

p 45 WEEK 6: TWO PILES OF STONES, ONE CRUCIAL LESSON

Joshua 7:1–8:35

The Place of the Passage

Chapter 7 comes as a shock. It opens with these ominous words: “But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things” (v. 1). This will be a more complicated journey than chapter 6 may have led us to expect. The complicating factor is sin in the camp. One man disobeyed Joshua’s instructions, the Lord burned with anger against the people, and the people bore the consequences. The story that follows is tragic but yields important lessons for Israel and for us. In these chapters we grasp the seriousness and consequences of sin, a prerequisite for grasping the gospel of grace—the good news to which this story ultimately points.

The Big Picture

Israel experiences the wrath of God for disobedience, and restoration of blessing for the obedience they learned.

p 46 Reflection and Discussion

Read through Joshua 7:1–8:35, then consider this section of Scripture, following the questions below. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 403–407; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. A Pile of Stones (7:1–26)

The chapter begins with a sober indication of sin’s presence in Israel. Because of one man’s sin, “the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel” (7:1). Put this statement about God’s anger in your own words. How can God be angry with all the people of Israel for the sin of one Israelite?

We are given the backstory of why Israel failed at Ai, but Joshua didn’t have the whole story yet. What do you make of Joshua’s response in 7:7–9? Was Joshua’s confusion and despair justified?

This chapter has a very clear structure, moving from setting, conflict, climax, to resolution. As the story grows in tension, what is its climax?

p 47 God's response to Achan may seem harsh, given Achan's specific sin. But this was much more than a small theft. Go back through the chapter and list the various descriptions of Achan's sin.

We may be able to hide our sin from others, but sin is never hidden from God. Identify indications from this chapter of the Lord's perfect and complete knowledge.

Even if coveting isn't a regular part of our vocabulary, Achan's desires are nonetheless a regular part of our lives. Recall again Hebrews 13:5–6: what is the deeper problem behind our covetousness? What sins of covetousness come to mind for you when reading this chapter?

Achan clearly confessed his sin, but the broader context of Achan's confession, including its timing and what he didn't say, is not encouraging. What features of this account highlight the problem in Achan's heart?

p 48 Joshua 7:1 and 7:26 bookend the chapter with a contrast. What happened that changed the Lord's posture toward his people?

2. Another Pile of Stones (8:1–35)

In this story, two piles of stones are better than one! What is the significance of pairing the story in chapter 7 with the story in chapter 8?

Israel conquered Ai but took the king alive and proceeded to hang him before burying him under the heap of stones. We will see such action again in the next few chapters. Do you think it was appropriate? Why or why not?

With the drama of the last two chapters in mind, what is the purpose of the closing scene in 8:30–35?

p 49 Read through the following *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these reflections have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

THE LORD'S PATIENCE. Joshua's response to Israel's failure at Ai is unreasonable, given all he knew of God. Previously he saw God bless his people with victory for obedience, and he knew well God's threat of defeat for unbelief. Based on Yahweh's covenantal relationship with Israel,

Joshua should have discerned there was sin in their midst. Instead, in lament he appears to accuse God not only of failing his people but also of ill will toward them. Joshua sounds like Israel grumbling in the wilderness (see Ex. 16:3). The Lord's response is stern but appropriate: "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned" (Josh. 7:10–11). This rebuke is less than Joshua deserves and demonstrates the patience of our Lord—patience made possible because of Christ's future sacrifice for such sins (Rom. 3:25).

GOD'S WORD, OUR LIFELINE. In the closing scene of chapter 8 we see Joshua gathering the people of Israel around God's Word. Every feature of this scene contributes to a sense of solemnity and worship: an altar of uncut stones, offerings, writing of the law, the standing positions of those present, and the reading of the law before the people. And when Joshua read the law, "There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel" (Josh. 8:35). Such devotion to the law demonstrates what was also true for Christ and for us: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4).

Whole-Bible Connections

ONE MAN, CORPORATE GUILT. That God would burn with anger toward all of his people for the sin of one man may catch us off guard, but we should not be surprised. When Adam sinned, he plunged the entire human race into sin, with all of its guilt and death and condemnation (Rom. 5:12–14). This reality of corporate guilt is important for understanding how God relates to humanity. In judgment, God curses his people because of the sin of one man; but by the same token, in salvation God makes many sinners righteous through the obedience of one man (Rom. 5:15–19; 1 Cor. 15:22).

ISRAELITE IN NAME ONLY. Rahab appeared to be outside God's promise, but her faith proved her to be an insider. The opposite was true for Achan. He is not alone in Scripture. Judas betrayed Jesus for money (Luke 22:4–5). Many [p 50](#) who followed Jesus for bread would eventually turn away (John 6:26, 66). Even some who have called Jesus "Lord" will be surprised in the end (Matt. 7:21–23). Jesus used the imagery of different soils to help his disciples discern the various responses to his word (Mark 4:1–20). Here's what John said about those who abandon their faith: "If they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19). Those who belong to Christ will stay with Christ until the end, and their love for him will endure (Phil. 1:6; Heb. 3:14; 1 John 2:15–17).

Theological Soundings

WRATH OF GOD. Chapter 7 is bookended with references to God's anger, highlighting its centrality to this section. The wrath of God is one of his divine attributes, an emotion and action arising from his holiness and love for what is just and good. Wrath is not intrinsic to God's character, as love is, for without rebellion there is no wrath. What Achan gets in a pile of stones

is what we deserve as sinners like him. We are born “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), and it is this fury of God’s anger against human sin that Jesus suffered for us on the cross.

THE LORD’S PERFECT KNOWLEDGE. The Lord’s slow but deliberate uncovering of Achan’s sin is a reminder of the way his perfect knowledge exposes our secret thoughts and deeds (Ps. 44:21; Heb. 4:12). It should sober us that the Lord saw Achan when no one else did, for indeed a day is coming when God will judge “the secrets of men” (Rom. 2:16). It should sober us still more that Achan hid until his hand was forced. In love with darkness, men avoid the light; but on the promise of mercy and cleansing, the gospel invites Christian and non-Christian alike to confess sin and find forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9–2:2).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Joshua 7:1–8:35 for your life. How does this passage lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises? Write down your reflections under the three headings we have considered and on the passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

p 51 2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Joshua 7:1–8:35

As You Finish This Unit ...

Confess in prayer to God any sins that you have been hiding, recognizing he knows all things and will judge even our secrets. Then praise him for the cross, where Jesus suffered that judgment for even the most secret sins of those whose faith is in him.