

## The Lesson Council.

**Question 11.** *Wherein was the act of Achan a sin demanding such severe punishment?*

So grievous were the results of idolatry that Moses saw fit to punish it in the severest manner, in order to deter the Jews from adopting it. He therefore pronounced upon all idolatrous cities the vow called *Che-rem*, the "irrevocable curse." By this vow every living thing was devoted to death, and property of all kinds was consigned to the flames, or preserved for the sanctuary. Achan, by sparing some of the spoils and devoting it to his own use, put himself under the city's ban, and had to be treated as an idolater.—*Rev. C. R. Barnes.*

It was the first and the most flagrant violation, 1. Of the divine prohibition recorded Josh. 6: 17-19; and 2. Of the promise voluntarily given by the people, Josh. 1: 16-18. It was an act of sacrilege that justly incurred the divine punishment, and a breach of discipline, which would, had it been overlooked, from the force of example, have proved most disastrous to all.—*J. E. Hanauer, Jerusalem.*

Israel was under a covenant which represented God primarily as King, and Achan's sin was an infraction of that covenant at one of its most significant points. He appropriated to his own use that which had been formally and irrevocably devoted to God. His crime was "less-majesty," in gravity equal to treason. Joshua's proclamation, chapter 6: 18, transferring the anathema to offenders found guilty of such sin, was in strict harmony with precedent (compare Num. 21: 2, 3) and with established legislation. (See Deut. 7: 2<sup>d</sup>, and Lev. 27: 28.)—*Rev. George Miller, D.D.*

Achan's act was founded in unbelief of God and in selfish greed that was careless of the interests of others, so that his own advantage was promoted. There are no sins more radically destructive of order and prosperity than these. But his punishment was the severest that human organized society can inflict because his offense was the highest known to its threefold law: 1. To military law, disobedience to orders in the presence of the enemy. 2. To civil law, treason to community by committing a deed that would imperil its existence. 3. To ecclesiastical law, that is, sacrilege—the appropriation to a common use of what God had reserved to himself.—*Rev. J. B. Van Meter, D.D.*

Achan's sin was composite. It was covetousness, disobedience, theft, and sacrilege. With it he shattered the decalogue. It merited severest penalty because, 1. It was a direct and flagrant defiance of God's explicit command; 2. It was a sin primarily against God, since the stolen things had been especially consecrated to the purposes of the tabernacle (Josh. 6: 19); and, (3) Such a sin left undetected and unpunished at the very threshold of the national history would discredit forever the sanctions of the divine law. The profound impression his punishment made is evident from Josh. 22: 20, and 1 Chron. 2: 7.—*Rev. F. M. North.*

**12. Why must the whole nation suffer for Achanian?**

The state is a divine institution, and founded upon family relationship. In such a fellowship, established by God, the good or evil deeds of an individual affect injuriously or beneficially the welfare of the whole society. The crime of Achan was imputed to the whole nation, not as though they had shared his disposition and act, but that he, as a member of the nation, had robbed the whole people of their purity and holiness.—*Rev. C. R. Barnes.*

Because Achan could not possibly have carried off all the articles named, chap. 7: 21, without the knowledge

of some one or other among the people; and even had this not been the case, the very fact that he was able to commit the act unperceived (which I do not think at all likely) shows a most culpable indifference on the part of the people as a whole for maintaining the authority of Jehovah, and a want of jealous watchfulness lest his laws, on which depended their success and safety, should be broken. Though Achan was the only one who committed the act of theft, disobedience, and sacrilege, the presumption, from what we know of the general character of the people, is very strong that others had wished to do the same, and had sinned in their heart. Further, leaving the sin of Achan out of the question, the people had in their proposal to Joshua, chap. 7: 3, shown a spirit of self-reliance and forgetfulness of their dependence in all things on God's help for success. Their elation because of the fall of Jericho made them forget who it was that had given them the victory.—*J. E. Hanauer, Jerusalem.*

The organic unity of the covenant people, in view of which each Israelite appears not only as an individual, but also as a part of the whole body, affords the explanation. In that light the relations of all Israel with Jehovah are seen to be compromised by Achan's sin, and the withdrawal of the divine countenance and favor becomes simply a sign that the covenant no longer holds. Israel is left to its own resources, and its ill-advised attempt to conquer a garrison of unknown strength with inadequate forces naturally results in defeat and loss. The idea of direct punishment is not in evidence in this part of the narrative.—*Rev. George Miller, D.D.*

Achan was not only a man, he was a member of the nation of Israel and of its army. What a soldier does the army does. What a citizen does is done by the State, unless the State repudiates it and takes measures for redress or punishment. God would teach his people this lesson of the responsibility of the whole for the conduct of its parts, therefore the defeat at Ai. If we could trace the results of deeds we would be able to see events of the same kind occurring to-day, not perhaps speedily, but as fruits come from seed.—*Rev. J. B. Van Meter, D.D.*

It is evident that God regarded Israel not as an aggregation but as an organism. So, in ways more obscure but no less certain, he deals with all nations. Dr. Mulford's remarkable work on *The Nation* is of especial value as a demonstration of this thesis. For the chosen people, in whose covenant relation with God was bound up the world's hope of redemption, it was of the first importance that they should be taught how close is the connection between the righteousness of the individual and the well-being of the community. Besides this, there are not wanting indications that the spirit which prompted Achan's overt act prevailed far beyond the curtains of his own tent.—*Rev. F. M. North.*

**13. Why were the family of Achan put to death with him?**

The Mosaic law especially forbade the putting to death of children for their father's sins; and many have imagined, therefore, that Achan's sons and daughters were simply obliged to witness their father's death as a warning. The strong presumption is that Achan, in burying the booty, could not have done it so secretly but that his children were knowing to it, and thus became participators with him in his theft. If so, then they would naturally fall under the ban with him.—*Rev. C. R. Barnes.*

The fact that the articles stolen were "hid in the earth in the midst of the tent" sufficiently proves that