



Sin Revealed

ACHAN'S ACTIONS WERE DISCOVERED AND JUDGED
BECAUSE HE DISHONORED GOD.

Scripture Passage: Joshua 7:10-23 Memory Verse: Galatians 6:7

Perhaps you're familiar with the story of the boy whose father tasked him with planting beans in the family garden. Once he finished, the lad could join his buddies at play. Shortly after he began working, the young man saw his friends heading for the baseball diamond. Anxious to get to the game and thinking his father would never know the difference, the boy hastily dumped all the seeds in one hole and covered them up. Later, when the seeds began to sprout, his disobedience became obvious. The clustered plants revealed the young man's transgression. Like Achan who stole banned objects, the boy's sin found him out. Achan's actions were discovered and judged because he dishonored the Lord.

As you prepare to lead this session, reflect on times the Lord revealed specific sins in your life. How did you handle your guilt? What spiritual lessons did you take away from your experience? Ask the Lord to reveal any secret sins that might be holding you back in your walk with Him. Seek His guidance as you share these truths with the adults in your Bible study.



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One of the central truths of the Bible is that every human being is a sinner. We sin against others, and every sin is a sin against God. The Bible also reveals that though we may try, we cannot hide anything from God—including our sins. What’s more, the Bible clearly declares that there will always be negative consequences for one who tries to conceal one’s sin from God. Nevertheless, there is good news. God’s Word teaches that whoever confesses and renounces their sins to God will find mercy and forgiveness. (PSG, p. 46)

What should be a person’s motivation to confess sin and seek forgiveness?



Understand the Context (Joshua 7:1–12:24)

Joshua 5 records the Israelites’ spiritual preparation for triumph over their enemies by renewing their covenant commitment. Chapter 6 then focuses on the conquest of Jericho. This military victory was not won by human wisdom or abilities, but by following God’s commands to march around the city’s walls, sound trumpets made of rams’ horns, and shout. In addition to bringing Israel victory, the Lord also tested their faith. And, because of that faith, the walls of Jericho collapsed (Heb. 11:30).

God placed all of Jericho’s inhabitants (except Rahab’s family) and possessions under the ban. That is, they were devoted either to the Lord’s purposes or they were destroyed. Unknown to Joshua, Achan took some of the banned objects and hid them. As a result, the Israelites experienced defeat in their next battle at a small village called Ai. The Lord led Joshua through a process to discover the guilty party. Then Achan and his family were stoned and their bodies and all their possessions were burned (Josh. 7:1-26).

After dealing with Achan’s sin, Israel successfully conquered Ai. In contrast to the miracle at Jericho, the Israelites defeated Ai with a wise military plan straight from the Lord. But while their surprise attack worked perfectly, the victory still depended on God. After capturing Ai, Joshua gathered the people to review the law and to renew their commitment to the Lord (8:1-35).

In Joshua 9, the Israelites failed to consult the Lord before entering into a covenant with the Gibeonites. These Canaanite neighbors tricked Joshua by pretending to come from a distant land. After Israel made a treaty with Gibeon, Joshua discovered their deception and made them become Israel’s servants (9:1-27).

In Joshua 10, God used the misguided treaty with Gibeon for His glory and Israel’s good. A coalition of five kings from the south besieged the Gibeonites, who appealed to Joshua for help. The Lord intervened in the battle, hurling large hailstones that killed more enemy soldiers than Israel’s swords. To finish the battle that day, Joshua asked God to make the sun stand still. The delayed sunset allowed him to capture and execute the five kings. Israel also destroyed the southern cities as commanded by God (10:1-43).

The first fifteen verses of chapter 11 focus on the Israelites’ conquest of cities in northern Canaan. The Lord required Joshua to hamstring the captured horses and burn the enemies’ chariots to prevent Israel from relying on military expertise more than on Him. The remainder of chapter 11 and all of chapter 12 summarize Israel’s conquests both east and west of the Jordan. This record would remind future generations of victories won by faith in the Lord.

Read Joshua 7:10-23 in your Bible. Identify the corporate effect of sin and the corporate responsibility of Israel for the sin. (PSG, p. 47)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Prior to the group time, move the colored circle to Ai on **Pack Item 1** (Map: *The Conquest of Canaan*). Hang **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 10** (Handout: *The Life of Joshua*).

DISCUSS:

What should be a person’s motivation to confess sin and seek forgiveness? (PSG, p. 46)

READ:

Discuss responses, then read the opening paragraph on page 46 of the PSG.

REVIEW:

Show adults the locations of Jericho and Ai on **Pack Item 1** (Map: *The Conquest of Canaan*). Remind them of the incredible victory God gave the Israelites over Jericho in Joshua 6 because they obeyed Him. Note that today’s session reveals what can happen when disobedience creeps in. Summarize this content from “Understand the Context” (PSG, p. 47):

“After the account of the fall of Jericho in Joshua 6, chapters 7–12 summarize the rest of the conquest of Canaan. Joshua 7 reveals that an Israelite sinned against God when the Lord brought down the walls of Jericho. When Achan saw some of the items that were to be set apart for the Lord, he coveted them and took them for himself. Achan’s sin resulted in Israel’s initial defeat at Ai. Only when Achan was confronted and his sin dealt with could Israel move on. Joshua 8 describes how God turned away from His anger and handed over the city of Ai to the Israelites.”

TRANSITION:

It is important for us to understand our personal relationship with God in the context of being a part of the people of God. Our actions affect others, often in ways we never expect.



Group Activity Option

Music

Play the song “Clean” by Natalie Grant. If possible, provide lyrics to allow the group to follow along. Explain that the song talks about the forgiveness, grace, and mercy that are available from God. State: *We all sin, and we all need to be cleansed by the Savior. As we’ll discover in today’s session, our sin can also cause problems for others, often in ways we are not aware.* Encourage adults to look for God’s response to sin and to consider how they should deal with sin in their own lives.

Covenant Violated (Josh. 7:10-15)

10 The LORD then said to Joshua, “Stand up! Why have you fallen facedown? **11** Israel has sinned. They have violated my covenant that I appointed for them. They have taken some of what was set apart. They have stolen, deceived, and put those things with their own belongings. **12** This is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They will turn their backs and run from their enemies, because they have been set apart for destruction. I will no longer be with you unless you remove from among you what is set apart. **13** Go and consecrate the people. Tell them to consecrate themselves for tomorrow, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There are things that are set apart among you, Israel. You will not be able to stand against your enemies until you remove what is set apart. **14** In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe the LORD selects is to come forward clan by clan. The clan the LORD selects is to come forward family by family. The family the LORD selects is to come forward man by man. **15** The one who is caught with the things set apart must be burned, along with everything he has, because he has violated the LORD’s covenant and committed an outrage in Israel.”

(vv. 10-11) After the defeat at Ai, Joshua fell facedown before the Lord (Josh. 7:6-9). The Lord revealed that the Israelites had sinned by stealing from items *set apart* for God. Therefore, His presence would no longer accompany them until they removed the banned or stolen objects.

The Lord commanded Joshua to *stand up*. The problem was not a failure on the Lord’s part. Rather, *Israel has sinned*. From God’s perspective, the entire nation, not just Achan, had sinned (see v. 1). Taking the promised land was a part of God’s *covenant* with His people, but they had violated that covenant. As a result, the Israelites had to remove the sin and rebellion within the camp before the conquest could move forward.

The Hebrew word translated *sinned* means “to miss the goal.” It involves a failure to do the right thing, which leads to guilt and judgment.” Observe the use of the plural *they*. As noted, God saw the entire nation as guilty.

This is known as “corporate solidarity” and can be summed up this way: (1) the whole group is treated as a unit, (2) an individual can represent the unit, and (3) there is little or no distinction between the individual and the unit. Achan’s sin highlights the third concept. God told Joshua that Israel had sinned (v. 11). Yet Achan individually admitted his personal rebellion (v. 20).

(v. 12) Because of sin, Israel could not *stand against their enemies*. In fact, God said that’s why they had to *turn their backs and run*. Withdrawing His presence was a devastating prospect for God’s people. This peril could only be avoided by dealing with the nation’s sin.

Key Doctrine

God

God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. (See Isaiah 6:1-5; 1 Peter 1:14-16.)

(vv. 13-14) The people’s first step was to *consecrate themselves* to appear before God the next morning. The verb for *consecrate* basically means “to be set apart” or “to be holy.” Consecration involved a variety of external acts (such as bathing or refraining from sex), along with genuine inward examination.

Verse 14 makes clear that the Lord took control of the entire selection process. Since all the Israelites were being held guilty, all of them needed to search their hearts and learn from the tragedy of their defeat. Thus the Lord required the people to present themselves before Him *tribe by tribe . . . clan by clan . . . family by family*.

Finally, members of the family selected would approach the Lord *man by man*. Through this process, the Lord was giving Achan a chance to come clean regarding his sin.

(v. 15) God’s judgment was swift and complete. He commanded that Achan, his family, and all he owned to be *burned*, just like the banned items in Jericho. Before that, though, Achan and his family members were stoned to death (Josh. 7:25). The Hebrew term translated *outrage* also can mean “disgrace.” It is related to the word “fool” and reflects a disregard for moral and spiritual values.



APPLICATION POINT: We should recognize that sin always dishonors God and negatively impacts our relationship with Him.

RESPOND: Write the following on the board or a large sheet of paper: *Our actions impact others, both positively and negatively.* Lead the group to list some personal examples of this from their lives.

CONTEXT: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (Handout: *The Life of Joshua*). Highlight Joshua dealing with Achan in Joshua 7. Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) and review the description of Achan. Summarize Joshua 7:1-9 to highlight Achan’s sin.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Joshua 7:10-15** as the group listens for what God instructed Joshua to do.

RECAP: Highlight God’s response to Joshua in these verses:

The Lord got right to the point—Israel has sinned. They had stolen from the Lord and then deceitfully hid what they had stolen. . . . The Lord revealed that it was because of this sin that the people of God could not defeat their enemies. He had warned them that there would be dire consequences if they disobeyed Him concerning the things that were to be devoted to Him. If they were going to act like enemies to God by disregarding Him, then they would experience a taste of what that meant. (PSG, p. 49)

ASK: **Why is it important for us to recognize sin’s impact on us and our relationship with God?** (PSG, p. 51) Discuss responses. Draw attention to the “Key Doctrine” on page 50 of the PSG. Affirm that our holy God takes sin seriously. Note that He would reveal just how seriously in the next verses.



Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Read the article on “Holy War” in a Bible dictionary. **Why did the Lord sometimes require the Israelites to dedicate everything in a “ban,” which meant that the inhabitants and possessions of an entire city would be set apart to the Lord and destroyed? How would you respond to someone who questioned why a loving God would order the wholesale extermination of the nations that were occupying the promised land?** (Hints: *The Lord had given these people time to repent. See Gen. 15:13-16. The Lord is a God of both love and judgment. See Ex. 34:6-7.*)

Achan Revealed (Josh. 7:16-19)

16 Joshua got up early the next morning. He had Israel come forward tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was selected. **17** He had the clans of Judah come forward, and the Zerahite clan was selected. He had the Zerahite clan come forward by heads of families, and Zabdi was selected. **18** He then had Zabdi's family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was selected. **19** So Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and make a confession to him. I urge you, tell me what you have done. Don't hide anything from me."

(v. 16) Joshua *got up early the next morning* to begin the task of determining the guilty person. The verb translated *got up early* often appears with important tasks the Lord assigned in the Old Testament. For example, Abraham got up early to obey God's instructions to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:3). And the Lord commanded Moses to rise early to tell Pharaoh to let His people go (Ex. 8:20). This verb is related to the Hebrew noun for "shoulder." The word picture includes individuals shouldering daily duties.

In both Joshua 3:1 and 6:12, Joshua rose early to move forward on a command of God. On those occasions, he was initiating something exciting for the people: preparing to cross the Jordan and beginning the march around Jericho. On this day, however, he was facing a much heavier duty.

The first step in the Lord's procedure for determining the guilty party involved Israel presenting itself *tribe by tribe*. The text does not indicate how the selection was made. He may have cast lots or used the priestly Urim and Thummin (Ex. 28:29-30; Num. 27:18-21). Regardless, this process of elimination resulted in the selection of *the tribe of Judah*.

This tribe originated from Jacob's fourth son and provided the genealogical line that ultimately led to the Messiah, Jesus. When the promised land was divided among the tribes, Judah received a parcel of land west of the Dead Sea. David and Solomon each came from Judah; so when Israel split into two kingdoms after Solomon's death, the Southern Kingdom became known as Judah.

(v. 17) The next step in the process resulted in the selection of *the Zerahite clan* within Judah. Zerah was one of the twins conceived by Tamar and her father-in-law, Judah (Gen. 38:30). Zerah was named in Jesus's family tree, although Jesus actually was a direct descendant of Zerah's twin brother, Perez (Matt. 1:3).

The next level of specification resulted in the Lord's revelation of *Zabdi* (also known as "Zimri," 1 Chron. 2:6) as the family head selected within the Zerahite clan. His name means "my gift" or "Yah gives." Readers can only imagine what Achan felt as the selection process methodically progressed!

(v. 18) Once Zabdi's family presented itself *man by man*, Joshua relied on God's omniscience to identify the culprit. Once the process was complete, *Achan* and his sin were revealed. The selection process involved casting lots, but God left no doubt that He was in control. Because of His direction, chance was not a factor. When all was said and done, the individual who needed to be identified was the one found guilty.

The process also had given Achan time to take the initiative to confess and plead for forgiveness, but he had failed to do so. Throughout this narrative, he had multiple opportunities to admit what he had done and to repent (see Josh. 7:13). In the end, he had nowhere left to hide.

(v. 19) Joshua demanded a confession from Achan and addressed him as *my son*. While he was Israel's leader, Joshua also felt a fatherly concern for Achan. Joshua's words constitute four commands: *give glory to the LORD . . . make a confession to him . . . tell me what you have done* and *don't hide anything*. Joshua's words did not distinguish between confessing sin and praising God. Rather, Achan would glorify the Lord by confessing his sin.

Confession continues to be one way God's people bring Him honor and glory. We need to acknowledge that He is always aware of our transgressions, so we need to overcome whatever prevents us from confessing our sins and seeking the Lord's forgiveness.



APPLICATION POINT: We should acknowledge that God is always aware of our sins.

READ:

Call for a volunteer to read aloud Joshua 7:16-19 as the group listens to how Achan was identified.

HIGHLIGHT:

Summarize the process through which God led Joshua to identify Achan:

“Joshua had the tribes of Israel come forward as the Lord instructed. As he did, the Lord selected the tribe of Judah. Next, the Lord selected the Zerahite clan. Then, the Lord selected the family of Zabdi. Finally, Achan was selected. It was essential the people witnessed that it was the Lord who was making the selections, just as He said He would in verses 13-15.” (PSG, p. 51)

DISCUSS:

Lead the group to discuss how long this process may have taken and how Achan may have felt during the process. Lead the group to discuss the different ways Achan could have responded to Joshua in verse 19.

SAY:

Joshua spoke to Achan as a father. He challenged Achan to stop the charade and to come clean before God. His confession would bring glory to God, while hiding his sin was futile.

ASK:

What might prevent one from confessing and seeking the Lord's forgiveness? (PSG, p. 52)

MEMORIZE:

Display Galatians 6:7, the memory verse for this session, and lead the group to read it aloud. Challenge the group to apply the truth of this verse by coming clean to God about any sins that might be hindering their relationship with Him and others.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Playing Cards

Prior to the session, remove all the face cards (*jack, queen, king*), joker cards, and the ace of spades from a standard deck of cards. During the session, allow volunteers to take one of these face cards, keeping it facedown and not showing it to anyone. As you discuss Joshua 7:16-19, lead the volunteers to turn over their cards one at a time. Share that a face card or a joker represents the Israelites who obeyed the Lord, while the ace of spades represents Achan. Allow adults to compare and contrast this method to what God did through Joshua in these verses.

Confession Made (Josh. 7:20-23)

20 Achan replied to Joshua, “It is true. I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I did: **21** When I saw among the spoils a beautiful cloak from Babylon, five pounds of silver, and a bar of gold weighing a pound and a quarter, I coveted them and took them. You can see for yourself. They are concealed in the ground inside my tent, with the silver under the cloak.”

22 So Joshua sent messengers who ran to the tent, and there was the cloak, concealed in his tent, with the silver underneath. **23** They took the things from inside the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites, and spread them out in the LORD’s presence.

(v. 20) Achan responded to Joshua’s plea with an honest affirmation: **It is true**. This statement translates a single Hebrew word related to the English word *amen*. It often is rendered “verily” or “truly” in Scripture.

The culprit acknowledged that he had **sinned against the LORD**. The Hebrew verb rendered *sinned* is the same verb that appears in God’s announcement to Joshua that Israel had sinned (see 7:11). It refers to missing a target. Spiritually, such missteps result in judgment.

Achan correctly recognized that his sin was **against the LORD**. In many contexts where the verb rendered “sinned” occurs in the Old Testament, its object is either God or His laws. By their actions, sinners miss God’s standards for holy living. Like a puzzle with lost pieces, they find themselves incomplete and lacking.

(v. 21) Achan’s confession reveals a familiar progression of sin. First, he **saw** items placed under the ban, then he **coveted** them. Eventually, he **took** what he wanted. Interestingly, forms of these same verbs appear in the record of Eve’s sin in Genesis 3:6. She also *saw* and *took*, while the term for *coveted* is rendered “was desirable.” The tenth commandment forbids the internal attitude of coveting, a reference to an ungoverned, selfish desire (Ex. 20:17).

Achan also admitted that he tried to hide his sin by burying the stolen goods **inside my tent**. His attempts to conceal what he took verifies that this was a conscious act of rebellion. He knew what he was doing was wrong.

Achan specified the objects he coveted and took: **a beautiful cloak from Babylon, five pounds of silver, and a bar of gold**. *Cloak* signifies something superior and therefore majestic. The word for *Babylon* refers to the land of Shinar. Genesis 11:2 connects this region to the people who built the Tower of Babel.

(vv. 22-23) Joshua sent **messengers** to Achan’s tent to verify Achan’s confession and recover the stolen items. There, they discovered the banned goods just as Achan had said. They found the cloak, along with the precious metals (though only the **silver** is mentioned specifically). With the messengers’ confirmation, the guilty man was glorifying the Lord as Joshua had counseled him to do (see v. 19).

The messengers returned with the banned goods. The items apparently were put on display so that Joshua and all the Israelites could see them. More importantly, the items were **spread . . . in the LORD’s presence**. The Hebrew verb translated *spread* often is translated “poured out” and often refers to anointing oil used in royal and religious settings. In Joshua 7:23, it emphasizes the banned items stolen by Achan were being returned to God.

Ultimately, Achan and his entire family were stoned for his deception (v. 25) and the Lord turned from His anger against the nation (v. 26). His possessions also were burned. Additionally, thirty-six men died in the battle of Ai (v. 5) as a result of Achan’s disobedience. As always, sin’s effects are far-reaching.

The severity of Achan’s punishment following his reluctant confession serves as a stark reminder that sin is serious. It also illustrates God’s absolute demands for holiness. Achan’s sin had sullied all of God’s people (v. 1), and removing the curse required the absolute destruction of everyone and everything related to Achan. This was the only way Israel would be able to move forward and continue the nation’s conquest of the land God had provided.



APPLICATION POINT: We honor God by repenting and confessing our sins to Him.

ASK:

What is repentance? Discuss responses. Affirm that repentance involves confessing sin and turning away from it.

READ:

Call for a volunteer to read Joshua 7:20-23 as the group listens for what Achan took from Jericho. Lead the group to share their responses. Lead a brief discussion on how these verses underscore the seriousness of sin in our lives.

RECAP:

Emphasize that sin always carries devastating effects, both for the ones who sin and for people around them:

Achan finally decided to confess his sin. His explanation is similar to what happened in the garden of Eden—he saw, he coveted, and he took. Also reminiscent of the garden is the effect. Adam and Eve’s sin affected the entire human race after them. Achan’s sin affected the entire nation of Israel. Both should remind us that our sins always have an effect on others. (PSG, p. 52)

ASK:

Why is it important for us to view sin as seriously as God does? (PSG, p. 53)

SHARE:

Write the following statement on the board or a large sheet of paper: *We honor God by repenting and confessing our sins to Him.* Point out that Achan had plenty of opportunities to confess, but he refused until he had no other choice. Remind adults that God wants us to deal with our sin quickly instead of trying to hide what we’ve done.

EXAMINE:

Distribute index cards and pens. Direct adults to reflect on their lives and to write down words that represent unconfessed sins. Assure them that this is for their eyes only. After a few minutes of reflection, encourage individuals to spend time in silent prayer, asking God to forgive them. If time allows, briefly walk adults through the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover of the PSG. Let them know that you will be available after the session to speak to anyone who wants to talk more about a personal relationship with Jesus or the confession of sin.

CONCLUDE:

Emphasize that the story of Achan is an incredible reminder of how seriously God takes sin in our lives. He is a holy God who hates sin and what sin does in the lives of His people.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 54 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- We should recognize that sin always dishonors God and negatively impacts our relationship with Him.
- We should acknowledge that God is always aware of our sins.
- We honor God by repenting and confessing our sins to Him.

DISCUSS:

Guide the group to discuss the second question set on page 54 of the PSG. Ask: **Why is your sin such a big deal to God?**

SHARE:

Note again the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover of the PSG. Note that this plan emphasizes an awareness and repentance of sin. Share that this is a key step in establishing a personal relationship with God through Jesus. Remind the group that you will be available to talk about this after Bible study or during the week.

APPLY:

Encourage adults to read and reflect on the first question set from page 54 of the PSG during the week. Point out the importance of encouraging one another to come clean before God in regard to sin.

PRAY:

Lead the group to express to God an understanding that sin brings judgment—while also thanking God for His forgiveness of sin provided through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

AFTER THE SESSION

Follow-up this session by sending the group an email or text with this message: *Remember Achan? Your sins will find you out. Yet, God is gracious. Galatians 6:7.* Challenge them to examine their lives for any unconfessed sins that are bogging them down. Encourage them to reach out to trustworthy brothers and sisters in Christ when they feel overwhelmed by temptation and sin.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
Explore the Bible Adult Commentary offers additional information and biblical insights related to the key passages.
(Available for purchase at **Lifeway.com.**)

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