

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Literary Analysis Paper: Joshua 7:1 - 26

Submitted to Dr. LaRue Stephens, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the completion of the course

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Old Testament Orientation I

by

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1. Insights from the Literary Features and Techniques

Comment on insights you gained from the literary features and techniques used by the narrator in light of the two presentations in Module 7. Also, because of the brevity of your summary, focus on the most significant features of the narrative.

The first literary feature to be addressed is the types of characters involved in Joshua 7:1-26, in order of appearance:

- Israel. In verse one, the nation is personified, becoming a character in the story. The type of character is a flat character, with one basic quality, representing the group of people as a collective body. Throughout the story it represents the reactions of the nation to the different pieces of the story, ultimately culminating in stoning Achan and his family, and destroying all of his belongings.
- Achan. Achan is a round character, with dialogue, family, desires and actions that have ramifications affecting the nation as a whole, his family and the army directly. From a previous battle where they were all commanded to destroy everything and keep nothing, he had kept some valuable clothing, silver and gold, in clear violation of the covenant with the Lord. While he does eventually admit to his sin, it is only after the entire nation has been gradually narrowed down to him, at which point, having been revealed, he confesses.
- Joshua. Another round character, serving as a leader of the people and an agent for seeking out and dealing with the conflict affecting Israel. Joshua leads the nation, sends the forces to attack Ai, reacts with horror to their defeat, interacts with God and then follows through on God's call to action.

- The Lord. The Lord is also a round character, interacting primarily with Joshua, but also with Israel. He serves as a catalyst for action on the part of Joshua, as well as the giver of the terms defining the consequences of Achan's actions. In a fascinating display, He actually rebukes Joshua for coming to Him in prayer when he should be taking action.
- Various individuals serving as agents, or props that carry the story along: Carmi, Zimri, Zerah, spies, 3000 warriors, men of Ai, 36 soldiers who were killed, elders of Israel, the tribes of Israel, the families of Zerah and Zimri, Achan's family. All of these are mentioned briefly in different capacities, but without any kind of featured role or significance.

Ultimately, the primary characters in this narrative are the Lord, Achan and Joshua, with a personified Israel playing a reoccurring part and a handful of names who, if this were a movie, would be credited as on screen extras.

The story does follow a traditional narrative model, with the primary characters being introduced as the action begins. Conflict enters the picture as the army fails in their attack on Ai – this was a shock to Israel as they were used to victories without casualties on their side. The conflict builds as Joshua and the other leaders react, pleading with God to respond. The conflict begins to unravel as God points out in verse 11 that there is sin, thereby violating His covenant and resulting in the loss in battle. God then goes on to give Joshua a course of action for remedying the problem, which finds its resolution in the admission of Achan to his sin. The action ends as the last of Achan's family and property are destroyed, and great pile of stones were placed over him as a form of marker and reminder to the consequences of violating God's covenant.

As noted by Dr. Gary Yates in his videos, *Old Testament Literary Analysis* parts one and two¹, one of the literary devices used in this passage is that of comparison and contrast between this story of Achan and that of Rahab in Joshua 2:

Joshua 2: Rahab

Woman

Canaanite

Her family survives

Nation perishes

Hides the spies on roof

Cattle, sheep and donkeys of Jericho perish

Has only heard of God but obeys

Joshua 7: Achan

Man

Israelite

His family perishes

Nation prospers and conquers

Hides the loot under his tent

Cattle, sheep and donkeys of Achan perish

Has seen God's acts but disobeys

2. Interpretive Issues

Explain one interpretive issue or problem from your narrative as well as your resolution.

Explain why you have arrived at your conclusion. Outside sources may help you in this section; cite them appropriately. Make this section one page.

The greatest potential for problems or interpretive issues is the possibility of misapplying the text to other situations. Some might interpret this passage as an example of how living in God's will guarantees success, while sin guarantees punishment – this is not the case, as we are not living under the same type of covenantal agreement, nor are we conquering a land God ordered us to take. This passage is not a “prosperity gospel” message.

Others may view the method of discovering the sinner, through a system of lots or narrowing down, as a viable practice for today. Some might interpret it as a warning against desiring wealth. Others may use it as a justification for a harsh, judgmental stance on sin.

¹ Yates, Dr. Gary, *Old Testament Literary Analysis* parts one and two, Liberty University.

However, this passage is not about those things. Without taking the context and historical situation into consideration, it is very easy to mistakenly interpret and apply this passage.

Ultimately, it is about God's holiness, the agreement He had with a specific group of people in a specific time with specific conditions that people today are not living under. This passage, as such, needs to be primarily viewed as a historical narrative told in story format. It is informative, not necessarily instructive. Through it the reader gains a glimpse at one small part of a much larger picture – the bigger picture being God's plan of bringing about a Savior for His fallen children.

3. Timeless Principles

Discuss the timeless theological and applicational principles in the narrative. What lasting teaching comes from it, and what are specific ways a Christian might apply the narrative to his life? Include specific problems, issues, and questions a Christian might have in applying the narrative to his life today.

There are several timeless theological and applicational principles in this narrative. The first is that of God's holiness. Through this historical story, the reader catches a glimpse of the seriousness and vastness of God's holiness and what it demands. While it is not so much an applicational principle, it is a timeless theological lesson that shapes the reader's understanding of who God is.

The second principle is that of sin. In verse 21, Achan says that he saw, he wanted, he took, he hid. The same path of sin is seen in the story of David and Bathsheba; he saw her, he wanted her, he took her, and then he tried to hide his sin by having her husband killed. This is a timeless principle in that the same is true for many today in the path of sin. The majority of

serious sin does not happen in a vacuum; it happens as an individual looks too long, finds themselves wanting too much and then rationalizing or convincing themselves of the benefits, indulging in the sin and then trying to hide the truth of it. This practice started with Adam and Eve in the garden! They saw the fruit, wanted the fruit (why were they in the vicinity of it?), took the fruit, and then tried to hide their sin from God by literally hiding. For the believer today, the principle is this: when he or she finds themselves looking, stop the cycle then! Do not let it progress to wanting and taking!

The third principle is possibly a little more subtle. It is fascinating to see God, in a way, rebuke Joshua for praying and pleading for help. Instead, God calls him to action! Normally, we are absolutely to turn to God in prayer, but in this instance, God rightfully points out to Joshua that he already knew what he needed to do – and as such, he needed to act. Instead, it is almost as if Joshua was using prayer as an excuse for inaction. The timeless principle is this; when a believer knows what they are to do, then they need to do it! Do not delay, do not continue to agonize over what course of action to take, do not plead with God for an answer He has already given – simply act!