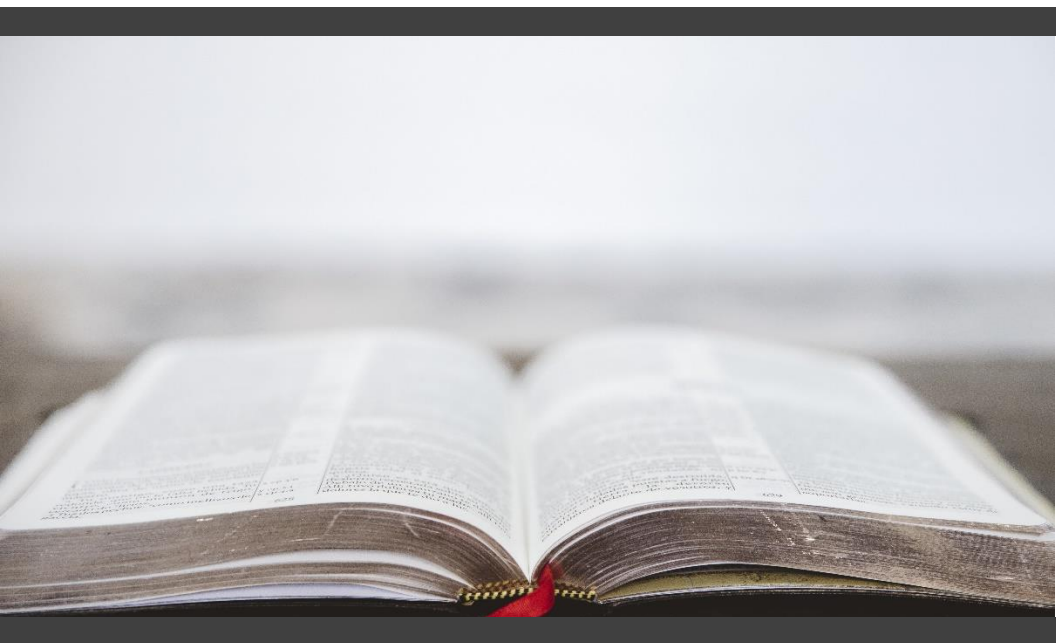


Achan's Sin



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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Achan's Sin

Introduction

A. The Bible is a living and effective book (Hebrews 4:12). One of the powerful things about the Bible is the true stories it tells. For, not only are these stories useful in understanding the overall story of the Bible, but also in teaching many valuable lessons applicable to people today (Romans 15:4).

B. One such story is how an Israelite named Achan sinned and the consequences of his sin (Joshua 7).

C. Purpose: To learn how Achan sinned regarding the devoted things and lessons applicable to us today.

1. Context

A. Israel defeated Jericho

1. Joshua chapter 6 details the first battle in Israel's task of conquering the Canaan land west of the Jordan River.

2. When Israel did what God instructed, God caused the walls around the city of Jericho to collapse and they advanced into the city to destroy it.

B. The Israelites were not to take anything from the city for themselves

1. In a general sense, the Israelites had been warned not to covet the gold and silver on the idols in the land so they would not be ensnared to worship those false gods (Deuteronomy 7:24-26).

2. Specifically concerning the city of Jericho, all the troops were under strict instructions not to take of any of the city's plunder (Joshua 6:17-18). If anyone failed to obey these instructions, they would set the camp of Israel apart for destruction and make trouble for it.

3. Overall, the Israelites obeyed God's instructions and the city of Jericho was destroyed, with everything and everyone in it (Joshua 6:21, 24).

C. Some things were devoted to God

1. Among the things in the city of Jericho were some things that were to be taken into the Lord's treasury – all the silver, gold, bronze, and iron (Joshua 6:19).

2. Overall, this command was followed by the Israelite troops when they were destroying the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:24).

- If you stopped with the conclusion of Joshua 6, you would conclude that the Israelites had been faithful to God in conquering Jericho and that they were now well on their way to conquering the Canaan land. But, there is more to the story (Joshua 7).

2. Story

A. Sin in Israel (7:1)

1. Even though the instructions were clear concerning the plunder in the city of Jericho (destroy everything except for those things devoted to God), not all the Israelites obeyed.

2. Israel was unfaithful to God's instructions because Achan (from the tribe of Judah) had taken of the devoted things.

B. Defeat at Ai (7:2-5)

1. Coming off their victory in Jericho, Joshua was planning for the next battle against Ai – and sent men to scout the land. Evidently, this was Joshua's own decision, as God did not tell Joshua the land was handed over to them until Joshua 8:1.

2. When they returned, they reported that all Israelite soldiers did not need to be sent because the population of Ai was much smaller (12,000 in total, Joshua 8:25). It was determined that 3,000 men would be sufficient so the rest of the warriors would not become worn out.

3. To the surprise of Israel, however, they suffered a defeat at Ai, including the loss of about 36 soldiers. This caused great discouragement in Israel regarding the task of capturing the Canaan land.

C. Joshua grieves and seeks answers (7:6-9)

1. Joshua was discouraged and confused about why this had happened. He and all the elders of Israel wept before the ark of the Lord. Joshua inquired of God why He had ever chosen to bring the Israelites across the Jordan if the result was only going to be defeat. If this were the case, they would have stayed on the other side of the Jordan.

2. Joshua feared the rest of the Canaanites would hear what happened to them at Ai and be emboldened to come and wipe them off the earth. And, Joshua questioned what God would then do for His great name if His people could be wiped off the earth by other nations.

D. Jehovah answers (7:10-15)

1. As Jehovah God answered Joshua, He indicated that Joshua should not be lying there in helpless grief! Rather, he should have realized that Israel had sinned and that God was being fair in what was done (as He indicated what would happen, Joshua 6:18).

2. God identified that Israel had stolen, deceived, and put what was devoted among their own possessions. Then, Joshua was instructed as to how they should identify the culprit – and that this one must be burned, along with everything he has.

E. Achan is identified (7:16-18)

1. As Joshua followed Jehovah's instructions to identify the offender, each tribe came before him (probably a representative from each tribe). The tribe of Judah was selected.

2. Then, the various clans of Judah came forward, until it was whittled down to Achan.

F. Achan's confession (7:19-23)

1. Joshua encouraged Achan to give God glory and confess what he had done, not hiding any of the details. So, Achan confessed his sin against God that was due to his covetousness whenever he saw the spoils of Jericho – most notably, a beautiful Babylonian cloak, silver, and gold. Therefore, he took both from what was devoted to destruction and what was devoted to God.

2. He had hidden these things in the ground under his tent. Those sent to investigate found the spoil where Achan had said and brought it back to Joshua.

G. Achan's punishment (7:24-26)

1. Joshua and Israel took Achan, Achan's family, the spoil, and all that he had to the Valley of Achor (meaning "trouble"). Joshua declared that just as Achan had brought trouble on Israel, they would bring trouble on him.

2. They were all stoned to death and burned. A large pile of stones was raised over them. Then, the Lord turned from His anger against the Israelites.

H. Victory at Ai (8:1-29)

1. Jehovah told Joshua to not be afraid or discouraged and to go and attack the city of Ai. God had delivered the city to them. Furthermore, God now allowed the people to plunder its spoil for themselves.

2. The strategy that would be employed against the city was an ambush, using about 30,000 of the best soldiers. Joshua and those with him would draw out all the fighting men of Ai, retreating before them so they would think they would defeat Israel as before. Then, the remainder of the people would set fire to Ai and then surround the army on both sides. This strategy was executed and Ai was completely defeated.

I. The law of God is read (8:30-35)

1. After this victory at Ai, Joshua built an altar to God on Mount Ebal and copied the law of Moses onto these stones.

2. All Israel stood around the ark of the covenant. Then, Joshua read all the words of the law aloud, including the blessings and the curses. There was not a word of all Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read before the entire assembly of Israel, including all the women, children, and resident aliens living among them.

- Although God was beginning to give them the promised land, this did not guarantee they would possess it all or continue to live in it. Rather, they were reminded of both the blessings of obeying God's law and the curses they would face if they disobeyed.

3. Lessons

A. God gives clear instructions

1. The instructions the Israelites were told to follow were not confusing (Joshua 6:17-19). They were to destroy everything except what was to be taken into the Lord's treasury – or they would be destroyed and make trouble for Israel. Thus, both the instruction and the consequences were clear. In fact, Achan never even tried to claim he did not understand.

2. God gives us clear instructions in the pages of Scripture today as to how we must live. As people who are fighting a spiritual war, we must be careful how we live in this earthly land. And, both the blessings and consequences are clearly identified in the Scriptures.

B. Great victories do not exempt us from temptation

1. Achan had just witnessed God's power and judgment against a wicked city (Jericho). He was witnessing God keep His promises to the Israelites and should have had great hope of possessing the land of Canaan. Still, he gave in to the temptation and sinned against God.

2. We should never let down our guards against temptation – even when we are doing things God is pleased with. For, when we get to a place where we think we are safe and confident, Satan has a way of manipulating the situation so we fall (1 Corinthians 10:12)!

- It is easy to feel as though we are invincible after experiencing a victory. But, we must watch out in these moments, as temptation may be right around the corner!

C. God cannot remain with sinners

1. Achan's sin was a big deal. We must always remember that sin is a big deal because God is holy. And, because He is separate from everything evil, He could no longer be with the Israelites unless the sin was corrected (7:12)!

- At this time, God had given the only solution for resolving this problem of sin as the death of the violator. For, sin always requires life as a payment for sin.

2. Sometimes we may try to justify our sin by thinking it is not a big deal. However, we must be assured that sin is always serious because it is always contrary to God's holy nature. Thankfully, Jesus has provided the ultimate payment for sin through His sacrifice on the cross to appease the wrath of God (Romans 5:8-10)!

D. God knows, even when no one else does

1. It appears that no one knew about what Achan had done. Achan had carefully tried to conceal his sin, even hiding the spoil in the ground (7:21-23). Yet, God knew exactly what had happened – and who had done the thing (7:1, 11, 16-18)!

2. Sometimes we think we are getting away with the evil things that we do, thinking nobody else knows anything about them. However, God always knows what is done – even those things that are done in secret (Proverbs 15:3; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Hebrews 4:13)!

E. Covetousness is idolatry

1. As Achan was confessing his sin to Joshua, he said that he was motivated to take the devoted things because of his own covetousness (7:21). Perhaps he had not intended to take of those things. But, when he saw them and had a great desire for them, he chose to fulfill his own desires rather than honor God – making covetousness his god!

2. Whether for physical possessions or pleasures, our own greed/covetousness works against us choosing to honor Jehovah God in our lives and leads us to often act in ways that violate God's commands. Therefore, covetousness for these earthly things is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5), honoring those desires above Jehovah!

F. Sin always has consequences

1. Perhaps Achan thought he had escaped punishment for his sin after he had hidden them inside his tent. Yet, God kept His word (as He always does) and brought consequences on the Israelites and Achan as He promised (6:18)! Certainly, his sin had been found out and he would pay the price for it!

2. Even when we think we have gotten away with our sin, we have seen that God always knows. And, we must be assured that our sin will not go unpunished!

- Although it is true that sin often has physical consequences attached to it (i.e. guilt, broken relationships, and various earthly consequences), the consequences are often not as physically severe as Achan's were. Yet, there are always spiritual consequences for our sin – including a broken relationship with God, separation from God's spiritual blessings, and (unless we repent) eternal punishment in the fires of Hell!

G. Our decisions impact others

1. Although Achan was held personally responsible for his sin and suffered the consequences, others were harmed physically by his actions (though they were not spiritually accountable for Achan's sin). Namely,

about 36 soldiers died, Israel was discouraged by the defeat, and Achan's family was killed.

- Although this may seem unfair as to why God would allow others to suffer because of one man's sin, we must remember that this is the reality of living in a fallen world. Sin is ugly and causes great suffering throughout this world in many ways – even to those who are innocent. Yet, we must be assured that God only holds each individual responsible spiritually for the sin he/she commits and not for the sins of another (Ezekiel 18:20)!

2. We must soberly recognize that our sin does not just have the potential to impact us in negative ways. Rather, others may also experience the consequences of our wicked decisions and actions (i.e. your family members).

H. No victory should be expected if God is not with us

1. When the Israelites went into battle against Ai the first time, without God being with them (i.e. with sin in the camp), they were defeated! When God was with them the second time, they were victorious (8:1)!

2. As we face many obstacles in our lives, we should not expect to be victorious unless God is with us and we are living for Him! Although we may devise our own strategies about how we may be successful in various areas of life, we will ultimately be defeated if God is not with us!

Conclusion

A. Achan's sin came at a great cost to himself and a cost to the nation of Israel. But, Israel was able to correct the sin and move forward past this sin to continue conquering the land.

B. We can learn some great lessons from this true story that are relevant to living to please God today! Let us never forget these lessons and make the proper applications of them.

Study Questions

Where is the true story of how an Israelite named Achan sinned and the consequences of his sin recorded?

1. Context

What had just happened with Israel in Jericho?

What were the Israelites told before they went into the city?

What were the Israelites told concerning the silver, gold, bronze, and iron?

2. Story

What was Israel guilty of (7:1)?

What happened to the Israelites when they went to Ai (7:2-5)?

How did Joshua respond to these events (7:6-9)?

How did Jehovah answer (7:10-15)?

How was the offender identified (7:16-18)?

How did Achan respond (7:19-23)?

What was Achan's punishment (7:24-26)?

What happened when Israel went back to Ai (8:1-29)?

What did Israel do after the victory (8:30-35)?

3. Lessons

How can you learn that God gives clear instructions?

How can you learn that great victories do not exempt us from temptation?

How can you learn that God cannot remain with sinners?

How can you learn that God knows, even when no one else does?

How can you learn that covetousness is idolatry?

How can you learn that sin always has consequences?

How can you learn that our decisions impact others?

How can you learn that no victory should be expected if God is not with us?

