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July 5, 2026

SIN REVEALED: JOSHUA 7:10-23

Introductory Activity

Narrate (tell it like a story) the story on page 59 of the ETB Leader Guide (“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.”)

Explain: Today, we are going to look at an event that might be familiar to some. It is a story about a man who secretly sinned, had the chance to repent, and only did so when he was “caught” (Teachers, that word “caught” is important for later in the lesson.)

Discuss: Before we get started, let’s consider our motivations for seeking forgiveness for sin. “What should be a person’s motivation to confess sin and seek forgiveness?” (ETB PSG, 46)

Summarize and Transition: The ultimate motivation for confessing sin is love. We confess to the Lord because of our love for Him. We confess to others when we sin against them because of our love for them. Nevertheless, confession can be difficult. When seeking forgiveness from others, our pride or shame might stand in the way. When seeking forgiveness from the Lord, our refusal to turn from sinful patterns might stand in the way. Today, we are going to look at the story of Achan and his sin.

If you remember our lesson from last week, when Joshua instructed the people to take the city of Jericho, he gave them instructions to return all the plunder to the Lord. In 6:19, he specifically gives them God’s instruction, “all the silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron, are dedicated to the Lord and must go into the Lord’s treasury.” In 7:1, the narrator reveals that Achan secretly disobeyed these instructions. The ESV says he (and Israel) “broke faith in regard to the devoted things.” Woudstra tells us that this phrase “broke faith” means “to act under cover... treacherously... secretly.” (Preaching, 77) This information is given as a prelude and explanation to the reader of the events that happen when Israel attacks the next city on their list, Ai. In verse 5, the narrator reveals that Israel lost the battle of Ai. This was disheartening for the people of Israel and Joshua, their leader. Verses 6-9 provide Joshua’s response to the events. He fell down in prayer to the Lord and lamented ever entering into the conquest of Canaan. At one point, he says to the Lord, “Why did you ever bring these people across the Jordan?” And then he says, “If only we had been content to remain on the other side of the Jordan!” (v. 7) That is where our lesson picks up. Let’s see how the Lord responds and then how the Lord sets things right.

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Joshua* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Joshua (TOTC)

1. COVENANT VIOLATED (JOSH. 7:10-15)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua 7:10-15.

Explain: In response to Joshua's prayer of lamentation, the Lord tells him to "stand up." Jeff Anderson says, "God would have none of this self-pity." (ETBC, 52) Richard Hess states, "Prayer and mourning remain unacceptable until the impediment is removed." (TOTC, 164) Joshua did not understand the situation, and he was focused on the circumstances and very close to blaming God for his and the nation's troubles. Therefore, God has to school him on a few things.

The Diagnosis of Sin (vv. 10-11): First, God diagnosed the problem—it is a sin problem. It is as if God is saying, "Let me tell you why you lost the battle. The fault does not lie at my feet. Y'all are the problem." God then gives 6 descriptors of their actions. First, He provides two general descriptors: "sinned" and "violated." Sinned means to "fall short of a moral standard," and violated means "to cross a red line." (ETBC, 52) They had violated God's law, and they had stepped over the line expected by those in covenant with God. Then God gets specific and explains how they violated the covenant. He gives 4 verbs to describe what they had done: they "have taken," "have stolen," "have deceived," and "have hidden" ("put those things with their own belongings"). The Lord stacked up verb upon verb... It is a way of saying, "you did this, plus this, plus this." (ETBC, 53) The sins listed "are the symptoms of the underlying disease, which is an attack on the relationship of trust and obedience that lies at the heart of the covenant." (Preaching, 82) Achan had violated the relationship of trust with God and had stepped outside the bounds of the covenant by stealing from the Lord.

Discuss: Often, our individual sins are symptoms of a deeper sickness. How can we ensure that our relationship with the Lord remains healthy and thereby steer clear of sinful behavior?

We must guard our relationship with the Lord. We do so through daily prayer, daily meditation on Scripture, and daily examination of our hearts. We do so by guarding our interactions, what our eyes see, and what our ears hear. Even as adults, we must be careful with our relationships and the situations in which we place ourselves. Achan had found himself alone in a room with the spoils of war. No one was watching, he thought. No one would ever know, he thought. So, he acted on his desires and disobeyed God.

The Result of Sin (vv. 12, 13b): (You might reread these verses. See Notes Box.) Next, we see the **result of sin**. It is important to note that what God says in verses 12 and 13b are **the results** of the sin. I use this word specifically because it is the natural (supernatural) result of violating the covenant. Because Israel, as a result of Achan's sin, is acting like the Canaanites, the Lord will not (cannot?) go with them to destroy the

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Why did God hold all of Israel accountable for Achan's sin?

God had called Israel to be set apart as His holy people. The Canaanites were set apart for destruction because of their sin. God had instructed the people set apart Jericho for destruction and set apart the booty of plunder to the Lord's treasury. When Achan refused to do so, he was acting like a Canaanite (sinful). In doing so he prevented all of Israel from obeying the Lord's instructions—because of him they could not set apart all of the good things to the Lord. "God does not indulge Israel and arrange more favorable terms for them. If the Canaanites are to be judged for their sin and destroyed by God's righteous wrath, so will Israel if she adopts the same disloyalty, idolatry, and impurity. Therefore, Achan's actions effected the entire nation. "The camp had become unclean [like the Canaanites] in God's eyes due to Achan's disobedience." (Preaching, 79)

Joshua 7:12

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.

Joshua 13b

You will not be able to stand against your enemies until you remove what is set apart.

Canaanites. It is the natural result of their actions; they ignored the covenant, therefore, the covenant privileges do not apply to them. "Indeed, covenant privileges serve to deepen covenant obligation." (Preaching, 79)

We should consider the result of sin for the disciple of Christ. When we sin, God still loves us. God is still for us. We are still going to heaven. However, like Israel, we remove ourselves from the temporal benefits of our relationship with Christ. In effect, our sinful actions prevent us from experiencing the abundant life Jesus promises in John 10:10. That is why the Lord calls us to repent of sin and return to Him. We see that in the passage. Verse 12 contains the gloriously hopeful word, "unless." God says, "I will no longer be with you *unless* you remove from among you what is set apart." They are to deal with sin by removing the stolen items from the camp, but they are also to deal with sin by removing the one who has now set himself apart from God.

The Consequences of Sin (vv. 13-15): Here God outlines the method of repentance and the consequences of sin. We have to remember that God is dealing with (1) the entire nation, (2) a people without the full revelation of God (the entire Bible) or the indwelling of the Spirit, and (3) a people set apart from every other nation in Canaan. These are important to remember as we move forward because they are some of the reasons God acts as He does in this passage. First, God outlines the method by which the entire nation will deal with sin. We will talk about the implications for this process in the next passage, but we see here that each tribe, then each clan, then each family, then each man will present himself to the Lord as each is identified as innocent or guilty of harboring sin. Second, God outlines the consequences for the man found responsible. The consequences are harsh because of the hard situation the people found themselves. Just as the land must be purified of sin before Israel can fully possess it, the nation must be kept wholly pure. The guilty party had to be removed from the camp so that sinfulness would not infect the rest of the camp. This is harsh, but we have seen similar things during the wilderness wanderings. These people are not guided by the Spirit and do not have the Bible. They only have the works of God that *they can see*. They must *see* the consequences of sin.

Discuss: Sin results in the inability to experience the temporal benefits of the promised abundant life. Sin also has negative consequences. How can sin, even private sin, negatively affect our relationships and other areas of our lives?

Summarize Transition: This passage and those leading up to it reveal that "sin always dishonors God and negatively impacts our relationship with Him." (ETB LG, 63) Nevertheless, God always gives us a way to "fix" the problem. He invites us to repent of sinful actions and turn back to Him. While believers do not face the harsh consequences that Achan faces, we

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do face the results of sin and the consequences of our actions. We should quickly repent of sin and return to the Lord. That is what the nation does in the next passage.

2. ACHAN REVEALED (JOSH. 7:16-19)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua 7:16-19.

Explain: This passage might seem like a simple list of activities, but in reality, it is a heavy passage. We see **Joshua's Heavy Task**, **God's Heavy Task**, and **Achan's Heavy Task**.

Joshua's Heavy Task (v. 16a): First, we see Joshua's heavy task. The narrator tells us that Joshua "got up early the next morning." (םַצֵּׁ םֶשֶׁׁ םֶשֶׁׁ) This is the same language used in Joshua 3:1, where Joshua got up early (םַצֵּׁ םֶשֶׁׁ) on the morning of the Jordan River crossing, and in 6:12 when Joshua got up early (םַצֵּׁ םֶשֶׁׁ) on the first day of marching around Jericho. The word translated got up early (םַצֵּׁ םֶשֶׁׁ) relates "to the Hebrew noun for 'shoulder.' The word picture includes individuals shouldering daily duties." (ETB LG, 64) Joshua had the heavy task of leading the people through this difficult situation. However, as we will see, he did not do this alone.

Discuss: We might not see ourselves as leaders, but we all lead something: our home, our business, our families, our classroom, our church committee, even ourselves. How can we depend on the Lord to help us lead when things get heavy?

We begin by getting up and shouldering the task. We cannot delegate our responsibilities to others or "phone it in." Second, we must ask the Lord for wisdom. We must rely on Him for guidance and insight. We also rely on Him for patience and empathy. This is what Joshua does. We see this clearly when we look at God's heavy tasks.

God's Heavy Task (vv. 16b-18): Nothing is too big or too heavy for the Lord. The weight of this situation is all the clearer because it is God who takes on the task of dealing with it. God did not tell Joshua to start an investigation or begin searching tents to discover the thief. Instead, the people were first instructed to consecrate themselves (v. 13). This is the same activity they were to engage in before crossing the Jordan. There, God told them to consecrate themselves "because the Lord will do wonders among you tomorrow." (3:5) In chapter 7, God will do another wondrous thing by exposing the criminal. To consecrate oneself involved outward actions to ensure ritual cleanliness. It also involved a "genuine inward examination." (ETB LG, 64) Next, Joshua was to call the nation together. At that time, God would select the tribe from which the perpetrator would come. God would then proceed to work His way down until He identified the person responsible.

There are two things we need to take away from the process. First, the time of consecration and introspection gave Achan time to own up to his crime. God always gives us a chance to repent of sin. Second, we should note that God is the one at work. It is He who catches the thief. If you examine the passage closely, you will note one word that is repeated: selected (CSB), taken (ESV, KJV). The word translated as "selected" or "taken"

carries the connotation of capture. God is capturing the perpetrator. Hass writes, "The selection ceremony symbolizes God's act of warfare against the nation. In this way, God captures or takes the person who stole the divine property." (TOTC, 166) It was a heavy task to determine the person's fault, and God took it on.

Achan's Heavy Task (v. 19): Next, we see Achan's heavy task. Once he is discovered, he is brought before Joshua. The human leader of Israel says to him, "My son, give glory to the Lord... and make a confession to him." Achan is instructed to do two things: praise the Lord and make confession. While we read this as two separate actions, we should see it as one. Joshua is telling Achan that he will bring glory to God by confessing his sin. The word translated glory "literally means 'heavy.' To give glory is to treat someone with the respect and recognition they are owed. Joshua told Achan to give God the weight He deserved, to be honest before the Judge of all the earth." (ETBC, 57) In confessing to the Lord, Achan would recognize the weightiness of God and, in effect, praise Him. The effort of repenting was a weighty thing; it also recognizes the weightiness of God, the King and Judge of Israel.

When we repent of sin, we are in effect worshipping the Lord. Repentance is a recognition of who God is. It is only because a person recognizes the holiness and kingship of God that they repent of sin.

Summarize and Transition: Achan had sinned in secret. Nevertheless, the Lord knew and had judged the nation at the battle of Ai. Through the process of discovery, God was giving the nation the opportunity to repent. The holiness of God and the harshness of the Israelite situation required that Achan face punishment, but the nation would be cleansed. All of this can remind us that sin is a weighty matter. God takes the lead, but in the end, the weight of confession falls on Achan. Sadly, he only confesses after he is found out. While he had the opportunity during the night of consecration and all through the day as the Lord called forth the various family units of Israel, Achan waited until God finally pointed His divine figure directly at him. God was aware of Achan's sin from the beginning, and Achan had ample opportunities to come clean before the Lord. We can be reminded, "We should acknowledge that God is always aware of our sins." (ETB LG, 65)

3. CONFESSION MADE (JOSH. 7:20-23)

Read (or have someone read) Joshua 7:20-23.

Explain: When faced with the evidence, Achan comes clean. He confesses.

Discuss: What is the difference between confession and repentance?

Explain: Confession is what Achan did here. He owned up to the sin he committed. Repentance is something more. Repentance *includes* confession of sin, but it also includes a commitment to turn from that sin. For example, if a person is discovered going over the speed limit and pays his ticket, he is confessing to a speeding infraction. If the person then continues to speed regularly, he has not repented of speeding. If, on the other hand, he determines to follow the speed limit and does so, he is practicing repentance. We don't not know if Achan is only confessing or practicing repentance here. The Bible does not reveal what is going on in Achan's heart at this point, but his words reveal what led him to sin in the first place.

Notes:

Sin Revealed: Joshua 7:10-23

In verse 21, he tells Joshua that he “saw the beautiful cloak [and precious metals]... coveted them...and took.” This is the same pattern that Eve took in the Garden. Genesis 3:6 tells us that she saw the tree; she saw it was delightful and desirable (i.e., coveted); she saw the tree was delightful and desirable, so she took and ate. The apostle John gives us a similar pattern for sin in 1 John 2:15-17.

Read or have someone read I John 2:15-17 (See Notes Box.)

Explain: Temptation may jump at us sometimes, but more often, the root of sin is in our hearts. Sometimes when we learn that someone has done something illegal, immoral, or unethical, we respond by saying, “What were they thinking?” The story of Achan and Eve and the words of John reveal that they were thinking about the thing they did. They were thinking about sin. We should endeavor to guard our hearts and minds. In Paul’s concluding words to the church at Ephesus, he urges them to do this.

Read or have someone read Ephesians 4:8 (See Notes Box.)

The way we avoid sin is by controlling what we are thinking. We do this by guiding our hearts and minds to think on godly things. This means that we guard what we see and hear and who we relate to regularly.

Summarize and Transition: Achan’s confession reveals the nature of his thoughts. While the God of the universe had instructed him to return the spoils of war to the Lord, Achan decided to keep a portion for himself. It was only after he was found out that he confessed his sin. Moreover, it was only after confessing that the Lord led Israel forward into the victory. Sin stood in the way, but his confession and the repentance of Israel enable God to act on their behalf.

CONCLUDE

This lesson reveals a sad and weighty day for Israel. They had lost many in battle as they suffered defeat at Ai. They were on the cusp of losing the connection to God and thereby His further protection. It was only after the heavy day of Judgement that they returned to God. All of this was due to one man’s inner thoughts that became his outward actions. One sad footnote to this story is that God had not intended to always forbid Israel from taking the plunder after battles. Jericho had been a special case to prove the point that He won the battle of Jericho. Joshua 8:2 tells that in the next God-sanctioned battle, God permitted the people to take the spoils of war. Achan’s desire had gotten the best of him. If he had only waited on the Lord, he would have received what he desired without sinning. This is a lesson for us. Many times, the things we desire in life are not sinful in and of themselves, but the way we go about fulfilling our desires can be sinful. There is nothing wrong with wealth, intimacy, recognition, or success. However, when we get ahead of God and pursue those things outside of His will, we can fall into sin.

Challenge:

Encourage the group to spend time in the coming week to examine their lives for unconfessed sin.

Encourage the group to spend time this week filling their minds with the word of God so that it will help guide their decision-making.

Encourage the group to pray for one another this week so that other group members will avoid sin.

Notes:

1 John 2:15-17

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.

Ephesians 4:8

⁸ Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.