

OpenTheo

June 9th: Joshua 7 & Luke 22:1-38

June 8, 2020



Alastair Roberts

The sin of Achan. The Last Supper.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Joshua 7. But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things. For Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.

well. Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Bethaven, east of Bethel, and said to them, Go up and spy out the land. And the men went up and spied out Ai.

And they returned to Joshua and said to him, Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few. So about three thousand men went up there from the people, and they fled before the men of Ai.

And the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men, and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted

and became as water. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel.

And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name? The Lord said to Joshua, Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned.

They have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them. They have taken some of the devoted things. They have stolen and lied, and put them among their own belongings.

Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.

Get up! Consecrate the people and say, Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow. For thus says the Lord God of Israel, There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.

In the morning, therefore, you shall be brought near by your tribes. And the tribes that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the Lord takes shall come near by households.

And the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man. And he who has taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel. So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe.

And the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought near the clans of Judah. And the clan of the Zerahites was taken.

And he brought near the clan of the Zerahites man by man. And Zabdai was taken. And he brought near his household man by man.

And Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdai, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah was taken. Then Joshua said to Achan, My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and give praise to him, and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.

And Achan answered Joshua, Truly I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I did. When I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold wearing fifty shekels, then I coveted them and took

them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and behold it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel, and they laid them down before the Lord. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters, and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had.

And they brought them up to the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today. And all Israel stoned him with stones, they burned them with fire and stoned them with stones.

And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

The book of Joshua to this point has been one in which the Israelites have largely been faithful. However, in chapter 7 we find that unbeknownst to Joshua and the rest of the people, one of the people had sinned, and they were all about to suffer as a result of that one man's sin. Sin, even secret sin, has consequences for the entire community and must be dealt with seriously accordingly.

When it is not dealt with, the ramifications can be very severe. This is especially the case when the sin explicitly breaches a commandment given to the entire community as a body when they are acting in the name of the Lord. Where the holiness of the people is at stake, unless such sins are dealt with very decisively, everyone associated with the sinner can suffer with them.

Israel has just won the battle at Jericho, but they had failed in the aftermath, as one of their number, Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah, had taken some of the items devoted to the Lord. Achan's name means serpent, so we should not be surprised that he was up to no good. He violated the commandment of chapter 6 verses 18-19.

But all silver and gold and every vessel of bronze and iron are holy to the Lord. They shall go into the treasury of the Lord. This was not just a sin of theft, it was an act of unfaithfulness, a breaking of trust, a breaking of the covenant.

It also put Israel in a very dangerous position. They now had items devoted to destruction in their possession and unless they could identify the culprit and the items, they could suffer destruction on account of them. Joshua sends out spies to a town named Ai, from which they return with an encouraging report.

Confident in their capacity to defeat the town, they send only a small number of men,

about 3,000, considering that Israel had about 600,000 men of military age. This was just a very small band. But they suffer a humiliating defeat.

They're pursued and they lose 36 men. There's a reversal of fortunes here. Israel is routed by a seemingly weaker force and their hearts now melt.

The lesson should be clear, without the Lord fighting for them, they are truly doomed. They suffer the same sort of weakness that their enemies have suffered to this point. Joshua responds to the crisis in a remarkable way.

He tears his clothes, he falls face down before the Ark of the Lord and remains there until the evening. He's joined by the elders and his words might be shocking to us. He complains to the Lord in words reminiscent of those of the Israelites, who complained in the Exodus that the Lord had brought them into the wilderness to destroy them.

There seems to have been a failure of Joshua's faith at this point. He seems to have temporarily forgotten the charge given to him by the Lord in the opening chapter of the book and the promises attached to it. He wonders whether Israel should not just have contented themselves with settling on the far side of the Jordan with the two and a half tribes in the land taken from the Amorite kings, not considering that those victories were examples of how the Lord would bless them in the land itself.

Joshua is concerned on two key accounts. First, they have a precarious purchase on the land on the far side of the Jordan at this point. They've defeated Jericho but nowhere else and they have the flooded Jordan River to their backs and if the Lord forsakes them at this point they cannot easily get back across the river and will be trapped and destroyed by the Canaanites, who will recognize their weakness and come to attack them.

The result would be the Canaanites cutting off their name and with it the Lord's name would also be brought into low reputation among the nations. The Lord rebukes Joshua. He instructs him to get up.

Israel's defeat was not a sign of the Lord's fickleness or his unfaithfulness to his covenant. Rather, Israel has offended against the Lord's holiness. If Israel is the means by which the Lord is defeating the Canaanites for their sin, they cannot be allowed to get away with sinning in such a manner.

In this calling, Israel must act as a faithful unity and a little leaven can leaven that whole lump. If the Lord is to be in their midst and to fight for them, they must rigorously maintain their holiness. And the specific sin is expounded upon in verse 11.

It's described in six separate stages. Israel has sinned, they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them, they have taken some of the devoted things, they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. Until and unless this sin was dealt with, the Lord wouldn't fight for Israel.

What is worse, they would themselves be set apart for judgment. Israel must consecrate itself and prepare itself for judgment the next morning. The culprit would be identified by going down through the levels of the people, from tribe to clan to household to man.

And this would occur by lot, perhaps by the Urim and Thummim. The guilty party would then be destroyed, with his entire family. On this, as on other occasions, the Lord deals with solidarities, not just with individuals.

Achan is finally identified and Joshua charges him to acknowledge what it was that he did. By so doing, he would give praise and ascribe glory to the Lord, who had declared his sin. Achan had taken the forbidden fruit, as it were.

He had stolen what belonged to the Lord, the one thing they were told not to take. He had lied, he had broken the Lord's express command concerning the spoil, he had rejected the Lord and he had coveted what was not his. He ends up declaring the items that he had stolen and where he hid them.

And then Achan was brought to be stoned with the items that he had stolen and with all of his family. They are then burned and covered up with stones. It should be observed that he and his family are suffering the fate of Jericho, which also had stones brought down upon it as the walls came tumbling down and then was presumably burned with fire, according to the way that cities condemned to destruction were generally destroyed in chapter 13 of Deuteronomy, and then left as a pile of rubble.

Like Lot's wife, who had looked back at Sodom, Achan's attachment to the destroyed city led to him and his family suffering its fate. The pile of stones over Achan remained a testament to his sin and a caution to Israel. On the one hand there are the memorial stones from the crossing of the Jordan, and on the other hand there are the stones covering Achan and his family.

As James Bajon has observed, Achan is a reverse of Rahab. Rahab is saved with all of her family and becomes one of Israel. Achan is destroyed with all of his family and becomes one of the Canaanites.

There is more going on here. By virtue of the way that he is introduced to us, and by the process by which the Lots are taken, Achan's lineage is highlighted, and most particularly that he is a descendant of Zerah. This brings us back to Genesis chapter 38 verse 27 to 30 at the end of the story of Judah and Tamar.

This is interesting. Perez's descendants go on to prosper despite a number of threats to being cut off as a line. Zerah's line, however, seems to be largely cut off.

They don't go anywhere. Achan is a descendant of Zerah. I have previously commented upon the strange and troubling law of Deuteronomy chapter 25 verses 11 to 12.

I have suggested it is a symbolic law and that it looks back to Genesis chapter 38. When men fight with one another, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of him who is beating him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the private parts, then you shall cut off her hand. Your eyes shall have no pity.

Symbolically, this represents the conflict between Judah and his oldest son Ur, and the failure to build up Ur's name, the dead son, by giving his son Sheila to Tamar as the one to perform the leveret. As a result, Tamar reaches out, as it were, and grabs him by the private parts, having relations with him secretly. Then, at the end of the story, there is a child that reaches out his hand.

That hand has a scarlet cord tied around it, and then the bearer of that hand is ultimately cut off, while another takes his place. Zerah, I suggest, then, is the hand that gets cut off. His line goes nowhere, and Achan is an example of this.

However, there is another hand, or line, and that's that of Perez. Perez goes on to be the ancestor of David and of Christ. And there are two stories with a scarlet thread.

There's the story in Genesis 38, and then there's the story of Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho. Rahab is a character who might remind us of Tamar in a number of different ways, who also plays the prostitute and is connected with a scarlet cord. Rahab ends up marrying into the line of Perez.

In Matthew 1, verses 3-5, we read, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nashon, and Nashon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab. Achan is also recalled at various points later in scripture. Joshua 22, verses 19-20, Only do not rebel against the Lord, or make us as rebels by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the Lord our God.

Did not Achan the son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fall upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity. In 2 Chronicles 2, verse 7, he is mentioned again. The son of Carmi, Achan the troubler of Israel, who broke faith in the matter of the devoted thing.

His name is actually given here as Achar in the text, and is described as the troubler of Israel, which is essentially the same term as Achar. A question to consider. How might Achan be like the characters of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5? Luke chapter 22, verses 1-38.

And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented, and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. Then came the day of unleavened bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may

eat it. They said to him, Where will you have us prepare it? He said to them, Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters, and tell the master of the house, The teacher says to you, Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished.

Prepare it there. And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him.

And he said to them, I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves, for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table.

For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed. And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this. A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

And he said to them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.

For who is the greater, one who reclines at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. You are those who have stayed with me in my trials. And I assign to you as my father assigned to me a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

Peter said to him, Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death. Jesus said, I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day until you deny three times that you know me. And he said to them, When I sent you out with no money-bag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything? They said, Nothing.

And he said to them, But now let the one who has a money-bag take it, and likewise a

knapsack, and let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me. And he was numbered with the transgressors.

For what is written about me has its fulfillment. And they said, Look, Lord, here are two swords. And he said to them, It is enough.

Luke chapter 22 opens by telling us that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is coming. The timing here is important. The Passover was the fourteenth of the month and followed by the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

This recalls the deliverance from Egypt, the Passover lamb, the death of the firstborn and all these other events that were so important within Israel's history. It's important to consider that this was one of the pilgrim feasts. In a few days' time, Jerusalem would be packed with pilgrims coming up for it, perhaps even a couple of hundred thousand.

All of Israel's attention would be drawn towards Jerusalem for this week. And Jesus' death and resurrection were occurring at a key time, when the attention of Israel and the gathering of Israel converged upon its capital. The chief priests and the scribes were seeking to arrest Jesus and kill him.

Jesus is clearly by this point a genuine threat to their power and their influence. He has a lot of support in the crowd and he outwits them at every turn. They don't want to capture and kill him during the feast, precisely because it would draw so much attention.

At this point, Satan enters into Judas. I believe this is the only time we read of Satan himself entering into anyone. In Acts 5 we're told that Satan has filled Ananias to sin against the Holy Spirit, but Judas seems to give a greater example of satanic possession.

Satan's reappearance after a long absence is significant. Luke 4, verse 13 tells us that Satan departed until an opportune time. And Judas, or Judah, is one of the twelve who sells Jesus into the hands of his enemies.

Judah was one of the twelve sons of Jacob who sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, also motivated by a desire for money. The role of money in the transaction between Judas and the high priest should also remind us of all that Jesus has taught about money. The chief priests need to get Jesus away from the multitude.

The multitudes have a kind of herd-like quality. They act as a unit and they protect Jesus from assault. If we connect the description of the man with the water pitcher with the previous description of the triumphal entry and the finding of the cult, I think we can see that there is a connection.

They're both described in a similar way. Disciples are sent on a mission, an errand to a particular location. They are told what will befall them, who they will meet, and what the reaction will be.

In 1 Samuel, chapter 9, two men, Saul and his servant, go looking for donkeys. They then encounter women, presumably with pitchers, going out to draw water. The women direct them to the site of a meal with the prophet, in the high place.

When Saul eats with the prophet Samuel in the high place, the kingdom is entrusted into his hands. Maybe there's something similar taking place here. Indeed, in chapter 10 of 1 Samuel, there are three signs given to Saul.

There's a sign where he meets men that tell him that the donkeys have been found. There's a sign where he meets men with goats, a skin of wine, and bread. And then there's a sign when he meets the prophets and the spirit comes upon him and he becomes a new man.

Arguably, all three of these signs are found at the end of the book of Luke. The first one, the finding of the donkeys, is fulfilled in the errand before the triumphal entry. The second one, meeting the men with the goats, the skin of wine, and the bread, is fulfilled in the man bearing the water pitcher.

He leads them to the site where they'll celebrate the Passover, which will be celebrated with a lamb or a goat, and where Christ gives them bread and wine. And then finally, they are told to wait in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high. That will be the spirit coming upon them so that they become new men, so that like Saul, they will be equipped to rule.

Why is it a man carrying a water pitcher? First of all, this would stand out. It's not typical a man would be carrying a water pitcher. It's interesting that this is not the first occasion in Scripture where there is a sign given involving someone carrying a water pitcher.

This is the sign given to the servant of Abraham when he meets Rebecca. The relationship between the king and his people was often described as a sort of marriage. And perhaps meeting a man with a water pitcher, presumably going out to the well, plays upon these themes.

Remember again that the story of Saul in 1 Samuel chapter 9 began with him meeting women bearing water pitchers. However, whereas Saul was like the bridegroom meeting the bride for the first time, the disciples are like the bride meeting the bridegroom. The man bearing the water pitcher will lead them to the place where they will celebrate the meal with the one who is the true bridegroom of Israel.

Perhaps we should think here that Jesus is the new royal husband of Israel, and the Last Supper has subtle wedding feast overtones. There is a rising tension in this chapter. The feast drew near in verse 1. Then came the day in verse 7. And when the hour had come in verse 14.

It's a rising tension. And the Passover meal with the disciples is connected with the

Exodus. In chapter 9 verse 31, Jesus had already spoken of his act in Jerusalem as his Exodus.

Jesus is about to accomplish an Exodus, and he is about to establish a covenant, as a covenant was established at Sinai. Jesus and his disciples are eating a Passover meal, or at least a Passover associated meal. It is essential that we notice that Jesus isn't just taking up physical food and drink, just regular bread and wine.

He's taking elements that already bear great meaning. The meal is freighted with meaning and symbolism already, and Jesus takes up that pre-existing symbolism and relates it to himself. In this case, that symbolism is that of the unleavened bread associated with the Messiah.

It's a broken and distributed and participated body. It's a self-communication in symbol. It's interesting that the description of the meal here has two shared cups.

We see one in verses 17 to 18, and then another in verse 20. There would have been four cups for the Passover meal. And Jesus expresses an abstinence from eating the Passover and drinking the wine until they are fulfilled.

The wine anticipates the kingdom, and maybe he's making some sort of Nazarite vow of abstinence here. The description of the wine as the new covenant in Christ's blood recalls the story of Exodus chapter 24, where the Sinai covenant had its blood of the covenant. In verse 8 of that chapter, And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, Whereas Moses threw the blood upon the people, Jesus communicates the blood through a different symbol, which is the drinking of wine.

He instructs them to do this in remembrance of him, or we could say, as his memorial. The purpose of a memorial like this is not primarily to remind us, but to present to God, to bring to his mind, as it were, the sacrifice of Jesus, to declare his death. And the fact that they are instructed to perform this again and again in the future, in remembrance of Christ, recalls the Passover at the first Exodus.

The Passover there was instituted as an ongoing practice for Israel. So Christ is instituting an ongoing practice here. Just as Old Testament deliverances were always accompanied with memorials to recall them in feast, in celebration, in signs, or in some other way, so Jesus associates his death with an explanatory symbol, a symbol that continues the meaning and the force of the event as well, so that people can participate in the reality of his sacrifice.

The meal is a covenant sealing meal. It gives a share in the kingdom to those who participate in it. The twelve will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, in verse 30.

This might make us think back to the judgment upon the wicked vinedressers. They will

be replaced by the faithful servants, the twelve apostles. However, one of the people at the table will betray Christ.

This looks back to Psalm 41, verse 9. Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me. And the disciples question who it is. But it's not long before they start talking about which of them will be greatest.

The kingdom that Jesus is giving to his disciples, however, operates quite differently from those of the Gentiles. The disciples still don't get this. There is authority in the church.

The ministers of the church are the ministers of Christ, representing his authority to his body. But that is exercised in the form of service, not for self-aggrandizement. Jesus' reference to being among his disciples as one who serves, as distinct from being one who sits at the table, might imply his washing of their feet in this scene.

Incidentally, Jesus serving his disciples by washing their feet, not explicitly mentioned here, but implied, casts light back upon the washing of his own feet in chapter 7, verse 36 and following. The sinful woman does for Jesus what he will later do for his disciples. Satan will tempt Peter three times to deny Jesus, and Peter will fail three times.

Yet Jesus prays for him, and he will be restored. There is a contrast between Judas and Peter here. Judas utterly apostatizes, but Peter is going to be restored.

Jesus also acts as a mediator here, interceding for Peter, so that Satan will not destroy him. After this point, the nature of their mission will change. They will need a money bag, sack and sword.

They will face a hostile reception. They can no longer rely upon hospitality being extended to them, and they won't have assurance of their safety. This need not be read as a statement that they had to buy actual swords at this point, but having swords would help them to fulfil biblical prophecy, as we see in verse 37.

Jesus would be numbered with the transgressors. A question to consider. What are some of the details of Luke's account of the Last Supper that stand out from the other Gospels?