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Joshua 7

*"Mistaken Achan and Secret Sin"*

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The Israelites had come to Jericho, the first city in the Promised Land they were to conquer. God miraculously delivered the city into their hands by collapsing the city walls (archaeology has verified that the walls fell outward!) so the people could rush in and take the city. The conquest of Jericho came with a strict warning from God, according to [Joshua 6:17-19](#): *"The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury."*<sup>1</sup>

Joshua is a book about conquest. In reclaiming the land of God for God, there was a need to destroy both the cities as well as the idolatrous, pagan people who occupied them while the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. Jericho was to be dedicated for destruction, because there was nothing redeemable about the city or its people, except Rahab and her family,<sup>2</sup> and the precious metals, which were to be placed into the treasure of the Lord. God's instruction left no doubt about the fact that taking anything that was to be devoted to destruction would in fact bring destruction upon the individual(s).

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<sup>1</sup> [Joshua 6:17](#) - *"And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent."* KJV

<sup>2</sup> Rahab and her family were spared because of her faith in God and the help she gave in protecting the spies.

In this study, we'll learn that so-called "secret sin" is not a secret to God, and unconfessed sin affects others and makes us vulnerable to the enemy of our souls. The good news for us is that the mercy of God will often be displayed in his patience!

### Historical Background

1. **Joshua 7:1** - *"But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel."*
2. Achan displayed his lack of character when he did something when no one else was watching, which was deliberate and intentional disobedience against God's instruction. (**Joshua 6:18**)
3. Achan's sin was not known at the time Joshua dispatched a reconnaissance team to spy out Ai.
  - a. **Joshua 7:2-3** - *"Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, 'Go up and spy out the region.' So the men went up and spied out Ai. When they returned to Joshua, they said, 'Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there.' "*
4. The reconnaissance team returned saying, "It's a piece of cake, and we'll only need to send a few thousand men to take the city!"
  - a. **Joshua 7:4-5** - *"So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water."*
5. This was the first defeat the Israelites suffered, and Joshua was grieved to the point of ripping his clothes and falling on his face, and blaming God for their troubles.
  - a. **Joshua 7:6-9** - *"Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, 'Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?' "*

6. God told Joshua the problem was “secret sin” in the camp!
  - a. [Joshua 7:10-12](#) – *“The Lord said to Joshua, ‘Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.’ ”*
7. In [Joshua 7:13-26](#), we read about the instructions God gave to Joshua to purge evil from among them.
8. When precedence needs to be set, God has to deal with people in drastic ways, and since a new nation was being formed, God could not and would not allow willful, deliberate disobedience to take place.
  - a. God exposed Achan’s sin for the sake of others so they might take warning.
  - b. In [Acts 5:1-11](#), we read about a similar thing that happened during the formation of the church.
    - i. The synopsis of the story is that Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and pretended to present a generous offering to the church, however, they failed to reveal the fact that they had kept a portion for themselves.

#### “Secret Sin” Is No Secret To God

9. Joshua and the Israelites may not have known what Achan did, and even Mrs. Achan may not have known, but God did; and burying it under the carpet would never make it invisible to God.
10. We would do well to remember that everything about our lives is in full view of God.
11. [Hebrews 4:13](#) – *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*

12. **Psalm 33:13-15** - *“From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth - he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.”*
13. **Proverbs 5:21** - *“For a man’s ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.”*
14. The Bible describes sin against God in various terms, including everything from rebellion to spiritual adultery, missing the mark, wandering from the path, pride, selfishness, blindness, deafness, a hard heart, a stiff neck, delusion, and self-worship.
15. Sin can happen in our thoughts, words, deeds, and motives of our heart.
16. There are sins of commission and omission.
  - a. Commission - We do what we shouldn’t do.
  - b. Omission - We don’t do what we should do.
  - c. **James 4:17** - *“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”*
17. In Achan’s case, his sin was the worst kind, in that it was intentional, deliberate, and willful sin of commission, the root of which was covetousness.
  - a. **Joshua 7:21** - *“When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”*
  - b. **Exodus 20:17** - *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”*

#### Unconfessed Sin Affects Others Around Us

18. **Joshua 6:18** tells us Achan’s sin made the whole nation vulnerable and *“liable to destruction.”*
19. Rarely is our unconfessed sin something that only affects us; it often affects those around us too, because our lives are integrated.
  - a. Because of one person’s sin, relationships suffer, friendships become strained, working relationships dissolve, and families become fractured.

#### Unconfessed Sin Makes Us More Vulnerable To The Enemy

20. There's something noteworthy about how the Israelites got trounced by their enemy because there was sin in the camp.
21. We are at the mercy of God, and when we live in willful disobedience to him, how could we expect his favor to be ours?
22. The only protection we have comes from the Lord.
  - a. **1 Peter 5:8-9** - *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..."*
23. We expose ourselves to unnecessary pain and problems by opening the door to the enemy through our sin.

The Mercy Of God Is Often Displayed In The Patience Of God!

24. God is waiting for a full confession and repentance, and he gives us opportunity because he is patient.
25. It's obvious that God was patient with Achan, because he gave him plenty of time to "come clean."
  - a. It would have been a lengthy process to bring the whole nation forward, tribe by tribe, clan by clan, family by family, and person by person.
  - b. Pastor Gary said he believed this was God's way of allowing Achan opportunity to at any time, right up to the last moment, confess and receive God's mercy and forgiveness.
  - c. It wasn't God's intention to kill Achan, because if it were then there would have been no reason to go through the trouble of searching through and sorting out the people to find the guilty person.
26. **Psalm 103:10-14** - *"[H]e does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."*
27. Unconfessed sin will not go unpunished forever, because God is just, holy, and pure, and so will not tolerate our sin indefinitely, so we must "get right" with him while there is still time.

28. The irony of this story is that Achan covered over his sin, while God exposed his sin; but if Achan had exposed his sin, God would have covered it!
29. [Psalm 32:1-3, 5](#) - *"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away... Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' - and you forgave the guilt of my sin."*

### Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Joshua 7](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Spend time talking about the quote Pastor Gary shared: "Reputation is who others think you are; character is who you are when no one is watching."
4. Read and discuss [Joshua 7:6-9](#).
  - a. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when they've questioned or doubted the Lord.
    - i. "God, why did you allow this to happen?"
    - ii. "God, what are you going to do about this?"
    - iii. "If only things were different!"
5. Read and discuss [Acts 5:1-11](#).
  - a. Allow the people in your group to share experiences they've had when the Lord publicly exposed their sin.
6. Read and discuss [Joshua 7:13-26](#).
7. Read and discuss [Hebrews 4:13](#), [Psalm 33:13-15](#), and [Proverbs 5:21](#).
8. Spend time talking about the illustration Pastor Gary shared about a man he knew who took a family photo with him on business trips so he would always be conscious of what was at stake if he was to give in to the temptation to enter into "secret sin."
9. What is your understanding of the sin of commission and the sin of omission? (See #16 above)

10. How have you handled the temptation to engage in the sin of covetousness?
11. In what ways has your sin affected others?
12. How has the Lord helped you to gain “the victory” over secret sin(s)?
13. What are some of the ways you’ve experienced God’s mercy and forgiveness when you’ve confessed and repented of your sin?
14. Read and discuss [Psalm 103:10-14](#).
15. In what ways has the Lord’s patience afforded opportunity for you to confess and receive his mercy and forgiveness? (See #29 above)
16. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: purpose in their heart to reject the temptation to believe the lie of the enemy, which says it’s possible to get away with “secret sin(s)”; recognize that the Lord knows everything about our thoughts, words, deeds, and the motives of our hearts; remember to regularly thank and praise the Lord for his grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).