Achan’s Sin



Scripture Reference: Joshua 6:18-19; 7:1-8:1

Suggested Theme: God knows everything. We cannot hide our sins from God.

Memory Verse: “The Lord’s eyes see everything that happens. He watches both evil and good people.” Proverbs 15:3, ICB

Story Overview:

Because Joshua believed the Lord would help the Israelites win another battle, he led the people in attacking the city of Ai. Israel lost miserably. The Lord told Joshua that one of the Israelites had taken things for himself during the battle of Jericho instead of devoting them to the Lord. Soldiers found a robe, silver and gold, that a man named Achan had buried and hidden inside his tent. Achan was stoned outside the city. The Lord then told Joshua to attack Ai again. This time, the Israelites won the battle. Achan thought he could hide his sin from the Lord, but he was wrong.

Background Study:

The first verse in the passage (Joshua 7:1) sums up the whole story. The rest of the passage contains the details of the situation. It is interesting that all of Israel is held accountable for one man’s sin. In modern society, we often value individuality to the point that we do not feel responsible in any way for our fellow man. God looks at His people individually and also as a group. This becomes very clear in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and follows in reference to the Church.

Not realizing there was sin in his own camp, Joshua continued to lead the campaign to claim the land for Israel. Nothing is mentioned about inquiring from the Lord before he made plans. He sent spies to the city of Ai, so he could plan a strategy. Ai would have been about fifteen miles from Jericho. It would have been a steep climb because Ai is at a higher elevation. The spies greatly underestimated the forces needed for battle. They suggested that Joshua only dispatch two or three thousand men to conquer the city. Joshua sent three thousand troops, and they were soundly defeated and humiliated.

Joshua’s shock and grief were intense. He did not understand what the Lord was doing. First, the seemingly impossible city of Jericho was conquered by marching, trumpets, and shouting and then a seemingly easy-to-conquer city defeated and humiliated the army of Israel.

It is not specifically stated how the guilty person would be singled out. A process of elimination is used. Perhaps lots were drawn. First, the tribe of Judah was singled out. Then it was narrowed down to the clan of Zerahites from the tribe of Judah. The Zerahite family of Zimri was then brought forward. Finally, it all came down to a man named Achan.

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When Joshua faced him, Achan confessed all. He told Joshua that he stole a robe, silver and gold, that was originally from Babylon when Israel conquered Jericho. The gold and silver had obvious monetary value. Jericho was a great city, and a Babylonian robe from there would have been considered chic (fashionable and stylish) and would have given him honour. He had ignored the Lord's command to devote everything from Jericho to the Lord. Achan confessed what he had done (Joshua 7:21). Achan might have thought no one would ever know, but the Lord knew. We cannot hide our sin from the Lord (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Achan and his children were stoned, and their bodies burned. It seems a harsh punishment to us. But Achan's sin had caused Israel to lose face before the nations and to lose faith in their cause. He was also responsible for the death of 36 soldiers. Most importantly, he directly defied the Lord's commands. It certainly points out how serious the Lord is about sin. Since Jewish law prohibited innocent family members from being put to death for the sins of their family members (Deuteronomy 24:16), Achan's children must have been guilty of assisting him in his sin.

After Achan was reckoned with, the Lord instructed Joshua to take the city of Ai. Jericho had been taken miraculously with no attack. Ai was won through hard fighting and total military commitment from Israel's army. The Lord does not work the same in every situation.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Hide something in the room and let the children find it. Try to make it challenging. Alternatively, you could show a "hidden picture" book and let the children locate the hidden pictures. "In today's story, we are going to learn about someone who tried to hide something. He was not playing a game. He hid something because he had stolen it. He thought no one would ever find it. He even thought that God would never find it! Let's see what happened."

The Story:

Do you remember how the Lord helped the Israelites win the battle of Jericho? The Israelites followed God's instructions, and the big walls around the city just fell down and crumbled. The Israelites rushed in and captured the city. Jericho had lots of gold, silver, and riches. Joshua told the Israelites that they were not to keep any of the gold, silver, or riches for themselves. They were to give it all to God for the Tabernacle. Joshua thought that's what all of the Israelites did.

After the battle of Jericho, Joshua led his people to the next city, the city of Ai. Joshua sent spies to see how strong Ai was.

The spies saw how big the city of Ai was, but they were not afraid. "Remember how we beat Jericho? The spies said, "We're so strong. We just need a few men to conquer Ai."

When the spies told Joshua that only a few soldiers were needed, he sent only a small army of 3000 men to fight the thousands of people in the city of Ai. When the Israelite army attacked the city, the people of Ai fought very hard and beat them. Thirty-six of God's people died that day.

Joshua was very upset! He tore his clothes and fell to the ground. He prayed to the Lord and cried at the same time: "Oh Lord, why have we lost this battle? You helped us win against Jericho, but now we have lost to Ai. All of our enemies will laugh at us and try to hurt us."

"Stand up, Joshua," the Lord said, "you have lost the battle because someone in your army has disobeyed Me. Remember how I told the people to put all of the riches from Jericho in the Tabernacle? All of those riches were mine. Someone kept some of the riches for themselves. They have kept them hidden. They have forgotten that I can see everything."

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Even though only one person had sinned, that person was making all of the Israelites suffer. The Lord told Joshua to gather all of the people together. The Lord would show Joshua who had sinned.

Early the next morning, Joshua called all of the people together and told them what the Lord said. Nothing can be hidden from God. God knows who had disobeyed Him. No one came forward and admitted that they had sinned, so Joshua ordered all of the people to walk before him. Each of the twelve tribes walked before Joshua. When the tribe of Judah came before Joshua, the Lord showed that the guilty person was from that tribe. Still, no one confessed.

Next, each of the clans (or big families) of the tribe of Judah walked before Joshua. The clan of the Zerahites was chosen. No one came forward to admit they had sinned. They still thought they could hide their sin from God.

All of the Zerahites walked in front of Joshua, and the Lord showed that the guilty person was from the family of a man named Zabdi. When no one in the family admitted their sin, the Lord finally revealed that a man from Zabdi's family had kept some of Jericho's riches. That man's name was Achan.

Achan finally admitted that he had stolen some things from Jericho. He had wanted to keep them for himself instead of putting them in the Tabernacle for the Lord. He thought that he could hide the things he stole and that no one would ever find out. He forgot that the Lord sees everything. Nothing can be hidden from the Lord. Achan told Joshua that the things he had stolen were buried inside his tent. Soldiers quickly went to his tent and found a beautiful robe, silver and gold, where he had hidden them.

This was a very serious thing that Achan did. Bad things were happening to all of Israel because of what Achan had done. Because he had stolen from the Lord and had tried to hide it, he was punished. He and his family (who had presumably helped him hide the riches) were taken out of the city and stoned.

The battle of Jericho was won because the people obeyed the Lord. The battle of Ai was lost because the people did not obey the Lord. Now, the Lord told Joshua that it was time to fight Ai again. This time, the Lord helped Israel win the battle because all of the people wanted to obey God.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

View this slideshow and download it from the original source: http://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/joshua-achan/

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What was Achan's sin? (He stole treasure from Jericho and hid it for himself instead of giving it to the Lord)
- Because Achan sinned, what happened when the Israelites attacked Ai? (They did not defeat the city, and 36 Israelite men died)
- How did Joshua find out who the guilty person was? (The Lord showed him)
- Achan thought that no one, not even God, would know about his sin of keeping the special objects from Jericho. Was Achan right or wrong about this?
- After Achan was punished, what happened when the Israelites attacked Ai? (They won the battle)
- What did you learn about God from this story?
- What do you think the Israelites learned when they watched what happened to Achan and his family for their sin?

Reflection:

- What do you think the robe, silver and gold that Achan kept looked like?
- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What question do you have for God about this story?
- God had just helped Israel defeat Jericho, something that was incredible because of God's miracle of breaking the Jericho wall and because Jericho was a big city. How do you think the Israelites felt when they lost the battle against Ai, a smaller city? How did Joshua feel?
- What do you think the things Achan stole looked like? How much do you think they were worth?
- Joshua told the Israelites not to keep anything from Jericho for themselves but to give it all to God in the tabernacle. Why do you think Achan kept the things from Jericho anyway?
- Imagine you are in a place where there are lots of beautiful, expensive objects around. You know it is wrong to keep the items for yourself. You are supposed to give them to God. Would you obey this command, or would you be tempted to keep the pretty, expensive items?
- Is there something you've done wrong secretly and thought that no one would know about it? God knows everything, even the things we do in secret. Let's take time to ask God to forgive us. We know God will forgive us if we ask Him to with a sincere heart. (Give the children time to pray and ask forgiveness for anything on their hearts)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- 1-2-3 The Devil's After Me Song

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- Shake the Devil Off Song
- My God is So Big Song
- Goodbye World Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Write sins on cards (lying, stealing, swearing, etc.), hide the cards around the room and let children find them. Parallel this to Achan trying to hide his sin.
- Discuss when you or someone you know thought they were getting away with something but were discovered.
- Write “good secrets” and “bad secrets” on the white/chalkboard. Ask the children to list some and then discuss them. Examples might be good secrets, such as a surprise birthday party, Christmas gift, doing something nice for someone and not telling them who did it, etc. Bad Secrets- doing something that is wrong and not telling, not telling someone something that could help them, hiding things that break the law or that could hurt someone or make them unhappy, anything that makes you lie to keep it hidden is a bad secret; any time someone tells you to keep something from your parents is a bad secret, and you should tell your parents.) Warning: Treat this very carefully. It is a sad fact that even children in the church can be abused or mistreated and then told to keep it a secret. Be sensitive and alert to any situation in the lives of your children. Although you will not be talking about child abuse to young children today, if you become aware of any such situation, you are obligated to that child not to ignore or keep that secret.
- Use the images below or download this Achan Flip Chart to tell the story. Samer Samlertaree created the flip chart for http://www.missionbibleclass.org.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Before the session begins, write the following words along the bottom edge of a paper. “God knows everything about me. I can talk to him about anything. Proverbs 15:3” Invite children to draw shapes of their choice on the paper (circles, squares, etc.) They can then proceed to write or draw things inside the shapes that they would like to talk to God about. Add embellishments to the page if you wish. Finish the activity with a prayer.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page of Hebrews 13:5 (Childrens Chapel)
- Worksheet: Achan’s sin word search (Word Search Fun)
- Other: Lesson plan (Bible Lessons 4 Kidz)
- Other: Various activities including devotional, power point, & crafts (Bible Lessons 4 Kidz)

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