

JOSHUA

Lesson 10 - Chapters 6 and 7

Last week we ended in Joshua chapter 6, whereby Israel conquered Jericho and killed all of its inhabitants except for Rahab and her father's family. Two principles were at the center of that lesson: first the principle of "the ban" also called the Law of Herem. And second the principle that a former enemy of God could (upon confession of faith to the God of Israel) be brought into the Camp of Israel.

The first principle of "the ban" was that all the spoils of Holy War belong to God. The spoils of Holy War, or any war for that matter, are the enemy people, their possessions, their farm animals, and the place of their residence including both the village or city and their personal homes. Because these spoils were God's holy property they could not be taken or used by anyone; to do so was to rob God. The only approved method to present the spoils to the Lord was to kill whatever had been living, and then usually to burn it. That meant the people, the animals, and the field produce was to be destroyed. The city or village was also to be destroyed and burned; but usually valuable metal objects and all gold and silver were to be handed over to the priesthood for they were seen as God's servants and earthly representatives.

The burning of God's holy property as the means to devote it to Him and Him alone is reflected in the principle of the burnt offering; that is, things were burned up on the Brazen Altar NOT as the means to kill them, but as the means to both keep them from being used by people and for handing them over to the Lord.

The principle of a former enemy being given the opportunity to become a friend of God and a member of the covenant community is what is being reflected in the narrative near the end of chapter 6 whereby Rahab and her family are rescued from the ruins of Jericho and AT FIRST allowed to live with Israel but outside of the camp of Israel. They enjoy the security and fellowship of Israel and of Israel's God, yet they are not the fullest possible members of the community. They receive some benefit, but not all. There are certain benefits that can only be obtained by being circumcised and thus made complete members of the community; this is illustrated by Rahab and her family (in time) being allowed to reside INSIDE the camp of Israel.

I suggested to you by means of relating a vision that Dr. Bob Lehton (our Saturday evening praise and worship director) had that this is very much an illustration of the condition of the Christian. When first saved we receive some, but not all, of the benefits of being near God's covenant community because initially we are still residing outside the camp. IF we mature, IF we become open to recognize that our Salvation was a product of Israel's covenants with God

(brought about by Yeshua), that those covenants are still intact, and that Israel is our elder brother in the faith, then we can move **inside** the camp for a yet closer relationship to God and to His chosen people IF we desire it. Either way we are saved, just as Rahab and her family were saved whether they were living outside or inside the camp.

Do not mistake this for a call to Judaism nor a suggestion that a move to Israel is in order; what I am describing is a spiritual more than a physical matter. It is a call to join the true spiritual ideal Israel on the one hand, and on the other to obey the Lord's earthly command to love, bless and comfort His people. So before us all lies a choice: do we want to be a Rahab that lives at a subsistence level OUTSIDE the camp, or do we want to be a fully committed Rahab that lives to the fullest INSIDE the camp.

Let's re-read the last few verses of Joshua chapter 6.

RE-READ JOSHUA 6:26, 27

Here we have Joshua issuing a curse upon the ruins of the city of Jericho. And it is that the city should never be rebuilt. The penalty to the leader who would rebuild what God has destroyed is that his firstborn and last-born sons would die in the process.

Joshua placed the city under "the ban" forever. Jericho was set aside as devoted to God, for all time. To rebuild the city was to retake possession of something that didn't belong to that leader or tribe that attempted it.

Understand that what is being communicated is NOT that people could never live in Jericho again. It's that a walled fortress, a protected city with gates, was never to be rebuilt. Recall that the symbolism attached to the closed-up city of Jericho that resisted God's people, was of setting itself against the Lord. The result of that decision and action is, ultimately, destruction. So a small settlement of people, a village, is not at all being contemplated in this curse (at least not in the simplest sense). That some Hebrews might use the stones of the ruins of Jericho to build themselves a house and then farm the area and raise livestock is one thing; however for an enemy to establish itself was another.

Later in Israel's history (about 5 centuries later) a leader would ignore this curse and bring upon himself the exact punishment called for here. We read about it in the book of 1Kings.

READ 1KINGS 16:30-34

We have a common Christian saying that we use rather often, but forget that it has two sides to it; the saying is that "God's Word will never come back void". We usually mean it in the sense that if we will learn the Word of God (or teach it to others) that in time blessings from following it will come about (hopefully beginning with Salvation), resulting in lives changed for good. The other side of that is demonstrated here: when God ordains a law with a consequence for its violation, or vows a curse (as in Joshua 6), it too will not come back void. It will not be forgotten; Hi'el lost his oldest and youngest sons as a consequence of rebuilding Jericho as a

walled city.

Let me point out something else that is happening in our time regarding Jericho, which demonstrates that this curse did not end with the beginning of the New Testament. For a long time, especially since Israel's return to its land in 1948, Jericho thrived. Jew and Arab lived side-by-side there, and a nice village was built next to Jericho's ruins. The Date Palms that grow there became renowned for their quality, and a thriving tourist industry bloomed and the residents did well for themselves.

Since the Intifada that began only a few years ago, and since Jericho became officially designated as a Palestinian possession, the place has wilted. Armed soldiers at roadblocks greet potential visitors. The enemies of God have again tried to make Jericho a stronghold against the people of God and so they have unwittingly placed themselves under the curse of Joshua. The place is poverty-stricken and few tourists will venture there any more even though tourists are hoped for. As one who leads tours to Israel, I can tell you that it is not a matter of whether the place is reasonably safe (and I'm not so sure that it is), it's a matter that as long as it remains a place occupied by the enemies of God for the purpose of defying Yehoveh and His chosen, it is under a curse and I want no part of it.

Let's move on to chapter 7.

READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 7 all

This is the story of the battle for the city of Ai, and it centers on a doomed character named Achan. It falls within that sort-of second tier of well, but lesser, known Biblical stories within Christendom; but unless one understands what precedes it, and the very definite principle it is built upon, its meaning gets diminished, lost, or badly misinterpreted.

The subject revolves around the same one that the battle for Jericho does: the ban, the Law of Herem. And the principle is brought forward in a number of ways into the New Testament, but probably none is better known than the one I'm about to read to you. And at the same time, because so many have all but abandoned the Old Testament we don't understand that the principle of the ban plays a significant role in this familiar story about Jesus.

CJB Luke 20:21 They put to him this sh'eilah: "Rabbi, we know that you speak and teach straightforwardly, showing no partiality but really teaching what God's way is. 22 Does Torah permit us to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor or not?" 23 But he, spotting their craftiness, said to them, 24 "Show me a denarius! Whose name and picture does it have?" "The Emperor's," they replied. 25 "Then," he said to them, "give the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor. And give God what belongs to God!" 26 They were unable to trap him by anything he said publicly; indeed, amazed at his answer, they fell silent.

What ever belongs to God is God's holy property. God's holy property has the ban placed on it. Whatever is not God's holy property may be legitimately owned and used by someone else; it does not have the ban placed on it. These Jewish religious leaders fully understood that the

Torah allowed taxes to be paid to a human government; the Law of Herem did not cover it. But as happens when traditions and doctrines of men begin to take on a larger role than the Holy Scripture commandments of God, rather straightforward issues can become clouded in a haze of glib sayings and religious rulings.

Things devoted to God are God's and therefore what He does with them are up to Him. Paul speaks of the two extremes of God's nature in Romans 11: His kindness and His severity. When a man attempts to disregard the ban by misappropriating God's holy property, that man will face God's severity instead of His kindness.

There is another familiar place in the Bible where the Law of Herem, the ban, is at the core of the matter but because the principle of the ban isn't known or understood among most Believers it is not recognized in the story.

CJB Malachi 3:6 "But because I, ADONAI, do not change, you sons of Ya'akov will not be destroyed. 7 Since the days of your forefathers you have turned from my laws and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot. "But you ask, 'In respect to what are we supposed to return?' 8 Can a person rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How have we robbed you?' In tenths and voluntary contributions. 9 A curse is on you, on your whole nation, because you rob me. 10 Bring the whole tenth into the storehouse, so that there will be food in my house, and put me to the test," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot. "See if I won't open for you the floodgates of heaven and pour out for you a blessing far beyond your needs.

How can a person rob God? What does that mean, to "rob" God? It means that by taking what already belongs to Him you have trespassed upon His holy property. That which is devoted to the Lord is His; it is under the ban. It cannot be taken or used or (just as important) held back. What is the result of violating this ban? Verse 9, "a curse is on you and your whole nation...."

There are some things owed to God because He has predetermined that they are His (such as the people and possessions of Jericho). Other things He leaves up to us, such as our **voluntary** contributions that we make by our own decisions. But when we agree with God on a voluntary contribution for Him (whatever that might be) then ownership is immediately transferred. Whatever we devoted by an act of agreement with God HAS become God's holy property. Should we ever think that after we have told God we want to give Him something and now we are backing out and change our minds, to us it is typically just a matter of that: we changed our minds and no longer wish to devote it to the Lord; in other words, the deal is off.....no harm no foul. But in the Lord's eyes, since it already became His upon your determination and agreement to devote it, NOW you are robbing Him.

This is why we have this concept in Malachi of "tenths" (or tithes) as referring to what **has been legislated** by God as owed to Him (whether you agree or not), alongside these "voluntary contributions" that are about other things that CAN be devoted to the Lord (or not) by our own choice (there is no penalty for our decision). Yet, once decided, the matter is settled. Thus we see (as with Paul in Romans 11, again) that those who DO give to God the things that are devoted to Him, those things that are under the ban, they will experience God's

kindness instead of His severity. And in this story of Achan in Joshua 7 we see just how severe God can be in dealing with matters of His holy property.

One would have thought that the lesson learned at Jericho was that by following God's commands, doing things in His way and in His time, His name would be revered and Israel would be victorious. It boggles the mind that all Israel did to capture Jericho was to march around it silently, with the Ark in tow and only the noise of their footsteps and the blaring shofars to be heard echoing off the surrounding hills. God did the rest; the walls didn't fall because Israel made a loud enough racket with those horns; the walls fell because Yehoveh destroyed them. Jericho didn't fall because of Joshua's brilliant battle plan or the army's fierce courage; it fell because of Israel's obedience.

But now we find that after the so-called "battle" was won, someone had disobeyed the Lord in a various serious way; and this would have a negative effect on what Israel would do next: attack the city of Ai. This person was Achan and his crime was that he had misappropriated some property found in Jericho; property under the ban, property belonging exclusively to Yehoveh. No doubt was left to his identity because 4 generations of his family history were given to pinpoint him.

It is interesting that immediately we see that on the one hand the "children of Israel" are identified as the responsible party; but on the other that one sole human, Achan, was the perpetrator. Even though only one man had committed this crime verse 1 explains that the Lord's anger blazed up against ALL of Israel, the whole nation.

This crime was imputed to the entire nation of Israel NOT because they were seen as equally guilty as Achan; they weren't seen as accessories to the theft of holy property. They weren't accused of all having the same kind of evil disposition as Achan or that in their hearts they WANTED to take God's property but fear held them back. Rather it was that Achan had not only robbed God, he had also robbed Israel of their purity and holiness. Israel now bore the burden of Achan's sin. One member of a group, a congregation, a family, or a nation can affect the entire body. The group has a responsibility to guard against such a thing, investigate and seek out the individual (or the several) involved if such a breach occurs, and then to take the proper God-ordained actions to punish the perpetrator and relieve the overall society of its burden.

I cringe every time I hear a Believer say, aren't you glad God doesn't demand that of us anymore? Aren't you glad that in His economy there are no more criminals because there are no more crimes?

And even though I certainly don't believe that I bear the guilt of the sins of my father, or of any other person, I CAN bear the collective burden that comes from another's sin IF I am a member of that group (be it a family or a congregation).

However that burden CAN become my own guilt before the Lord IF I know that I have a responsibility to identify the lawbreaker, and take God's well-defined actions against him, but I determine NOT to. Now I am committing sin, for I am breaking God's laws. Do you see this?

Open your Bibles to 1Cor. 5.

READ 1Cor. 5 all

I don't know how this could be clearer; the subject ONLY concerns the body of Christ, the body of Believers. And it is that when a person sins to some level that can cause harm to the body, then that person must be identified, judged, and removed. Goodness, Paul even says that trespassing BELIEVER should be handed over the Adversary, Satan. He is to be expelled from the congregation so that his sin doesn't infect or entice others with sin or put a burden of responsibility on the rest of the members.

CJB Matthew 5:29 If your right eye makes you sin, gouge it out and throw it away! Better that you should lose one part of you than have your whole body thrown into Gei-Hinnom. 30 And if your right hand makes you sin, cut it off and throw it away! Better that you should lose one part of you than have your whole body thrown into Gei-Hinnom.

This is from the Sermon on the Mount; Yeshua is of course NOT telling people to literally gouge out their eye or hack off their hand; it's a metaphor for explaining that as painful as it might be that because ONE member of a group who is sinning can cause the whole group to feel God's anger, that one who is sinning must be removed and discarded.

I've spoken on this time after time; you cannot make yourself a member of a group and then think that you stand above the actions of that group in the Lord's eyes. There are times when you're a member of a group, like it or not, like in your family. But there are other times when it is purely by your choice. Either way in many cases you will bear the burden of the sins of even ONE of those members.

And, as it shows here in Joshua 7, it was NOT a KNOWN sin that Israel was being blamed for. Achan had done his thievery in secret; it was only AFTER Israel had suffered the consequence of God's anger that the leaders and then the people Israel were even aware that the cause of a humiliating defeat at Ai was Achan's clandestine misappropriation of God's holy property.

Verse 3 begins the explanation of the circumstances; Joshua sent some men (spies, advanced scouts) to an area not too far from Jericho, near the towns of Beit-Aven and Beit-El, to reconnoiter. This place is identified as Ai; in Hebrew Ai simply means "ruins". Since people were living there in large numbers (about 12,000) then at this time it obviously wasn't a ruin; but apparently this city had been built upon or near a large ruins and so it was given the NAME of "ruins", Ai.

Flush with success from their easy taking of Jericho, Israel's army was feeling a little arrogant and cocky. They sized up the city and its defenses and determined that it really wasn't even worth sending very many troops there to take it, only 2 or 3 thousand would be sufficient. Much to their surprise when the army attacked Ai they were quickly routed, chased for a couple of miles, 36 troops were killed, and as a result of this humiliating defeat all the confidence that

had been gained from their stunning victory at Jericho went down the drain. As verse 5 says, “the hearts of the people melted and turned to water”.

Now Joshua was equally as stunned; he went from being seen as a great general of an unstoppable force, to a weak leader of a disheveled bunch of easily discouraged toy soldiers. In response he went to God; he fell on his face in despair (before the Ark of the Covenant), he and the leaders of Israel certain that the Lord must have withdrawn His help. They lay there all day until sunset, pouring out their grief before the Lord and seeking both comfort and answers. The question asked of God is this: “God! Why did you take the trouble to bring this people across the Jordan if you meant to hand us over to the Amorites and have us perish?” The question was really more of a complaint, not unlike ones we read of in Exodus that happened during Israel’s wilderness journey. But the Rabbis severely fault Joshua for his whining because at least out in the wilderness it was the PEOPLE who complained; here it was their leader, Joshua.

Joshua expressed two fears to God; first that when the other peoples and tribes of Canaan hear about this they will gain courage and come to destroy Israel. Second that Yehoveh’s name will be dishonored. It is good to remind you at this point not to think of the term “name” so much as like an identifying title like Tom, or Becky, or Jerry. The Hebrew word for name is **shem**, and it carries with it the sense of reputation or character. So the concern is about the reputation of Yehoveh that preceded Israel into Canaan; a reputation of strength and invincibility and holiness that by definition flowed over and into the people of Israel.

I really like God’s response; He is not in the least bit impressed with all the drama kings flopping around in the sand before Him, or of the dirt flying into the air, or of the sound of garments being torn, or all the wailing and moaning; and He also doesn’t appreciate Joshua and the leaders coming to Him basically asking why God didn’t do something different. In other words OBVIOUSLY the fault lay with the God of Israel, not with the Israelites. It’s maybe the most asked question of the Lord by Christians: where were you God when all this was happening to me?

Yehoveh says, “Stand up!” Translation: stop praying, stop complaining, and seek the proper source of the impediment to victory. The issue isn’t God the issue is Israel. In verse 11 the Lord tells Joshua that Israel has sinned, that is why Israel can’t stand up before their enemies. The sin is that some of the “ban”, the spoils of Holy War from Jericho, were improperly taken and thus the Lord will not be with Israel again until the problem is solved. The covenant has been broken and God in His justice cannot bless and aid a bunch of covenant breakers. God’s holy property had been taken and the consequences go way beyond simple breaking of a rule.

Remember back to our Leviticus lessons; there we learned a principle that is about as foreign to the mind and doctrine of a modern Christian as you can get. It is that both holiness and impurity can be transmitted from person to person, person to object, and object to object. Holy property is not hyperbole or a nice dramatic sounding description to kind of liven up the narrative. Holy property is literally something that has become holy (to some degree or another) as a result of being devoted to the Lord. It is theoretically capable of transmitting its holiness to other things, like people. The priests could, under certain circumstances and

depending on their order, touch holy objects. But lay people, ordinary Israelites, could NEVER come into contact with the holy. Nor could holy things come into contact with them. The ONLY possible result from such an event is that the holy becomes defiled; or that the ordinary becomes destroyed because God will NOT allow unauthorized transference of holiness from one person or thing to another.

Therefore it was imperative that the thief responsible for taking those banned items from Jericho is found, and the items retrieved.

Because it was the Lord (who knows and sees all things) who apparently was the only one (other than Achan) who knew of the crime, and because as of this time no one had come forward to finger the criminal, a process would be needed to uncover the perpetrator; that process is explained beginning in verse 13.

The first step was for all Israel to consecrate itself; it was to prepare for a confrontation with Yehoveh. Exactly what that entailed in this circumstance is unclear. Before they crossed from Moab to Canaan, the consecration involved washing their garments and immersing themselves in water. Doing so brought them a kind of righteousness before the Lord that was the prerequisite for the divine act that was about to follow.

Let's back up one verse to verse 12: it says that the only remedy for the situation is to destroy the things meant for destruction (the ban) that have been taken. One verse later it is explained that these banned items that are now in somebody's possession (of course we know it is Achan) are under a curse. In verse 15 it says that the accursed person who has done this is to be destroyed by fire, along with all of his possessions.

So the path is this: the person who has misappropriated the "ban" has become "ban"; in essence the one who confiscated the holy property has BECOME himself holy property.

Thus the misappropriated ban right along with the thief who took those items has (through his actions AND mostly from his personal contact with those items) become ban and must be destroyed by the only approved method: fire. Why fire? Because it fits the pattern of an Altar sacrifice that necessarily involves burning up the item being devoted to God as the only means to His possessing it while at the same time preventing any person from using it.

The method for finding the evildoer was actually by lot. Although the word "lot" isn't used here, Jewish and Christian scholars agree that the methodology presented in these verses is precisely the way lots are used. So in verse 16 we see that "Joshua got up early in the morning", an expression of his zeal to get on with the work the Lord has assigned to him; and he assembled all the tribes. One by one each of the 12 tribal princes came forward until the lot determined that the culprit belonged to the tribe of Judah. Then clan-by-clan each clan chief of Judah came forward until the lot determined to which clan the criminal belonged (it turned out to be Zarchi). Then the Zarchi clan was brought forward family leader by family leader until the lot indicated that it was the Zavdi family that had produced the thief. And from the Zavdi family each head of his own household was brought forward until the lot indicated that the criminal had been found: Achan.

Achan was confronted with his crime; there would be no trial because there was no need. The Lord had divinely shown Joshua who the guilty party was.

We'll see what happens to Achan next week.