

ACHAN'S SIN

Joshua 7:1-26

Key Verse: 7:1

"But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel."

In the previous chapter when they obeyed God Almighty absolutely we learned that the Israelites conquered the Jericho Fortress. How easy it is for one soldier out of 40,000 to speak words while marching, but regardless of the large number of soldiers, no one spoke. They went around Jericho Fortress one time a day for six days, and on the seventh day, seven times. Then General Joshua commanded, "Advance!" and the trumpet blew a charging march and all the soldiers shouted, "Victory to God and victory to General Joshua and victory to us!" The wall of Jericho was wobbling, and then it completely collapsed to the ground. We learned three things. Firstly, the Israelites' absolute obedience to God's command. Secondly, when the Israelites obeyed, God gave them victory. Thirdly, human life is a war or battle. A minority of people win the victory of life. But a great majority of people, as history proves, become losers in life. May God grant victory, only victory to our lives when we obey God's word absolutely. Today's passage is the story about Achan's sin. Achan's sin made the Israelites lose the war to Ai. We also learn that Achan's cheating did not please God. His cheating was a bad influence to his people.

First, Achan's sin caused God's anger to burn against Israel (1). Look

at verse 1. "But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel." The beginning of verse 1 says, "But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things..." In reality, Achan, one person, took some of the things devoted to God. But the beginning part of verse one says that "the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things." God's people and many of God's churches and institutions are all different in one way or the other. However, Christians are one body in God's sight. Achan, one person, sinned against God. But God saw all the Israelites as unfaithful because of this one person. Christian community is not an organization, but an organism. It is hard to explain the deep meaning of the difference between an organization and an organism or the meaning of a Christian society. But we can understand easily when we listen to St. Paul. He says, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1Co 12:26-27). Christians are all one body, and each of us is a part of it. Sometimes the weaker parts are indispensable. For example, the bowels are not seen yet they are working 24 hours a day. But they are not much honored. Still, the nose cannot say "I am indeed elegant. But bowels are no good because they sometimes growl and they are dirty and are not seen. They are always working 24 hours a day. They are stupid." We must know that God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that are not seen, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern and honor for each other (1Co 12:22-23).

When the Israelites obeyed God's word absolutely God blessed them to capture the Jericho Fortress. One person, Achan, took some of the things devoted to God secretly. But God considered all the Israelites as unfaithful like Achan, to God Almighty. God saw one person as equal to a nation. This is the reason Peter claimed, "You are a chosen people" (1Pe 2:9).

In this particular generation, at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of a new millennium, almost all Christians are contaminated by modern culture. Each person thinks of himself as having no relationship to others. Jean Paul Sarte wrote many novels and essays. His works sound very funny, but he mainly wrote about human relationships. In his own time, human relationships were pretty good. But he predicted one separation upon another separation until there would be no unity or community and people would be very self-centered. These days we see so many who have no relationship with others; they live with dogs and cats. Some people live with monkeys, but in Illinois it is illegal to live with monkeys.

Just as God regarded one person as the entire body of the Israelites, so then all children of God are one body and spirit. And they should not be separated from their fellow Christians. They must honor each other and with one voice they must praise God and honor God as God. There is a wayward girl. Because of this sinsick and selfish girl all our community panicked until she returned home. Then she began to give bad influence to very genuine girls to get them out of their homes. Because of this event many of us had a grinding headache. We are afraid of her bad influence. When one part of the body is sick, our entire body suffers much and to

God we are called unfaithful. Because of this one person, God's anger may burn. Let's pray that we have community spirit. And that we also may have a sense of being a chosen people.

Second, the Israelite soldiers were badly defeated by the soldiers of Ai (2-5). "Ai" doesn't mean, "I, my, me;" it is the name of one town in the Promised Land. Now General Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and spy out the region." So the men went up and spied out Ai. These guys returned and reported to General Joshua, "Oh, not all the people will have to go up against Ai. It seems to be good to send only two or three thousand people to take it and not weary all the people, for only a few men are there."

"So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them" (4-5). The men of Ai chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. Each time the men of Ai struck an Israelite soldier with baseball bats the Israelite soldier screamed, "Oh, my head! Oh, my buttock! Oh, my nose is broken!" as they were going down the slope. What was worse, at this, the hearts of the people melted like water. What a terrible description that the hearts of the Israelites melted like water. The soldiers of the Israelites were so valiant when they marched around the Jericho Fortress, but now, they were chased and beaten up, rolling down the slopes. Finally their hearts were melted, and became like water. What a shame. What a tragedy. What a defeat! It made God burn with anger. They lost all hope of conquering the Promised Land. When they depended on God's word and acted accordingly, they won the victory. But when they did not, they suffered terrible defeat.

Third, General Joshua realized his sin that he did not listen to God (6). At the news that his soldiers were routed and defeated, General Joshua realized painfully his great sin against God. He had won the war against the Jericho Fortress when he heard God's word very carefully. But this time, General Joshua didn't ask God. He sent three thousand soldiers to Ai and they lost the war and the people's hearts were melting like water. Then General Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there until evening, not drinking even a cup of cold water. The elders of Israel did the same. Moreover, the elders of Israel sprinkled dust on their heads. They were repenting to God very sincerely. After much prayer and sincere repentance, General Joshua went to God. He said, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?" General Joshua seems to be complaining to God, but it is not so. He was terribly penitent that the soldiers of God under his care lost a war. Thus they did not glorify the name of Almighty God. And he again prayed holding onto the promises of God tightly, "The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?" It meant, "You are the great God! You promised us to conquer the Promised Land. We are defeated now. If the nations of the Promised Land hear this they will defame your name. What are you going to do?"

General Joshua's prayer to God was an expression of his sorrow to

God because of their defeat by Ai. And next, he grabbed God's promise to the Israelites and asked God's pardon and asked his presence with them. Then God became helpless.

Fourth, God says, "Go, consecrate the people" (10-13). God almighty said to General Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions." In actuality, Achan, one person, took some of the devoted things, but God uses the plural form, as if the entire Israelite people stole the things devoted to God. Here, we see that our God sees each of us as one person. And at the same time he saw one person as the entire army of Israel. Here we learn that one person's influence is indeed crucial; it can be destructive, or it can bring victory and glory to God. God said to General Joshua, "Because of this I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it'" (12,13). In these verses we learn one important thing. One person seems to be nothing compared with the entire army, but if one person's heart is deceptive, the entire army cannot win the battles or the war. So God sternly warned them to remove one person who stole the things devoted to God.

God taught them how to find out the rascal. God told them to present themselves by tribes, then, to come forward clan by clan and family by

family, then man by man. God said, "He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the Lord and has done a disgraceful thing in Israel!" (14-15) General Joshua was in deep grief and sorry to God. And he did not know what to do, but he did what God told him to do to find out the rascal. General Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes and Judah was taken. As you know, Judah is the main line of the covenant people. After finding out that the rascal was in the tribe of Judah, he told the clans of Judah to come forward. Zimri was taken. Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan was taken (16-18).

Then General Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord the God of Israel, and give him the praise." General Joshua's command to Achan was thunderous. It is because General Joshua spoke before God. Especially, General Joshua's calling Achan, "My son" indicates that all the Israelite soldiers were like dear sons and an entire family. "Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me," General Joshua said. Achan was overwhelmed by Joshua's question. So he replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia...." Achan wanted to be like an English gentleman. He was very much interested in the beautiful robe. The robe looked like a three-piece suit made in Babylon to Achan's eyes. He also saw glittering gold here and there, so he took fifty shekels. He thought, "I'm going to be an English gentleman. I'm gonna buy a four-stallion chariot and wear a three-piece suit made in Babylon and drive like Judah Ben Hur, `Ya, Ya, Ya.'" His momentary illusion and momentarily forgetting God's grace led him to destruction. According to his words, General Joshua sent messengers to the tent and there it

was hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Lord.

Then General Joshua together with all Israel took Achan, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had to the Valley of Achor. General Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The Lord will bring trouble on you today." This is a very painful story. Because of one man's sin, his sons and daughters and even his sinless animals, donkeys, were in for trouble.

What happened next? We don't know whether Joshua commanded it or not, but all Israel stoned him according to their tradition. When they were stoning Achan's family and flocks and herds, blood gushed out here and there, even from many children's stomachs. After they had stoned them, they burnt them. Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. There are many people who are not aware that God punishes people because their wickedness is too great. But this part tells us that because of one man's sin, even his sons and daughters were stoned to death. Even a cute donkey was stoned to death, silently shedding many tears. Maybe the cattle were stoned much more because they are more powerful.

After this punishment, the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since. Achor means trouble.

We learned that because of Achan's desire to wear a suit from Babylon and have gold and silver and become a driver of a four stallion chariot, he took devoted things. It was not his intention, but he was not right with God. Precisely, in his subconsciousness there was no God, so at the moment of crisis, he could not look up to God. He and his sons and daughters were all stoned to death, and on his tomb, heavy stones were laid. Therefore, God must dwell in our subconsciousness. Romans 2:8-9 says, "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew then for the Gentile..."

We are living in the generation where personal privacy and acts of immorality in the darkness are largely condoned. Condoning does not help those in darkness; it is the same as stoning to death. An individual person wants to be the center of the universe. That's a great mistake. God is the center of the universe. We are his beloved children. We must not rob what belongs to God. We must render victory to God. Each of us must honor himself and fellow Christians as a part of God's chosen people.