

JOSHUA

Lesson 11 - Chapters 7 and 8

As we continue this week in Joshua 7, the subject is still Achan, the battle for the city of Ai, and the Law of Herem. This principle of Herem, in English usually called the ban (b-a-n), is so pervasive in the Bible that it would be proper to speak of it as a pattern as well as a principle, and this pattern shows up in some unlikely places. For instance it is said that the Levitical sacrificial system is based primarily on two things: the requirement of blood for atonement of sins, and the provision within God's justice system to substitute the life of an innocent animal for the life of a guilty man. But there is also a third foundational element present in the make-up of the sacrificial system: the principle of the ban.

The law of the ban is that banned things are things God has declared as His holy property. The English word "ban" is chosen to translate herem, because the idea is that to ban something means to dedicate something exclusively to the Lord and therefore to disallow it's use by any human, or perhaps to restrict access to the banned thing. While ban, the Law of Herem, is technically an ordinance that pertains to Holy War and most directly affects the disposition of the spoils of war taken from the enemy (as we see here in Joshua), the overall principle is based on the concept that property devoted to God becomes God's holy property; and holy property is untouchable. And anyone who would dare to misappropriate God's holy property, or use it in an unauthorized way, would pay the consequence of forfeiting they're life.

This may sound like a simple matter of criminality; that the person who partakes of the banned property (God's declared holy property) has broken the Law and therefore the lawbreaker is subject to the curse of the law (the prescribed punishment). In other words it's no different than if the person who had stolen the banned property had murdered, or raped, or committed adultery; break a law, pay a price. But as we near the end of Joshua chapter 7 we're going to find that the matter was far more about the Lord protecting His holiness than about someone committing an intentional and serious sin.

Let's begin by re-reading a short section of Joshua 7.

RE-READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 7:16 – end

I told you last week that in this search for the culprit (who would turn out to be Achan) that absconded with the Lord's spoils of war that we were not witnessing a trial; allow me to amend that statement just a bit by saying that this was not a HUMANLY run trial, using normal legal procedures, and decided by a human judge. Rather this was a heavenly trial run by God as the

victim, the accuser, the witness, and the judge. This was not a human trial brought about by human discovery in which (by means of investigation) the goal was to ascertain the truth and to ferret out the responsible party. Rather this was a divine proceeding in which the Lord (who already knew the guilty party with certainty) was going to supernaturally reveal the identity of the guilty person to the officials of Israel so that they would take the proper action against him, thus satisfying God's justice and lifting the consequence off of Israel's back.

Thus what we see in verses 16 –18 is a winnowing process of all 12 tribes coming forward, then from all the tribes one tribe (Judah) is identified, and then from Judah its clans are screened until one clan is separated out, then from the chosen clan families are questioned, and then finally from the selected family the heads of households are marched forward until the guilty one is revealed. The details of the procedure that we really don't have spelled out for us is that **lots are being drawn** at each stage of the winnowing process as the method the Lord uses to communicate to Joshua and Israel who the criminal is.

Now the thought of lots being drawn to determine guilt or innocence probably would unnerve us today (I know it would me!) and especially in our democratic society. But again, remember, this was a **divine** proceeding; no man was even aware that a serious trespass had occurred and thus no man had accused anyone of anything. Therefore in the Law of Moses we don't find that drawing lots is used as a means to come to a judicial decision when the crime is human upon human. However here in Joshua the crime that was perpetrated by Achan was human upon God. No human was harmed or violated per se, only the Lord, therefore the means of arriving at a just decision is different. So while in a human trial witnesses are needed to present evidence and mount a case against the accused, in this direct violation of God's holy property by Achan the procedure has nothing to do with determining guilt or innocence; it is ONLY about Yehoveh revealing the guilty party to the human authorities.

Let me remind you that all of this lot drawing was happening because a calamity of sorts had just occurred: Israel's army was routed when they attempted to conquer the Canaanite city of Ai and 36 Israelite soldiers were killed. As a result Joshua was in a state of shock, the people were scared and demoralized (because this was not supposed to happen to them) and God was angry. The Lord was demonstrating to Joshua (and to us) that the problem that led to Israel's defeat was not necessarily a poor battle strategy or execution of a plan; rather it was that Israel had become arrogant and self-confident after their easy victory over Jericho. But also that not everything went well and in accordance with Yehoveh's instructions at Jericho (unbeknownst to Joshua). At Jericho a great sin against Yehoveh had occurred in secret; a member of Israel took some of the banned property in Jericho and THIS was the underlying reason for Israel's defeat at Ai.

This gives me an opportunity to remind you of something that just drives modern Christians (primarily Western Christians, like us) to anger and denial; the Lord had assigned a kind of communal responsibility upon all Israel for the sin of this one man, Achan. Let's explore this for a few minutes. I did NOT say that communal **guilt** was upon all Israel because the Lord did not say that in His eyes every Israelite was guilty of trespass against Him because of what Achan had done. But every member of Israel was now under the **burden of the consequence** of one man's sin. Does that concept bother you? I've heard so many pastors and preachers

say that while that reality may have been so in the OT era, that in the New Testament times it all changed and no one is responsible, or bears the burden, except for his or her own sins.

Wrong. First, that assumption theologically mixes apples and oranges and the subject is a complex one that can only be properly explained in Torah because it is only lightly touched upon in the New Testament. It is one thing to be held guilty for another man's sins, it's quite another to find yourself bearing a consequence CAUSED by another man's sins; and as I just explained it is the latter situation that is being demonstrated here in Joshua 7. However don't think that the former possibility is a thing of the past, either. Can we be held guilty, as individuals, before the Lord for the sin of our father? Absolutely. The father of everyone in this room is Adam, and since the day our original parents sinned we have all borne their guilt (it's the overwhelming reason that we need a Messiah in the first place!). Over and over we are told in the Scriptures that we were conceived in sin as a result of Adam's original sin; and that we bear personal guilt because Adam is our father. The ONLY people in existence who do NOT bear the guilt of Adam's sin are those who place their faith in Yeshua because it was Messiah Yeshua's divine purpose to remedy this situation for all who would trust Him. For His blood did something that the blood of no bull or goat could ever do or ever in history did: atone for the guilt of Adam that became our communal guilt. Theologians call that particular kind or category of sin and guilt the "sin nature". That is when Adam sinned something within his spiritual DNA became corrupted, had a direct negative effect on his mind and his body, and all of this was passed along to every human who would come after him; no one could avoid it.

Yet there is another and different, though related, kind or category of sin and guilt, the guilt that is the result of our actions and behavior. It is THIS kind of sin that is being dealt with in Joshua 7. Achan personally committed a trespass against the Lord and thus only he bears the guilt; unfortunately while Israel doesn't bear the guilt, the heavy burden of the results of Achan's sin are borne by the entire community. That's not my allegorical explanation; that is specifically what these passages say.

Achan's sin is the same kind of sin (behavior and actions and intents) that the sacrificial system of animal blood could produce forgiveness (for most but not all trespasses). The sacrificial system worked. God ordained it and those who followed it with a pure heart indeed had the guilt of their actions and behaviors removed (I have pointed out the literally scores of times in the Law that the Scriptures say after a proper sacrifice, "and he shall be forgiven"). BUT.....the sacrificial system could NOT remove the kind of guilt that all men carry within us regardless of our personal behavior, the sin of Adam, the sin that changed the course of human history. Jesus' blood is so holy, so perfect, and so powerful that even the original sin.....the sin present in our very nature....can be forgiven.

Bottom line: **communal guilt** is alive and well. The whole world bears it and the only ones exempt from the consequences of this communal guilt are Yeshua's disciples. **Communal responsibility** is also alive and well, and the church STILL bears communal responsibility right along with everyone else in the world. When a member of the body to which you belong sins you can (and probably will be) affected. That membership in a body includes (depending on the situation) your family, your community, your nation, and your church or synagogue or whatever body you worship with. That is why we find Paul telling the Corinthians to drive out a

person from the church (a Believer) who is sinning and will not admit it and/or repent from it because otherwise all members of that body will become affected by it in the form of bearing it's burden (but not it's guilt).

Let's understand the seriousness of this situation in Joshua 7: the Lord says that "Israel" communally, has broken the covenant with Him (as a result of Achan's misappropriation of banned goods) and now the \$64,000 question facing Joshua and Israel's leaders is, how can Israel restore its covenant relationship with Yehoveh?

This is the lesson that the Lord is teaching Joshua and it's why this story of Achan has fascinated and informed Jewish and Christian Bible scholars because the means of mankind restoring it's broken relationship with God is the whole point of salvation and redemption.

In verse 19 the lot reveals that the criminal is Achan, and Joshua confronts him. Here is the beginning of restoration; Joshua asks Achan (in a rather fatherly way, actually) to confess. And the reason he is asking for Achan's confession is, it says in literal Hebrew, to "set forth the glory of Yehoveh". In other words sacred lots as directed by God have outed Achan, and Achan needs to publicly confirm that the Lord has indeed supernaturally revealed the truth, thus further confirming that the Lord's justice is perfect. It shows that nothing can be hidden from Him. But notice that confession is the necessary first step towards reconciliation with God; nothing good happens until confession is made. And Achan demonstrates the proper format for confession; that whatever act of lawlessness one commits it is an act that by definition is against God. If we lie, it is against God. If we steal, it is against God. Therefore it is to God that we must confess.

Naturally, as revealed in verses 20 and 21, the items Achan took were because they pleased his eyes. He took things that are materially valuable and enticing and would give him personal benefit. The first thing he took was a coat (or robe) from Shinar. Shinar was a region of Babylon and noted for its extravagancies; this was probably a royal robe and worth a lot of money. Achan also took a goodly amount of silver and gold. Knowing, of course, that he was doing wrong he hid the items in the ground under his tent.

After Achan confessed all, Joshua sent men running to Achan's tent and indeed there were the items right where Achan said they were; God's holy property lying inside a hole under a common tent. Now something terrible and instructive happens; Achan, his entire household, his livestock, all his possessions, and the stolen banned items were taken outside the camp to the Valley of Achor and there all living creatures associated with Achan were killed, everything Achan owned was burned up with fire, and a mound of stones was placed over the remains; people, animals, and material objects.

Achor is a play on words; it means trouble. Since Achan caused such trouble, then Joshua said the penalty would now be "trouble" upon him, and so the place where this trouble upon Achan occurred was appropriately named "trouble" (Achor).

What happened here is that the man, Achan, who stole the ban (the items devoted to God) and his family THEMSELVES became ban. They became property devoted to God. They became

as substitutes for the holy property and were thus treated as holy property is treated; they were destroyed and burned up with fire as the only prescribed means to give holy property directly to the Lord. Notice something: in Jericho everything that was considered spoils of war (ban) was devoted to God, all of it. The people of Israel were to receive nothing of the spoils from Jericho. So we find that the enemy (the people barricaded inside of Jericho) was killed, and then everything (people and livestock and most of their possessions) were burned up and left to lie under the stones of the collapsed walls of Jericho.

So naturally we see the same pattern as what happened at Jericho applied to Achan and his family and possessions: they became God's enemy due to Achan's sin of stealing the ban, and thus they became ban; they are killed, then burned up, then have stones piled upon them. It is precisely what happened to the ban at Jericho.

This, then, brings us full circle back to the beginning of our lesson when I explained that the holy property that has become holy as a result of its being selected and used for sacrifices to God (animals, produce) is similar in nature to the holy property that is the ban resulting from Holy War. And there is a peculiar aspect of God's holy property that we've talked about in the past but needs to be reviewed; it is that calling God's holy property "holy" is literal, not metaphorical or rhetorical. Things devoted to God take on a real and literal holiness once God accepts them. And the thing we learned months ago about both holy objects and people, and impure objects and people, is that they can transmit their holiness or impurity to other people and objects by contact and in some cases, by their mere proximity. We see this demonstrated in Leviticus primarily as it pertains to defilement. That is (for instance) if a person contracts Tzara'at (that divinely caused skin disease) they can infect an object or another person by touching them. If a dead mouse falls into a cooking pot, that cooking pot contracts ritual impurity not so much because a mouse touched it but because its dead (death is the worst sort of ritual impurity). Then if something is cooked in that now defiled pot, the food contracts the impurity. Then if someone eats that impure food, THEY become impure. This is not a joke, it is not superstition; it is carefully explained in the Torah and it is quite a serious problem.

There are several remedies prescribed in Torah for a person or object that contracts uncleanness, ranging from washing with water to being destroyed if the object is too porous and thus absorbs so much impurity that it can never be cleaned. But what happens when we're dealing with the opposite end of the scale; what happens when we're dealing NOT with impurity, but with holiness? The answer is that we find that holiness CAN also indeed be transmitted in the same way as impurity is transmitted, by touch. However God has effectively rendered the possibility of the transmission of holiness to divine theory, so to speak, because He refuses to allow accidental or unauthorized transmission of holiness to occur (even though by its nature and spiritual laws it CAN happen).

Don't be confused by this; the concept of the **possibility** of holiness being transmitted in an unauthorized way, but the Lord never permitting it, is not doubletalk it is quite straightforward. As an illustration of how this works: we know that some blood diseases are communicable by touch. If we allow diseased blood to touch our skin, or especially to come into contact with an open sore or cut, it is possible that we will become infected. However that possibility can be rendered as mere medical theory because if we wear latex gloves, and masks, and take all the

proper precautions then the spread of contamination is thwarted. We have a way to take what CAN happen, but not allow it to happen. Holiness CAN be spread by touch to unauthorized people or objects, but God doesn't allow it.

The problem for mankind is that Yehoveh's solution and method for controlling unauthorized transmission of holiness is to simply destroy whatever is about to become holy as a result. In other words if a Tabernacle Incense burner (used for service to God in the Wilderness Tabernacle) were to be improperly removed by someone from the Tabernacle and taken to a tent and it came into contact with a common cooking pot, by all spiritual laws that cooking pot would become holy. Whatever was cooked in it would then become holy and that would be transmitted to whoever ate that food. But the way God handles such a thing is to immediately destroy the cooking pot and usually the one who facilitated the improper use of God's holy object thus stopping it before it can happen. We saw this scenario play out with Aaron's (Israel's first High Priest) sons who took holy incense burners and put "strange fire" into them; in other words they took coals taken from a common wood fire instead of from the Brazen Altar and laid them upon holy objects ordained for service in the Tabernacle. The Lord burned up the holy instruments and Aaron's sons otherwise divine holiness would have been transmitted from the holy incense burners to those common coals.

We saw a similar thing later on when Korah and several men from his clan decided they didn't like God's decision of Aaron's clan being the only ones allowed to present holy incense to the Lord, so they brought their personal fire pans from home, filled them with their own coals and incense and tried to present them to the Lord inside the sacred Tabernacle grounds. They're proximity to the Lord would have caused His great holiness to transmit to their fire pans (making them holy but without His permission), and so Yehoveh supernaturally burned up those fire pans as well as all the men (around 200) who brought them. Thus holiness was not transmitted outside of God's control.

Are you starting to see how this applies to our story of Achan? Achan had touched the ban from Jericho. The ban is holy property. Achan was, theoretically, contaminated with a level of holiness to which he was not entitled because it would have transmitted from God's holy property to him. What is ALWAYS God's solution to this problem? Destruction of the unauthorized receiver of holiness, be it an object or a man.

Now a greater theological problem is to answer why was Achan's family and all his possessions and his livestock also burned up? It is possible that his family was complicit in the robbery of God's ban (although there is no indication of that in the Scriptures), but what role did the livestock play? I must say that most reasonable people (in a compassionate knee-jerk reaction) see God's destructive response as awfully extreme and merciless in this situation. So while there is not universal agreement among theologians on this, in general it is thought the reason for the Lord's severe reaction was that since Achan touched the holy property and thus became contaminated with holiness, he then likely touched his family members who in turn became contaminated with holiness, and they then touched their animals and other personal property. Therefore all had become contaminated with unauthorized holiness and the only solution was their total and complete destruction. The burden of Achan's sin had its worst and most devastating effects on his own household. Is that not always the case? Yet it seems

as though as we contemplate taking an action that may well be against the Lord, we don't consider that many innocent people that we love may be hurt or destroyed because of it.

Let's move on to Joshua chapter 8.

READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 8 all

Achan has been destroyed and the holy property returned to God; justice has been done, and therefore restoration has happened. The immutable spiritual principle is that sin must be confessed, and then it must be dealt with in order for God's justice to be satisfied. Once God's justice is satisfied restoration can happen. It was this same spiritual principle that Yeshua did not come to abolish but to fulfill on our behalf. It is the USE of this ancient spiritual principle that is the only means to OUR reconciliation with the Father.

Thus, with reconciliation and restoration accomplished, the Lord tells Joshua, "do not fear and don't despair!" God is telling Joshua that he is going to go back to the place of his defeat, Ai, but he is not to fear the same results. And that is because since Joshua and Israel have the burden of Achan's sin removed, the Lord will again lead the Israeli army to victory. The Lord says that Joshua will now do to the king of Ai and his people what was done to Jericho. But, there is going to be one significant difference: God has graciously decided that SOME of the spoils of war will go to the people of Israel. Some of the spoils of war will NOT be set apart and devoted to God (as ban). Let's be clear: this means that since God is NOT asking for some spoils to be set apart for Him, therefore those things that He gives to the people do NOT become holy.

Let's talk about this for a minute because if the Lord had given this same instruction to Israel when they attacked Jericho, Achan would never have committed a crime against God. What Achan did in Jericho and died for it, and caused Israel the greatest of trouble, is now being permitted in Ai. Why? When it was wrong before to take some of the spoils, why is it suddenly OK now? Is this simply a matter of God's will being different in different situations? Or is there something more behind this? There is an interesting parallel between this decision of the Lord to allow the people to partake of the spoils in one situation but not in another and the principle of firstfruits. Now I confess to you that while I'm not 100% sure of it, I see this as less of an interesting parallel and more as a pattern. That is it's not that the principle of firstfruits is **similar** to the Jericho and Ai battles, but that the battles for Jericho and Ai as concerns the disposition of the spoils of war intentionally follow the God-ordained pattern of firstfruits.

I think you have been taught sufficiently on the principle of firstfruits so that I don't have to go in depth to review it; the notion is that the first of everything belongs to God. "Firstfruits" isn't referring only to fruit trees (the first of the fruit tree fruit). "Fruits" is a bible term that means that which is produced; it's the results of some kind of process. Some scholars have taken to using the term firstlings, and I think that's maybe a better term than firstfruits because in Western culture it sounds more broad and universal in its application (rather than applying it merely to agriculture). Thus a firstborn is but the human form of firstfruits; the first of a man's children (a son) is to be devoted to God. By way of example, the first lamb of a sheep is devoted to God,

and the first income from a job or a trade is devoted to God, and the first produce from a field, or vineyard, or orchard is devoted to God.

Although the law of firstfruits is stated in a number of places in the Torah, and is applied in a number of passages throughout the Bible, here are a couple that set the foundation for establishing the ordinance of firstfruits:

CJB Leviticus 23:10 *"Tell the people of Isra'el, 'After you enter the land I am giving you and harvest its ripe crops, you are to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the cohen. 11 He is to wave the sheaf before ADONAI, so that you will be accepted; the cohen is to wave it on the day after the Shabbat. 12 On the day that you wave the sheaf, you are to offer a male lamb without defect, in its first year, as a burnt offering for ADONAI. 13 Its grain offering is to be one gallon of fine flour mixed with olive oil, an offering made by fire to ADONAI as a fragrant aroma; its drink offering is to be of wine, one quart. 14 You are not to eat bread, dried grain or fresh grain until the day you bring the offering for your God; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations, no matter where you live.*

CJB Leviticus 19:23 *"When you enter the land and plant various kinds of fruit trees, you are to regard its fruit as forbidden- for three years it will be forbidden to you and not eaten. 24 In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, for praising ADONAI. 25 But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, so that it will produce even more for you; I am ADONAI your God.*

So the concept is that ONLY after giving Yehoveh the first of whatever is produced does a man have any right to the remainder. But there is one other aspect to firstfruits that often escapes us in our rather simplistic mindset that probably every Believer has uttered at some point in our lives: "everything belongs to God". Yes, everything indeed belongs to God but only some things are DEVOTED to God. And, by definition, the firstfruits of everything are automatically devoted to God.

What does that mean? Well it means something much stronger and more serious than we might think. The principle that we're seeing play out in Joshua is that things devoted to God (people, animals, objects) are God's holy property. God's holy property belongs to God alone and once devoted to Him no one may make unauthorized use of it without consequence. On one hand the ownership of the property has transferred, so to speak, from the worshipper to God. On the other hand the Lord says that even though the worshipper may NOT give Him the firstfruits of everything, even though you may wrongly hold it back, it belongs to Him nonetheless, it's just that WE are misappropriating it. That we might rebel and keep those firstlings for ourselves does NOT change the fact that those firstlings are ALREADY spiritually devoted to Him because He has declared it to be so. That is exactly the problem with what Achan did; even though those banned items OUGHT to have been physically turned over to God (but weren't because Achan kept them for himself) doesn't mean that from a spiritual perspective those things lost their holiness or that they don't belong to God.

I think I see the wheels turning in some of your heads as this sinks in. It's not that the firstfruits

of our income should be devoted to God it's that by definition according to God's universal and unchangeable laws, that income already IS devoted to Him. It's already His even if we don't realize it; it's only a matter of whether we're going to physically turn it over to Him or misappropriate His holy property and keep it for ourselves. Do you have a firstborn son? That son is already the Lord's as the firstfruits of your loins; it's only a matter of whether you choose to openly devote that son to God and recognize that son's status, or deny to God what is already His property.

The thing is, from the big picture standpoint, while indeed everything belongs to God ONLY the firstfruits must be turned over to Him because they are holy property. The remainder (generally speaking) He authorizes for our own use. When we decide to KEEP His holy property, it is sin. It was Achan's sin. And there will be consequences.

Let's peel this onion back one more layer and then call it a day. Applying the principle of firstfruits to Israel being given the Land of Canaan, we see that the very first city and land given to Israel upon entering Canaan was Jericho. God's instruction was that all the spoils of Jericho were to be His. Not one thing was to be used by Israel as their own. This is because, like the orchard in Leviticus 19:23, all of the first crop is considered as devoted to God, and therefore the entire first crop is holy property, and therefore the entire first crop is completely off limits to God's people.

However, the NEXT year, after God's portion (usually considered to be 1/10th) is given to Him, the remainder is turned over to the people for their use. So while everything in Jericho was devoted to God because it was the first city taken in the Promised Land, the NEXT city to be taken was Ai. And with Ai SOME of the spoils was given to God but the people of God could use the remainder. This is simply following the pattern of firstfruits.

Are you holding back the firstfruits in your life, the firstfruits that are already God's holy property? It really doesn't matter whether you agree with God or not on the matter; the law of firstfruits has already been set into motion and cannot be altered or stopped. The firstfruits of everything in your life Yehoveh has already deemed are His and there isn't a thing you can do about it. Your holding onto God's holy property is dangerous, counter productive, and a trespass against Him. Whether it's income from your work, your children, your crops, your ministry, or whatever; the firstfruits of it ALREADY belongs to Him and if you're hanging on to it then I suspect things aren't going too well.

When things didn't go too well for Joshua and Israel, Joshua and the leaders of Israel fell on their faces and whined and moaned and asked the Lord why He did this to them. The Lord responded by telling them to examine themselves, not Him. It was sin amongst them....in fact the sin of one man, Achan.....that was the problem, not God.

When Yeshua said, "give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's", He didn't say, "give to God **so it can be** God's". He said give to God what **IS** God's. Give to God what is already God's. For to hold it back is to rob God of His holy property.

We'll continue chapter 8 next week.