

Joshua 7:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.

Analysis

This verse marks a tragic turning point from Jericho's victory to Ai's defeat. The phrase 'committed a trespass' (maal maal, מַעַל מַעַל) uses intensified language—maal means treacherous violation of sacred trust. The 'accursed thing' (cherem, חֵרֶם) refers to items devoted to God or destruction that humans must not touch (Joshua 6:17-19). Achan's taking what belonged to God was sacrilege and theft combined. The genealogy— 'son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of Judah'—establishes historical precision while showing sin affects entire families and tribes. The phrase 'the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel' (vayichar-af Yahweh bivnei Yisrael, וַיַּחַר־אַף יְהוָה בְּבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) reveals corporate accountability—one man's sin brought divine wrath on the entire nation. This demonstrates covenant solidarity: Israel wasn't merely individuals but a corporate body where one member's sin affected all. Reformed theology recognizes both individual responsibility (Achan sinned) and corporate consequences (Israel suffered). This pattern continues in the church—'a little leaven leavens the whole lump' (1 Corinthians 5:6, Galatians 5:9).

Historical Context

This sin occurred immediately after Jericho's conquest, Israel's first major victory in Canaan. The cherem (devoted ban) required total destruction of Jericho's population and dedication of precious metals to God's treasury (Joshua 6:17-19). Achan violated this command by taking a Babylonian garment, 200 shekels of silver, and a gold wedge, hiding them under his tent (7:21). Ancient Near Eastern warfare typically included plunder distribution to victorious soldiers, making God's cherem command unusual and testing Israel's obedience. Achan's sin brought immediate consequences: defeat at Ai with 36 Israelites killed (7:4-5), devastating morale and raising existential questions about God's presence. The corporate nature of guilt reflects ancient Near Eastern and Semitic concepts of family/tribal solidarity where one member's actions affected the entire group. This wasn't arbitrary collective punishment but recognition of social reality: sin's consequences spread beyond individuals. Archaeological evidence suggests Jericho's destruction was thorough and complete, confirming Joshua's account of total conquest and devoted destruction.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What 'accursed things'—sins you're hiding or tolerating—might be preventing spiritual victory in your life or church?
2. How does the principle of corporate accountability challenge individualistic Western Christianity that ignores communal responsibility?
3. What does God's anger against Israel despite one man's sin teach about the seriousness of hidden sin within covenant communities?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּמָּעַל ו	בְּבָנֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל:	מֵעַל	הֵי חָם	וָקָח
committed	But the children	of Israel	a trespass	in the accursed thing	took
H4603	H1121	H3478	H4604	H2764	H3947
עַכְּ	בְּבָנֵי י	כַּרְמִי	בְּבָנֵי י	זַבְדִּי	בְּבָנֵי י
for Achan	But the children	of Carmi	But the children	of Zabdi	But the children
H5912	H1121	H3756	H1121	H2067	H1121
זֶרַח	לְמִטָּה	יְהוּדָה	מִן	הֵי חָם	וַחֲרָה
of Zerah	of the tribe	of Judah	H4480	in the accursed thing	was kindled
H2226	H4294	H3063		H2764	H2734
אֵף	יְהוָה	בְּבָנֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל:		
and the anger	of the LORD	But the children	of Israel		
H639	H3068	H1121	H3478		

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 22:20 (Curse): Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.

Ecclesiastes 9:18 (Parallel theme): Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

1 Chronicles 21:7 (References Israel): And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel.

Joshua 22:18 (References Lord): But that ye must turn away this day from following the LORD? and it will be, seeing ye rebel to day against the LORD, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.

Joshua 22:16 (References Lord): Thus saith the whole congregation of the LORD, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD?

Jonah 1:7 (Parallel theme): And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

2 Chronicles 24:18 (References Lord): And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass.

2 Samuel 24:1 (References Lord): And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

Ezra 9:6 (Parallel theme): And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

Daniel 9:7 (References Lord): O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.