



## SECRET SINS

Joshua 7-8

One spiritual victory does not guarantee another. Israel's great victory at Jericho was followed by a humiliating defeat. The God of Israel did not fail; the people failed. Spiritual successes are not occasions to lower our guard but reminders to renew our commitment to the Lord.

Today we move from the great victory over Jericho into the dismal swamp of defeat at Ai. The opening words in Joshua chapter 7 immediately spell trouble:

*But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan . . . took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.*

Earlier in chapter 6, the people had been told that all the treasures of Jericho were to go into the treasury of the Lord. Everything else was to be destroyed in judgment. The city of Jericho was, in a very real sense, the firstfruits offering of the land to God.

When we begin chapter 7, we know something Joshua doesn't know yet. We're told in verse 1 that Achan has stolen from Jericho some things for himself. As a result of that sin, God removes His protection in battle, and as recorded in verses 2 through 5, Israel is surprisingly defeated at the city of Ai.



A Hittite prayer of Murshili II

Now you need to understand that Israel was defeated at Ai because Joshua and the entire nation were so self-confident they didn't even bother to ask for



God's help. Had they done so, they would have been made aware of Achan's sin. But we have no record in Scripture that Joshua went to the Lord before battling the army of Ai. That's like you and me starting our day without even talking with the Lord. It's very dangerous to underestimate the enemy and overestimate our own strength.

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Let me make some practical observations as we work through this passage and apply them to the believer today. The first one is this: *the believer is vulnerable to temptation following some spiritual success.*

It's easy to get a false impression after a victory that you can coast, that you can let down your guard, rather than remain alert and prayerful and humble. The apostle Paul warned the believer in 1 Corinthians 10:12 to take heed—be careful—while you are standing, lest you fall.

After the great victory at Jericho, the Israelites are thinking that Ai's going to be a piece of cake. Just send a couple thousand men over there and clean it out.

The second observation is this: *the disobedience of one individual can have a profound effect on the entire community.* Verse 1 says that "the people of Israel broke faith." But wasn't it Achan who sinned? Look down at verse 11, where the Lord says, "Israel has sinned; they have transgressed . . . they have taken some of the devoted things."

You see, from God's perspective the entire nation is impacted by this one man's actions. There is this principle at work that your sin and mine truly affects other people around us. One person's secret sin can lower

the spiritual temperature of a church body, influencing and hurting the church's overall testimony. We impact each other—probably more than we think.

Now Achan had taken some clothing and some money and hidden it in his tent, which lets us know his entire family is part of the plot. I wonder today if you have something hidden in your computer files. Maybe there's someone at work you're getting close to and you think it isn't going to hurt anybody.

Achan's sin was nothing less than idolatry. He wanted something God told him he couldn't have. And anytime you want something or someone that God has forbidden, you're making that object or that person an idol—you're setting God aside in favor of something else.

Paul says in the New Testament book of Colossians that covetousness is idolatry (3:5). That gold and that clothing became more important to Achan than God. And that's idolatry—when something becomes more important to you than God.

Let me tell you, we live in a covetous world. Every commercial and advertisement strikes a chord with our desires for more; idols are everywhere. And the problem is, covetousness isn't just dangerous; it's contagious.

What is God's judgment on Achan for his idolatry? The same as it is today: the wages of sin is death. It might not happen as soon or as quickly as it will here in Israel during these covenant days in the Old Testament, but ultimately, God will judge every one of us; and without Christ paying the penalty for our idolatry, we don't have a chance before a holy God.

Now Joshua has to figure out who brought God's judgment on Israel because nobody's confessing to it. So, according to God's instructions, Joshua begins to cast lots in verse 16 to identify the tribe, the clan, the family, and finally the guilty individual.

Why does God choose this rather slow method? I believe He does it to impress upon the entire nation the seriousness of sin. Every tribe must stand there, and all the people are going to be thinking, *Am I right with God?* This long process causes every individual in the nation to consider his or her relationship with God.



But it also gives Achan an opportunity to confess and repent. So, as each lot is cast and the choice narrows to his tribe and then to the clan of Zerah, it's getting a little closer. Then the lot identifies his grandfather, Zabdi, and then his father, Carmi. Will Achan step forward now and repent? Not at all. He's going to wait until the lot points to him and his back is against the wall. But even then, he is merely remorseful and not repentant. Remorse is feeling badly because you get caught; repentance is feeling badly because you sinned in the first place and turning away from that sin.

*So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to [Achan's] tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel.* (verses 22-23)

We know from verse 25 that Achan and his entire family are given the death penalty from God.

Keep in mind that in Deuteronomy 24:16, God's Word says that no child will die for the sins of his parents and parents will not die for the sins of their children. So, it's clear Achan's whole family has been involved in this secret sin and old enough to be involved willingly.

Sin is always destructive—for an individual, a family, a church, or a nation. The judgment of God might not come suddenly, but it will arrive eventually.

Now that Achan and his family have paid the just penalty for bringing sin into the camp, the Lord tells Joshua to go back again, and this time, conquer the city of Ai. And all of chapter 8 deals with the battle plan for conquering Ai. And it's a very different plan from the one they used against Jericho. God tells Joshua in verse 2 to "lay an ambush against the city,

behind it." And with that plan, Joshua and the armies of Israel are victorious.

Even more important, they experience revival as a nation, making a fresh commitment to follow the word of God and the will of God. Any revival in your life today will look just like theirs did. It will be related to confessing sin—especially secret sins—and obeying the Word and the will of God.

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Is there a potential "Ai" moment looming in your future? How do you know? How does Galatians 5:16-17 and 1 Peter 5:6-8 help explain the any "Ai" failure and help you avoid the "Ai" disaster in your own life?

How is Satan sometimes able to convince you that God isn't watching and listening to you as His child? What are the personal implications of the truth that you are part of God's family? How can fellow believers help each other avoid setting God aside in favor of something else?

What truth about God's response to Rahab the prostitute did Achan fail to learn and apply in his own life? How might these two events help you teach your yet to be saved friends or family about the good news of God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ?

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