

Tainted by Sin

THEOLOGICAL THEME: All of us are tainted by sin because we have inherited a nature and an environment inclined toward sin.

In *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, Robert Fulghum tells about the street he grew up on, a dead-end street that was clearly marked. Despite the signs, he would see drivers navigate the two-block street until encountering a third sign located in the cul-de-sac—the one reading, “DEAD END.” Fulghum speculates why drivers took the chance to drive down the street as if the two warning signs at the head of it were inaccurate: “So you drive as far as you can, even when you can clearly read the sign. You want to think you are exempt, that it doesn’t apply to you. But it does.”¹

Christians can be like that sometimes. We see warnings in Scripture about sin and its consequences, and yet we persist in thinking that maybe the warning doesn’t apply to us. We think we can keep from sinning, even if we put ourselves in a position of temptation. Or we think that if we sin, we surely won’t face the consequences. We can keep it hidden or contained. Somehow, we will be exempt.



What are some warning signs you may encounter before you make a bad choice in life?



In what way does consideration of sin’s consequences deter you from sin?

In this session, we will study the story of Achan and Israel's battle with the city of Ai. The story of Achan gives us a powerful picture of how one man's sin can affect everyone around him. It shows us the terrible punishment for sin (death) and how God's enemies are overcome. This story shows us the high cost of being tainted by sin and points forward to the glorious hope of seeing that sin dealt with on the cross.

1. The sin of one man affected all of Israel (Josh. 7:1-12).

In Joshua 6:27, we read: "So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land." But chapter 7 opens with a change-of-direction conjunction—"But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things." A change-of-direction conjunction is an interpretive part of speech that indicates whatever happened before will now be different. Whenever you see a "however" or a "but" in Scripture, it's usually a good thing when it comes *before* God. Unfortunately, in this text, the change-of-direction conjunction is a bad sign because it comes *after* a statement about how the Lord was with Joshua. Take a look:

¹ But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.

² Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai.

³ And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few."⁴ So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai,⁵ and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.



Voices from Church History

"Does it make sense to pray for guidance about the future if we are not obeying in the thing that lies before us today? How many momentous events in Scripture depended on one person's seemingly small act of obedience! Rest assured: Do what God tells you to do now, and, depend upon it, you *will* be shown what to do next."²

—Elisabeth Elliot (1926–2015)

⁶ Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. ⁷ And Joshua said, “Alas, O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!” ⁸ O LORD, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! ⁹ For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?”

¹⁰ The LORD said to Joshua, “Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? ¹¹ Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. ¹² Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.

Joshua sent some spies to the city of Ai, and they returned with a jubilant (and somewhat arrogant) recommendation: “Sir, it will not be necessary to expend the entirety of our military forces in our attack upon Ai. Since Ai is a smaller city (Israel had just defeated a most formidable foe in Jericho), only deploy about 2,000 or 3,000 men to engage Ai’s smaller ranks.”

But in a surprising turn of events, this small city put the Israelites on the run. Apparently, Israel had forgotten that it was not their army who defeated the much larger city of Jericho—it was the Lord who fought for them. They lost the battle at Ai because the Lord who fought for them was no longer fighting for them.



What aspects of God’s goodness to you are you most likely to take for granted?

Joshua reacted to this shattering news by tearing his clothes and falling on his face before the ark of the Lord. The elders of Israel put dust on their heads. Torn clothes signified mourning and repentance. Dust indicated great shame. Joshua did not know what egregious act had caused God to turn against Israel, but he recognized the signs of God’s disapproval.

In his prayer to God, Joshua sounded a lot like Moses (Ex. 32:12-13; Num. 14:13-16; Deut. 9:28), who was always concerned about God’s reputation among the surrounding nations. Joshua knew that God had not brought the people into the promised land to abandon them (Josh. 1:3,5). Joshua’s knowledge of the God of his fathers led him to repent for the Israelites over the loss at Ai. Joshua knew God would not violate His trustworthy name.

Take a closer look at Joshua’s prayer to God in Joshua 7:7-9.	
What aspects focus on the Israelites’ dire situation?	What aspects focus on God’s name and honor?

The reason for Israel’s defeat was the presence of rebellion in the camp. A man named Achan had sinned, and God associated Achan’s individual sin with the entire community.

God indicted the entire nation, and His anger was leveled against all Israel. Sin is destructive. The sins of individual believers affect the family, the church, and the community. Perhaps others knew what Achan did and allowed it to persist. If they did, they affirmed him in his destructive actions. God told Joshua that He would not fight for him and the Israelites until the correction for their sin has been made.

Voices from the Church

“Achan had sinned against God’s explicit command. As a result, God allowed his countrymen to be defeated. This was a tangible lesson that one person’s sin can affect everyone around him. So it is within the fellowship of believers.”³

—Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby



What are some examples of one person's sin leading to terrible consequences for others?



Why do you think God allowed all the people to suffer when just one man committed the offense?

2. The penalty for sin is death (Josh. 7:19-26).

¹⁹ Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” ²⁰ And Achan answered Joshua, “Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: ²¹ when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. ²³ And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the LORD. ²⁴ And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵ And Joshua said, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today.” And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. ²⁶ And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

As Achan confessed his sin, he described what he did wrong. The three actions (**I saw, I coveted, I took**) are similar to the description of worldliness in 1 John 2:16 as “the desires of the flesh,” “the desires of the eyes,” and “pride in possessions.”

Achan hid these treasures inside his tent. It is possible that members of his family saw him dig the hole in which to hide the forbidden treasure. Perhaps they thought it more honorable to keep Achan's secret rather than risk alienation through divulging his transgression. If they knew, they kept silent, allowing Achan to look innocent on the outside. The inside of his tent revealed otherwise (see 1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 51:6).



Ever since Adam hid from God in the garden, we have been trying to hide our sin. What are some ways we can help each other bring our sin out into the open?

Since all Israel was affected by Achan's sin, which resulted in the defeat of the nation and the loss of 36 lives, all Israel picked up stones in the Valley of Achor ("Valley of Trouble") to stone Achan and his family. The whole community took responsibility for ridding themselves of the accursed thing. They also burned them. When the fire reduced the bodies of Achan, his family, livestock and stolen valuables to ashes, a stone memorial of infamy was placed over them as a warning to those who would consider transgressing the Word of God.



Voices from Church History

"For when he calls death the wages of sin, he alarms them again, and secures them against dangers to come. For the words he uses to remind them of their former estate, he also employs so as to make them thankful, and more secure against any inroads of temptations."⁴

—Chrysostom (circa 347-407)

The chapter ends with these words, "Then the LORD turned from his burning anger" (Josh. 7:26).

As frightening as this scene may seem, it later gives rise to a promise. In Hosea 2:14-15, God promised to one day "make the Valley of Achor a door of hope." This place where Achan brought trouble upon Israel and then suffered the penalty of death for his sin would one day be a doorway to hope, because though the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

Unlike Achan, who took unlawful things, Jesus Christ came to give the unthinkable—His life for ours (2 Cor. 5:21). Achan died for *his* sin so that the Lord's anger would turn from Israel. Jesus died for *our* sin so that we could be reconciled to God.



What happens when we minimize the horrible consequences of our sin?



Why does sin deserve death?

3. God's enemies are overcome only after sin is dealt with (Josh. 8:1-2).

¹ And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land. ² And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it."

The Lord told Joshua that he and Israel would have a second chance—this was the second time around for them as they faced Ai in battle again. The Lord informed Joshua that Ai would suffer what Israel had suffered when there was sin in the camp—defeat.

In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sinned against God. Eve **saw**, **desired**, and **took** the forbidden thing. Then they hid from the Lord. As believers, we face the choice of following God or disobeying Him. Every time we face sin and refuse to repent, we harden our hearts toward God. We run from Him and hide rather than run to Him and repent. The story of Achan reminds us of the terrible consequences of sin.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

42. Sin and Death

The ultimate consequence for sin is death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death (Rom. 6:23). God was clear to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). The type of death that would result from the fall in the garden of Eden wasn't only physical death but spiritual death as well, the separation of a person from God. Spiritual death continues in a permanent state when someone dies apart from the reconciling work of Christ, who defeated death through His own death on the cross and subsequent resurrection.

Achan had opportunities to repent. Each time he entered his tent, he knew of his stolen, hidden treasure. When Joshua instructed the people to consecrate themselves (Josh. 7:13), Achan should have repented during the process of consecration. Even before Joshua isolated Achan's family, Achan could have repented. Instead, because he hid his sin, Israel suffered a terrible defeat, and Achan lost everything—his life, his possessions, and his family. Sin resulted in death, and only after sin was dealt with could Israel move forward in victory.



After the sin in Israel was dealt with, God told Joshua not to be discouraged or afraid. What is the connection between hidden sin and discouragement? Or hidden sin and fear?

Conclusion

Joshua's ancestor Abraham was called a friend of God because he believed God. To have faith means to have confidence in something or put your trust in Someone. Abraham entrusted his life to God and had confidence in God's plan for his life.

Conversely, enemies of God are alienated from Him and are hostile in their minds because of their evil behavior (Col. 1:21). They do not trust God or seek to follow His ways. Enemies of God live as though God's rules do not apply to them. They are wrong.

The wages for sin is death; this is bad news. The good news is Jesus received these wages in our place and gave us the free gift of God—eternal life. Christians have a responsibility to pray, worship, and witness as those who were tainted by sin *but* who have been washed white as snow by Jesus.

CHRIST CONNECTION: The Valley of Achor is a chilling reminder of sin and its consequences, but God later promises to make the Valley of Achor “a door of hope” (Hos. 2:14-15). The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to exalt His name in our battle against lingering sin and its consequences.

1. How can we encourage one another to remember our dependence upon God's power and provision in our lives?

2. What are some of the consequences of sin in our community that our church/group can address together with the gospel of Jesus?

3. Identify some steps you will take to battle against lingering sin in your life that God's name might be exalted through your testimony and example.

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