

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-First Week - Thursday

### THE ACCURSED THING

*"So Yahweh said to Joshua: 'Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.' . . . Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan . . . was taken. . . . And Joshua said, 'Why have you troubled us? Yahweh will trouble you this day.' So all Israel stoned him with stones . . . Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So Yahweh turned from the fierceness of His anger" (Joshua 7:10-26).*

The city of Jericho was decreed, even before it was taken, to be wholly an accursed thing, or rather a thing *devoted to destruction*. Not only the city itself was to be consumed, but everything contained in it (except the articles of precious metal, which were put to use in the sanctuary since they would not burn). It has seemed to some a rather severe requirement that the soldiers should have been forbidden from taking for themselves the least benefit from the spoil of this rich and wealthy city. But there are many reasons for it.

The principal seems to have been to impress upon them in the most lively manner the fact that the conquest of the city was not in any respect due to their military power, and therefore they had no right to any portion of the spoil. Nothing was so well designed as this holding back of the spoil to remind them to whom alone this important conquest was due.

It was also a prudent measure in two respects. First, it tested the obedience of the people; and here we saw a wonderful instance of the religious and military discipline of the troops in that this stringent order was so well obeyed. Second, if it had been permitted for the soldiers to glut themselves with the spoil of a rich city at the outset of taking the promised land, then they would have been more disposed for luxury and idleness than for the severe labors which lay before them in the martial conquest of Canaan.

Also, the city had been won without the exhausting toils or feats of valor which might seem to demand such recompense. It may be added that it has been at all times usual in military

operations to deal severely with the first town taken by storm, the garrison of which has held out to the last, in order to strike such a dread into the people as may facilitate further conquest or induce submission in order to avoid a similar doom. Upon the whole, Jericho was to be regarded as the firstfruits of conquest, and as such offered up to the Lord as a burnt offering.

Joshua meant for the city to stand in its ruined condition as a monument to this battle. He therefore pronounced this solemn adjuration: "Cursed be the man before Yahweh who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates" (Joshua 6:26).

The prohibition to take of the spoil was transgressed by one man only, but it brought disaster upon the army of Israel in the next military operation at the town of Ai. Joshua was deeply and painfully sensible of the injurious effects of such a stain upon the hitherto irresistible arms of the Israelites. He and the elders of Israel rent their clothes, put dust upon their heads, and lay prostrate before the ark till eventide. He was informed of what had taken place and told that Israel could not prosper while "the accursed thing" remained among them. He was then instructed in the steps to be taken for the identity of the offender.

This was the lot (conducted in the same manner as that by which Saul was chosen king in a later age). It is very possible that this method was resorted to in the present case to afford the culprit an opportunity of putting a timely stop to the proceeding by showing a repentant confession of his crime. But nothing of the kind occurred. In fact, by remaining silent to the very last Achan shows a stubborn resistance as well as unbelief, hoping perhaps that an error would occur and he would escape by a wrong indication of the lot. And if he were willing to assume the possibility of such an error, he must also have been willing that some other person should suffer for the crime he had committed.

By process of the lot, the tribe taken was that of Judah; after that the family of the Zarhites was taken and then the household of Zabdi. That household was then brought man by man until Achan the son of Carmi was taken. On being addressed by Joshua, Achan confessed his crime. "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

After this confession there was but one course of dealing with one who had troubled Israel and brought so deep a stain upon its honor and disgrace upon its army. He was stoned, and his corpse was consumed by fire along with the accursed things and with all that belonged to him.