

GOD JUDGES DISOBEDIENCE

CORE PASSAGE: JOSHUA 7:2-6,10-12,19-21,25-26

CONTEXT

God miraculously provided the people of Israel a victory at Jericho. The entire city was meant to be devoted to destruction; only Rahab and her family were spared. The silver, gold, and bronze of the city was dedicated to the Lord's treasury (Joshua 6:19). However, one man did not follow God's commands, and the entire nation would be affected by this man's sin.

KEY CONCEPT

Sin deserves God's judgment.

As you examine Joshua 7:2-6,10-12, 19-21,25-26:

- Consider that no one sins in a vacuum; sin always hurts the community of God's people.
- Recall the gospel, that Jesus, the only sinless man, died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin for all who believe in Him.



TIMELINE

The Lord Leads Through Joshua (Joshua 1)

Joshua Leads the Israelites Through the Jordan River on Dry Ground (Joshua 3-4)

SESSION STUDY: Israel Defeated at Ai Due to Achan's Disobedience (Joshua 7)

Joshua Sends Spies to Jericho (Joshua 2)

Israelites Conquer Jericho, and God Spares Rahab (Joshua 6)

After Judgment Against Achan, Israel Conquers Ai (Joshua 8)

Daily Readings

Day 1: Joshua 7:1-15

Day 4: Joshua 9:1-27

Day 2: Joshua 7:16-26

Day 5: Joshua 10:1-43

Day 3: Joshua 8:1-35

Day 6: Psalm 7



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PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOSHUA 7:2-6,10-12

THE DISOBEDIENCE OF ONE AFFECTS THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Circle Joshua's actions in the story.

2 Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and scout the land." So the men went up and scouted Ai. **3** After returning to Joshua they reported to him, "Don't send all the people, but send about two thousand or three thousand men to attack Ai. Since the people of Ai are so few, don't wear out all our people there." **4** So about three thousand men went up there, but they fled from the men of Ai. **5** The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of them and chased them from outside the city gate to the quarries, striking them down on the descent. As a result, the people lost heart. **6** Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD until evening, as did the elders of Israel; they all put dust on their heads. . . . **10** The LORD then said to Joshua, "Stand up! Why have you fallen facedown? **11** Israel has sinned. They have violated my covenant that I appointed for them. They have taken some of what was set apart. They have stolen, deceived, and put those things with their own belongings. **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."

Key Concept: Sin deserves God's judgment.

On the heels of a great victory at Jericho, one man stopped the flow of the Lord's blessing. Achan disobeyed God by taking what God had set apart for the Lord's treasury (Joshua 7:1). He stole from the Lord and thought no one would notice. But God sees all things. This one man's disobedience caused thirty-six innocent men to die, an army to scatter, and Israel to wonder what went wrong.

While Achan alone had robbed God, notice how the Lord referred to this sin in verse 11: "They have violated my covenant . . . They have taken . . . They have stolen, deceived." While we like to think that sin only affects us, sin never affects only the sinner. Sin always hurts the community of God's people.

Jesus said, "There is nothing covered that won't be uncovered" (Luke 12:2). How does such a statement in light of Achan's story spur you to resist temptation and confess sin?

Israel was dismayed at their defeat. How could Ai, smaller and weaker than Jericho, run them off so easily? Wasn't God on their side? Joshua lamented the situation before God, but God rebuked Joshua. The reason for such a defeat should have been obvious—sin was among them.

God brought His people into the promised land in the power of His strength, not Israel's. His holy presence was the leading force. Therefore, God instructed Joshua to get rid of the sin in the camp quickly and decisively. When believers step outside of faithful obedience, we invite God's discipline and put up a barrier to our relationship with the Lord that can impact our families, our church, and our communities. But once sin is confessed, God has promised that He is faithful to forgive, cleanse the unrighteousness, and restore the blessing of full fellowship with Him (1 John 1:9).

What are some ways you have seen your sin impact the lives of others around you?

CHURCH CONNECTION

Sin has deadly consequences and affects the church body along with the individual.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

JOSHUA 7:19-21,25-26

DISOBEDIENCE LEADS TO DIRE CONSEQUENCES.

Highlight phrases that communicate what it means to confess sin.

19 So Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and make a confession to him. I urge you, tell me what you have done. Don’t hide anything from me.”

20 Achan replied to Joshua, “It is true. I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I did: **21** When I saw among the spoils a beautiful cloak from Babylon, five pounds of silver, and a bar of gold weighing a pound and a quarter, I coveted them and took them.

You can see for yourself. They are concealed in the ground inside my tent, with the silver under the cloak.” . . . **25** Joshua said, “Why have you brought us trouble? Today the LORD will bring you trouble!” So all Israel stoned them to death. They burned their bodies, threw stones on them, **26** and raised over him a large pile of rocks that remains still today. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore that place is called the Valley of Achor still today.

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

“Achan’s sin might seem like a ‘victimless crime’ in that it does not impact another individual, but his sin of disobedience impacts the community’s view on sin and their view of the Lord’s tolerance of sin. Christians must remember that their choices do impact the community.”¹

–Kenneth Mathews

The only way forward for Israel was for God to sanctify Israel again. With the sin and sinner still unknown, Joshua made his way through the people by the leading of the Lord and finally stopped with Achan's family and ultimately Achan himself (Joshua 7:16-18). Thirty-six men had died because of his sin. An army of three thousand had been run off the hill in battle. The enemies at Ai believed that God could not deliver their city into Israel's hands. Achan had brought calamity upon Israel, and now he would pay the penalty for his sin.

The specifics of Achan's confession are instructive. He revealed his sinful heart's desire and confessed to taking a cloak and some silver and gold. The gold and silver may make sense, though all sin is illogical, but why would Achan take a cloak from Babylon? Babylon at that time was the epitome of prestige, power, and success. When Achan saw that cloak, he coveted it. Achan's sin had two parts: simple theft and prideful desire. He wanted for himself what had been devoted to God, putting himself on a level with God.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

SIN AS TRANSGRESSION: The word *transgression* means "to cross over" or "to pass by" and is often used in reference to transgressing God's explicit commands. When God gives a specific command, as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and when that command is disobeyed, transgression has taken place (Romans 5:14; 1 Timothy 2:14). In this sense, sin is law-breaking.

Israel was not their own. The mission God set them on was not their personal self-aggrandizing project. God was giving them the promised land, where they would be happy in Him and His miraculous work of grace. Achan's sin may seem small to us, but God took it seriously because God's people would never have what He wanted to give them if He did not train their hearts to trust in Him for everything. In a land of enemies, Israel's biggest threat was inside their camp in their own hearts. In the heart of Achan was a desire for something other than an obedient relationship with God, and this God judged with death.

How does the reality that no sin is hidden from God strike your heart?

Why is prideful desire such a big threat to our life with God?

THE PROGRESSION OF SIN

Read Joshua 7:21 and consider Achan's confession of sin.
In the right-hand column, describe a similar progression for a common sin.

ACHAN'S SIN (JOSHUA 7:21)	COMMON SIN
"I SAW . . ."	
"I TOOK . . ."	
"I CONCEALED . . ."	

What might be some communal consequences of the progression of sin described in the right column?

Key Concept: Sin deserves God's judgment.



HEAD

How can meditating on the gospel help you fight sin?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Our heart longs for justice. This world is broken and needs to be set right. Only God can do that. As you pray over Psalm 7, consider the hope that God's justice brings to your heart.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

Where is your heart deceiving you today, and how does Christ speak a better word?



HANDS

Where is your life out of step with God's command today, and how can you place your trust in Him anew to fight sin?



THE DOCTRINE OF WORSHIP

By Matthew Z. Capps

What is the primary purpose of humanity? The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it quite plainly—“to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.”¹

Concisely put, the reason we exist is to worship God. Now, those who aren't confessional believers might charge God with being an egomaniac. They might ask: “What kind of God creates beings to worship Him?” Yet there is another question to be answered first: “Is the God who created us worthy of worship?” The Christian would answer: “Yes! In fact, God is the only being in the universe worthy of unqualified worship.”

If this is the case, then we were created not to meet a need in God, as if He required our affirmation. Christians have long recognized the truth that God is perfect, that is, without deficiencies. By this, we mean that unlike all other beings, God lacks no desirable attributes or qualities in Himself (see Acts 17:24-30). Now we are able to see with more depth the loving intent of our Creator. Perhaps you've heard someone say: “We all have a God-sized hole in our hearts.” We do (see Ecclesiastes 3:11)! This points to the self-giving God who created us to bask in His glory. That God creates us to reveal Himself to us, and doesn't withhold Himself from us, is an act of pure love and grace.

IN THE BEGINNING, CREATED TO WORSHIP

Often we think of the garden of Eden in Genesis as just a Mesopotamian farmland without connecting it to God's purposes in creating humanity. However, it's been noted by many Old Testament scholars that Eden functioned as a temple-garden, where Adam and Eve worshiped in the presence of God like the later Aaronic priests did. Not only did Israel's later tabernacle and temple entrance face east like Eden, many of its furnishings were symbolic of elements of Adam and Eve's initial home.²

This created worship intent for humanity is why the sin of idolatry is so deadly. Indeed, one could argue that idolatry is the sin under all sins. Isaiah 42:8 reads: “I am the LORD. That is my name, and I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.” At its very root, idolatry seeks to steal glory from God. Essentially, this was the root issue of the fall in Genesis 3. Though Adam was created in God's image to reflect God's glory, he attempted to grasp divine glory, to seize what was forbidden. From then on, all humanity has been under the curse of Adam. Paradise was lost, and into the wilderness our first parents thrust us.

IN THE PROMISED LAND, FAILURE TO WORSHIP

Now, when we journey through the Old Testament from Eden's garden to the wilderness tabernacle to Jerusalem's temple, we see God's grace in offering His people His presence. Even more, God established in the Mosaic covenant a sacrificial system that allows His people to participate in worship, which they were made for. And still, over and over, throughout its history, Israel was lured into the idolatry of pagan nations. The Canaanites, for example, were known for such depraved practices as sacrificing their own children to false gods, and for their evil, Israel was commanded to destroy them from the promised land. Yet still Israel would accommodate to their ways and end up in apostasy, deserving their own judgment from the one true God who created and cared for them. This cycle of sin and idolatry was so vicious that God's people had no way out in their own power. God raised up judges who were able to correct the course of Israel for a time, but each judge's death resulted in a reversion to idolatry. The subsequent kings were no better at accomplishing a permanent change of heart toward the worship of God.

IN THE SON OF GOD, THE PERFECTION OF WORSHIP

Then, in a small town called Bethlehem, God's presence was revealed in a fresh and new way. The Word of creation, the Son of God, was born in flesh to tabernacle among His people (John 1:14). Jesus, the image of the invisible God, came and passed the test in the wilderness to make the world new. The first Adam, in his flesh, grasped at divinity,

but the divine Christ, took on flesh. In doing so, Jesus, the last Adam, would fulfill the task of spreading the temple-garden to the ends of the earth. And by Christ's death and resurrection, we see a new creation coming. He will make all things new.

Even now, it is through Christ that we are welcomed into the worship of God in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Yet we await what theologians call the "beatific vision," when we will behold God in all of His perfections. It is in seeing God "face to face" in the glittering finale of Jesus's second coming that we will experience an eternal delight that is unimaginable, a day when "night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5). And that, brothers and sisters, will be the experience of worship we were created for.

References

1. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1897), 7.
2. L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 37, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (London, UK; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 102.

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