

FASCINATING STORIES OF FORGOTTEN LIVES

STUDY FIVE

Achan: The Man Whose Sin Brought Calamity

Joshua 7

There are times when our sin impacts others' lives. That makes it all the more complicated. There was a man whose sin brought calamity to many people. In fact, it brought defeat to an entire nation.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll



To deepen your study, scan to listen.

PRIVATE transgression. Public tragedy.

Far too often, scandal rocks a Christian ministry. A pastor, an elder, or a trusted leader vested with spiritual authority and public influence commits a particular sin, perhaps blindly believing that his or her transgression is a private matter and unlikely to harm anyone. This person is self-deceived and leads others to think that he or she is walking in the light, when, in fact, he or she is walking in darkness.

But God is not fooled, nor is He mocked. He is grieved, and He brings people to account. “You will always harvest what you plant” (Galatians 6:7). Sinful seeds sown in secret inevitably sprout and bear bitter fruit.

Once the private sin becomes public, the impact can be calamitous. For example, when a pastor’s sin is exposed, church members’ faith is shaken, trust in leadership is shattered, confusion and anxiety proliferate, and, if the church splits because of the scandal, inestimable damage occurs. Some may even depart from the faith.

This *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study probes into the life of an Old Testament character named Achan, whose self-indulgent, self-deceptive, secret sin brought catastrophe upon his own people, the nation of Israel. Israel was fresh off the thrill of a major military victory, but, because of sin in the camp, God’s people would soon taste the agony of defeat.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING

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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Invite the Lord to minister to you through His Word as you pray David's prayer, reflecting on the importance of seeking His forgiveness of sin.

*How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?
Cleanse me from these hidden faults.
Keep your servant from deliberate sins!
Don't let them control me.
Then I will be free of guilt
and innocent of great sin.
May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:12–14)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The people's spirits were still soaring from their decisive victory—when Jericho's massive walls toppled, opening access to the rest of Canaan. Their victory was miraculous! Read about it in [Joshua 6:15–21](#). What was God teaching His people through this victory?

What instructions did the Lord give Joshua in [6:17–19](#)?

The battle belonged to the Lord, as well as the plunder. Offering Jericho's treasures to God was an act of worship and a lesson in gratitude to God for winning Israel's battles. The ban also became an unexpected lesson in the far-reaching consequences of disobedience.

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Observation: Greed and Its Consequences

Observation means paying close attention to the words, phrases, sentences, and key ideas in a passage before seeking the meaning.¹

Achan's Sin and Israel's Defeat—Joshua 7:1–5

The account of Jericho's defeat in Joshua 6 ends with the favorable wind at Joshua's back: "The LORD was with Joshua, and his reputation spread throughout the land" (Joshua 6:27). What unexpected headwind met Joshua in [7:1](#)?

With no knowledge of Achan's sin, Joshua dispatched his spies to scout Ai. According to [7:2–5](#), describe their attitude, report, and recommendation to Joshua before the battle. What was Israel's fate against Ai? Describe their attitude after the battle.

That happens when a body of people goes through a time of defeat. The hearts of the people melt. It's called demoralization. The feeling is defeat.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Joshua's Prayer and the Lord's Answer—Joshua 7:6–15

After falling in battle to a weaker enemy, Israel was "paralyzed with fear" (Joshua 7:5). According to [Joshua 7:6–9](#), what did Joshua and the elders do, which they had neglected before going into battle against Ai? Whom did Joshua blame for their defeat? What fearful thoughts gripped him, and what did he assume would happen?

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According to [Joshua 7:10–15](#), whom did the Lord hold accountable? What was the Lord's remedy for Israel to restore fellowship with Him?

One individual who continues to walk against the way of God can hurt and hinder an entire church. One Judas can color the entire body of disciples. It is serious, even in the time of grace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Achan's Confession, Sin Judged, Fellowship Restored—Joshua 7:16–26

Read [Joshua 7:16–19](#). What four-fold process did the Lord use to identify Achan? What must Achan have experienced as the process narrowed and pinpointed him?

In [7:20–21](#), how did Achan detail his descent into sin? Pay close attention to the verbs he used in his confession. What are those verbs?

According to [7:22–26](#), how was Achan's sin judged?

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It may seem easy to overlook the gravity of one significant detail in the account of Achan's confession and God's judgment. What was the result of his confession and judgment, according to Joshua 7:26?

Joshua had done nothing wrong. Only one soldier in the whole of the army of Israel had done something wrong, but the entire nation had suffered defeat. That's what it means when we refer to sin being in the camp. There was defeat by association. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Slippery Slope from Temptation to Sin

Achan's individual sin was closely associated with the nation's sin.

A man named Achan had stolen . . . so the LORD was very angry with the Israelites.
(Joshua 7:1)

Israel has sinned and broken my covenant! They have stolen. (7:11)

Then Joshua said to Achan, "Why have you brought trouble on us?" (7:25)

What does this passage teach you about the gravity and consequences of individual sin within one's faith community?

Achan's confession in 7:20–21 identified four steps into sin and deception. First, Achan "saw a beautiful robe, . . . silver coins, and a bar of gold." Second, he "wanted them so much." Third, he "took them." Fourth, he *hid* the stolen items "in the ground beneath [his] tent" (7:21, emphasis added). Describe Achan's slippery slope into sin. At what point did he commit sin? What sins did he commit?

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James explained how sin ensnares us in stages ([James 1:14–15](#)). What are these progressive stages?

How does the account of Achan illustrate what James taught? At what point could Achan have stopped without sinning?

If Achan could offer us advice about temptation and sin, what lesson might he teach?

Achan, in a moment, tasted the sweetness of stolen waters. And, intoxicated in the ecstasy of the robbery, he told himself it was okay. He sinned. Reasoning and logic were put on hold. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Remedy of Confession

Perhaps the lives of Achan, his family, and the soldiers might have been spared if Achan had come forward immediately and confessed voluntarily. In [Galatians 6:7](#), Paul warned about sin, deception, and hiding from God. Elaborate on Paul's point.

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In *1 Corinthians 10:12–13*, what did Paul say that helps us move along the continuum from warning to promise in our battles with temptation?

However, if temptation ensnares us and we yield to sin, Scripture offers hope. What is the healing remedy for sin, according to each of the following verses?

Galatians 6:1: _____

Proverbs 28:13: _____

James 5:16: _____

1 John 1:8–9: _____

If we would judge ourselves, we will not be judged. The simplest and swiftest way of dealing with wrong is to deal with it personally. If you find yourself living with rationalized standards, stop it and deal with it. If you can't do it alone, get some help. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Exposing and Expunging Hidden Sin

Achan's tragedy offers three lingering lessons on sin, cover-ups, and confession.

1. *There is a unique stench connected with suspicion.* The closer we walk with God, the more sensitive our “spiritual noses” become. Be alert. There could be sin in the camp—in your life, in your family, or in your church.
2. *An absence of peace accompanies hidden sin.* The heart is not equipped to handle hidden sin, but the heart is equipped to handle peace that comes when the sin is confessed.
3. *When wrongdoing is uncovered, God honors swift and thorough action.* Waiting to confront wrong never pays off. Deal with it right away.

Is the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart through these applications? If so, in what ways?

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What have you learned about hidden sin's damaging effect on others? Do you need to pull a secret sin out of hiding, receive God's forgiveness, and resolve it with others? Come to the Savior in a prayer of confession.

Do you discern deceptive sin in the life of another? Have you prayed, and are you spiritually equipped to lovingly confront him or her without being pulled into the same sin? Briefly share your heart's desire and pray for the Lord's direction and presence in this situation.

Joshua later went on to conquer Ai, and then most of Canaan. Achan's pile of stones, however, remained as a continual reminder that we must pass through some troublesome valleys on the road to blessing. The good news is that we *pass through* them. In God's grace, He offers forgiveness and restoration so we can live free in His promised land.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I acknowledge that these have been serious words. The work of a Joshua takes both courage and faith. Deal directly with me and stop me in the process of rationalization. Stop me at this moment, and cause me to confront the truth, never to practice a lifestyle of compromising situations, secret sins, and hidden wrong. I pray that as a result there might be cleansing, forgiveness, restoration, and recovery. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1990, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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