

Valley of Achor - A Devotional on Hope

“The son of Carmi was Achar, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the accursed thing.” (1 Chronicles 2:7)

Life sometimes feels like walking through an endless valley of trouble. In Hebrew, this valley is called ‘Achor’. How does this word relate to the transgression of Achar, whose very name means ‘trouble’? If we explore this in scripture, we can discover a way out of the valley. According to Hebraic tradition, we need to search the scriptures for the first time the word or concept is used. For this, we turn to the seventh chapter of the book of Joshua for the account of Achar and the transgression of the ‘accursed thing’.

Here we find Joshua on his face before God, asking why Israel has been defeated by their enemies. *“Why have You brought us over the Jordan only to be delivered into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us?”* (Josh. 7:7) This defeat followed right on the tail of their stunning victory in Jericho. Just after the mighty walls of Jericho came crashing down with just the blast of their shofar¹, Israel ends up being chased, tails between their legs, by the insignificant army of Ai. *“therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.”* (Josh 7:5) Don’t we sometimes feel discouraged like this when walking through our valley of troubles? Why God? Why have you saved us just to let us be defeated by these troubles, destroyed by even the weakest of enemies? If I can’t even get victory over this insignificant issue, how can I expect to deal with the really serious trouble in my life?

What is God’s answer to Joshua? “Get up! Israel has sinned. They have taken some of the accursed things and put it amongst their own stuff.” God revealed the reason He was no longer giving Israel victory – it was because of the accursed things. In Hebrew, the word used is Herem {הרם} Until these accursed things were removed from their midst and destroyed, Israel would not be able to stand before their enemies. They were doomed to destruction! God’s presence would not be with them anymore. (Josh 7:12) God had warned Israel not to take anything from the spoils of Jericho or they would bring a curse upon it and ‘trouble’ it. (Josh 6:18) Here the Hebrew word used is from the same root for trouble – achar. Who could have brought this trouble upon Israel? A man whose name actually means trouble – Achar. It also means ‘gloominess’. Enough trouble in our life can make us gloomy, pessimistic, always expecting something to go wrong. Interestingly enough, here the man’s name is not Achar but Achan, a slight variation to the one used in the book of Chronicles, but one with the same lineage – son of Carmi (Ben Carmi). In his greed, Achar had taken a beautiful Babylonian garment, as well as some gold and silver, hidden it under his tent, (thinking no one would ever discover it which automatically reveals his unbelief in God who sees all things). This brought defeat upon Israel.

What was God’s remedy for defeat? Destruction of the Herem! When the accursed things were found under Achan’s tent, evidence of his sin of covetousness and

¹ Plural for shofar, ram’s horn, used in spiritual and physical battle

disobedience, everything – this included Achan, his sons, his daughters, his donkeys, sheep, oxen, the accursed things, even his tent – they carried all that belonged to him to the Valley of Achor. There, they were stoned to death and then burned with fire. Joshua said, “*Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day.*” (Josh 7:25). This contains a lesson for each of us. There is no remedy for sin but its complete removal. How is this possible? How can we eradicate sin from our midst since we are sons and daughters of Adam, infected with sin from the beginning in Gan Eden; all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

For answers, we must follow the trail of the valley of Achor to the book of Hosea. Here is a woman I can well identify with as the woman I was in the past – having a spirit of harlotry – she decks herself in flashy earrings and jewelry and chases after her lovers without a thought to the One who is her true Beloved. But God has His ways. In His incredible kindness and mercy, He absorbs all the rejection and woos her back unto Himself. Hedging her way with thorns, and walling her in so that she can no longer catch her lovers, causing all her ‘mirth’ and immoral partying to cease, He then allures her, brings her into the desert (midbar) and speaks comfort to her there. The midbar (wilderness or desert) is a place where God speaks. Midbar מדבר comes from the root Daber דבר which means ‘speak’ or ‘word’. It was here that He spoke to Moses in the burning bush. It was in the desert where He spoke to the adulterous woman, Gomer. It is in the dry and parched places of our lives where God often speaks a word to us as well.

Now God speaks an amazing word: “**I will give her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there as in the days of her youth...**” (Hosea 2:15) God actually promises to turn the Valley of Achor (trouble) into a door of hope! How can the valley of our troubles be turned into a place of hope? How is the curse of Achor turned into a blessing? What (or should I say who) is the door? The Hebrew word for door is delet, but the word used here is Petach, which means ‘an opening’. In the New Testament, Yeshua (Jesus) uses a metaphor well known to the people of Israel – a shepherd with his sheep. He says, “I am the door (sha’ar = gate) of the sheep.” (John 10:7). He repeats, “*I am the sha’ar. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*” (John 10:9) Yeshua is the opening through which we may enter into life. He is the good shepherd (Ro’eh Hatov) who leads His sheep to lie down in green pastures. The enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy, but Yeshua said He has come to give us life and life more abundantly. He laid down His life for us. No one took it from Him but He lay it down of Himself as He was commanded by His Father.

Yeshua is the One who has turned the curse of Achor into the blessing of hope (tikvah). The Messiah redeemed us from the curse: “*Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of the torah, having become a curse for us.*” (Gal. 3:13) Because of the curse of sin, we were doomed to destruction, just as were the Israelites under the curse of Achor. But Yeshua took the sin upon Himself so that we may have hope and walk in righteousness. “*He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” (2 Cor. 5:21) The blood of bulls and goats in the Old Testament sacrificial system could never truly remove or destroy our sins. The sacrifice had to be repeated

over and over again, and even then the sin was only temporarily covered, not destroyed. But Yeshua entered the Holiest place with His own blood, thereby completely eradicating our sin. (Heb. 9:12) It has been destroyed as surely as was Achan and all that belonged to him in ancient Israel. Because of the accursed things we hold unto our bosom, our ‘herem’, those things devoted to destruction that we refuse to relinquish, we are doomed to sure defeat, even from the most insignificant opposition such as the feeble army of Ai, but in Messiah, we may walk in victory. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord, Adoneinu, Yeshua Hamashiach. ² We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³ Our ‘herem’, our sin, dooms us to eternal separation from God. But through Yeshua we may be forgiven and have eternal life in God’s presence. He is Immanu-El (God with us). ⁴ Death is swallowed up in victory. Halleluyah! ⁵

In the book of Hosea, the Lord promised a wayward, weak, sinful woman that He would give her an opening of hope (Petach Tikvah) instead of the misery of a perpetual walk of condemnation through the Valley of Achor. He promised her an eternal covenantal relationship and that she would then sing again in His presence as she had in her youth. As a young Jewish girl, I used to lead the singing of prayers and worship in our children’s congregational Sabbath services. But as I grew older, I forgot my God and rejected my faith; choosing instead to walk in the ways of the world, looking for love in all the wrong places. When God hedged my way in with thorns, causing my lovers to abandon me, and my mirth to cease, I thought I would never sing again. It felt like my life was over; my hope had been cut off. But then God performed a miracle in my life - He revealed Himself to me as a God of covenant, betrothing me to Himself forever in righteousness, lovingkindness, mercy and faithfulness through the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua. He said, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*” My first request was to sing for Him again; and He gave me that desire of my heart. The Valley of Achor has been turned into a door of hope and I sing to Him again as in the days of my youth.

Why are so many who have, by faith, walked through the sha’ar, the gate – this Petah Tikvah – opening of hope – still walking in hopelessness, despair and defeat? It is because of our stubborn refusal to take hold of everything that Yeshua died to give us. He came to give us life and life more abundantly. He came to give us an inheritance of peace, love, joy and righteousness in the Holy Spirit. But we can be like prisoners, sitting in the gloom of our cells, depressed and discouraged, while the doors stand wide open, the brightness and warmth of sunshine and the musical sounds of birds singing beckoning us to freedom. We are accepting a heavy covering of guilt and condemnation instead of the garments of praise and righteousness. “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua, who live and walk not after the dictates of the flesh, but after the dictates of the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1)

If we already know Yeshua as our Messiah and yet feel as if we are always walking in the Valley of Achor - in defeat, despair (hopelessness) and destruction, perhaps we need to

² Our Lord, Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:57

³ Romans 8:37

⁴ Isaiah 7:14

⁵ Isaiah 25:8, 1 Cor. 15:54

also examine our lives for evidence of herem – accursed things. Could there exist things in our possession, even unknowingly, that should be devoted to destruction? I have visited very few homes of Believers where I did not see evidence of some kind of witchcraft, idolatry, or occult. It may take some spiritually discerning ‘snooping’ to cleanse our homes from this herem, asking God to reveal anything in our possession that may be causing us to walk in defeat.. It may be a statue, a piece of jewelry, a children’s toy. A friend of mine, a young mother, recently related an incident when one day, her baby would not stop crying. The mother became more and more irritated with her child to the point where she felt enraged. Thankfully, she knew was spiritually discerning enough to realize that the enemy was at work and she noticed a small toy that a homeless person had given to her child. Looking closely at this toy figure, she could see the rage and demonic expression on it’s face. She immediately took it outside, her husband smashing it under his heavy work boots; and shortly, the crying and the rage completely disappeared. PTL! How many of us are living with the presence of the enemy in our homes because of herem – items devoted to destruction? We may be allowing our children to watch television, movies or play video games that are an abomination to God in our homes. We must be willing to give up and even destroy anything the Holy Spirit shows us that is not pleasing to Him. A return of God’s favor and presence is well worth the sacrifice of whatever material possession that may be.

“Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing (herem). (Deut. 7:26)”

What is our personal Valley of Achor? Surely some measure of trouble is part and parcel of real life in this fallen world amongst imperfect people. Job wrote, with a somewhat negative outlook that some would simply call realistic, *“Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward....Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.”* (Job 5:7, 14:1) Another reality is that we do have an adversary – an enemy of our souls who seeks to kill, steal and destroy and can definitely ‘trouble’ us. However, sometimes our ‘herem’, which continually brings trouble into our life is spiritual, emotional or mental rather than physical. We may have wrong attitudes, wrong thought patterns that need to be destroyed. Perhaps the fiery coal of an angel needs to touch our unclean lips and change the way we speak. The Word warns us that a root of bitterness will not only cause trouble in our own lives, but will also defile the lives of many people we come into contact with.⁶ Sobering thought, but well worth considering if we continually struggle with trouble. Even a close relationship with one who is covetous and disobedient may cause our destruction. We are warned not to keep company with an idolatrous, covetous person, even he or she does claim to be a ‘Believer’ – not to even eat with such a person! (1 Cor. 5:11) Bad company surely does corrupt good character. All of Achan’s family were destroyed along with him. We must pray fervently that those in authority over us walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

Let’s pray together:

⁶ Hebrews 12:15

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel), thank you for revealing to us the sin of Achan and providing the remedy for the Valley of Achor through the door of hope (Petach Tikvah). Thank you, Yeshua, that You are the gate by which we may enter into eternal life by faith. Please reveal to us any 'herem' in our lives – physical possessions, wrong relationships, sinful attitudes, thought or speech patterns - that may be causing us to yet wander in the Valley of Achor, in perpetual trouble. Show us what we are holding onto or hiding that should rather be devoted to destruction. Burn it all away for You, God are a consuming fire. Forgive us and cleanse us. Help us to walk in the freedom that You died to give us. Teach us to walk in the peace, joy and righteousness that is our inheritance in You. Bring us through to victory, Lord, for Your namesake and to You be all the glory. Amen.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace (shalom) and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope (tikvah).” (Jer. 29:11)

About the Author:

Hannah Neshet grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching Christians about the Jewish roots of their faith.

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