

## Do You Take Sin Seriously? God Does!

The Sin of Achan

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The church of God's history has paralleled Israel's history in many ways with its ups and downs physically and spiritually. God abundantly blesses His church and He also judges His church along the way as it moves forward toward life in His eternal Kingdom.

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter alerts us to this reality.

**I Peter 4:17-18** For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now, if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear [or be seen]?

We certainly need a door of hope when we read something like that. God judged and blessed ancient Israel and its prophets according to their faithful attitudes and actions which, because of human nature, occasionally weakened. God takes sin very seriously and sin is the real cause of weakening and, if it were possible, defeat for God's people.

For instance, one moment Elijah is standing on Mount Carmel calling down fire on God's altar; the next moment, Elijah is at Horeb complaining to God.

**I Kings 19:10** So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Well, we certainly are not at the point of people taking our lives, generally speaking, on the street, but those of us who do not have anyone to meet with or can hear my voice but are meeting alone, do feel alone and feel that maybe God forsakes them sometimes, which He definitely does not.

It is that way in the book of Joshua. When people think of Joshua, most think of the victory of the armies of Israel at Jericho—that great walled city that stood at the entrance of the Promised Land—and it is right that they do. The victory of the Israelites at Jericho was a great victory carried out in strict obedience to the battle plan of God

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and accomplished by His power in throwing down the city's towering stone ramparts.

But that is in chapter 6 of Joshua. Turn with me to Joshua 7. In verses 1 through 5 it tells of the army's terrible defeat at Ai, a much smaller city. It is the only defeat of the invading forces recorded in Joshua and it contains the only report of Israelites actually slain in combat.

What caused such a change? How could a defeat like this follow so closely after a great victory like Jericho? Commentators have offered several explanations. Some have suggested the Israelites were too self-confident, which is certainly evident in the story. Ai was a smaller city than Jericho, so we can deduce that Israel lacked humility when they were going up against Ai after having such overwhelming success with Jericho. The people had forgotten that it was God who had delivered Jericho to them and not the troops of Israel.

Other commentators have thought that the defeat of Ai was due to a lack of prayer, particularly on the part of Joshua, who should have consulted the Lord for the ordering of the battle at Ai. Apparently he did not do this; he acted on the recommendations of his scouts.

As we read the account of Israel's defeat at Ai, we sense that each of these elements was indeed present, as the commentators suggest, but these are not the reasons God Himself gives for the disaster. God's explanation was that there was sin in Israel's camp.

**Joshua 7:1-5** But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel. Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few." So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water."

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What a difference from how they felt after Jericho!

**Joshua 7:6-7** Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord God, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!

That was what the Israelites said as they were wandering through; they wanted to go back to Egypt there at the beginning.

**Joshua 7:8-9** O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?

After the defeat, it is understandable that Joshua would be dismayed. So he prostrated himself before the Lord and then we read about the sin of Achan, taking it up in verse 10:

**Joshua 7:10-12** So the Lord said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.

That pretty well terrified the Israelites, especially Joshua, that God would no longer be with them if they did not do something about the accursed things.

We must learn from this that God takes sin very seriously!

The sin of one man who had kept spoils of war for himself had immediately brought judgment on all Israel and the death of many; and only the death of the transgressor

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allowed Israel to move forward again. So God took the corporate purity of His people and the importance of sincerity in their claims of total commitment far more seriously than most Christians do today.

What happened to Achan is recorded for our edification to show us how sin starts and progresses and if it is not acknowledged and admitted early and resisted, there will be serious problems and ramifications. Achan was one of Israel's soldiers in the battle of Jericho. He was on the right side within the conflict but he was not obedient at Jericho; and one of God's commands was that the entire city of Jericho be destroyed—all of it, everything! All metal articles—gold, silver, bronze, and iron—were to be taken to the treasury of the Lord as the firstfruits of the conquest but everything else was to be consumed by fire and the people of Jericho were to be killed. That way there would be no influence whatsoever of the past sins and idolatry of the Canaanites.

Achan heard those commands along with everyone else but when he entered the city and actually saw some of the forbidden spoil before him, he coveted what he saw and took it. As he later confessed before Joshua, "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it." (Joshua 7:21)

Now the fact that Achan hid the plunder shows that he knew he was doing something wrong. It was for this willful sin that the judgment of God came upon the whole people in the next military encounter at Ai. What was it that led Achan to this sad act of disobedience? Let me give you three root elements: dissatisfaction, coveting, and stealing.

Let us discuss first that Achan was dissatisfied. That is, he was dissatisfied with the way God had ordered the affairs of his life. It is true that God was in the process of leading Achan, along with the other members of the nation, into a new land of great wealth and opportunity. It was a country in which each family was to possess its own land, own its own house, and sit beneath its own vines and fig trees.

But Achan's mind was not on the blessings that lay ahead. He was thinking of the past and was probably reasoning something like this: "God hasn't treated us very well in these many years of wandering. It's true that He's given us manna to eat and that He's kept our clothes from wearing out all this long time. But can you imagine how awful it is to wear the same clothes for forty years and eat the same food day after day and never have any real money to save up for the future? I've had enough of this life. Following God may satisfy these others but it doesn't satisfy me. The first chance I get, I'm going

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to take matters into my own hands and improve my situation.”

Now he probably did not say that out aloud but some of those thoughts, if not all of them, probably went through his mind. Achan’s dissatisfaction, which was itself a sin, gave birth to disobedience.

Turn with me to Isaiah 14. This is usually the case that dissatisfaction gives birth to disobedience. When Satan sinned by rebelling against God, it was dissatisfaction with his position in God’s world that led him to do it. He was the creature, God was the Creator. But he was not satisfied, he was not content, and he wanted to be like God—even have His position.

**Isaiah 14:13-14** “For you have said in your heart: “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most High.

So dissatisfaction was the root of Satan’s sin, and pride was there just as well. And it was through his rebellion against God, who had made him what he was, that sin entered the universe.

Remember the example of the sin of Achan. It is an example for us today and we have to be very careful that we do not become dissatisfied and complaining about the way God is dealing with us and about our leadership.

It was the same in the case of Adam and Eve when sin first entered the human family. God made Eve and Adam perfect in all respects, but when Satan calls Eve’s attention to the fact that she and her husband were not like God, knowing good and evil, he sowed the seed of dissatisfaction and laid the ground for his triumph.

We may become dissatisfied with our own progress in spiritual growth, but certainly not in the way God is working with us. Here in Philippians 3, Paul tells us:

**Philippians 3:13-14** Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

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Included in this is what we dwell on from the past, not forgetting the ills that others have done to us over the years. We need to be making sure that we are just leaving that behind and moving forward toward the goal and the prize set before us and not letting those dissatisfactions of maybe how we have been treated or how things work in the church are affecting us. And the same apostle, Paul, in the same letter in which he spoke of pressing or reaching forward to win the prize of Christ's calling, also said this:

**Philippians 4:12** I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Achan did not learn this lesson in those forty years of wandering. So we sure need to make sure that we have learned it here in God's church. Paul's secret was to strive for Christ's glory rather than his own and to be willing to achieve that end through whatever means God proposed for him; sometimes that is suffering, sometimes that is blessing—whatever method God decides to use.

Now for the second element. Achan coveted what was not his. Under the rules of war, a conqueror can seize the possessions of the one he defeats and perhaps Achan was thinking along those lines. But this was his error. Achan may have been a part of the invading army and may have wielded his sword effectively, but he was not the conqueror of Jericho nor were the other Israelite soldiers conquerors; God was the conqueror, all of the spoil was God's. God was giving the city of Jericho to Israel's armies and it was He, not Joshua or any other generals, who had demanded that spoil from the battle go into the Temple treasury and that everything else was to be destroyed.

That is why God explained the defeat to Joshua by saying they had even taken some of the accursed things and have both stolen and deceived, and they have also put it among their own stuff. Because God looked at that spoil and viewed it as His, and rightly so.

What was the nature of the items that Achan took? He took two kinds of things—gold and silver, which suggests the sin of materialism on Achan's part; and a beautiful robe from Babylonia, which suggests the desire to appear fashionable and elegant, again succumbing to the lust of the eyes. Babylon was a highly regarded city at that time in history. In later years, it was overwhelmingly powerful and it overpowered Israel in 586 BVC. Even in this period of history, Babylonian material was regarded as extraordinary and fashionable.

When Achan saw the robe displaying the intricate work and style of Babylon, he saw a chance to be like the world in its outwardly visible success and fashion, and so took the garment. And we do not need to stretch this attitude of Achan's to our own lives since materialism and worldliness perhaps are our own age's too most apparent sins. We must work to make sure covetousness is not a problem in our own lives.

Now, as you well know, "You shall not covet" is the tenth of the Ten Commandments. It is a root sin behind each of the other violations. Nothing will so quickly destroy a Christian's life as dissatisfaction with God's arrangement for us, which leads to lust for what God has not yet given and has given to someone else.

Now the third element. Achan stole the articles; they were God's. That is, Achan's dissatisfaction and covetousness, which are internal invisible failings, led to sinful actions. Achan stole, he misled; and when he hid the precious metals in the garment, he lied. Misleading and lying always follow stealing.

We may sin in our lives and then by the grace of God, be led to confess, repudiate, and repent of the sin before we reap the sin's consequences. Usually, though, sin's consequences play out. We may be forgiven for the penalty of the sin. For example, a sexual sin is committed and someone gets an STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease). What happens? They may repent but they may still have to suffer the consequences of that sin. That is the way sin works. Sometimes God will wipe that sin out of us totally and sometimes He will not, but He will always forgive us if we have the right repentant attitude, which wipes our sin out but there is still the effects that come.

This dreadful working out of sin should make us guard against even what seems like the most innocent dissatisfactions. Is there anything you are dissatisfied with? I think we all have our moments of dissatisfaction, but do you let it eat at you? Then dissatisfaction opens us up to being tempted.

How does temptation work? Achan was tempted, gave in to his desire, and sinned. From the many examples of temptation in the Bible, we can piece together the dynamics of how it works. Temptation exists in the first place because the moral and spiritual world is such that a great battle between good and evil is raging at every moment. For people living in an evil world, life at every moment is a crisis in which a converted person's allegiance is claimed by God and an unconverted person's allegiance is counterclaimed by Satan and the evil world. But those of us who are converted are often influenced by people who are unconverted and we end up doing worldly things.

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Temptation begins the process towards sin. The enemy is within, as James makes plain. Temptation is the enticement of a person to commit sin by offering some seeming advantage. The sources of temptation are Satan, the world, and human nature. We are exposed to them in all situations, in all places, and at all times. The nearest approach to a definition of the process of temptation from within is given us by James. Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. In James 1, James, the pastor of the headquarters church in Jerusalem, provides some insight into the process towards sin. It begins with temptation.

**James 1:12** Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

What a wonderful statement that is and what a wonderful promise! Temptation here can refer to trials or tests with a beneficial purpose or effect, or it can refer to trials or tests designed to lead to the wrong desire. The benefit to, or, in contrast, the detriment to a person's character, depends on the reaction of the person who is being tempted. Temptation of itself is not sin; it must be accepted first, then it results in sin. Temptation is, more often than not, a forerunner of sin. It warns that the potential for sin is not far away. So as soon as temptation comes and we recognize it as temptation, the bells are going off—"Alert! alert!"—because you are headed in a certain direction or you have the potential to.

People are susceptible to giving in before the attacks and pressures of trials, but they are also subject to failing before the attractions and pleasures of temptation. Just as a wrong reaction to testing will obstruct spiritual growth and maturity, so will a wrong response to temptation. James outlines the source of temptation, the process of temptation, and the solution for temptation here in James 1.

So what is the source of temptation? We have already touched on that.

**James 1:13** Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

So we are safe in that way; God will not be tempting us. Jesus Christ was tempted as we are but He remained sinless. God cannot be successfully tempted. In Him there is not the slightest moral corruption to which temptation may appeal. Temptation does not proceed from God; God tests and approves us while we endure temptation.

James offered a sharp rebuke to those who find an easy excuse for sinning. To free themselves from responsibility they say, “I am tempted by God” or “from God. It’s not my fault.” But God is not the origin or the agency by which people are tempted. James made it abundantly clear—God cannot be tempted. There is nothing in God to which evil can make an appeal; He is literally untemptable. Furthermore, He tempts no one. God often tests but He never tempts.

**James 1:14** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Temptation is a feeling to think or do something contrary to God’s law. We are drawn away from truth and virtue. We are drawn away from God’s standard of righteousness. The source of temptation is from within a person and it is his own evil desire, lust, inner craving that he has to fight against. He is dragged away and enticed. We are tempted by our own desire.

But we can allow our thoughts to follow certain tracks, our steps to take us into certain places, and our eyes to linger on certain things, and as a result, stimulate desire. If we encourage desire long enough, there is an inevitable consequence: Desire becomes action. Achan saw a beautiful robe from Babylonia and was drawn toward it by his own desire.

We are enticed and attracted when we are offered hope of reward or pleasure; that is position, material things, food, drink, entertainment. But as Christians, our hope of being like Christ and with Him must replace our hope of physical pleasure. We cannot leave a void in that area. If there is a void, it will be filled; and if Satan has his way, he will fill it for us if he can.

The verbs “drawn away” and “enticed” in verse 14 are taken from the activities of fishing and hunting. The Greek word for enticed means “to bait”: to catch a fish with bait or hunt with snares. So a person may both build and bait his own trap. We draw fish out of their original retreat. We lure the fish with bait. The bait on the end of the fishing line is called what? A lure.

So James pictures our desire first, as attracting our attention and persuading us to approach the wrong thing, and, second, as luring us by means of bait to yield to the temptation. What does temptation begin the process toward? I have already mentioned that, what it is. James changes his description from a snare to conception and birth.

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**James 1:15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Notice the reference in verse 15 to the growth of a person from fetus to adult—from complete innocence to corruption by our own human nature, Satan, and the world. First, temptation comes; then desire, like a mother, conceives and gives birth to sin; then sin, the child of desire, develops till it is full-grown and ready to produce offspring. And when sin is full-grown, it has become a way of life and gives birth to death. Sin brings forth death.

You are very familiar with what Paul says in Romans 6:23, “the wages of sin is death,” and sin brings forth death. Now “brings forth” in verse 15, is an animal phrase for birth. It means that sin spawns death. Conquered by desire, man becomes less than a man and sinks to the level of beast—raw emotion and desire.

A brief summary of James 1:13-15, shows that temptation begins the process towards sin. When we are drawn away by our own desires and enticed by Satan and the world, then desire gives birth to sin, then sin brings forth death.

What happens to a person’s body after his physical death? Nobody really stops to think about what happens to the human body after death. They probably just tell themselves that they will die and be put in a coffin, or buried, and that is it. This would probably be what the world thinks. That is not all that happens to a person’s body—we are talking about the physical body here. There is a process that continues. Morticians probably understand this more than most people and I am sure coroners comprehended even more. In its own way, it is really quite a marvelously God-designed process but it also turns our stomachs.

When you die, it is only the beginning of what happens to the corpse. The age at which death comes does not change what happens to the human body. Perhaps a young man who dies is advantaged enough to be buried in the middle of a winter. I am talking about—without the morticians and without funeral homes—what has to be done with the human body; it has to be buried.

So the young man who died may be advantaged enough to be buried in the middle of winter, and that tends to slow things down a bit. But sooner or later, usually sooner, the dinner guests arrive. First come the blowflies—*Formia regina*—to lay their eggs.

In a fresh corpse there is a population explosion of sorts and that kind of population

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growth—we are talking half a dozen generations here—adds up to tens of thousands of maggots; always moving, always hungry. The larvae themselves generate so much heat that those at the center must crawl out to the edges to cool before burrowing back again to the task at hand. In time-lapse photography it all becomes a boiling, churning storm, and of course the maggots are only the first arrivals. In time, the fragrance of decomposition brings a host of others. But I see no reason to trouble you with all the details. (So much for resting in peace.)

Perhaps the young man finds out about this and decides cremation is the way to go, which convinces me of that as well after seeing what happens to the body. This leaves no corpse behind to be violated over slow years by the beetles and the worms. Surely cremation is a quick and dignified end to our human form. Are we not told as much in the advertisements for cremation?

Do you have any idea how hard it is to burn the human body? Hold on to your stomachs, I guess I should say. How much heat is required? What happens when the body comes in contact with a 600-degree flame? Well, let me tell you. Please forgive me if I do not spare you; you will learn that there is a reason for this distressing description.

First, the hair from head-to-toe crisps in a blaze of blue smoke. Then the body snaps to attention, just like a cadet in a parade review. The body tries to sit up; it does not matter that there is a casket lid in the way, it tries to sit up all the same. The temperature rises, maybe to 800 degrees Fahrenheit, and it is now that the marrow boils and the bones themselves begin to burst, the backbone exploding just like a string of Black Cat fireworks.

And still the temperature goes up—1000 degrees, 1500 degrees, 2000 degrees. The eruptions keep on, rattling the retort oven like gunshots but again, I will refrain from naming just what is exploding at this point. Let it be sufficient to say that this goes on for as long as three hours before the mortal remains reduce to ash and fragments and bone.

Decay—in burial or burning—happens to all human beings and this seems like a hopeless end as the only reality of those who have not been given understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Yes, these things I described happen to your physical body. Unconverted people around the world come up with baseless false scenarios of what happens when they die. They try to avoid images of the physical decay that is involved but they know nothing beyond that, and they can only guess what happens after death. Most are without hope or have a false hope of going to a nondescript heaven.

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Turn with me to Revelation 19. A contrast is illustrated to show that the fires of a crematorium burn far cooler than the unquenchable fire that will instantly and completely burn up two of the most evil human beings to walk this earth—the beast and the false prophet.

**Revelation 19:20** (ESV) And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

The beast and the false prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire when Christ returns. And shortly following that, Satan and his demons are imprisoned in the bottomless pit for a thousand years, which we call the Millennium. When the thousand years pass, Satan is released and he gathers Gog and Magog to fight against the saints and after God defeats this futile attempt, He casts the evil spirit being, Satan, into the Lake of Fire. One thousand years pass during the time period between Revelation 19:20 and Revelation 20:10.

**Revelation 20:10-11** And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

So Satan first deceived himself and he determined to deceive the other evil angels who followed him, thus becoming demons. Never satisfied with that domain, Satan has been working on mankind ever since God allowed him access to Adam and Eve. “The devil who had deceived” (that is what it says here), that is the banner that he wears; he is the great deceiver. The devil who had deceived the beast, the false prophet, and nearly all of the rest of humanity will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (that is all of the rest of humanity who refuse to live God’s way of life).

Turn back over to James 1 please. As we go back to James 1, we pick up James’ warning in verse 16. Temptation often comes through deception and that is why James warns us not to be taken in by temptation.

**James 1:16** Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

There is an emphatic statement, the alarm should go off. This is a succinct but powerful statement. The biological imagery is vivid in James 1:14-15. The lust or desire conceives and from this conception sin is born. The unmentioned father who does the impregnating is most certainly Satan; the grotesque child, sin, then matures and produces its own offspring—death. The steps are all too clear. Unchecked, lust yields to sin and unrepented sin brings forth death. It is strangely ironic that sin gives birth to death.

Now just as a right response to trials can result in growth to full spiritual maturity, so also a wrong response to desire will result in decline to abject spiritual poverty and ultimately death itself. So, as I said earlier, when a temptation comes, we have two ways we can go. We are cautioned by Jesus to watch and pray against yielding to the pressure of temptation by our own carelessness or disobedience. In all such cases, God provides the way of escape. Temptation of itself is not sin; it must be entered into or accepted before it results in sin.

God does not expect us to resist temptation by ourselves. He understands and sympathizes with our weakness.

**Hebrews 4:15** For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus was tempted in the same way we are tempted. Though He did not sin, life was not easy for Him. His sinlessness was an earned sinlessness as He won victory after victory in the battle with temptation and Satan.

Now holiness is possible only under conditions that make it necessary to meet, resist, and triumph over temptation. Therefore Jesus Himself became our great High Priest in that, being tempted in all points as we are, He never once yielded but fought and triumphed; and we are expected to emulate that, we are expected to do the same.

Temptation is not sin because Christ was tempted as we are, yet remained sinless. It only turns into sin when and as the suggestion of evil is accepted and yielded to. So that allows temptation as the way of purifying us but Satan uses it to entice us into sin, defiling us. And as it helped to purify Christ, so also it helps to purify us as we overcome Satan, sin, and the world.

When we are tempted, God will help by providing a way out, not to avoid temptation, but

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to meet and reject it successfully and to stand firm under it. This is testing, as permitted and controlled by God, and really every moment of life is a test of whether we are going to do right or wrong.

The goal of life itself is linked to trial, temptation, and testing. God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able. He wants us to endure temptation and receive the crown of life. The most effective antidote of resisting temptation is to capture every wrong thought before it leads us into sin. God will help us to resist the temptations that lead to sin if we stay close to Him spiritually, and do our part to resist and overcome.

Revelation 21:7 says, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." God is our spiritual father and He wants us to succeed and therefore He both disciplines us and blesses us.

One of the enemy's tricks is to convince us that our God is holding out on us, that He does not really love us and care for us. When Satan approached Eve, he suggested that if God really loved her, He would permit her to eat of the forbidden fruit or tree. When Satan tempted Jesus, he raised the same question of hunger: "If Your Father loves you, why are You hungry?"

The goodness of God is a great barrier against yielding to temptation. Since God is good, we do not need any other person, including Satan, to meet our needs. It is better to be hungry in the will of God than fully outside of the will of God and to feel full. Once we start to doubt God's goodness, we will be attracted to Satan's offers and the natural desires within will reach out for the devil's bait.

**James 1:17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

God is absolutely reliable in every sense of the word.

**James 1:18** Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

So, in stark contrast with the morbid scene of death that descends from unbridled lust, is the bright scene of new life that emanates from the word of truth. Satan, the father of

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darkness, generates the offspring of sin and death. God, the Father of the heavenly lights, who created the stars and our universe, gives salvation and life and is unchanging. Shadows from the sun shift, but not the One who made the sun.

The way to resist temptation is found in a close relationship with the God the Father and His Son, with a constant response to His Word. One must trust in the unchangeable Father of lights and rely on His life-giving Word of truth. So Paul writes, here in Ephesians 1,

**Ephesians 1:13** In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

As human beings, we cannot imagine the power that exists in the Holy Spirit of God, the mind of God, and what it does for us in making us able to resist temptation and to overcome sin, Satan, and the world. We just cannot comprehend the amount of power there is but to be able to use that, we have to be close to God. The further away we are from God, it may be that there is less of the Holy Spirit we have to use, and there is also the principle 'If you don't use it, you'll lose it.'

There is no reason why one of God's chosen firstfruits have to yield to temptation; it is a choice, and we must learn to resist its deadly force or we can never grow into the spiritual maturity God desires of His children of light.

**Ephesians 5:8-14** For you were once darkness, and now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. [There is some work to be done.] And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which were done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

Come out of your stupor, come out of your spiritual sleep, and Christ will give you the light of understanding; He will enlighten your mind. So the light produces goodness, one manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, and goodness is love in action. Righteousness means rightness of character before God and rightness of actions before people. Both

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of these qualities are based on truth which is conformity to the word and will of God.

Now to “walk as children of light” means to live before the eyes of God, not hiding anything; and as you remember, Achan hid something because he knew he was sinning. It is relatively easy to hide things from other people because they cannot see your hearts and minds. But Hebrews 4:13 tells us: “There is no creature hidden from His sight [meaning God’s sight] but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” Achan forgot this and God exposed him.

Let us get back to the story of Achan. In no uncertain terms the Lord redirects Joshua’s attention to the true reason for Israel’s defeat. Israel has transgressed God’s covenant. Achan’s sin caused all Israel to sin as a family. When a sin is committed by a family member, it affects the whole family. So it is in the church; if one of us is committing an awful sin, it affects the entire church.

Look what happened in the Worldwide Church of God many years ago. There were many, many sins and there were many, many sins in the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God and it just led from one thing to another. First, the doctrines were rewritten and “clarified” which meant ‘weakened,’ ‘watered down’ and that was a domino effect from there and God exposed the sins of that organization; and He will again expose organizations that sin.

“They have taken some of the accursed things,” God says. That is they have stolen, lied. Put them among their own belongings, that is, they deceived. All were actions explicitly forbidden in the law of God. Adherence to that law was insisted on in the assurances given Joshua in Joshua 1:7 and 8. The actual individual perpetrator of these crimes was Achan, but the whole family pays the price as a covenant unit.

But in addition to the corporate responsibility inherent in a covenant community, there was also the apparent negligence of Joshua and Israel’s leaders in failing to seek divine direction for the Ai campaign. No wonder then that Israel cannot stand before their enemies. Israel was promised success on the condition that the people of Israel, both personally and corporately, would be faithful to the Lord. If the church is hurting today in any way, it is because some are not faithful to the Lord. Hopefully it is not all of us. So we must really work hard to make sure that we are faithful.

**Joshua 7:13-15** “Get up, sanctify the people [that is, set apart the people from the world], and say, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the Lord God of Israel: “There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the

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accursed thing from among you. In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the Lord takes shall come according to families; and the family which the Lord takes shall come by households; and the household which the Lord takes shall come man by man. Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.’ ”

Now remember the description of cremation. This is what the people witnessed—the crackling, the popping, the firecracker sounds—when Achan and his family were burned. The offending party, once discovered, is to be burned with fire because one who takes accursed things commits an outrageous act—an act of willful irreverent foolishness—and makes himself and all that he has liable to the same treatment as the accursed things.

Achan’s family must have known of his offense and thus rightly shared his fate. Achan’s offense is not a civil infraction for which he alone might be held responsible, but a religious one that defiled the whole camp and most especially those closest to him. It defiled the whole camp because it was a covenant relationship.

**Joshua 7:16-18** So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarahites; and he brought the family of the Zarahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

After the arousing success of Israel’s first victory in Canaan, the opening summary of Joshua 7 has an ominous ring, as we have already discovered. But the people of Israel broke faith. While Achan is the actual perpetrator, Israel, as a covenant community, is held responsible for the presence of sin in its midst. And the same holds true for the church. This is why Paul reprimanded the Corinthian church for not dealing with the sin, in I Corinthians 5. The church’s sin was pride at their tolerance of sin.

So Achan’s stealing of the accursed things arouses the anger of God and leads to Israel’s first defeat in the land of Canaan. Despite his fine Israelite pedigree of the tribe of Judah, Achan begins the Canaanization of Israel. That is part of the reason it was

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such a serious sin in God's eyes. Achan begins the Canaanization of Israel. He began idolatry in Israel in the Promised Land. His idolatry led him to covet, steal, and lie. Achan was on a roll for breaking all of God's commandments at that point and had to be dealt with.

The main object of the Canaanite worship was the sun god who was addressed by the general name 'Baal' meaning lord or master. Each locality had its special Baal. There were various local Baals. There were some under the name 'Baalim' meaning 'lords.'

The secret sins of life are going to be brought to light at the final judgment but it does not always take that long for sin to be exposed; it took only a short time in the case of Achan. At God's command, lots were drawn by which one tribe out of the 12 Israelite tribes was selected and then one clan out of the numerous clans of that tribe, followed by one family out of the clan, and finally one person out of the various people in that family. The chosen person was Achan of the family of Zimri, of the clan Zerah, of the tribe of Judah.

**Joshua 7:19-21** Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

Notice there, in verse 21: He "saw" among the spoils that beautiful Babylonian garment—that was temptation—and then "I coveted." There is this desire and the sin; and then he "took"—another sin of stealing—and then "hidden in the earth"—there is another sin, the sin of deceit; it was a lie.

So we see Achan followed the same process towards sin that James spelled out for us there in committing that terrible sin that he did. The story then continues in what I think are the most chilling words of the account.

**Joshua 7:22-23** So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord.

That is the same thing that is going to happen at the Great White Throne judgment—all the sins will be laid out before the Lord. The stolen objects were displayed before the people. But the most frightening part of the story is that they were spread out before the Lord. They were spread before the eyes of the holy God, as all sin is.

The story ends with the death of Achan as the people of Israel stoned him and his entire family as punishment for the sin that brought defeat on the army and dishonor to the name of God. After this, the blessing of God returned to Israel and Ai was destroyed.

We see in this story the process towards sin and death—in temptation, desire, sin, then death. Joshua is, as we have seen, a bridge between the years of wandering and the years of settlement between preparation and possession. The existence of the written Word of God is evidence of the unchanging power of God and the presence of the supernatural leader, Jesus Christ, with the Israelites and who is with us today as the church.

To this He added the continuity of the covenant. Here there is a continuity of judgment. When Achan sinned, the blessings of God stopped for the people corporately. When judgment was applied, blessing returned, and victory followed. This same principle applies to the church today.

By the way, I do not know of any sins being committed in this church, either individually or corporately. So I am not accusing anyone or accusing any church of doing this. I just know human nature and know that it exists and so I feel strongly that we should be warned that it is there.

This simple yet profound process explains all the rest of the Old Testament. It explains the period of the judges, the period of the kings, the captivities under Syria and Babylon, the Jews' return from Babylon, and the Jews' dispersion in AAD 70 under Titus. It explains Romans 9 through 11, which speaks of the Israelites turning away from God, Israel's rejection of God, and of the yet-future day of coming back to God and once more as a nation being the people of God. Israel's relationship cycle with God repeats itself all through history. It has a characteristic, a tendency, and a cycle that is followed.

First comes blessing, then sin enters, then comes judgment. If the people of God returned to Him after the judgment, the blessing begins again and flows on. That is been the cycle of Israel's history. This process is the principle of God's judgment of His people. It is unchanging throughout Scripture because God really is there. God is a holy God and God loves His people, and God deals with His people consistently. God is

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actively raising His children as a spiritual Father.

In the New Testament we see the principle of the story of Ananias and Saphira, who were judged by God for their sin of lying to the leaders of the early church about the sale of their land and the gift of a portion of that to God's work. This continuity extends to our own time also.

In our time we see it in the defeated and discouraged lives of many who have sinned but who have never brought their sin to God for cleansing. It is seen in the lives of those who think they do not need God because they are so blessed. First comes blessing; then, if we are not careful to resist temptation and desire, then sin; and then judgment.

Now if the story of Achan and the defeat of the Israelite army at Ai means anything to us, it must mean that sin cannot be tolerated in the Christian life. But although this is a story of judgment, it is also a proclamation of hope for the blessing that will come again when sin is repudiated.

Let us remember something that occurs in the book of the minor prophet, Hosea. Like the seventh chapter of Joshua, Hosea is a story of God's judgment. It is the story of judgment in the life of the unfaithful wife Hosea married, a wife whose betrayal of Hosea represented the unfaithful actions of the people of Israel during the days of Hosea's ministry. It is also a warning to the church.

In the story of the judgment of God on Gomer, Hosea's wife, the grimmest part is where God speaks of three judgments. Each one is prefaced with the word "therefore" which makes them more or less parallel. Because of Gomer's unfaithfulness, God warns that He is going to do three things:

First, in Hosea 2:6, God is going to block her path with thornbushes and wall her in so that she cannot find her way. This means that God was going to bring her up short so that she could not obtain her desires, just as He does with us when we choose the path of disobedience rather than submission.

Second, in Hosea 2:9, God says that He is going to take away "My grain when it ripens and My new wine when it is ready." It means that God will begin to deprive His disobedient child of necessities.

The third time the word "therefore" occurs in Hosea is Hosea 2:14-15. It is linked to the Valley of Achor, a direct reference to the story of Achan and his death by stoning. Achan and Achor have similar spellings and the place of Achan's death was called Achor. This

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is the pun with his name because Achor means 'trouble' or 'disaster' which was what Achan brought upon Israel and received back on his own head at the time of his stoning.

**Joshua 7:24-26** Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? [That word 'troubled' is the word 'Achor.' So it is "Why have you 'Achored' us?"] The Lord will trouble [that is, Achor] you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones [all that lived there, in addition to Achan]. Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day.

Please turn over to Hosea 2. We are going to read verses 14 and 15. When we come to this point in the story, it is somewhat frightening. The Valley of Achor was a place of death and this seems to be the point to which the judgments on Gomer were heading: first, frustration; then depravation. What is left with the ultimate judgment? The death of the one who has been sinning. But right here, the inexplicable grace and mercy of God come in because although we expect the worst for Gomer, what the text actually says at this point is:

**Hosea 2:14-15** Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor [remember, literally 'troubling'—the 'Valley of Troubling'] as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt."

What does God mean when He says, "I will give her the Valley of Achor as a door of hope"? Since Achor means "troubling," then the phrase that contains it—"the Valley of Achor"—means obviously the valley of troubling. It occurs five times in the Bible. The first two are in Joshua 7:24-25, which we read in connection with the story of Achan and his sin when the people of Israel had conquered Jericho in the first wave of their invasion of the Promised Land.

As we have discussed, Achan had taken spoil of Jericho but the people had been told

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by God they were not to do so. For this they lost the next battle at Ai. "What was wrong?" they asked. At last, an investigation was made of the sin of Achan and the sin of Achan was discovered and judged. Achan and his family were stoned in the Valley of Achor, which took its name from the incident in Joshua 7.

The third time it is mentioned in Scripture is in Joshua 15:7 and that is merely as a border in Judah. The fourth time this valley is mentioned is in Isaiah 65:10, when He speaks of a day when it will become a resting place for herds "for My people who have sought Me"—the valley of hope. And then the fifth time, is here in Hosea 2:15. The place of troubling is to become a place of hope for God's people.

God takes sin very seriously, as I have mentioned already, and sin is the real cause of weakening and, if it were possible, defeat for God's people. But God provides the spiritual power to overcome and the hope to energize us to resist sin, endure trials, and persevere in suffering.

Please turn with me, finally, to John 12. How can a troubling place with such swift judgment be hopeful? How can the destructive troubling be changed? We certainly cannot change it ourselves but there is One who can and who does. God sets hope before us when all seems most lost. He does it by taking our trouble upon Himself.

You remember those words of Christ in the final hours prior to His death as He thought ahead to all that would take place on the stake.

**John 12:27** "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour."

And again, we are told that Jesus was troubled in spirit.

**John 13:21** When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me."

Why was Jesus troubled? He was troubled in our place. God troubled Him with our sin that we might be saved from it and be brought back to God. It is on the basis of His death for that sin that He can now say to us what is recorded in John 14:

**John 14:27** "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world

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gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Yes, sin brings judgment. But God often graciously uses the judgment to bring about change in us that enables Him to turn what otherwise would be the greatest of all judgments into a blessing of hope. Who can turn the Valley of Achor into a door of hope? We certainly cannot. But Jesus Christ can and does, and He has done it by taking Achor’s trouble upon Himself. He was troubled for us. He went down into that dark valley of judgment, dying in our place, in order that He might raise us up in hope by His death and resurrection.

Psalm 33:22 tells us: Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in You.

May our source of hope, Jesus Christ, return soon!