

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Joshua - Lesson 4 - Chp. 7

Recap of Last Lesson

In our last lesson the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River and were camped at Gilgal between the Jordan and Jericho. Scripture says:

Joshua 5:1 (NKJV) So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who *were* on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who *were* by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.

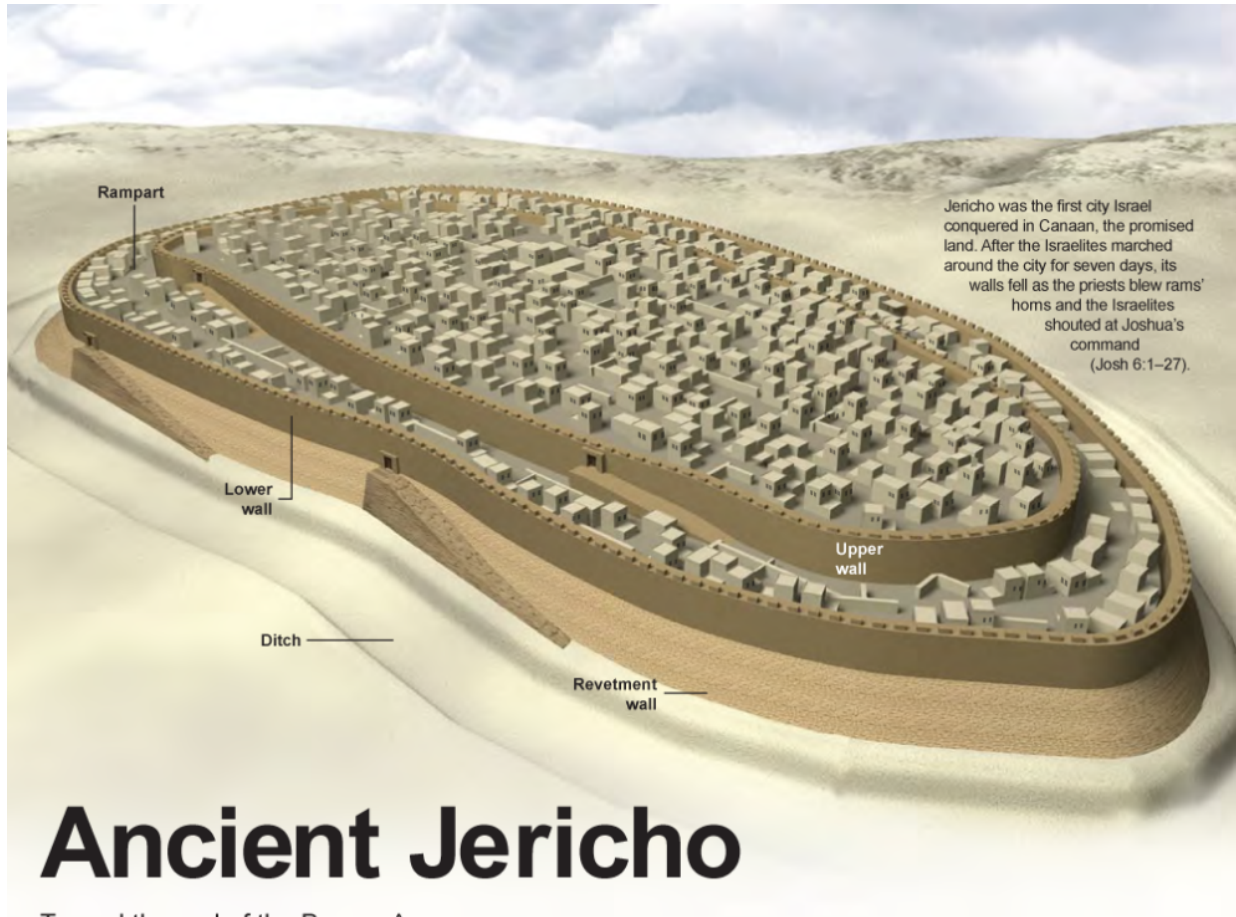
The inhabitants of Canaan were scared! Now was the time for Israel to attack Jericho while they had the psychological advantage. However, the Lord instructed Joshua to circumcise the second generation of Israelites that had not been circumcised because they were born in the wilderness. They also took time to keep the Passover. These were not good war strategies by worldly standards, but God's ways are not man's ways. God wanted them to put Him first by keeping His covenant. They had not practiced their religion fully while wandering in the wilderness (they had not kept the Passover since they were camped at Mt. Sinai thirty-nine years ago). Now that they were in their land, it was time to fully practice and keep the Law of God and live off the land that God had given them. Things were different now that they had crossed the Jordan River!

Joshua 5:10 Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. **11** And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. **12** Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

While Joshua was on a scouting expedition near Jericho, the Lord appeared to Him as the Commander of the army of the Lord. Joshua then led the Israelites to battle against Jericho - but what strange battle plans God gave Him! They were to march around Jericho with the priests blowing trumpets and bearing the Ark of God before them. The people were to remain silent as they marched around the city one time each day for six days. On the seventh day they marched around the city seven times, and on the seventh time around, the people shouted a victory shout. Then Joshua gave these instructions:

Joshua 6:16 And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: "Shout, for the Lord has given you the city! **17** Now the city shall be doomed by the Lord to destruction, it and all who *are* in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who *are* with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. **18** And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. **19** But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, *are* consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord."

It was a great victory at Jericho. The wall that encircled the city, protecting it from every enemy - that great wall fell down flat! Rahab, who protected the spies of Israel and who had faith in the God of Israel, was rescued along with all of her family members who took shelter in her house. Because Rahab was faithful to Israel, Israel was faithful to rescue her and her family. It was a mighty victory for Israel that day. God judged the citizens of Jericho - and at the same time made a way of escape for anyone who would believe and obey Him (in this case, Rahab the harlot and her family).



Toward the end of the Bronze Age

Archaeological excavations reveal that Jericho was violently destroyed sometime toward the end of the Bronze Age. The walls seem to have been thrown down by sudden force, as if by an earthquake. Charred wood shows that what was left of the city was burned. Excavators have also found food supplies buried in the destroyed city, which shows it was not captured by siege.



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Trouble in the Camp - Joshua Chapter 7

Joshua 7:1 (NKJV) But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel.

The Lord was angry with all of Israel because Achan took the accursed things. What are the accursed things?

This first city of conquest in Canaan was to be devoted to destruction. No spoils of war were to be taken. Everything and everyone was to be destroyed (except Rahab and her family), and all of the valuable and precious metals (gold, silver, bronze, and iron) were to be used in the Tabernacle worship. Therefore, anything that was not completely destroyed or placed in Tabernacle worship became an “*accursed thing*.”

Joshua chapter 7 opens with this statement, “*But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan . . . took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel.*” One man broke this covenant, but the Lord was angry at all of them. God had warned them earlier: *And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it*. Everything in Jericho was “*devoted to destruction*,” and taking the spoils would bring trouble upon all of Israel. God warned them ahead of time. Let’s read the details of what happened:

Joshua 7:2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which *is* beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, “Go up and spy out the country.” So the men went up and spied out Ai. **3** And they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.” **4** So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. **5** And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them *from* before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.

Jericho had been easily conquered. The word of the Lord came forth, they obeyed it exactly, and victory followed. The next conquest would be Ai, a little city with a little name that translates to “heap of ruins.” Joshua sent his spies to check out the place to plan his strategy. He was counseled by the spies to send only a few thousand men. Under normal circumstances, this would have worked, but when God is against someone, there is no way he can win. Joshua lost 36 men that day - a new experience because the Israelites were used to total victory. Instead of victory, they were defeated and routed. Scripture says, *therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water*. That is a good description of a heart that has lost courage and feels defeated and perplexed. This was the description of the Canaanites after they heard that Israel had crossed the Jordan River on dry ground; but now - this describes the Israelites!

What was going on? Didn’t God say, “*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is*

*with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9)? Yes, God did say that, but the verse before says, ***This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*** Success comes from obeying the word of the Lord and the commandment of God.*

Joshua 7:6 Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. **7** And Joshua said, “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! **8** O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? **9** 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?”

Joshua sounds somewhat like the generation that died in the wilderness. Some of their complaints were, *Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt* (Numbers 14:3)? But then Joshua pleads for the name of the Lord, that it should be feared. Joshua is saying all these things because he truly does not understand why all this is happening. But the Lord cuts him off:

The Sin of Achan

10 So the Lord said to Joshua: “Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? **11** Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put *it* among their own stuff.

We will find out in just a few verses that one man - Achan - did this, but the Lord said that *Israel* did it! God had warned them before they attacked Jericho that if they took the accursed things, they would make the whole camp of Israel accursed and trouble it. Jericho was to be totally destroyed, and the penalty for taking and keeping the accursed things from Jericho was destruction. The Lord continued the explanation:

12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. **13** Get up, sanctify the people, and say, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the Lord God of Israel: “*There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.*”

The only remedy was to separate themselves from the accursed thing. They were told to sanctify themselves. God was going to work in their midst tomorrow, so they needed to sanctify themselves. Notice that God said He would meet with them “*tomorrow.*” God gave Achan a night to consider his sin and come to Him in repentance.

14 In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be *that* the tribe which the Lord takes shall come according to families; and the family which the Lord takes shall

come by households; and the household which the Lord takes shall come man by man. **15** Then it shall be *that* he who is taken with the accursed thing 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 a disgraceful thing in Israel.”

16 So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.

Judah, that preeminent tribe of Israel - the biggest tribe that went first in battle - this was the tribe that held the transgressor.

Joshua 7:17 He brought the clan 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. **18** Then 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.

Through the casting of lots the Lord made it known which tribe, which clan, which family, and now which man was the transgressor. It was Achan, whose name means “troubler.”

19 Now Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide *it* from me.”

Joshua speaks almost tenderly to Achan, saying, “*My son, I beg you . . .*” His counsel to Achan is correct - Achan needs to confess and hide nothing. God knows it all anyway, so trying to hide the truth is futile.

20 And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: **21** When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.”

Achan saw a beautiful Babylonian garment. Babylon is mentioned throughout the Bible beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation. The first time we are introduced to it is at the Tower of Babel in Genesis. There, the people rebelled against God’s command to spread out over all the earth and populate the whole earth. Instead they built a tower to the heavens and congregated in one place. Since that time, the term “Babylon” has been a symbol of evil and defiance. In Revelation, “Babylon the Great” is thrown down, never to be found again.

The Babylonian garment must have been very attractive or valuable for Achan to have risked so much to take it. It was a part of the “*accursed things*” that were set apart for destruction. When Achan stole it and placed it in the camp of Israel, the whole camp became like that garment - set apart for destruction. It should have been burned along with the rest of the city.

But Achan also took silver and gold. These precious metals were commanded to be put in the treasury of the house of God - the Tabernacle. When Achan took these, he stole from God Himself. It’s bad enough to steal from a person, but to steal from God is a terrible sin indeed.

Achan also insulted God’s leadership in Israel by doing exactly the opposite of what God said to do. This was an insult to God’s holiness.

Joshua 7:22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. **23** And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord. **24** Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. **25** And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

26 Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day.

God commanded that Achan and everything that was his - along with the stolen things from Jericho - be destroyed. Achan's sin affected the entire community of Israel. His sin caused the blessing of God upon the Israelites to be withheld in the battle of Ai. Thirty-six innocent men died because of Achan's sin. He stole that which was "*devoted to destruction*" and therefore brought destruction on others. God explained to Joshua, "*Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction* (Joshua 7:12). We fool ourselves if we think that our sin affects only us. Disobedience brings ruin, even upon the innocent. Sin's effects go beyond the initial sinner.

Achan was stoned to death, and his body was burned - as was the city of Jericho which was set apart for destruction. The Valley of Achor (*Achor* also means "trouble") became a place to remind Israel that trouble comes to those who disregard the commandments of God. (Look up Hosea 2:15 and Isaiah 65:10 where eventually God makes the valley of Achor a "door of hope" and a "rest").

Set Apart for Destruction

The concept of something being set apart for destruction is seen in several places in Scripture. It can be difficult for us to understand with our New Testament mindset of grace and mercy. However, it is a biblical theme that stretches throughout the Bible. In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul was rejected as king of Israel because he did not completely destroy the Amalekites:

1 Samuel 15:2 Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. **3** Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'

Amalek was to be "*set apart for destruction.*" This was the end result of a people that were in total rebellion against the Lord in that they mercilessly attacked Israel in the wilderness while they were on their way to the promised land.

Saul did not obey. He kept alive what was to be destroyed.

10 Now the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, **11** "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments . . .

13 Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed *are* you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

1 Samuel 15:14 But Samuel said, "What then *is* this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

15 And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." . . .

19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?"

20 And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. **21** But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."

22 So Samuel said:

"Has the Lord *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,

As in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

And to heed than the fat of rams.

23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,

And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,

He also has rejected you from *being* king."

We see in Scripture that when someone does not obey God's command to "completely destroy" that which is set apart for destruction, the destruction then comes upon that person. Saul was rejected from being king over Israel. From that moment on he had no real peace. It was the end of his dynasty, and he died a miserable death.

What is the Application for Us?

Old Testament stories like this can seem so unrelated to our New Testament thinking. However, in many cases, what they experienced in reality we experience spiritually. The conquering of Canaan's land by Israel is a picture of the battle in the heart of each Christian. Our Christian walk is a walk of battles, and *the battlefield is inside each one of us*.

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian writer and thinker, wrote a series of children's books entitled, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the first book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, four children are sent away from London to Professor Kirke's manor home in the country to escape the air raids during WW 2. There, they discover a wardrobe (which is a piece of furniture that is used as a closet). When they enter the wardrobe, they find in it an entire country - actually a whole world. They have many adventures there in Narnia, and even return to Narnia several times in the other books in the series. While in Narnia, they grow older and rule and reign as kings and queens, fighting battles and reigning according to the will of Aslan, the great lion and king of that country.

The point is that there was a whole country inside the wardrobe. Likewise, there is a whole "kingdom," so to speak, inside each one of us. In this kingdom the Christian does spiritual battle each day, striving for the victory. If we should allow sin to have a place in the kingdoms of our hearts, we will lose the victory. Each one of us must identify sin in the heart and slay it without mercy. That is the only way that we can please God.

A well known Pentecostal song writer of the 1970's wrote:

Jesus be the Lord of all, Jesus be the Lord of all,
Jesus be the Lord of all the kingdoms of my heart.

1. In my heart are kingdoms of a world that's all my own,
Kingdoms that are only seen by myself and God alone,
In the past when I tried to rule my world, it just seemed to fall apart,
So please, Jesus, be the Lord of all the kingdoms of my heart.

2. I guess I only fooled myself, for I said I had yielded all,
But in a secret corner of my heart was a kingdom that did not fall,
I surrender now, make my heart Your throne, rule each kingdom great and small,
For if You're not Lord of everything, then You're not Lord at all.

The story of Achan is best applied to the heart of the Christian. When we first come to God, as the Israelites first came to Canaan's land, we must give our all to God. We must renounce sin, evil, and everything that is contrary to God. There has to be a destruction within our hearts of everything that God hates, and we must do battle through prayer and repentance to win the victory. When we "cross over" to Canaan's land through water baptism, we are now God's children in His place, and we are destined for victory if we will only obey His Word and listen to the Spirit.

If sin enters into our hearts, we must identify it and destroy it, or it will destroy us. We must destroy sin without mercy. If sin is allowed to exist in our hearts - if we hide it - it will eventually destroy us. *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*

We must also preserve the treasures in our hearts for God. Treasures of prayer, praise, Bible reading, faith, worship. These belong to God and are dedicated to Him.

We must fight the battle in our mind and our heart, and there are some things in us that must be completely destroyed, or we will be destroyed by them (these things are wrong attitudes, sinful desires, etc.). Refusing to fight the battle is the same as defeat. If we will admit it, as Christians we fight battles *every day*.

Sin wants to master us, just as sin wanted to master Cain. God said to Cain:

Genesis 4:6 . . . "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? **7** If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it.

Cain did not fight the battle in his heart, but he indulged himself in his feelings. Then he murdered his brother, Abel. We make decisions according to how we think, or what we feel and want. So, at times, we find ourselves struggling with anger, bitterness, and hatred - leading us into areas of temptation. But God tells us to fight against these sinful feelings. We do not walk by feelings, but we walk by the Word of God. We must put wrong feelings and ideas to death, having no mercy. Paul said:

Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. **9** Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, **10** and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him . . .

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; **13** bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. **14** But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

The battle is waged because we are given the power to overcome sin's grasp. There is no battle when there is no opposing side. It takes two to fight. When we are dead in our trespasses and sins (not born again), there is no spiritual battle within us because there is no spiritual life. The Spirit of God brings us to life spiritually, yet we live in these bodies of flesh that still have a sinful nature. Thus, the battle rages in the lives of believers, but the victory is assured because we are in Christ.

Be willing to fight the battle everyday. When we pray and seek God, when we read His word, when we fellowship in the house of God and absorb the preaching, we arm ourselves to do battle. We also are aware of the enemy. God will speak to us what we should “let live” in our hearts. Some things must be utterly destroyed, or they will destroy us. Just like in our story about Achan, some things can not be allowed to live in our hearts, and we must not indulge ourselves by letting them live.

Conclusion

What can we learn from the story of Achan?

1. We learn that there is a penalty for sin - and that penalty is death.
2. We learn that sin is never an isolated event. When Achan sinned, the whole nation of Israel was the loser for it, and even blamed for it.
3. We can be sure that our sins will find us out. Sin cannot be kept a secret. Its effects are felt, and then the sinner is found out. In this story, God revealed to Joshua and the people that Achan was the one who sinned.
4. We learn just how much God hates sin. After Israel had sinned, God was silent, and they lost their next battle. Sin always separates.

Israel would eventually go on to defeat Ai. This was made possible after Achan was destroyed. When Israel defeated Ai, the Lord said they could take the spoils of war for themselves. In this situation, the city was not “*set apart for destruction*” like Jericho was. Jericho was the first city to be conquered, and therefore it belonged to God. Then the Israelites could take the spoils of war in the conquests that followed as a blessing to themselves.

If Achan had only followed the command of God, he could have enjoyed the spoils of war at Ai. His disobedience and impatience cost him his life, the lives of his family, and the lives of thirty-six innocent Israelites. Likewise, as we live this Christian life, looking for victory in our hearts, we must do things God's way. His ways are perfect, and victory comes to those who believe His Word.