

But yet, here in chapter 7, we read that one man, Achan, took some of the things that were devoted to destruction. And that has implications for the whole nation.

His individual actions have corporate implications. Notice how verse 1 starts and ends. It speaks in corporate terms. The people of Israel broke faith.

Look at the end of the verse. The Lord burned against the people of Israel. As the people of God are engaged in the hugely significant conquest of the promised land, it is, as is so often the case, not the threat from without that is most prone to derail the church, but the threat from within it.

And that's not unique to Joshua's day. We've seen it in Nehemiah. We see it littered throughout the New Testament. It is deeply sobering, but it is reality.

[10 : 31] It is the evil one's most effective tactic. And so this passage is here to jolt us, to warn us, so that we might be alert to the temptations that lie within, the dangers that lurk in every one of our hearts, lest we sin and damage God's precious church.

Verse 1 of chapter 7 gives us, the reader, the key to understanding the events on the ground in the rest of the chapter.

Joshua didn't know about verse 1. He found out in verse 11. But we know, we've been informed, and we know that all that follows, all the events of chapter 7 are a result of, a consequence of verse 1.

They're a consequence of Achan's sin. We know from verse 1 that the anger of the Lord burns against his people because of what he did. If you look to the end of the chapter, verse 26, it again speaks of the Lord's anger.

But at the end of the chapter, it speaks of the Lord's anger being turned away. This is a chapter about God's anger. So let's trace the story as it details the unintended consequences of Achan's actions for the people of God then.

[11 : 51] And then we'll note some of the big headline implications for God's people today. So firstly, verses 2 to 5, God's anger at Achan's sin leads to defeat in battle.

From Joshua's point of view, he's just overseen the remarkable, miraculous defeat of Jericho. He's riding a wave of confidence.

The Lord has promised to be with him and Israel. The previous chapter ends with these words. Look at the end of chapter 6. So the Lord was with Joshua, and his name was in all the land.

His fame was in all the lands. Joshua knew that the rest of the land was there for the taking. And so he sets his eyes on the next target, the city of Ai, which is near Beth-a-bun, east of Bethel.

Now you could make all sorts of judgment calls on Joshua's strategy here. He should have sent more men. He was complacent. Why didn't he just send all the troops rather than just a small selection?

[12 : 58] He shouldn't have sent out spies. Why is he doing that? But there's nothing here in the text to suggest that Joshua's strategy was off. He was using sound judgment, choosing the best course of action to bring about victory.

The reason for defeat is there right at the very start of the chapter. The anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. The fact that Israel were defeated in what should have been a very straightforward and routine battle was evidence of the Lord's wrath, especially given what had just happened to Jericho, a fortified city.

That was a tough one. Ai should have been a walkover. If Joshua was overconfident or complacent, then that was a result of God's anger leading them to destruction.

Joshua could have taken the entire army to Ai, but still they would have been defeated because the Lord's anger burned against them. Notice the impact that the defeat has on the people.

Not only have they lost men in battle, but end of verse 5, the hearts of the people melted and became as water. That picture of hearts melting has up till now been a picture of the Canaanites.

[14 : 15] But now because of Achan's sin, the people of Israel become like the people of Canaan. They become devoted for destruction.

The impact of that one man's sin on the entire nation was simply devastating. Sin is never just a private personal pleasure.

Sin always has devastating ripple effects.

Think of Genesis 3. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. That was a meal for two that changed the entire course of human history, more than they could possibly have imagined.

[15 : 14] Sin always has ripple effects. And so too for Achan, seeing the clothes, the nice coat, the silver, the gold, he took them, even though he was told explicitly not to, and the consequences were devastating.

God's anger led to defeat for God's people. Verses 6 to 9. God's anger leads to perplexity for Joshua. Look down at verse 6.

Rightly, Joshua is absolutely devastated by the defeat. Not only has the mission to capture Ai embarrassingly failed, not only has he lost men in battle, not only does he fear the destruction of Israel, but he also fears for the honor of the Lord, for his great name.

That's his great concern. Look at how he responds, verse 6. He tore his clothes. He fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord. He's utterly perplexed.

How has this happened? This defeat came from nowhere. We just took down Jericho. And we lost to Ai? What's going on?

[16 : 28] Think about the past few weeks in the life of Joshua and the whole nation. Great words of promise in chapter 1. Astonishing revelations from inside Jericho in chapter 2. The drying up of the Jordan.

The astounding victory over Jericho, chapter 6. God has been with them, just as he promised. And he was demonstrating his presence in amazing ways. But now this? Defeat by Ai?

Joshua is at sea. He's utterly perplexed. Perplexed. And he brings his perplexity to the Lord in prayer.

These words of Joshua's are not words of unbelief, but of despair. How has this happened? Why? Joshua does not yet have the insight of verse 1.

He doesn't know the true cause. And often when things go badly wrong, when life seems out of control and things are going badly and very rapidly off the rails, all we can do is do what Joshua does here.

[17 : 31] Pray to God to seek protection both for ourselves and for his honor and glory. Perhaps Joshua could have realized more quickly that sin would have been the likely cause of the calamity.

And it probably ought to be the first question we ask ourselves to examine our hearts and lives. Have we sins? But I don't think the writer wants us to beat up Joshua.

His instinct to pray to the Lord, to bear his soul before the sovereign Lord is the right one. In his perplexity, he goes to the laws. Verses 10 to 15.

God exposes Achan's sin. Amidst the perplexity, the confusion, God speaks. And he brings utter clarity and truth to everything.

And it is a devastating truth. Because he reveals the shocking truth. The very thing that the Lord prohibited. The very thing that Joshua instructed the people in chapter 6 not to do.

[18 : 35] They've done. Verse 11. They have 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. They have, midway through verse 12, become devoted for destruction.

The problem was not poor military strategy. The problem was sin. And it's laid out in precise detail here. The Lord saw it all, didn't he?

Achan perhaps thought he was on to a winner. Not only did he get to take part in the victorious destruction of Jericho, but he would get to keep some of the spoils. But the reality was, he stole from God.

Those things were devoted to God. And he stole from him. He lied. And he tried to hide it up. He wanted to seem like he was on board with the whole thing.

[19 : 36] Just another Israelite soldier who did his duty, but he sought to deceive by hiding the plunder. But his deception would not deceive everyone. You see, God cannot be deceived.

Even the most well-planned, well-executed, well-hidden treachery won't fool him. He will not be deceived. Sure, Achan successfully deceived his fellow people.

He deceived Joshua. But not so the Lord. And then you read these terrible and frightening words. Verse 12.

I will be with you no more. Unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. Nothing is more crucial to the people of God than the presence of God.

And here, it is threatened to be removed. The very thing that has been the bedrock of Joshua's conquest is about to be withdrawn. When God is present with his people, they triumph.

- [20 : 46] Even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, they succeed. Think of the Jordan. Think of Jericho. God was with his people. And when he withdraws because of the sin of his people, they manage with Ai to snatch defeat from the jaws of what should have been a straightforward victory.

God's presence with his people is everything. And now he threatens to withdraw it. That is devastating. But even in the revelation of his wrath lies the desire for restoration.

I will be with you no more unless, unless there is a way back. And the Lord sets that out in verses 13 to 15.

How Joshua is to go about removing the devoted things from Israel. He tells him to consecrate the people. And in the morning, verse 14, he's going to bring forward tribe by tribe and narrow it down until the person who's responsible is found.

And then verses 16 to 26. God's anger is turned away as Achan is punished. God's anger is turned away as Achan is punished.

- [22 : 08] The path to restoration for God's people lay in the destruction of Achan, his family, all his property. And that seems to us unbelievably harsh, doesn't it?

We read passages like this with our hands over our eyes, kind of peeking through. We don't like to read it. But we need to read it carefully. Look at verse 15 where God sets out what Joshua was to do with Achan.

He who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire. He and all that he has because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel.

The penalty is devastating because the sin is devastating. It wasn't some trifling thing he did. He broke covenant with the Lord. He brought disaster upon Israel.

The penalty is devastating because the sin is devastating. And our failure is a failure to see the fundamentally devastating nature of Achan's sin because mankind always underestimates the seriousness of sin.

- [23 : 20] And that's the case here. Achan probably thought it was just a nice cloak, a bit of gold, some silver. Nobody was hurt. What's the problem? But the problem was he had ignored and deliberately and willfully disobeyed the command of God.

Achan would have heard, as all Israel did, Joshua's announcement in chapter 6 that we read earlier. Why else would Achan have gone to all the trouble of burying the treasure? He knew he shouldn't have taken it.

But he underestimated the seriousness of breaking covenant with the Lord of all the universe. And so the penalty is serious. The sin that has brought Israel to the brink of calamity must be removed.

And only once it's removed, once it's cleansed, once the Lord's anger is turned away, only then will God be able to dwell amongst his people again, to be with them, and to deliver the city of Ai to them, which he does in chapter 8.

This is a shocking chapter. The writer spends a good deal of time on it. Tempting, I'm sure, just to airbrush that bit out and talk about the conquest of Ai successfully.

- [24 : 41] But he doesn't do that. He spends time on this humiliating, embarrassing defeat. Why does he do that? For those generations who would read this account years down the line, and even us today, it would have made for a jarring, jolting, sobering read.

It was meant to warn. And for those first readers, there could only have been one conclusion they could draw. God's anger burns against sin.

And his own people are no exception. Sin left unchecked within the people of God is devastating. God won't be deceived.

No sin is really hidden in the ends. And no doubt, any man or woman of faith who read that account would have examined their own hearts, acknowledged their own sin, and repented of it.

Faithfulness to God's covenant was paramount, and not something to be taken for granted. But they knew that in the midst of God's fierce and hot anger, there was grace.

[25 : 55] There was mercy, even for the worst of sinners who repented. The very place where Achan was stoned, it was called the Valley of Acre, which literally means the Valley of Trouble.

It marks a low point in the conquest of Canaan. But the Valley of Acre reappears in the book of Isaiah, chapter 2. Listen to this. Therefore, behold, says the Lord, I will allure her, that is, his people, I will allure them, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.

And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Acre a door of hope. Acre, once a place of desolation, the Lord would turn to be a door of hope.

Sin does not have the last word in the human situation, because God delights in mercy. Listen to these words from Isaiah. Sin is devastatingly serious.

It almost ended the conquest for Israel. But in the midst of wrath, there is mercy. There is a way back. The Valley of Acre returned to a door of hope.

[27 : 29] What are the implications for us? We live many, many years after these were written in a different continent. What are the implications for the church today?

Well, we've seen that this is a passage that hits us right between the eyes. It's shocking stuff. One that grabs us by the scruff of the neck. It alerts us here today of the danger from within.

The lessons for them then are the same as for us now. So let me highlight four implications in particular. Number one, God takes sin seriously.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that God is settled, consistent, and fierce in his opposition to sin. He takes sin very seriously indeed.

God hates sin. It's an affront to him, to his holiness, to his goodness, to his mercy, to his name. It was his opposition to the sin of the Canaanites that led to the destruction of the city of Jericho.

[28 : 37] But God is not just opposed to the sin of people out there somewhere. This account, Joshua chapter 7, is about sin within the people of God, within the visible people of God.

And so for us today, for those who are within the visible people of God, there can be no immunity from God's fierce anger against sin. The only safe place to be is sheltering under the refuge of Christ's cross.

As we acknowledge our sin, repent of it, fling ourselves upon his mercy. You can't point to your membership of the Tron Church as defense.

You can't lean on heritage. God takes sin seriously, no matter where it's found. And so you must examine your own heart, your own life.

Am I living in sin? Am I consciously or unconsciously transgressing God's law? God takes sin seriously. Let's not underestimate the seriousness of it.

[29 : 45] Second implication. Individual sin affects the whole church. Not only do we see God's settled opposition to sin, his burning anger against it, but we see sin's devastating consequences for the whole church.

We noticed earlier that Achan was one man. But the whole of Israel is affected, verse 1. Individual sin affects the corporate body, no matter how secretive that sin may be, no matter how harmless we think it might be.

Sin always has corporate implications. Achan surely thought no harm would come. What does it matter? It's just a coat, some goals.

But the devastating reality is that sin always affects the whole. And that's a sobering warning, isn't it, to all of us. You may well think, what harm could come from that little peccadillo of mine?

Who will know if I bend the figure on my tax return? What harm will come from my late night internet searches? Your private sins are not just private.

[31 : 00] There will be implications for the whole church. Perhaps as you lie on your bed tonight, even in the quiet after the service, are there hidden sins you need to repent of?

You come to a God who is rich in mercy. He will not turn you away. What about on a larger corporate level?

A willingness to turn a blind eye to blatant disregard for the Bible's teaching on sex and marriage. Let's not kick up a fuss what the minister gets up to in his bedroom. What harm can that do? Let's just leave it.

Well, consider the catastrophic decline of the Western church. Turn a blind eye to sin? There are implications.

There will be implications. A failure to take sin seriously in the lives of individuals will in the end prove catastrophic for the church. That is why a church that exercises church discipline is to be cherished.

[32 : 08] Church leaders that tackle sin in the lives of the flock is a healthy sign. If you're a student here tonight, think about what sort of church to join with, to serve in.

Look for a church that takes church discipline seriously. Implication number three. God will expose hidden sin.

Achan hid his sin, or at least he attempted to, but God knew. God exposed him in the end. And the warning for us is far more serious than that.

For all of us, in the end, we will be exposed. No sin in the end will remain hidden. We might be able to fool those around us, those who lead the church, perhaps even your own family, perhaps you've even fooled yourself.

But in the end, God will expose every sin, even hidden sins. There is a stark and shocking parallel in the New Testament.

[33 : 17] In the early days of the church, Ananias and Sapphira, in Acts chapter 5, sought to deceive the church. They thought their deception, their sin, would remain hidden. They sold a field and gave, so they said, all the profit to the church, when the truth was that they held some back.

Now, they were fully entitled to do that. They didn't have to give everything. But they made out that they were giving it all. They were attempting to deceive. But they were exposed. God was not going to be deceived.

And God is not deceived today. The Lord Jesus in Luke 12 says that nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.

Therefore, what you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light. And what you have whispered in private shall be proclaimed from the rooftops. One day, everything will be exposed.

And it's God who will do the exposing. That is the truth. And no matter how successfully we might hide from others, we will in the end be exposed by our judge on the last day.

[34 : 34] God will expose hidden sin. Fourth implication. Sin within the church is, as we've seen, a great threat.

And it is the devil's most effective tactic. Sin is never just a private matter. It has implications for the whole. That is why the devil uses it as a weapon. It's so effective.

It's why he deploys it at crucial moments in the church's life. In Joshua, the people were just beginning to establish a base in the promised land.

Momentum was starting to build. Likewise, in the book of Acts, it was the early stage of the church. Things were starting to grow quickly. Enter Ananias and Sapphira.

At crucial moments in the church's growth, the devil will seek a foothold. So beware. Be watchful. As a congregation, we are in a crucial time of growth and change.

[35 : 47] We began the year by operating in one location. We will, God willing, be finishing it operating in three. We began it with two Sunday services. We end it with four.

Now, for the devil, that represents a huge, great, whopping target to aim at. One of his tactics will be to erode from within.

So let us all be alert. Will you carefully examine and guard your own heart's motivations? So many opportunities to seek to serve self.

So many avenues to push yourself forward. So many avenues along which you could cause havoc. Will you guard yourself? Will you pray for the leaders of the church that they would act swiftly, decisively, if and when they are made aware of hidden sin?

It is dangerous. It's no private matter. Perhaps there's a particular hidden sin you know that you need to repent of.

[37 : 00] Well, there is hope for you. There's hope for all of us and how we need it. God has poured out on his own son his wrath against sin so that we might be forgiven.

Will you turn to him? Sin within the church is so often devastating. And it crops up in all the most ordinary sort of ways.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he's urging them to maintain unity as a congregation. And he says this. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor.

For we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down in your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you.

[38 : 14] Along with malice, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Paul knew that the devil would seek a foothold in the church.

And the sorts of things he mentions there are just everyday, ordinary things. How we talk. Do we tell the truth? Are we bitterness?

Are we harboring bitterness towards others? These are the sort of things that can cause serious damage within the church. So let us examine our own hearts.

Let's not give the devil a foothold. Let us, as we close, remember that nothing, nothing will stop the Lord from building his kingdom.

It's potentially easy to lose heart in light of the reality of the human heart, isn't it? Joshua chapter 7 could easily discourage us. We could lose heart.

[39 : 17] But the Lord will build his church. Nothing will stand in his way. We know that the great and final blow has been struck against the enemy.

We know Christ is returning and will bring about the consummation of his kingdom. So do not lose heart. Every word, every promise will come to pass.

God is faithful to his promises. Great is his faithfulness. Let me pray. Father, forgive us for a lack of trust in you.

You are a good God. Every good thing comes from you. Yet how quickly we disbelieve your promises. How quickly we disbelieve the good that you intend for your people.

You are a trustworthy God. You have made great promises and you will surely fulfill them. And you have fulfilled in Christ.

[40 : 45] So that we have great assurance. Great certainty. Thank you that you are God who is so full of mercy and goodness. Would you help us to trust you?

To trust that your promises are true. And help us, Lord, in light of this shocking and difficult passage that we might examine our own hearts.

That we might repent of the sin that lies within every one of our hearts. Thank you that you are great and good and merciful savior.

And you have turned the valley of Achor to a door of hope. We thank you in Jesus name. Amen.