

Joshua 7:10-23

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July 5, 2026

Lesson: Sin revealed

Joshua 7:10-15 (KJV)

10 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?

11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.

12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you anymore, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.

13 Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.

14 In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the LORD shall take shall come by households; and the household which the LORD shall take shall come man by man.

15 And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

Q: What does it mean to feel that God is on your side?

Have you ever felt a need to purify yourself so that God would help you overcome a challenge?

The company I work for pays \$4.4m a year for Microsoft licenses. We have to buy the licenses that we need ahead of time because if we run out, people are not able to work – but we don't want to buy more than we need because they are expensive and you have to hold them for a full year.

It is important to keep track of all the new employees and contractors that are hired, and the ones that leave. It seems like it would be easy to forecast but it isn't because people have multiple roles and might leave one role that needs the software and go into a role that doesn't. They have never been able to manage it. They have no idea how many they should buy each month to avoid problems.

They gave this responsibility to my team. I've been working on the analysis, getting new data pulled in on exactly when accounts are closed. I've spent weeks on it, and I am supposed to present it in a few days.

Even though they have never been able to manage this, they expect my analysis to be flawless and the team that gave up the responsibility to my team will spend hours looking for anything I've done wrong. So, I look at the data all kinds of ways to try to find errors before anyone else can.

I found a problem on Thursday and have been working to figure out what I've missed. It's very stressful.

I got up and decided that I would focus on my lesson for Sunday School first because I believe that when I put God first, then He will help me figure out the problem. I believe it works the same way it worked when the Israelites relied on God instead of trying to solve their problems with Earthly solutions like treaties and agreements with other nations.

I know what it feels like when God is helping you through challenges, and I know how it feels to face your challenges alone.

Today's lesson is about the importance of facing our challenges with God's help, rather than facing them alone.

It is about God. It is ALL about God.

I think it is very hard for us to remember that everything that happens around us, even the things that happen that only impact us as individuals - is about God. We walk around as the center of our universe. We see only through our own eyes, hear only through our own ears and no other human knows what is going on in our head. No matter how many people you are around, you're all alone in your head, with only God to know your thoughts.

This does two things:

1. It makes us feel like everything is about us.
2. It makes us feel safe hiding our sins because they are hidden from everyone around us.

But everything is not about us, everything that happens in the universe is about God, and His glory – and even though no other humans know of our sins, for God, they are completely uncovered.

The Israelites were facing great challenges. They were fighting wars. They'd already overcome Jericho with God's miraculous help.

But afterward Achan saw a beautiful robe from Shinar, and about six pounds of silver and a little over a pound of gold, and he took them in secret and buried them under his tent. He'd successfully hidden his treasures from everyone around him, but not God of course.

Q: Why did God demand that they take nothing from Jericho?

<Pause for response.>

I think maybe there is a hint of an answer in asking what **did** God allow them to save from Jericho?

<Pause for response.>

God only saved Rahab and her family.

Joshua 6:17, 22-23, 25

17 And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: **only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.**

22 But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and **bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath**, as ye sware unto her.

23 And the young men that were spies went in, and **brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had**; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel.

25 And Joshua **saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had**; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; **because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.**

God directed Joshua to only save Rahab and her family and their possessions because she had hidden the messengers. She was God's instrument of the Israelites' victory over Jericho. She was also instrumental in God's later plans.

Rahab married Salmon, and had a son Boaz. Obed was born to Boaz. Jesse was born to Obed. David was born to Jesse and 27 begats later Joseph was a descendant of David. (Matthew 1:6-16).

God denied the Israelites the loot of their sack of Jericho. Think about how the Israelites might have viewed this. They'd wandered through the wilderness with only what they could carry for 40 years, and they see rich clothes and the wares that make daily life more comfortable and treasures of gold and silver laying in the ruins of Jericho, and God told them to leave it alone. Imagine how hard that would be.

We often look down on the Israelites' poor decisions, but in this case everyone except Achan obeyed God. How would today's Americans do with this challenge? Would there be only one man in all of Washington County that picked up some gold to take home? I don't think we would have done nearly as well as the Israelites. I think that tells us what is in store for America, as devastating as it is to think about.

But those spoils of war didn't belong to the Israelites, they belonged to the one that won the battle – that was God, and God alone. God wanted them to understand that it is He that wins our battles, not us. When we charge out without Him, we are defeated, just like the Israelites were defeated as soon as they came to the next battle.

They probably felt invincible, as if every enemy would now fall to them, and they would be feeling something that the Bible clearly tells us will come between Him and us. What would that feeling be?

<Pause for responses.>

Pride. From the very beginning, it has been pride that comes between God and His creation.

Isaiah 14:12-15

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Ezekiel 28:12-14 and 17 describes Lucifer as being "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty" and he was as near to God as the cherubs that protected the Ark of the Covenant were. It was his downfall, and it has been the downfall of many since.

God wanted the Israelites to know that it was His victory over Jericho, not theirs and so the treasures they took went into His treasury.

Joshua 6:24

And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

So when Achan took the treasures, he was stealing from God, and he was tainting God's demonstration of His glory.

When we fail to put God first, are we stealing from God? Did we earn the treasure of our breath, did we win the heartbeat of our child, or our wife or husband?

No. We can earn money only with the breath and heartbeat God gives us, and those greatest victories in our lives – the lives of those around us, are not the result of our work or our wins, but God's only.

Spending our lives in sin is stealing from God, and it's no different than Achan.

Joshua 7:14-15

14 In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the LORD shall take shall come by households; and the household which the LORD shall take shall come man by man.

15 And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.

Now we can imagine how Achan is feeling. His sins are about to be dragged into the light for everyone to see. His family, his friends. Imagine Achan sitting around the fire with his friends and family, reveling in the victory over the people of Jericho. Maybe he was loud and boisterous in an attempt to cover for his sins. Maybe he was loud and slapping everyone on the shoulders. Or maybe he was quiet and secretly thought about how he would sneak the treasure out to trade for nice things one day. Think about the people we know who are like Achan, loud and boisterous or quiet and sneaky – who all have sins, like we have sins.

And then one day Joshua tells everyone that God knows someone has stolen treasure from Jericho and that He is going to judge everyone to decide if they are innocent or guilty. And now Achan knows that he is caught.

This is not the last time that God will have everyone come to stand before Him one at a time, to be judged, is it? We will all be like Achan one day. Like Achan, we will feel the fear of our sins being seen, first by the people around us – but ultimately by God. We can hide our sins from men, but we cannot hide them from God. We fear our sins being seen by men much more don't we? But it's not men's judgement that condemns us, it will be God's judgement that matters.

And here is Achan, sitting by the fire ahead of the longest night of his life. Hearing everyone around him wondering who it could be that has transgressed. There were probably rumors around the campfire of other people that weren't liked, that people would be whispering accusations about. Imagine Achan hearing the whispering condemnations of other people and hoping that tomorrow would not come.

When we sit with our secret sin, we also fear the day that our sin will be discovered. We waste the life that God gives us, living in this worry, because we failed to keep ourselves from sin. We worry because we know it is wrong, but also because we fear the day our sin will be discovered.

Joshua 7:16-19 (KJV)

16 So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken:

17 And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken:

18 And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

19 And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me.

The phrases "was taken" are used other places in the Bible that indicate the casting of lots, so this is believed to be the way that God demonstrated His judgement. So Achan was judged and shown by the casting of lots to be guilty, and then - only when he was already judged guilty, he admitted his sin, so we will never know what would have happened if he had immediately come forward and admitted his sin before he was judged.

Joshua 7:20-23 (KJV)

20 And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done:

21 When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it.

23 And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD.

Once he is judged, Achan is eager to explain why he'd committed the sin. At this point, it is too late to save himself, and so we are left to wonder what was gained by his confession.

Sympathy?

When we've done something wrong, we usually feel a need to explain. In this case, there is no question that God will take his life – He has already provided the sentence, so maybe Achan wants his family and friends to understand his motivations and to feel pity for him. We see this often in crime documentaries. People who have done wrong still want others to feel pity or empathy for them. The difference in this case is that unlike criminals who will live for years in prison to possibly benefit from this empathy, Achan was to be immediately killed.

As a last obedience?

Perhaps Achan's last act was directed by God as a warning to others. He walks through the progression of his sin which begins in his eye, inflaming his desire, made him take the treasures and then keep and hide them. This is the way many of our sins progress. Maybe Achan's last words were a lesson to the wise.

Repentance?

Perhaps Achan was genuinely repentant for his actions. He knew that his fate was sealed, and he chose to finally admit his sin before the Lord, which Joshua had actually asked that he do in verse 19.

19 And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me.

Joshua said that it would give glory to the Lord to confess to him, and that is what Achan did. So, in his final act, Achan did give glory to the Lord.

What about us?

This is another example of the importance of putting God first. His glory is all that matters, regardless of the treasures that we might pass by in life, we should not envy them but should be grateful for the victories that God has given us. We have the treasures that matter, our families and our friends, the heartbeat within them, the breath they breathe and our own lives that are His gifts to us, given before we were born – completely unearned.

Unlike Achan, we are not confessing our sin only to be judged, but to clear the barrier of sin from between God and us. We know what it feels like to be forgiven for our sins, and we know how it feels to hold onto them and try to hide them from God. We cannot hide our sins from God. All we can do is rob ourselves of being close to him when our sins come between us. He wants to give us much more treasure than we can take.