

# *It Is Written*

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## Achan's Sin

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Fresh on the heels of an astounding victory at Jericho, the young Israelite nation, under Joshua's leadership, focused on the next objective in their campaign to capture Canaan -- the land promised by Jehovah. Ai, a small town, was next on the list. Upon their return, the men sent to spy out Ai advised Joshua to send only two or three thousand men against Ai "for the people of Ai are few" (Josh. 7:3). The men of Ai turned the battle into a rout, chasing the Israelites back to where they came from, striking down thirty-six men in the process, almost completely demoralizing Joshua and Israel.

Joshua could not understand why God would bring them over the Jordan only to be destroyed by the Amorites. He poured out his heart to the Lord about the matter. Then the Lord revealed the reason for this defeat. Achan had taken spoils from Jericho, which were forbidden of the Lord, and had hidden them among his stuff. This sin had to be corrected before God would permit Israel to continue her conquest of the promised land. Achan, his family, and his livestock were stoned and burned along with the rest of his goods. What a price to pay for one sin.

After the matter was corrected, Israel, with the guidance and help of God, defeated Ai. (Read Joshua 7 and 8.)

Achan's case illustrates the power of sin. His sin caused a whole nation to suffer. "But, that was back then," says someone, "what about now?" The Hebrew writer compares sin back then and now: "For if the word spoken through angels (during the Old Testament era, see 1:1-eob) proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so a great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him" (Heb. 2:2-3, read also Heb. 10:28,29).

The case of Achan refutes three popular myths about sin.

### **Myth: One sin won't hurt.**

How often have you heard it said that it won't hurt to do it just this one time -- "it," meaning whatever sin is under consideration at the time? Achan's one sin hurt him greatly, along with his family, his nation and the cause of his God.

One sin does hurt. "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10). Eve's one sin brought death to the whole world. Moses' one sin caused him to miss Canaan (Num. 20:7-13). Nadab and Abihu's one sin cost them their lives (Lev. 10), as did Uzzah's (2 Sam. 6:1-8) and Ananias and Sapphira's (Acts 5). The rich young ruler only lacked one thing to inherit eternal life (Lk. 18:22-23), but lacking that one thing caused him to go away sorrowful. Simon the Sorcerer was said to be "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" after committing one sin (Acts 8:23).

One who thinks that one sin will not hurt needs to be aware that one sin may very well be a launching pad for many other sins.

Joseph's brethren became envious of him. This fostered a hatred to the point they could not even speak peaceably to him. This was followed by conspiracy and bodily harm. They sold him into slavery; and, to cover up their crime, they lied to their father (Gen. 37).

David, a man after God's own heart, looked on a woman to lust after her. This led to fornication. Then, in a futile effort to cover his sin, he resorted to treachery and finally had the woman's husband killed (2 Sam. 11). Did his one sin hurt? He wrote, "My sin is always before me" (Psa. 51:3).

Apostasy from the Lord is taken one step at a time. Paul urges Timothy to preach so as to prevent apostasy, then explains why the urgency by showing how apostasy progresses. First, "they will not endure sound doctrine." Such people begin their downward slide into apostasy by becoming annoyed at sound preaching -- preaching that truly reproves, rebukes and exhorts. Secondly, "they will heap up for themselves teachers" to scratch their itching ears. They will seek and find teachers to teach it their way -- more pleasing to the ear and less negative toward sin. Thirdly, they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables. Going, going, gone! They have completed the plunge into apostasy. But, where did it start? When they took the first step of not enduring sound doctrine.

Each sin that one does weakens his resistance to the next one until he finally develops a seared conscience.

### **Myth: One's sin is nobody's business but his.**

Achan's sin affected the entire nation. It hindered their progress in capturing Canaan. His sin caused all the children of Israel to be rebuked: "But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things" (Josh. 7:1); "Israel has sinned, and they have transgressed My covenant which I commanded them" (Josh. 7:11). This sin caused the whole

nation to suffer defeat: "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies" (Josh. 7:12). Achan's household was gravely affected by his sin (Josh. 7:24).

The fornicator of 1 Corinthians 5 affected the whole church. Paul asked, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" While it may be true that some sins, because of their personal nature, only hurt the individual and his relationship to God, all too often an individual sin has a way of hindering the gospel of Christ and hurting other members of one's family and/or congregation.

### **Myth: One can keep sin hidden.**

Achan probably thought that he had done a pretty good job of hiding his ill gotten gain. It was hidden in the earth in the midst of his tent -- in the privacy and safety of his own home. God knew it all along and ultimately all Israel found out about it. Every diligent Bible reader today also knows about it.

Moses warned the children of Israel: "be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23). One can never sin and rightly feel secure in the belief that no one will ever know. There are too many ways for even secret sins to become known for one to depend on the protection of secrecy. We once heard the story of two preachers, traveling far away from home, stopping at a tavern and deciding to have a little drink. After all, they were so far away from anyone who knew them that their secret sin would never be known. Since no one knew them or that they were preachers no harm would be done. As they were about to leave they got into a mild argument about who would pay the bill. While they were discussing the matter, the bartender leans over and says, "That's all right fellows, we don't charge preachers in here." No, my friend, do not count on your sins remaining hidden.

Sin is never hidden from God: "And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13).

More often than we may realize our sin is not hidden from others. When Moses killed the Egyptian, "He looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." Still the thing was known (v. 14). We may be more transparent than we think. We may be seen when we are not aware of it. But, if no one on earth ever knows -- God knows and will judge us according to the works done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

One sin, not repented of, can make a big difference. Let us not have any illusions about it. Just one sin does hurt. Just one sin may very well hurt someone else. Just one sin may very well be found out by others. It is already known by the Lord, for sure. Let us be careful. Strive to avoid even one sin. When we do sin, we need to correct it immediately, to minimize the damage it can do to ourselves and others.

Achan, his family, and all Israel suffered from a sin that Achan thought he had carefully concealed. We should not go and do likewise.