



“The Valley of Trouble”

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I want to read an account from the Old Testament book of **Joshua** that occurred right after the famous fall of the city of Jericho. The people of God were now to conquer the land of Canaan. Jericho was first on the list, but after the fall of Jericho, a very unfortunate event happened involving an Israelite who made a grave error, bringing a heap of trouble upon the people of God. His name was Achan and his story is recorded in **Joshua 6 & 7**. If you're very familiar with the stories of the Bible, you'll remember that this was when the people marched seven times around the walls of Jericho, they blew the trumpet and shouted, and the walls then fell. Joshua gave them these instructions as they went to do the Lord's bidding.

Joshua 6:17-20 “And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD. So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.”

Well, that's all well and good, but see what happens next.

Joshua 7:1- “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.”

This caused great trouble for the people because they were next to go and take the little city of Ai in their ongoing conquest. But they miserably failed in that mission and came back defeated because God did not fight for them. This led not only to great consequences for those soldiers, but ultimately for all the people—especially Achan and those he loved. This all happened in a valley that was infamously named for Achan and it became known as the Valley of Trouble. We want to avoid that valley in our own lives today. We'll talk about that in our study today.

Every city or place gets its name from something or somebody. Many towns are named after some notable statesman, politician, or perhaps the early settlers of a bygone era. Sometimes a place is named for some historic event, calamity, or disaster that took place there. Such is the case of a little valley situated between the cities of Jericho and Ai in ancient Israel. It was named *the Valley of Achor*, which means *the Valley of Trouble*, and it got its name from the trouble that was brought upon Israel by a man named Achan. His name means *troublesome* and he certainly lived up to that name in our text. Achan is not that unusual of a man because he's like some of us who seem to bring trouble upon ourselves and others around us. Achan's behavior brought great trouble upon the Israelites; so much so that this valley was named after him. There are some very important lessons that we need to learn from this story so that we might keep ourselves and others out of the valley of trouble today. You and your family may be living in the Valley of Trouble.

When God empowered the Israelites to destroy the city of Jericho, He strictly forbade them from taking the spoils of the city for themselves. The city was to be destroyed along with its people, except for the house of Rahab the harlot. The valuable things from the city's ruins, such as the gold, silver, and finer vessels were to be taken and put in the treasury of the Lord. The rest was to be burned. Joshua was emphatic that this be done. The things of Jericho were to be accursed to them and what was to be saved was to go directly to God and be sanctified for His service.

But Achan had other plans. When nobody was looking, Achan saw the treasures of Jericho and he stealthily took them and hid them in his garment. He snuck them back into the camp and buried them beneath his tent. Joshua and the people had no idea that Achan had done this. They thought they had obeyed the Lord's instructions and that all was well. The truth didn't come out until some days later when they faced their next foe in the conquest of Canaan: a little inconsequential town named Ai. Ai should've been an easy and winnable battle. After all, if the walls of a great city named Jericho could fall, what was Ai to them? Joshua sent spies up to surveil the area and they came back so confident that they could easily take the city that they told Joshua not to bother sending the full regiment of troops, that only a small number could do the job. So, he sent about 3,000 soldiers to go and conquer Ai. But a surprise was awaiting them. It didn't go exactly as they had planned. They no more than got to the gate of the city than the men of Ai rose up and killed several of their soldiers and sent the rest fleeing back to their camp.

Joshua was absolutely vexed and distressed. He couldn't understand how in the world this could be. How could they have destroyed Jericho and failed to take a city like Ai? How could they possibly expect to face the many other cities throughout the land of Canaan if they couldn't even take a town like Ai?

Joshua 7:10-11 "So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? 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."

I want you to notice how that God accused the nation as a whole for the sin that one man committed. The sin of one person can become the sin of a group of people. The sin of one man or one woman can become the sin of a whole congregation of people, a whole church, for example.

Joshua 7:12 ““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.”

God then told Joshua that the next morning, he was to gather the people together, going man by man until he found the culprit. So, he launched an investigation and acting on a divine hunch you might say, when Achan was brought to Joshua, Joshua coerced a confession out of him.

Joshua 7:19-26 “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. And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: 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." So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. 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. 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. 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. 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.”

The *Valley of Achor* means the *Valley of Trouble*. Just as Achan brought great trouble upon the camp that day, so sin will get us into terrible trouble today. We need to learn some lessons from this Valley of Trouble.

First of all, we need to remember that sin cannot be hidden from the eyes of God. Achan thought he had pulled off a brilliant scheme. He thought he had really gotten away with something, that no one was the wiser. He probably thought he was more clever than all of the other men. That could've been their treasure, but he was smart enough and sneaky enough to take it and not be seen, and bury it, and it was all his. But he left one important factor out of the equation, the most important of all: God. He didn't think about the fact that God knew what he was thinking. He pushed that out of his mind. He wasn't thinking about the fact that as he snuck that treasure back to his tent to bury it that God was watching him. God saw every bit of it. God knew all along where the spoils were buried. He knew who the perpetrator was. Achan should've known that God sees everything. You can't hide anything from Him.

Psalms 90:8 “You have set our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.”

Hebrews 4:12-13 “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a

discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

We're going to give account to God. There is a judgment day that's coming, and God doesn't forget. Nothing is hidden from God. He sees it all and remembers it all and we're going to answer to Him for our unrepented, unconfessed, and unforgiven sins. Have you ever stopped to realize that God is watching everything you do, every minute of every hour of every day? That God hears every conversation you have, every word you utter? God even knows everything you think.

I remember a woman a few years ago who was a member of the church. She was in a place she did not belong one night, doing something a Christian shouldn't be doing. She saw a person from there in town who knew me. When she saw that person, she panicked and begged that person not to tell me that she saw her there. That person told me anyway, but the sad thing about that is that she was really concerned about whether or not I knew she was there, but I don't know that she was too concerned that God knew she was there. That's the issue: not whether I know, but that God knows. He's the judge. He's the one whom she and I everyone else will someday give account for our lives.

God sees everything we do. Did you know that God sees when a person steals? He knows right down to the penny how much they took. God hears and knows every time a person lies. There is not one single lie that escapes His knowledge. He knows about the affairs and elicit behavior of unfaithful spouses. He knows about the immorality of those who sneak around in the shadows doing sinful things. You may hide it from others, but you don't hide it from God. He knows all about it. He knows when we cheat on our taxes or take something from the office that's not ours to take. He knows when we cheat or defraud another person in a business or sales transaction. God sees all of that. And there will one day be an accounting of those things.

There is only one way to cover sin from the eyes of God and, ironically, that's by confessing it TO God, repenting of it, and seeking His forgiveness. That's the only way to hide it from God's sight.

Psalm 32:1-2 "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit."

You see, that's the only way to cover sin. You bring it to God, you confess it, you turn from and forsake it, and meet the conditions of His will so that we can be forgiven of it. You can't hide your sin from the Lord and Achan teaches us that.

Second, we need to remember that Achan's sin was first against God. And ALL sin is ultimately against God. **1 John 3:4** tells us that **"...sin is the transgression of the law."** So, when we commit ANY kind of sin, we are first and foremost sinning against the Lord, and we need to be concerned about that before anything else.

In this case, Achan was literally stealing from the Lord. We know that everything ultimately belongs to God, but there are things that are specifically devoted to God. They are sanctified, holy, and they belong to Him and Him alone. The spoils of Jericho were God's. They were to be placed in the treasury of the Lord to be used for His service. God decreed that. But Achan coveted them and in his greed, he sought opportunity to enrich himself and he dishonestly took what did not belong to him.

You may remember that in the book of **Malachi**, God accused the priests of keeping what should've been given to Him. God went so far as to say that they were robbing Him (**Malachi 3:8**). Did you know it's possible to rob the Lord? They were robbing God. People rob God every day. Do you realize that everything you possess—including your life itself—comes from the Lord? He is to be honored first with those things. I'm not merely talking about our money, but our time, our talents, our very life as a whole. We should seriously ask ourselves the question: Does God come first? Do we put Him first with our time? Do we use our resources in a way that pleases and first honors God? You know, God gives us so many hours in a day and so many days a week. On the first day of the week, God decrees that His people come together to worship and break bread. We're taught in **Hebrews 10:25** that we're not to forsake the assembling of ourselves with the disciples of the Lord. We're to come together with the church to worship. That's to come first. But how many people put their job or vacation or hunting/fishing trips or golf outings before that? God comes first.

Does God come first when it comes to your resources and how you use them? Do you honor God first? The first recorded sin in the early church involved two people who kept back the price of some property that they had pledged to give to the work of God. They sold it and tried to keep back the money for themselves, hiding it and lying about how much they made on the property. **Acts 5:1-11** tells about how Ananias and Sapphira died as a result of their brazen act of stealing from God and covering it up. Many a Christian lives their life that way as well, taking their money, time, devotion, affection, and worship that belongs to God and simply using it for themselves, then making excuse as though God doesn't know the truth of the matter. Achan learned a hard lesson in regard to that. His sin was against the Lord. Thirdly, Achan not only sinned against the Lord, but against the people of God. Did you know that the Bible shows us that the sin of one person can become the sin of many? Certainly, the consequences of the sin of one can reach out and infect a multitude of people. The sin of one member can cause great trouble for the whole church. In this case, the whole nation suffered defeat at Ai because of the actions of Achan in the aftermath of Jericho. Hundreds of thousands of people suffered a tremendous, humiliating setback because of the sin of this one man.

Romans 14:7 "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself."

We should remember that. The church can suffer great trouble because of the deeds of one member. For example, what about a church that has a preacher who doesn't pay his debts? Doesn't that have an effect on the reputation of the church as a whole? What about an elder, deacon, teacher, or leader in the church who is a business cheat or perhaps a womanizer? Doesn't that affect the church as a whole? A lot of church members don't think about this, but the worldly church member who compromises the example of the entire congregation by undercutting what the church preaches and stands for, and they do so by their sinful compromising and worldly living.

Some churches suffer because of indifference and apathy of a few. Why should you be the exception, that you don't have to attend faithfully? That you don't need to be faithful in attending worship or being active in the work of the church, but everyone else does? Sometimes it's the sour, negative, or bitter attitude or hatefulness of one member that's enough to poison a congregation. Does the church suffer defeat or find itself in the Valley of Trouble because of your life or my life, your decisions or my decisions, your behavior or my behavior?

Fourthly, Achan sinned against his whole family. Look at what happened. This was a terrible tragedy.

Joshua 7:24-25 “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. 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.”

You see, he took his family down with him. Once they had stoned everything alive, they burned it to a heap of ash and covered it up with another pile of stones. They destroyed everything that was attached to this wicked man and they did away with the effect and influence of his sin.

Now, we’re not living in such times. We realize that. God isn’t carrying out capital punishment upon His people who sin today. Nor is anyone suggesting that we could or should. That’s not the point. But there is still a heavy price to be paid for sin. Often, it’s the family that pays just as great a price as the sinner himself. I know of fathers and mothers who are derelict in their duties toward God. They don’t take God seriously. They’re not really living a Christian life. They’re not leading their family to the house of God to worship and serve the Lord. Consequently, what they don’t stop to think about is that they are likely dooming their children to a Christ-less life and a Godless eternity by their own disobedience. Are you leading your family to hell? Are you leading your little boys and girls to a life of sin and worldliness? Are you showing them that obeying the gospel and living a Christian life isn’t really all that important? That there are things of greater importance in life? Are you setting a terrible example in front of them with your sinful living? You could put them on a different path. If you would obey the gospel, if you would start attending the worship of the church and living a Christian life, you don’t know where that would lead them.

Friend, you are not the only one to whom judgment is coming. Judgment is coming to every sinner. It may very well be that by your example alone, you are leading your family whom you claim to love down a path that will end in spiritual disaster. Are you and your family living in the Valley of Trouble today? That was the story of Achan. May we learn the lessons of that place and avoid the sin of this man which led to such trouble and destruction.

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