

MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH  
A WINNING MINDSET

## STUDY FIVE

## Postmortem of a Deceiver

*Selections from Joshua 7*

*When there's sin in the camp, we're ill-equipped to go any further until we deal with it.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE Israelites' first military encounter in their new homeland was an earthshaking success. God caused the walls of Jericho to collapse as if He had hit them with a battering ram. With Jericho's defenses in ruins, "the Israelites charged straight into the town and captured it" (Joshua 6:20).

The account closes with a favorable wind at Joshua's back: "So the LORD was with Joshua, and his reputation spread throughout the land" (6:27). *Surely the rest of Canaan will fall just as easily*, Joshua must have thought.

Then Joshua 7 opens with the word *but*—what an ominous, bubble-bursting word.

*But Israel violated the instructions about the things set apart for the Lord. A man named Achan had stolen some of these dedicated things, so the Lord was very angry with the Israelites.* (Joshua 7:1)

What "dedicated things"? Who is Achan? What did he do to rankle the Lord against the entire nation? This *Searching the Scriptures* study reveals the answers, including the disastrous consequences that followed when sin slipped into the camp.



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## Postmortem of a Deceiver

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### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Sin is an unpleasant subject. Particularly, secret sin. The Lord has compassion toward us when we sin and invites us to come to Him with our struggles. Ask Him to reveal the truth your heart needs to hear through His Word.

*Father, I stand at the doorway to Your throne seeking mercy—which You have already shown me through Christ. I know I am accepted. Still, I hesitate. Draw me near with Your gracious love as I invite Your light to reveal the sin I must confess and forsake. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The opening verse of Joshua 7 recalls the ban Joshua issued just before God brought down the walls of Jericho. Read [Joshua 6:17–19](#) and write down Joshua's instructions, noting his reason for the ban.

Interestingly, after the next battle, God allowed the people to “keep the plunder and the livestock for [themselves]” (Joshua 8:2). Jericho's victory, however, was unique. It was the first conquest in the promised land. Just as the people were to offer the first bundle of grain from their annual harvest to the Lord at the festival of the first fruits ([Leviticus 23:9–14](#)), God wanted the nation to reserve for Him Jericho's plunder as the first fruits of the conquest.

The ban was meant to be a lesson in *gratitude to the Lord for winning the Israelites' battles*. Instead, it became a lesson in the consequences of greed.



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### Observation: Greed and Its Consequences

The first step of observation is to break the text into manageable bites. Each sentence, phrase, or even word may contain key ideas worth chewing on before moving to the next piece.

#### Achan's Sin and the Defeat at Ai—Joshua 7:1–5

Read *Joshua 7:1–5*, and write down what you observe. What attitude do you perceive in the spies' report and advice to Joshua? List the consequences of the defeat at Ai.

What was missing in the foolhardy attack on Ai that was so prominent in the Jericho account (see *Joshua 5:13–6:2*)?

*Three thousand warriors moved up the hill, and, before they knew it, they were in a fast retreat, and 36 of the Hebrews' finest soldiers were killed. The camp was in confusion. How could this be? There was sin in the camp. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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

Plunging from the pinnacle of victory to the depths of defeat, the nation spiraled into a state of shock. “The Israelites were paralyzed with fear” (Joshua 7:5). What did Joshua and the elders do, according to *Joshua 7:6*?

In *7:7–9*, Joshua prayed—something he should have done before sending the army to Ai. In Joshua's prayer, what did he assume? Whom did he blame? What fearful thoughts gripped his heart?

What did the Lord say to Joshua in reply, according to *7:10–15*? Where did the fault lie for the defeat at Ai? What was the Lord's remedy?



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*Joshua truly believed that the people heard the prohibition and were willing to abide by it. It must have taken him back to hear about the sin. There's always a sense of shock when you find that someone has been living in deceit. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Achan's Confession and the Sin Cleansed—Joshua 7:16–26

Read [Joshua 7:16–19](#) and follow the process the Lord used to pinpoint Achan, whose name appropriately means “troubler.” (Perhaps lots were cast to determine the Lord’s choice at each selection stage.) How did Achan describe his descent into sin in [7:20–21](#)? Pay special attention to the verbs in these verses.

How was Achan’s sin dealt with, according to [7:22–26](#)?

Previously, Joshua ordered that a memorial of twelve stones be built to honor God for bringing the Israelites safely across the Jordan ([Joshua 4:19–24](#)). The pile of stones covering Achan’s body in the “Valley of Trouble,” however, stood not as a celebration but as a warning. Two memorials remained—one as a lasting reminder of God’s faithfulness and the other, of sin’s consequences.



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### Interpretation: The Path from Temptation to Sin

Four steps marked Achan's descent into deception, which we can identify in his confession in *Joshua 7:20–21*. First, he “saw” the beautiful robe, the silver, and the gold. Second, he “wanted” them. Third, he “took” them. And then, fourth, he hid the stolen items “in the ground beneath [his] tent.”

What sins can you identify in Achan's downward spiral?

James explained how sin takes hold of us in stages in *James 1:14–15*. What progression did James describe?

How could the account of Achan be used to illustrate what James was teaching about temptation and sin? At what point could Achan have stopped without sinning?



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Rationalization greases the skids of our slide into sin. What rationalizations do you think Achan used to ease his conscience and smooth his downward path?

If Achan could speak to us about his sin, what lesson would he teach about temptation and sin? What advice might he give?

*Whatever the garment, the silver coins, or the bar of gold may be for us . . . glance at it but go on. Achan didn't go on. He took it, hid it, and 36 men died because of it. There are consequences that follow disobedience. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: The Remedy of Confession

Only after Achan was caught did he finally confess his sin. What if he had come forward immediately and confessed voluntarily? Perhaps, his life, his family members' lives, and the lives of the soldiers could have been spared.



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What warning and promise does the Lord give us in our battles with temptation, according to *1 Corinthians 10:12–13*?

What do the following verses say about confession as a healing remedy for sin?

*Proverbs 28:13*: \_\_\_\_\_

*James 5:16*: \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 1:8–9*: \_\_\_\_\_

Centuries after Achan's sin, the prophet Hosea reflected on God's compassion toward His sinful people who stumble into their own valleys of trouble. Through Hosea, the Lord called to His people to return like a husband pleading with His wayward wife to come home:

*"But then I will win her back once again.*

*I will lead her into the desert  
and speak tenderly to her there.*

*I will return her vineyards to her*

*and transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope."*

(Hosea 2:14–15)





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Through Hosea, the Lord was referring to Achan's terrible sin and the trouble he caused the nation in "the Valley of Trouble." But there's hope! Regardless of the wrongs we have committed, God can transform our *valleys of trouble* into *gateways of hope*. What did Hosea say the Lord will do for us when we confess and return, according to *Hosea 6:1–2*?

What hope do these verses communicate to you?

*If we're known for nothing else, let's be known for our truthfulness. Let's tell the truth. Let's live the truth. Let's model the truth. Let's uphold the truth, so that God will be glorified.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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### Application: Steps through the Gateway of Hope

No one is immune from following Achan's path into sin and hypocrisy. His tragedy teaches us four lasting lessons about secret sin.

1. *Take God seriously.* He sets the standard for right and wrong, and we must not think we can trifle with His holiness.
2. *Believe His Word.* Don't try to bend God's truth to your own standards.
3. *Confess sin quickly.* The sooner we douse the flame of sin with God's mercy, the less damage it will cause.
4. *Refuse all hypocrisy.* Don't lead others to believe you're something you're not.

Has the Lord answered your opening prayer to use the light of His Word to reveal sin? If so, what sin might you need to confess . . . to the Lord and, perhaps, to another person?

If you're not certain what steps to take, seek counsel with your pastor or Christian counselor. Find a spiritual friend to pray for you.

For further help after we've sinned, in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll follow five specific steps in restoration modeled by Joshua when God offered the nation a second chance at Ai. Let God's compassion for strugglers and mercy for sinners lead you through God's gateway of hope into forgiveness and a new beginning.



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### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, help me not to linger when I see something enticing. Strengthen me to not let temptation sink roots of covetousness in my soul. Speak truth to my spirit when I start to rationalize, and make clear to me a way of escape, Lord. I long to live in Your light of truth with a clean heart and a clear conscience for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.*

