

Infectious Achanitis

Joshua 7:1-26

IN the past few months there have been quite a few illnesses in our community. Some had the flu, some a virus, some pneumonia or a cold, and some have the shingles! Others have physical problems which are much more serious. But there's one illness which has hit every one of us. It runs rampant through our homes and families, leaving no life untouched. It's never been monitored by the Centers for Disease Control, and has no medical cure. Yet it has the capacity to ruin or destroy your life. In fact, it has reached epidemic proportions. None of us has escaped. We all have been infected.

What is the name of this dreaded disease? It has many names, but I think today we can call it "Infectious Achanitis."

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Joshua 6 contains the thrilling and exciting story of a great victory for the Hebrews. Jericho had been conquered very easily through the power of Almighty God. Then Joshua 7 opens with a word that indicates that something is about to change: "But." We can recapture the force of that word if we read Joshua 6:27 and Joshua 7:1 together: "*So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land. **But** the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things...*"

Something was seriously wrong! The people had been contaminated with "Infectious Achanitis." Then God's Word goes on to say that because of this disease, the people suffered a tragic defeat at the hands of a very small city named Ai.

Some would scoff and say that the Israelites were simply over-confident after their tremendous victory against Jericho. They may have been, but God said that the defeat was caused by something else.

Others, who are a bit more spiritual, would point to the fact that Joshua did not pray and ask God what His will was before the battle against Ai. He did not ask for strength or direction; in fact, he didn't pray at all until after thirty-six men had been killed, and, as we see in verse five, "*the hearts of the people melted and became like water.*"

Prayerlessness is often the cause of a lot of defeat even in our lives today, but in this case God specifically said that the defeat was caused by something else. They had been infected by this disease we have named after the man in whom it appeared somewhere between the victory at Jericho and the defeat at Ai: “Infectious Achanitis.”

What exactly is “Infectious Achanitis”? Simply put, it is the very human inclination to rebel against God. Before the battle at Jericho, God had expressly forbidden the Hebrews to take any spoil from the battle. God wasn’t just being selfish; He had two very good reasons for this command. *First*, the spoils of Jericho were sort of a symbolic “first fruits” of the harvest of good things to come in the land of Canaan. As the first fruits, they belonged to God. The *second* reason is that under the rules of ancient warfare a conqueror could seize the possessions of the people he defeated. But the Hebrews were not the ones who conquered Jericho—God was! They didn’t have to do anything to win that victory except march around the city thirteen times and shout and blow the trumpets. God did all the rest.

But Achan willfully rebelled against the command of God by taking some of the spoils. It wasn’t much, but it was enough.

How does Achanitis begin, and how can we recover from this infection? Let’s look more closely at the Word of God for the answers.

1 **Diagnosis: Rebellion against God**

We see first that Infectious Achanitis begins with only one person and verse one very clearly names that one person. Achan was one of the soldiers of Israel, who had participated in great and wonderful things God had done for His people. He had eaten of the manna. He had seen the swollen waters of the Jordan stopped so the people could cross over on dry ground. He had seen with his own eyes the walls of Jericho crumble as if they were dust.

Yet simply being on the right side during the battle did not keep Achan immune to the infection of rebellion against God. In fact, his own testimony about what happened is found in vv. 20-21:

“I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel.”

“I saw”

“I coveted”

“I took”

Even in his diseased state, Achan realized that he was the one responsible for his sin. It started with him.

Any communicable disease or infection begins with one individual. Every one of us comes into contact with thousands upon thousands of microorganisms every day. As long as we are healthy, and our bodies' natural defense mechanism is not broken or lowered in any way, such as a break in the skin or lowered resistance, then these microorganisms cause no harm to us. But if our resistance is low, or there is a break in the skin, then these microorganisms can become pathogenic, or harmful to us. The infectious process begins if they enter our bodies at that point in time, and multiplies at an alarming rate.

If I am infected, I can spread that infection to you in a number of different ways, if your resistance is low or there is a wound in your skin. You in turn can pass the infection onto others, and they to someone else, as long as the chain of transmission is uninterrupted. But the infection starts with one individual.

Rebellion against God can cause a lot of heartache in a family or in a church, but it always begins with one individual. At some time in your past, you have been a carrier of Infectious Achanitis. Perhaps right now there is coursing through your spirit an attitude of rebellion against God, and unless it is checked it will spread to everyone else in your life.

Look at how Achan's sin affected everyone else in the camp of the Hebrews. At the end of verse one we read, "*So the Lord's anger burned against Israel.*" When Achan sinned, the blessings of God on everyone else were interrupted. The end result was that not only was Achan stoned, but also his sons and daughters, as we see in vv. 24-25. Now lest that seem too harsh, remember that at this point in their history, God was dealing with the Hebrew people as a nation. He emphasized to them over and over that they were all responsible for unfaithfulness on the part of any.

You see, my rebellion against God affects other people; your rebellion against God affects other people.

In the medical arena, the spread of infection from one person to another is called "the chain of transmission." This chain of transmission is the natural progression of a disease or an infection. It will grow and reproduce all by itself without any encouragement, unless proper precautions are followed. In the same way, it is our

nature to sin and rebel against God. In a spiritual sense, there is a chain of transmission regarding our sin. No Christian can sin without affecting your whole family, and in fact, the whole church. Your lower spiritual temperature, your weakened resistance to evil, affects others around you.

In verse 25, Joshua asked Achan a question just before he was executed. It is interesting to note that Joshua didn't ask Achan "Why did you do this?" or "Did you really think you could get away with it?" or not even "What were you thinking?" The question emphasized the widespread danger Achan's sin had caused for everyone: "Why have you brought this trouble on us?"

Next, though, we need to see that this kind of infection always rises to the surface in times of crisis. In verses four and five, we see that the three thousand men they sent up to attack the city were routed by the men of Ai, and 36 men were killed. They did not know about it at the time, but Achan's rebellion against God was the cause of their defeat at Ai.

Take a closer look. Ai was two miles to the north of Jericho, and east of Bethel. We learn in 8:25 that Ai had a total population of 12,000, so it was smaller than Jericho. The Israelites easily should have been able to overcome it--and they would have except that the people were infected with Achanitis. But it didn't actually come to the surface until the people were in battle. Flush with victory over Jericho, the people didn't know how weak they really were until they were soundly defeated by the men of Ai.

I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, but you may have an infection in your body right now which is weakening your body by the moment, without your even being aware of it. You may not be aware of that infection until the battle begins in your body. The body's natural defense mechanisms spring into action, and begin to attack the invading infection. The battle begins, and the infection makes itself known.

You may not be aware of rebellion against God in your life, or you may have somehow been able to ignore it to some degree, but it can cause a battle, a civil war within your spirit. Many times this civil war going on inside ourselves is the reason that others can't seem to get along with us. When you look at a church body which is having fellowship problems, when people just can't seem to get along with each other, it is because there is an infection somewhere in that church.

So we've seen so far that this rebellion against God starts with one, spreads to others unless checked, and surfaces in battle.

2 Cure: Restoration to God

So here is the good news: this disease is curable! But as with any illness, once the diagnosis has been made, there must be a determination as to where the infection began. Every hospital has an infection control nurse, someone whose job it is to determine where infections began and how to break that chain of transmission. It is the same with Infectious Achanitis. In our process of finding a cure, we first must discover the source.

That's what Joshua did. In verses six through twelve, he took the whole matter to God. Something was obviously wrong. God had promised repeatedly to be with him. God had specifically promised that Joshua would be successful if he obeyed the Law of Moses. Before they even crossed the Jordan River, God had said to Joshua *"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful"* (1:8). As far as he knew, Joshua had done just that, so this didn't make sense. Something else had to be wrong, and God knew what it was.

So verses seven and eight tell us that Joshua *"tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads."* In verses 10-12, God gave Joshua an answer, but it probably wasn't the answer Joshua wanted or even expected to hear.

First, God said in verse ten, *"Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"* And then God gave Joshua the diagnosis: *"Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep."* The people were infected with the serious affliction of rebellion against God. God plainly told Joshua that the reason they were defeated in this battle was because the people had sinned. He continued in verse 11, *"They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions."*

Now look at verse twelve: *"That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction."* Repeatedly God had promised Joshua "I will be with you," but now He says, *"I will not be with you anymore unless"* you take the

proper steps to eradicate this infection from among you. This rebellion will not be tolerated.

Most of us will not have to look any further than our own hearts to discover the source of our bout with Infectious Achanitis. The *rest* of us haven't looked very closely and need to look again, for the Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9, "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure,*" or "desperately wicked." Jesus Himself told us in Mark 7:21, "*For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean.*" You see, the human heart—*my* heart, *your* heart—is the source.

In the 19th century, it was discovered why there was so much disease, and why, when there was an epidemic, it seemed to go on and on relentlessly. They couldn't understand why the hospitals, supposedly places where the sick get well, were the very places where it was the worst. It was discovered that many of the doctors were spreading infections and fever from one patient to another simply because they did not wash their hands. Once that discovery was made and then accepted, patients recovered quickly. Now it is standard practice for medical professionals to wash, even scrub, their hands many, many times a day. My own dentist washes his hands and changes his gloves every time he moves from one patient to another.

God told Joshua how to break the chain, and it had to do with cleansing as well. In verse thirteen, He told Joshua that the people needed to consecrate themselves, because what had been devoted for destruction was still among them. In other words, some of you have taken what belongs to the Lord. But look at the end of that verse for some piercing words: "*You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.*"

Medical professionals tell us that we can do some very simple things to prevent infection. We are told to take an honest look at our habits, our lifestyles and surroundings and identify things which might promote the growth of bacteria. For example, maintain a clean home and surrounding environment, practice good hygiene, and keep the area where you live free of garbage. But the number one key to preventing disease and breaking the chain of transmission is frequent hand washing. ***Keep your hands clean!***

Do you see the spiritual connection here? God told Joshua to break the chain by telling the people to consecrate themselves. Get right. Cleanse yourselves. Recommit yourselves.

But then comes the most difficult part of the cure—the *treatment*. We see that in vv. 14-26, and it began with *separation*. In a hospital, the health care professionals wear disposable masks, gloves, caps, goggles, booties and gowns to prevent spreading infection and bacteria from one patient to another. It was the same with Achan and his family, who undoubtedly were aware of his sin and had perhaps even assisted him. Achan and his entire family had to be separated from the others. The rebellion, the sin, the infection had to be completely eradicated from among the people in order for the cure to begin.

To begin our treatment of Infectious Achanitis, we must separate ourselves from that one thing which has hindered our relationship and fellowship with God. But then we must *cleanse* ourselves. We're talking good, old-fashioned repentance.

Once Achan confessed, he told Joshua that he had hidden the things in the ground under his tent. Joshua sent messengers, and they found the spoils exactly where Achan said they would be. Look at verse 23 for a clue as to what we should do in our lives. That verse reads, "*They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Lord.*" I believe this was done for at least a couple of reasons. *First*, I believe they spread all this out on the ground so it could be examined, so everything would be seen. Is that something you need to do? Is there something in your life that needs to be reexamined as to whether it belongs in your life? Do you need to spread those things out before the Lord?

Second, I believe this was a symbolic act of giving those things back to God. When you and I reexamine our hearts and lives, and spread what is in our hearts out before the Lord, we will be saying, "Father, I'm giving all this back to You. I surrender it all to You, completely and forever." When we do this, we can receive cleansing of our rebellion against God.

So there must be *separation* and *cleansing*. Then we see in vv. 24-26 a third step in the treatment. We must *discard* those things that that displease Him and stand between us and a right relationship with our Heavenly Father. We see there that Joshua took Achan, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters to the valley of Achor, where they were stoned and then finally burned. Burning was not the normal thing for Israel, but it was commanded here to show the Lord's

abhorrence to the crime that had been committed. It indicated an intense punishment for a serious crime.

In health-care institutions, the primary way of getting rid of infectious matter is to incinerate it. All those gowns, masks, caps, gloves, tubes, syringes, sponges, wipes, and even scalpels, are incinerated to ash, because that's the best way to kill any bacteria which might have survived. In our lives, we must discard those things which represent rebellion before God. We must rid them from our lives.

So the diagnosis is rebellion against God. Discover the source of your rebellion against God. Break the chain of rebellion, and begin the treatment. The treatment is restoration to God, and it is brought about by separating ourselves from the sin, cleansing our hearts of the sin, and discarding the things or thoughts or lifestyles or relationships that represent that rebellion.

It ended badly for Achan and his family, but it doesn't have to end badly for you. Go back to where you failed. Look up into the face of Jesus. Confess your sin. Receive His forgiveness.