

Achan's Sin and Defeat at Ai

Passages: Josh 7–8

Memory Verse

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” (Romans 6:12–13)

Knowledge of God's Will [God's Word]	Knowledge of God [God's Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Achan's sin affected all of the Israelites, leading to many deaths and their defeat in battle.2. Only by sanctifying themselves were the Israelites able to experience the blessing of God's presence.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God is all-knowing.2. God desires our honest prayers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. We must learn to walk according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh.2. To walk in God's way, we must confront and remove any sin in our lives.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Achan's Sin
- B. Defeat at Ai
- C. Victory over Ai

Life Application:

- 1. How Do We Walk?
- 2. Confronting Sin

Memory Verse

Conclusion: From their initial defeat and subsequent victory over Ai, the Israelites were able to learn and witness God's just and holy nature. He did not allow sin to remain among His people, and He reminded them of the importance of obeying His commandments.

Introduction

After winning the battle of Jericho, the Israelites were greatly encouraged and ready to take on the next city, Ai. The Israelites likely expected an easy victory, as Ai was not as large as Jericho. However, it is often when we are the most confident in our own abilities that we lose sight of God, the one who allows our success.

A. Achan's Sin

During the battle of Jericho, God had commanded the Israelites to add all the spoils from Jericho to the Lord's treasury. They were not allowed to take any of it for themselves. Let's read Joshua 7:1, 21. What items did Achan take from Jericho? (*He took gold, silver, and a Babylonian garment.*) The items that Achan took made up a tiny portion of all that was taken from the city. But God knew what Achan had done in secret, and His anger burned against the Israelites. What was the problem with Achan's actions? There are three things that we can learn from this event.

1. The dangers of desire and covetousness

a. Lust of the eyes

Due to his desires, Achan sinned and took these items for himself. From his sin, we can see how dangerous the lust of our eyes can be. As visual beings, what we see can have a huge impact on our desires. Let's read verse 21. There is a clear progression to Achan's sin: he first "saw," then "coveted," "took," and lastly, "hid." This is why it is so important that we guard our eyes and think about what we see on a daily basis. Just by being aware of the things that we look at on our phones and the media that we consume, we can guard our eyes better and limit our exposure to things that can lead us to sin against God.

b. Covetousness

What does it mean to covet? When we see and desire possessions or wealth, this desire leads to covetousness. Paul describes coveting something as a form of idolatry (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5). What we covet may be security, pleasure, praise, or power that comes from materialism. But whatever form it takes, any form of covetousness reveals a dissatisfaction with our current life. We can see that Achan failed to find satisfaction and contentment in God's goodness and care.

2. We cannot hide sin from God

Apart from following his material desires, Achan also tried to hide what he had done. There were plenty of opportunities for him to confess that he had sinned, but he did not admit to his fault until the drawing of lots singled him out. He didn't realize that we may be able to hide things from our parents or our friends, but God sees and knows all that we do. Before they entered into Canaan, Moses warned the Israelites that if they fail to follow God's commands, "you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out" (Num 32:23). Achan's sin was revealed before the people, and he was punished for submitting to his desires, as well as for failing to confess his sin to God.

3. Our sins affect others

Although Achan was the only one who took the items, the Bible tells us that all of the Israelites had committed a trespass. And as a result of his sin, men died. In the same way, our actions can impact others and affect those around us. We may think that our actions are our own, and that

even the sins that we commit are our own. But the Bible often compares sin to yeast—it has a tendency to spread, and its consequences can affect others, even if we may not see these effects right away.

Even though the items Achan stole only comprised a small portion of the loot taken from Ai, he was stealing from God, which was an enormous sin. In addition, the Bible also describes the items that he took as “accursed.” Achan’s actions showed his lack of fear towards God, a lack of sensitivity towards sin, and an indifference to the idolatry and evil of the city. His disobedience showed his preferential treatment towards the objects and idols of this world, rather than towards God.

B. Defeat at Ai

Let’s read Joshua 7:2–9. Joshua and the other Israelites had no idea what Achan had done. As a result of his sin, the Israelites were paralyzed with fear during the battle, many men died, and even Joshua experienced confusion and despair. It was clear that Achan’s sin was a serious matter that led to serious consequences. However, his sin was not the only reason for their defeat:

1. They were overconfident

Joshua had sent spies to search out the city of Ai before the battle, and the report that they gave showed their overconfidence. They saw how small the city was compared to Jericho, and thought it would be an easy victory. But such self-confidence can lead to destruction. When we rely on human wisdom and make hasty assumptions based on our past victories, we forget to rely on the Lord. However, without God’s wisdom or power, we may easily be defeated by seemingly small problems or obstacles.

2. They did not inquire of the Lord

Unlike the battle of Jericho, Joshua and the Israelites did not inquire of God before going into battle. They had forgotten that the key to winning the battle was not the size of their army, but their reliance and total trust in God! It is clear that without prayer, we cannot receive God’s blessing or understand His will.

From the Israelites’ mistake, we can see the importance of relying on God instead of on our own strength. When everything is going smoothly, it is easy to forget that God was the one who helped us along the way. This is why it is so important for us to remember God’s sovereignty and control in our lives. Let’s read Psalm 20:7. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.” The successes that we are able to achieve are because God allows us to be victorious, not from any strength or power of our own. This understanding makes it all the more important that we strive to obey His commands.

The Assembly Is Sanctified

Let’s read Joshua 7:6–26. After their defeat, Joshua took a few immediate steps to handle the situation:

1. He first consulted with God

Upon their defeat, Joshua was completely astonished. He could have tried again with more men, or perhaps tried a different strategy. Yet Joshua clearly understood that their defeat was linked to the fact that God had not been with them. So, what was the first thing that he did? He “fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, he and the elders of Israel.” These actions and Joshua’s questions show us their despair and confusion (vv. 6–9).

What three questions did Joshua bring before God in his prayer? (*Why did you allow us to be*

defeated? What shall I say when Your people run from their enemies? What will happen to Your great name when Your people are defeated?) Joshua did the right thing in bringing his doubt, self-pity, and complaint to God without hesitation. In immediately bringing his confusion to prayer, he demonstrated his instinctive desire for God’s help and wisdom.

Joshua’s prayer was desperate and heartfelt—in much the same way, God desires our honest prayers. Joshua’s reaction is a reminder that when we have failed, the first thing we need to reflect upon ourselves, understand the cause of our defeat, and come to God with an honest and humble heart. “God resists the proud, but give grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6)

2. Under God’s command, he then isolated and identified the sin

Let’s read 7:10–15. God cares deeply about the lives of His people. He revealed Himself to Joshua by telling him to “Get up!” As a spiritual leader, Joshua could not lead His people by putting his face on the ground the whole time. In much the same way, God wants us to get up and deal with our mess by being attentive to what He wants to say. God wants us to listen to Him. He is ready to deliver us, but we must first take up our responsibilities! Instead of wallowing in self-pity or spending time feeling sorry for ourselves, we need to “get up” and deal with our sins (Prov 28:13) by fixing our eyes on God and seeing the lessons He wants to teach us.

3. Lastly, he removed the sin completely

Joshua obeyed God’s instruction to identify and reveal the Israelites’ sin. In contrast, Achan had many opportunities to admit what he had done, yet he refused to face his own sin. He may have thought that he would not be caught, or perhaps was scared to confess what he had done. Whatever his reasoning, he did not say anything until his name was finally drawn. Covering his actions only led to more sin, until he was past the point of no return.

When Joshua spoke to Achan, he asked him to “give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him.” Achan’s sin affected all of the Israelites, but ultimately it was a sin against God. God’s instructions to His people was clear: they must be holy, because God is holy. Their victories depended on their obedience to God.

Note to teachers: *This passage may bring students to question why Achan’s family was also punished for his sin. If this question comes up, you may want to take a few moments to explain the following. Otherwise, due to the length of the lesson, feel free to omit this portion.*

Although Achan was the one who sinned, his sin affected many. God saw his failure as a national sin—Achan’s sin revealed his indifference to the evil and idolatry of this age at a time when the entire nation had to be committed to holiness during their conquest of the land. The Israelites as a whole needed to take responsibility for any lack of discipline, so when even one person failed, in God’s eyes, it was a collective failure.

Achan’s lack of action is a reminder to us. When we sin, we need to confess what we have done and repent. We cannot be in denial about the fact that God sees all, and that our sins cannot remain hidden. If we fail to confess and repent, then God’s judgment will be even worse when it comes. It takes great courage to confess our sins, but we will find that when we do repent from the depths of our hearts, God is willing to show us His mercy and His grace.

C. Victory over Ai

After removing the sin from their assembly, God once again encouraged Joshua and gave him instructions on how to conquer the city of Ai. Let's read Joshua 8:1–9.

During the battle, Joshua did not draw his hand back until all of the inhabitants of Ai were completely destroyed (Josh 8:18, 26). His actions echo Moses in the battle against the Amalekites, recorded in Exodus 17. Like Moses, Joshua carried out his duty until the very end. He had faithfully picked up the baton that Moses had passed on to him, and as the rightful successor of Moses, God was abiding with Joshua just as He had with Moses.

We can see that removing any sin from their midst made such a huge difference! This time, God's presence is clear (Josh 8:1). The city of Ai was burned and the people completely destroyed, just like Jericho. Moreover, this time God allowed the Israelites to take the spoils from the city for themselves. He did not want His people to leave empty-handed. Through these two battles, they learned an important lesson: God is the one who gives them victory, and He expects them to follow His commands.

1. Victory comes from God

When we examine the battles of Jericho and Ai, we can see that the key to victory was not the Israelites' own strength, but their obedience to God. Jericho was a mighty city, but they were able to defeat it easily with God's help. On the other hand, the city of Ai was much smaller, yet they suffered a crippling defeat at its hands because of Achan's disobedience. Moreover, if Achan had simply waited, he would have been able to rightfully take a share of the spoils from Ai. Instead, his impatience brought about destruction to him and his whole family. This defeat was a clear warning of the importance of following God's instructions and waiting for His timing instead of relying on their own strength.

2. Nothing is hidden from God

Achan's punishment may seem harsh to us, but sin is not a small matter. It is outright rebellion against God. When Saul disobeyed God under the pretense of wanting to offer sacrifice, Samuel reprimanded him with the words, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Sam 15:23). Like Saul, we may try to cover our sin, or pretend our actions are not actually against God's will. We may be able to fool others or even ourselves, but we can never fool God. Hiding our sins only obstructs our spiritual walk with God, and can affect others as Achan's did. Therefore, we must be careful. Paul warned us, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal 6:7).

God is not only all-knowing, but also all-powerful. Since only God has such qualities, we can trust Him to lead us to victory in our spiritual journey to enter into His heavenly kingdom. However, such blessings will only come after we remove any sin from our lives. When we follow Him wholeheartedly, we will experience victory.

Check for Understanding

1. Name three things that can we learn from Achan's sin.

- a. Lust of the eyes: As visual beings, what we see can have a huge impact on our desires.
- b. We cannot hide sin from God: God is able to see and know all that we do.
- c. Our sins affect others: Sin is like yeast—it has a tendency to spread, and its consequences can affect others.

2. What was Achan's second mistake? He failed to come forward and confess his sin.

3. **Aside from Achan’s sin, what were two other reasons the Israelites were defeated?** They were overconfident in their own abilities; they did not inquire of the Lord.
4. **What did Joshua do after their defeat?** He first consulted with God; then under God’s command, he isolated and identified the sin; and lastly, he removed the sin completely from the assembly.
5. **What prerequisites must we follow to achieve victory in our spiritual lives?** We need to remove any sin from our lives and follow God wholeheartedly.

Life Application

1. How Do We Walk?

Achan’s disobedience was a serious sin that had a great impact on the rest of the Israelites. He made this choice because he decided to walk according to the flesh instead of according to the Spirit. Let’s read Romans 8:5–11. Read through the verses and list the differences between those who walk according to the flesh and those who walk according to the Spirit.

Those who walk according to the flesh	Those who walk according to the Spirit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Set their minds on the things of the flesh</i> - <i>Will be led to death</i> - <i>Become an enemy of God</i> - <i>Are not subject to the law of God</i> - <i>Cannot please God</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Set their minds on the things of the Spirit</i> - <i>Will be led to peace and life</i> - <i>Have God dwelling within them</i> - <i>Belong to God</i>

We can see that walking according to the flesh means acting on our sinful nature and desires, while walking according to the Spirit means denying our sinful nature by relying on the Holy Spirit. There are real consequences to walking according to the flesh. Some of them are more visible, such as when Achan’s sin affected the rest of the Israelites, and other consequences affect our relationship with God, our family members, and even our future. It produces a lifestyle that is displeasing to God, and that ultimately leads to death. On the other hand, walking according to the Spirit gives us peace in our hearts and everlasting life.

Whether we walk according to the Spirit or according to the flesh is a conscious decision that we have to make. Do we decide to submit to our worldly desires, or do we instead submit to God’s teachings? We may find ourselves often struggling to choose between what we desire and what God desires. It is a struggle that we can only overcome with God’s help. To walk in the Spirit, we must rely on the Spirit!

For each of the following scenarios, discuss how each person can walk according to the Spirit instead of the flesh.

- a. *Ben was walking past his teacher’s desk when he spied from the corner of his eye a piece of paper on the floor. He bent to pick it up—only to realize it was the quiz that they would be given later on that day. When he realized this, he hesitated. The teacher was busy with other students at the moment, so she had not noticed him yet. Moreover, he was unsure if he would be able to pass this quiz. Wouldn’t it be okay if he just took a quick peek at the questions? What can you say to Ben in order to encourage him to walk in the Spirit? (2 Cor 8:21; Lk 16:10; 1 Pet 2:12)*
- b. *Jenny was playing music on her phone when she noticed something. Her account, she realized, was subscribed to the music app, even though she didn’t remember adding a subscription. When she checked her account details, she suddenly remembered that several months ago, her mother had helped her sign up for a free three-month subscription by adding her credit card information*

to her account. However, both of them had forgotten to cancel the renewal. Her mother had clearly not noticed the extra charge, however, and Jenny had become accustomed to being able to play and download any music she wanted. Surely it would be okay if she left the subscription running? Even if her mother realized, she could just tell her that she had forgotten. What can you tell Jenny in order to encourage her to walk in the Spirit? (Col 3:9; Prov 10:9; Heb 13:18)

2. Confronting Sin

The first thing Joshua did when they were defeated was to turn to God and address the mistake that had been made. Even if we have gone against God's will, it is important to acknowledge what we have done and take immediate steps to confront our sin. Achan had many opportunities to confess his sin, from the instant he took the items, to the moment where the Israelites were defeated, and even during the process of drawing lots. When his sin was finally revealed, however, it was too late for him to confess.

Are there any sins in your life that you haven't yet confronted? What are some steps that we should take in order to face the sin in our lives?

a. Turn to God

Do you remember what sin is? Like Joshua, the first thing we need to do is turn to God, reflect on ourselves, and ask God to help us to identify any sin in our lives. John wrote, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn 3:4). We can only know what sin is when we know God's law. This means having a thorough understanding of His word. When we do, it becomes easier for us to understand how to walk according to the Spirit instead of according to the flesh.

b. Isolate and identify the sin

Take a few minutes to think of any personal behavior that you would like to change because it affects your spiritual life negatively. Do you have any habits that are against God's will? Do you tend to make decisions that you know He would not like? Examples may be the way you spend your time at home, the way you treat your parents, or perhaps a lack of diligence in your school life. Write down two things.

c. Remove the sin completely

The Bible teaches us: "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Prov 28:13). True repentance requires a change of heart—it doesn't mean we can just say "sorry" and return to our old ways. It means completely "forsaking" our sin. But it is not easy to change our nature as humans. Confronting our sins requires praying for the power of the Holy Spirit and making proactive decisions that help us to avoid similar situations in the future.

Consider what you wrote: What do you think is the root cause of this behavior? Are there any factors that enable it? For example, if you want to avoid playing too many games, then it would be best to avoid downloading or buying them. For some things, however, the root causes are more difficult to avoid, such as spending too much time on the internet. In this case, can you think of a method that will help you to reduce the time you spend on your computer or on your phone? If you need help, try brainstorming together with the class.

Let's read our memory verse, Romans 6:12–13. "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to

sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

Since we have been saved and have a new life in Christ, we should not let sin continue to rule over our lives. If we do, then we become slaves to our sinful desires, which then rule over us. We need to instead remember that we are instruments and vessels for God’s use, made alive in Christ and freed from our sins. To remain free, we need to confront any sin in our lives and be determined to forsake it entirely instead of allowing our desires to rule our actions. When we do, we will no longer be “instruments of unrighteousness to sin,” but will instead be “instruments of righteousness to God.”

Memory Verse

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” (Romans 6:12–13)

Meaning

See Life Application #2.

Conclusion

From their initial defeat and subsequent victory over Ai, the Israelites were able to learn and witness God’s just and holy nature. He did not allow sin to remain among His people, and He reminded them of the importance of obeying His commandments. If they failed to obey, then God would not be with them. But as long as they chose to follow His commands, He would lead them to victory. We likewise need to remain free of sin in our lives, and instead obey God’s commandments. When we do, we will find that God will always be with us, and He will lead us into victory!

Lesson 10 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. How do we present ourselves as “instruments of righteousness to God”?
By confronting any sin in our lives and being determined to forsake it entirely instead of allowing our desires to rule our actions.
2. “He who _____ his sins will not _____, but whoever _____ and _____ them will have _____.” (Proverbs 28:13)
covers, prosper, confesses, forsakes, mercy
3. What did Achan’s actions show us about his attitude towards God and sin?
He showed a lack of fear towards God, a lack of sensitivity towards sin, and an indifference to the idolatry and evil of the city. His disobedience showed his preferential treatment towards the objects and idols of this world, rather than towards God.
4. What were two reasons for the Israelites’ defeat at Ai? What can we learn from this incident?
They were overconfident; they did not inquire of the Lord. We can see the importance of relying on God instead of our own strength.
5. Why is it so important that we avoid sin and follow God’s commands?
Sin is not a small matter. It is outright rebellion against God. The blessings that He offers will only come after we remove any sin from our lives. When we follow Him wholeheartedly, we will experience victory.
6. What does it mean to walk according to the Spirit?
It means denying our sinful nature by relying on the Holy Spirit. It means making the conscious decision to follow what God desires, not what we desire.