

# 05

## SESSION FIVE

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# The Hidden Sin of Achan

### SESSION SUMMARY

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In this session, we will study the story of Achan as a part of 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, as well as the high cost of being tainted by sin. And it points forward to the glorious hope of seeing sin dealt with on the cross.

### SCRIPTURE

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Joshua 7:1-12,19-8:2

# THE POINT

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**Sin has consequences not only for ourselves, but also for those around us.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

Divide students into teams and instruct each team to choose a representative to answer questions from your state's driver handbook. Team members are allowed to help their representative come up with the correct answers, but only the chosen student can give the answers. Offer a small prize as a reward to the team with the most correct answers.

Discuss why it's important to know and obey traffic rules. What could happen if you disobey the rules (cite specific rules)? Why should you memorize the rules before taking a driving exam? Do the people who make the rules expect you to obey them? Why? How do you know they expect you to obey them?

If you have ever been issued a speeding ticket, then you know there is a large price to pay for not obeying the speed limit. You also know that the consequences affect more than just yourself. (For example: If you hit another car then that driver is affected. If your insurance rates go up, then your family is affected. Etc.) There is also a huge price to pay for not obeying God's rules. God doesn't give you rules and laws to hold you back from having fun. He gives you these laws to protect you and others from harm.

### Option 2

Call out examples of partial obedience. For instance: Your teacher instructs you to write a 5-page essay and you turn in 4 pages; your coach calls for 20 pushups but you only do 18; or your boss wants you to clock in right on the hour but you are always 3 minutes late. Discuss the impact of partial obedience in each scenario.

Share the following story: On January 28, 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart 73 seconds into its flight, resulting in the deaths of its seven crew members. The Rogers Commission report stated that the disaster was caused by the failure of an "O-ring" seal in the solid rocket booster. The commission not only found fault with a failed sealant ring, but also with officials who allowed the shuttle launch to take place despite concerns voiced by NASA engineers.<sup>1</sup>

What caused the shuttle to fail? Why do you think the officials didn't listen to what the engineers told them? Would you say that the officials did most things right concerning the mission? If so, why did things go wrong? Point out how their refusal to listen ended with disastrous results.

What qualifies as "partial obedience"? Would you want someone to build your house who "only sort of" follows the blueprints? Would you want to go to a doctor who does most things right? Why not?

Discuss what partial obedience means in light of our relationship with God. Emphasize that we are called to be totally obedient to Him.

- **In what ways can someone be guilty of partial obedience when it comes to his or her relationship with God?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**Sin has consequences not only for ourselves, but also for those around us.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joshua:** chosen by God as Moses' successor to lead the Israelites to the promised land
- **Achan:** stole items from Jericho that were to be dedicated to the Lord, putting all of Israel at risk of disaster

## PLOT

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In previous sessions, we've seen Joshua as he has received God's charge to be "strong and courageous." We've watched the children of Israel cross the Jordan River. We've seen God bring down the walls of Jericho and give the Israelites the land He promised Abraham. But now, we see what happens when Israel fails to obey God completely, highlighting once again the cost and consequences of sin in a broken world.

## TIMELINE

### CONQUEST OF AI

*How one man's sin can negatively affect everyone around him.*

### THE CHARGE TO ISRAEL

*The people must make a choice: worship God alone or follow after false idols.*

### THE JUDGES CYCLE

*Because Israel follows after false idols, God delivers them over to their enemies.*

## ACHAN'S SIN AFFECTS ALL OF ISRAEL

In Joshua 6:27, we read: "So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land." Chapter 7 opens with the conjunction "however" or "but"—"But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things..." Let's take a look:

**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. 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. 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." So about 3,000 men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, 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. 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. 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! O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! 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?" The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? 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. 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." (Josh. 7:1-12)**

Joshua sent two spies to the city of Ai, just as he had sent two spies to collect intelligence in Jericho (Joshua 2:1). He was preparing to take the next steps in his quest to conquer Canaan and knew he could not attack the larger cities of

Canaan without being seen by Ai. He needed to conquer Ai to maintain an element of surprise.

The spies 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.”

Joshua usually received his marching orders from the Lord—from how the Israelites were to march across the Jordan River to how they were to march around the walls of Jericho. But this time, he quickly accepted the recommendation and deployed 3,000 men to fight against Ai.

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 was no longer fighting for them.

Joshua reacted to this shattering news by tearing his clothes and falling on his face before the ark of the Lord. Joshua did not know what egregious act caused God to turn against Israel, but he recognized the signs of God’s disapproval.

In his prayer Joshua sounded a lot like Moses (Ex. 32:12-13; Num. 14:13-16 and Deut. 9:28), who was always concerned about God’s reputation in the surrounding nations. Joshua knew God had not brought the people into the promised land to abandon them. Joshua knew God would not violate His trustworthy name.

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.

Verse 1 says, “But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan ... took some of the devoted things.” Usually, one man (Achan) would be referred to by the first person singular pronoun “he,” and yet this passage uses the third person plural pronoun “they” three times—“they have transgressed my covenant”; “they have taken some of the devoted things”; “they have stolen and lied.” God viewed Achan’s individual sin as a collective sin of the entire community. All of Israel was held accountable.

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. God told Joshua that He would not fight for him and the Israelites until the correction for their sin had been made. Here is Achan’s confession:

**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.” And Achan answered Joshua, “Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: 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.” So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. (Josh. 7:19-22)

- What are some examples of poor decisions teenagers make that negatively impact their families? their church? (p. 35, PSG)
- Recall a time when your sin affected more than just yourself. How might considering the impact of your actions help you to obey God and make better choices in the future? (p. 35, PSG)

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### 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—separation 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.*

## THE BATTLE IS WON WHEN SIN IS DEALT WITH

After Joshua had uncovered the sin in the camp, he did not presume success on the battlefield. This time, He listened to the Lord about the number of soldiers who should fight against Ai. God instructed Joshua to take all the soldiers with him and to go to Ai.

**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. 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.” (Josh. 8:1-2)**

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.

## TIMELINE

### DEBORAH

*God gives personal gifts to be used for His glory and the good of others.*

### GIDEON

*God gives strength to accomplish His will.*

### SAMSON

*God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.*

Interestingly enough, although the Israelites were not permitted to keep the spoils in their victory against Jericho, this time God permitted them to take valuables (including livestock) and employ them for personal use. Had Achan waited on the Lord instead of disobeying the Lord's command regarding the valuables of Jericho, he would have been able to take valuables from Ai.

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.

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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Chapter seven ends with these words, “Then the Lord turned from his burning anger.” As frightening as this scene may seem, it is a place of 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. 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—who, like Achan, were enemies of God—could be reconciled to Him.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **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, Achan, committed the offense?** *God created humans as morally responsible agents who are capable of doing good and evil. Not only that, but He created us as social beings, intended to relate to one another as we live out our life in Christ together. Because of these two things, sin has consequences that go beyond the person who commits it. For example: A dad who leaves his wife and kids to pursue his own sin not only affects himself, but also hurts those closest to him.*
- **Ever since Adam hid from God in the garden of Eden, we have been trying to hide our sin. What are some ways we can help one another bring our sin out into the open?** *One way is through confession and accountability. Having one or two close Christian friends that we can share with helps tremendously in the fight for faith.*
- **What happens when we minimize the horrible consequences of our sin?** *One thing that happens when we minimize sin is that we minimize God's grace and the cross of Christ. Think about it: When we make little of sin, then we will naturally think little of the cross of Christ. But when we see sin for what it is, then we will be in awe of the grace of God displayed in the cross.*
- **Why does sin deserve death?** *Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God, and as a result, is deserving of physical, spiritual, and eternal death.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*



# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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As Achan confessed his sin, he described what he did wrong, which happened to be similar to Adam and Eve's sin. They saw that the tree was good for food (lust of the flesh), a delight to the eyes (lust of the eyes), and that it could make them wise (the pride of life). For Achan, the lust of the flesh was apparent when he "coveted"; the lust of the eyes when he "saw ... a beautiful cloak from Shinar, 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels"; and his pride of life when he "coveted them and took them" (Josh. 7:21).

- **How should this story help us avoid falling into greed and covetousness?** *It was greed and covetousness in Achan's heart that eventually lead to his downfall, which should make us all the more vigilant at fighting against these sins when we see them arise within us.*
- **What are some ways this story has challenged your understanding of personal sin?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



## HEART

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Achan hid these treasures in his tent. It is possible that his family saw him do this. Perhaps they thought it more honorable to keep Achan's secret than risk alienation by divulging his sin. By hiding his wrongdoing, Achan looked innocent on the outside. However, the inside of his tent revealed otherwise. First Samuel 16:7 declares, "man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" and Psalm 51:6 states that God desires "truth in the inward being."

- **What do you think is taking place in the human heart when someone decides to sin?** *Given that Achan put his own family and fellow countrymen in jeopardy because of his sin, one thing we see is that the heart that sins is a selfish heart, one that doesn't consider others.*
- **When God looks at the inside of your heart, what does He see?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



## HANDS

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This story reminds us that there is a battle all Christians face—the battle against lingering sin in our lives. But instead of hiding our sin and hoping that no one will call us out, God calls us to wage war against our sin through repentance and faith in Him. As John Owen once said, "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you."<sup>2</sup>

- **What are some practical ways we can do battle with sin in our lives?** *One very important way is by memorizing Scripture and using it as an offensive strategy against sin. After all, Scripture, which is the sword of the Spirit, is the only offensive weapon in the armor of God.*
- **If we become lazy in the fight against sin, how might that become a negative witness to non-believers in our lives?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### SOURCES

1. History.com Staff, "Challenger Disaster," History.com, 2010 [cited 28 Aug. 2015]. Available from the Internet: [www.history.com](http://www.history.com).
2. John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, (Christian Heritage, 2012).

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16](http://lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**