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Sin Defeats

Lesson Aim: To note that sin among a people is stronger than an enemy before a people.

L3. Date: April 1959. **Text:** Joshua 7:1-8; 8:1-2. **Topic:** Sin: Danger of.

This lesson marks a defeat suffered by the nation of Israel. God has recorded it in His Word to serve as a warning to all who would hear of it. It is a memorial, not erected of dirt and stone but written in the history of men, which warns about the dread effects of sin. The basic lesson we should learn is: God will never bless those who rebel against His will. Even though one's sin may be covered for a while and none expect his guilt, God knows and in due time it shall be brought to light and judged. *"There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known,"* Luke 21:2. Since all things are *"naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do,"* we can be sure no single sin will go unpunished, Hebrews 4:13. Perhaps someone is reading these comments who feels alienated from communion with God because of sin. This is the inevitable result of rebellion. Fellowship can be restored only when an honest confession is made and a new dedication is pledged to the will of God.

Sin defeats any individual who dares trifle with it. Sin defeats any nation which embraces it. The Bible says, *"God is angry with the wicked every day."* Psalm 7:11. Again, *"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God,"* Psalm 9:17. Our lesson is not concerned with something that happened more than three thousand years ago. It is using that incident to illustrate a basic truth for today: God does not, has not, and will not tolerate sin. Sin brings its due deserts in the defeat of the sinner.

EXPOSITION

I. Sin May Occur Among God's Own chosen People, 7:1, 11.

1. Sin arises from an evil desire. Back of all sin lies an evil desire. This means sin actually arises within a man and then expresses itself in deeds which righteous men will disapprove. The sin of Achan began, not when he took of the devoted articles in Jericho, but when he *planned* to do so. Just so, Jesus informs us that the guilt of adultery begins, not with sinful deeds, but with sinful thoughts, Matthew 5:28. Paul likewise informs us that it is the “love” of money (that is, the inordinate craving for it) which is the root of all evil, I Timothy 6:10. No wonder that he resolves to “*bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,*” II Corinthians 10:5. The modern Christian will do well to observe his deeds, words, and thoughts, “*for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he,*” Proverbs 28:7.

2. Sin is expressed in deeds of rebellion. One of sin’s most outstanding traits is that it refuses to remain in the realm of thought. It will show itself in deeds of rebellion against God and man. Thus Achan’s evil thoughts resulted in his “committing a trespass” in the devoted thing. (to “commit a trespass” literally means to “prevaricate a prevarication” or to “lie a lie.” It sets out the nature of sin as deceit.). Since all the city of Jericho and its merchandise was devoted to Jehovah, Achan was guilty of stealing from God when he took from the spoil of the city. God had commanded that anything devoted to the banned (“accursed”) should be either destroyed or dedicated to the sanctuary. There is no room for personal ambition when one fights under the banner of God. It seems the remembrance of the miracle of provision in the wilderness and the opening of the waters of the Jordan with the falling of Jericho’s walls would have created a spirit of holy awe among the people and kept them from sin. Let us remember, however, that the awful spectacle of Calvary is not sufficient to keep us from occasional stumbling. Any sin, however innocent it may appear, is open insurrection against the holy will of a righteous God.

3. The sin of one may bring judgment upon many. Observe verse one states “*the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing,*” And yet only one man’s sin is recorded. This is on the ground of the constituted oneness of social and ecclesiastical bodies. The people are so bound together under God that the sin of one will hinder the progress of all. This is why the failure of a single church member is so serious—he stands in the way of the entire congregation. Bush’s Notes wisely observes, “No man, in sinning, can be sure that the consequences will stop with himself. For aught he knows, they may affect the whole extent of his relations; and this ought to make us watchful both over ourselves and others, that we neither commit nor countenance deeds that may spread desolation over the bosom of a whole community.” “*Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in*

the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? And that man perished not alone in his iniquity,” Joshua 22:20. God have mercy on the man whose sins direct others into the course of hell!

4. Sin may be hidden to men, but not to God, verse 11. God knew of Achan’s sin and caused Israel’s army to flee before the army of Ai. Through sin, the covenant with God had been broken (see Exodus 19:8; 24:7). The sin was so much more serious in that it involved sacrilege, appropriating to their own use the portion God had reserved for Himself. Then, instead of confessing the sin and seeking forgiveness, the sinner had studiously endeavored to hide it in his tent so that it would not be known by either men or God. How mistaken is the sinner who tries to hide sins from God. He knows not that *“all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do,”* Hebrews 4:13. Read Psalm 139:1-12. Judgment day will find all sins brought into the open and men accounting *“according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad,”* II Corinthians 5:10.

II. Sin Brings Its Own Punishment, 7:2-26.

1. Sin brings blindness, verses 2-3. Joshua now sends scouts to look over the city of Ai which was thirteen miles from Jericho (though 3,200 feet higher) and three miles from Bethel. It was the next logical point of attack for an invasion of the land. The easy conquest of Jericho and the intervention of God in behalf of Israel has made the spies presumptuous. They were right to expect God to aid them, but to depend on this aid while they had sin in the camp was useless. Not even Joshua consulted God before making the attack on the city. They were blind to the fact that the nation was now under Divine displeasure because sin had hindered their communion with God. The report brought back was that there were only a few people in the city of Ai and a detachment of two or three thousand Israelite soldiers would be sufficient to overcome them. Yet, Joshua 8:25 reports that when the city was taken Joshua slew twelve thousand in one day! How blind men are when God withdraws His presence from them. Paul agrees that *“the god of the world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,”* II Corinthians 4:4. Thus blinded men rush headlong into judgment!

2. Sin brings defeat to the most noble efforts, verses 4-5. The initial attack against Ai is repulsed and the army of Israel turns and runs back to the plain of Jericho. They are followed to Shebarim (“benches of rock”), which refers to the rocky gorge through which they must pass to return to the plain. This defeat shows God’s displeasure. What a difference between Israel’s experience at Jericho and at Ai! The difference between glorious victory and

shameful defeat is sin. Well may hearts melt and become as water when God withdraws His power in Judgment on sin. The thirty six men who were killed in the battle were mute signs of withdrawal of the Divine presence. So let every sinner see that God never approves sin nor blesses him who is guilty of sin.

3. Sin produces sorrow, verses 6-9. That which was supposed to have happened to the enemies of Israel had now happened to her. God had permitted their defeat at the hands of sinful men. This was an occasion for sorrow. The depth of distress felt by Joshua and the elders (princes) of Israel is shown in their tearing their garments, falling upon their faces in prayer, and putting dust on their heads, as well as the pitiful prayer that Joshua uttered. Should the promise of God now fail? Would Israel be destroyed by the inhabitants of Canaan? If so, how will God preserve the glory of His great name? Joshua reveals concern about the welfare of his people and the glory of God. Isn't it true that sin always harms men and dishonors God? No one has ever really profited from the experience of sin. Its inevitable end is sorrow.

4. Sin invokes God's displeasure, verses 10-12. Since sin is open rebellion against God it naturally displeases Him. When trespass has been committed there must be a reconciliation made for it. Therefore, God calls upon Joshua to cease from lying upon his face and praying. The fault does not lie with God, but with Israel. This sin involved a transgression of the covenant, theft, and hypocrisy, verse 11. How could prosperity and victory be given to such a people? Perhaps we need to learn the old lesson again, "*God is angry with the wicked every day,*" Psalm 7:11. The reason for defeat is not to be sought in God but in the sin which invokes God's displeasure. The sinner himself comes under God's curse, verse 12. The presence of God need never be expected to shine upon the disobedient.

5. Sin brings widespread suffering, verses 16-26. The casting of lots was used to discover that the guilt lay in the tribe of Judah, the family of the Zarahites, the household of Zabdi, and the person of Achan. However, the suffering for sin was much wider than merely the punishment of Achan. Judgment came upon Achan, the material he had stolen, his children, his live stock, his tent, and all that he had. This is the tragedy of sin. The transgression of one man will often bring suffering upon many others, including the innocent. How many children have had to suffer because of an alcoholic father? How many have died in war because of the ambition of a power-mad ruler? How many have been led into sin by the influence of a parent or friend and lived to suffer because of it? Such is the inevitable result of sin.

6. Sin culminates in death, verse 15. Achan was killed by stoning and then his body was burned. Stoning was a punishment ordained for blasphemers and presumptuous offenders, Numbers 15:30, 35. We do not read that Achan verbally blasphemed, but all deliberate transgression is virtual blasphemy, so he suffered the blasphemer's fate. Burning with fire is the fate of persons or things accursed, Deuteronomy 13:15-16. Since Achan had taken of an accursed thing, he has to take its place in the fire. Sin is always the same. Its end result is always the same—death (Romans 5:12; James 1:14-15). It will produce spiritual death in the condemnation of the unsaved (Ephesians 2:1-3) and sometimes result in physical death, even for the saved (Acts 5:1-11; I Corinthians 11:30). The wages of sin have never been reduced. *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,”* Romans 6:23.

III. Sin Can Be Overcome, Only in God's Provision, 7:14-15; 8:1-29.

1. Sin is forgiven only when it is properly judged, 7:14-15. The judgment of the guilty man and his proper punishment would bring God's blessings on the nation again. Only such judgment would suffice. There are two classes of sin: forgiven sin and unforgiven sin. The point of distinction between them is judgment. The hope of forgiveness has come to us today because sins have been judged and forgiven at the cross. The basis of our forgiveness is not just that Jesus died, but that He died for our sins. He was *“delivered up for us all,”* Romans 8:32; He was *“made sin for us,”* II Corinthians 5:21; He was *“delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification,”* Romans 4:25. It is in this judgment on sin that we have hope of forgiveness. He who does not depend upon His sacrifice for forgiveness is lost without hope either in this world or in the world to come.

2. Forgiven sin brings victory, 8:1-29. When proper punishment had been executed against Achan, Israel resumed her invasion of the land. The first objective was to conquer Ai. A study of the topography of the land and some expert military tactics were used to draw the people from the city and the city was taken and burned. The defenders of the city were destroyed and thus another stake was taken in the conquest of the land of Canaan. What a difference in the results of the first and second attack on Ai—the difference was God's judgment on sin. He always gives victory to those who are His own; whose life is pure and undefiled. So the Christian may rejoice, *“Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,”* I Corinthians 15:57.

3. Forgiveness comes only through Jesus Christ. Paul describes Jesus as the one *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace,”* Ephesians 1:7. This forgiveness is freely available through Him, and it comes only through Him. *“Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,”* Acts 4:12. Therefore, he who rejects God’s provision in Jesus is unsaved. *“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life,”* IJohn 5:12. Thus the lines are clearly drawn. Each one who reads these words is either a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26) or he is lost in sins and without hope (Ephesians 2:12). *“Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,”* Joshua 24:15.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Locate on a map of Palestine: Gilgal, Jericho, and Ai.
2. What is the basic truth of our lesson today?
3. What is the source of sin in man?
4. How does sin express itself?
5. What happens to the man who tried to hide his sin?
6. What punishments could we list which result from sin?
7. How can sin be overcome?
8. Give at least three scriptures showing how a sinner is saved.