

Joshua 7:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken:

Analysis

The process narrows: from Judah's tribe to the Zarhites' family, then to Zabdi's household. Each stage increases tension and specificity. The mention of specific names (Zabdi, Carmi) gives historical particularity—this isn't allegory but real people facing real judgment. The progression from broader (tribe) to narrower (household) demonstrates exhaustive thoroughness—God leaves no ambiguity. Every household in the selected clan stood before the Lord; every man in the selected household was examined. This process, while time-consuming, ensured justice. No one could claim arbitrary selection or rushed judgment. The repeated phrase 'was taken' (three times in verses 16-18) emphasizes divine agency—God is actively revealing the guilty. The narrowing also builds dramatic tension, teaching Israel (and us) that sin will be uncovered. Hebrews 4:13 states: 'all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' This public process makes private sin public, fulfilling the principle that hidden things will be revealed (Luke 8:17).

Historical Context

The clan system (mishpachah, מִשְׁפָּחָה) organized Israel's social structure between tribe and household. The Zarhites descended from Zerah, Judah's son through Tamar (Genesis 38:30). The genealogical specificity roots this account in Israel's actual family history. The process might have taken hours as each stage required gathering the appropriate group, conducting the lot selection, and moving to the

next level. Archaeological discoveries of ancient Israelite settlements show the clan-based residential patterns—related families living in proximity. This meant Achan's extended family and neighbors would have been present as his guilt became increasingly apparent. The shame would have been profound—not just Achan's but his entire family's and clan's. This public identification served as powerful deterrent against covenant violation. The specificity also prevents later disputes—no one could claim Achan was scapegoated or the process was flawed. Multiple witnesses observed each stage of divine selection.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does the thoroughness of God's process teach about His justice and patience?
2. How does the progression from general to specific mirror how God often brings hidden sin to light?
3. What pastoral wisdom can we learn from the careful, methodical process rather than hasty judgment?

Interlinear Text

וַקָּרָב	אֶת	מִשְׁפֵּחַת	יְהוּדָה	וַלָּךְ	אֶת	מִשְׁפֵּחַת
And he brought	H853	the family	of Judah	and he took	H853	the family
H7126		H4940	H3063	H3920		H4940
הַזַּרְחִי	וַקָּרָב	אֶת	מִשְׁפֵּחַת	הַזַּרְחִי	לְגֶבֶר	יָם
of the Zarhites	And he brought	H853	the family	of the Zarhites	by man	
H2227	H7126		H4940	H2227	H1397	
וַלָּךְ	זַבְדִּי					
and he took	and Zabdi					
H3920	H2067					

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 26:20 (Parallel theme): And the sons of Judah after their families were; of Shelah, the family of the Shelanites: of Pharez, the family of the Pharzites: of Zerah, the family of the Zarhites.
