

General Church Education



An Israelite Steals from the Lord

Joshua 7

Lesson 9

Jacob's Ladder Religion Lessons

Level 4: The Lord Is the Hero

For ages 9-10

An Israelite Steals from the Lord

Joshua 7

For Parents and Teachers

After the victory at Jericho, Joshua's spies thought Israel could easily take Ai, the next city, with a small force. But the three thousand men who attacked were immediately driven back in defeat. Joshua's impulse was to blame the Lord, but the Lord revealed that the defeat was the result of hidden sin. One of the fighting men had stolen goods from Jericho and hid them in his belongings. Lots were drawn, and Achan was found out. He confessed to coveting and stealing a garment, silver and gold. As a consequence, everything belonging to Achan was taken out of the camp and destroyed.

Victory was won at Jericho because Israel obeyed the Lord. Defeat at Ai followed because one man disobeyed and secretly stole from the spoils and hid them in his tent. Achan's theft was serious. The Lord had commanded that all spoils should be destroyed, or given to the Lord. Achan couldn't resist keeping some things for himself. His act is like our choice to get rid of some faults but hang on to a few sinful behaviors that "look good" to us. Like Achan, we may hide evils, believing nothing will happen. But in the end, *all* must be destroyed. To decide by lot is to let the Lord's truth be the judge. First general principles are identified, and then specific evils. When all are rooted out, we can return to the battle.

Ideas for Children

- The Israelites were to consult the Lord when going into battle and acknowledge that all victories were His.
- The Lord gives us victory over evil when we look to Him and obey His Word.
- Achan's theft and lies picture our tendency to hang on to and excuse our faults.

From the Writings

'Ai' means knowledges of worldly things. See *Arcana Coelestia* 1453.4.

Profanation and a consequent removal of goodness and truth are meant in the spiritual sense by the action of Achan, who took some of 'the devoted things'—a mantle of Shinar, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold—and hid them in the earth in the middle of his tent, on account of which he was stoned and everything was burned, as described in Joshua. Jehovah said to Joshua, Israel has sinned. They have transgressed My covenant which I commanded them, and have taken some of that which was devoted. They have committed theft, have lied, and have put it among their own vessels. 'The devoted things' meant falsities and evils, which were not on any account to be mixed with anything holy. 'A mantle of Shinar, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold' in the spiritual sense are specific types of falsity. 'Hiding them in the earth in the middle of the tent' meant a mingling with things that are holy—for 'a tent' means that which is holy. Such was the meaning of the declaration that they had committed theft, lied, and put what was devoted among their own vessels; for 'vessels' means holy truths. See *Arcana Coelestia* 5135.6.

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Vocabulary

trespass—sin

accursed—condemned, evil

disgraceful—blameworthy, offensive

When the children of Israel attacked the city of Jericho, they destroyed everything in it except the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron. These were to be put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. Rahab and her family were also saved because they helped Israel.

The Lord gave Israel victory in the battle, but one of the Israelites, Achan, from the tribe of Judah, disobeyed the Lord. He broke the rule that all treasure taken in battle belonged to Jehovah. He took some treasures from Jericho for himself. The children of Israel suffered serious consequences because Achan was disobedient.

The First Attack on Ai

Ai was a city just fifteen miles north and west of Jericho. It is near Bethel, which means “house of bread”. Important things had happened in Bethel many years before. Abram was in Bethel when the Lord told him to look north, south, east and west, after promising him the land. Jacob, Abram’s grandson, was in Bethel when he dreamed of a ladder to heaven while he slept.



Ai was the next city the children of Israel were to destroy to take the land of Canaan. Joshua prepared to attack by sending men to spy out the city. The spies came back and reported that the city was not strong. They thought a small force of two or three thousand men could easily take it. They did not think all Israel’s warriors should get tired by fighting. Joshua did not ask the Lord what he should do, and he listened to the spies.

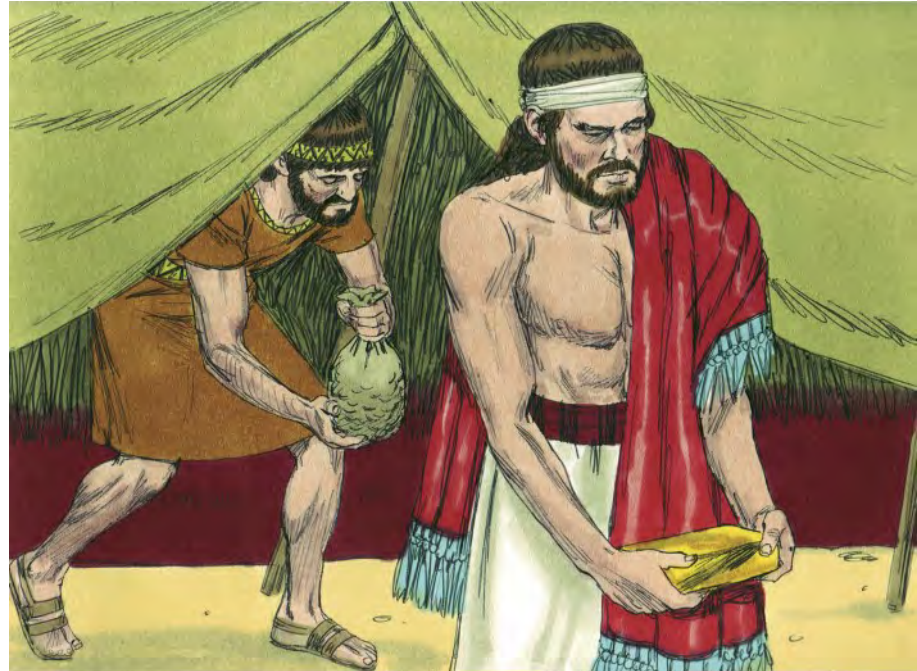
Read Joshua 7:1-3.

But instead of the victory they expected, the attack went wrong.

Read Joshua 7:4-9 to find out what happened.

Joshua Blames the Lord

Overcome with fear, disappointment, and grief, Joshua tore his clothes and put dust on his head, which was a sign of mourning. He fell down before the Lord and cried out:



Why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites?

Joshua's reaction was to be angry with the Lord, to blame Him for the defeat. It's easy to look for someone to blame when we fail.

Joshua needed to hear an important truth. The Lord told him that the battle had been lost because Israel had committed a trespass or sin. Someone had "taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff." (Joshua 7:11) Even though the guilty person hid what he stole, the Lord knew what had happened.

Read Joshua 7:10-13.

Finding the Guilty Man

The Lord told Joshua to find the person who had sinned by drawing lots. We do not know exactly how this was done. If we were to draw lots we might put twelve pieces of paper in a pot. Eleven pieces of paper would be unmarked, and the twelfth would have a dot on it. Twelve people would choose a piece of paper. The person who picked the paper with the dot on it would be "chosen" by lot.

Read how this was done in Joshua 7:14-19.

When Israel cast lots, Achan was chosen. Joshua spoke tenderly to Achan, and he confessed. The treasures he had hidden in the earth in the middle of his tent were found. Achan and his whole family were punished for what he had done.

Read Joshua 7:20-26.

Punishing Achan's family may seem cruel, but the Lord wants us to learn something through this story. When we break the Ten Commandments the Lord wants us to search our hearts to find

out what caused the trouble. If we ask His help, He will show us what caused the trouble so we can get rid of it. We must also get rid of any wrong ideas that came from what we did. These ideas are like “Achan’s family”. Imagine a person secretly taking something that is not theirs, and then lying to cover it up. The lies are like “Achan’s family”. We must not steal, and we must also hunt out the bad thoughts, like lying, that follow what we have done and get rid of them as well.

When we do something wrong, the Lord asks us to look at our hearts to see what we have done, stop doing it, and try again to do what is right. We must not only say we are sorry, but get rid of the bad thoughts and feelings that “look good” to us, just as stealing the treasures looked good to Achan.

In our next lesson we will find out what happened once the accursed things were removed and Joshua and the people tried to take Ai a second time.

Discussion Questions

- Compare the way Joshua prepared to attack Ai in Joshua 7, with the way Joshua prepared to attack Jericho in Joshua 6. In what ways were the preparations similar? In what ways were they different?
- Why did Joshua think the children of Israel would be able to take the city of Ai easily?
- Can you think of a time when feeling overly confident made you prepare inadequately for an important test or event? What happened?
- Who did Joshua blame for the failure of the attack? Was he right?
- God’s laws are spiritual laws. Can you name one of God’s laws we are to obey? What happens if you act against it?
- Some laws are moral rules. These have to do with what we believe in our conscience is right and wrong. Can you think of something you believe that is right or wrong? What happens in your mind if you act against it?
- Some laws are legal rules. These have to do with the laws of the country. Can you think of one of these laws? What is the consequence of breaking one of these laws?
- Achan stole silver and gold that was to be given to the Lord. Like Achan, we are to give the Lord credit for the strength and love He gives us during our spiritual battles. He is the one who defends us from evil. How might you give credit to the Lord?
- In what ways can people end up benefiting from mistakes they’ve made?
- Why does it seem that some people get away with doing what’s wrong?

Activity Overview | An Israelite Steals from the Lord

Recitation

Learn the recitation by heart.

Lord, who may abide in Your Tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?
He who walks uprightly,
And speaks righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart. Psalm 15:1,2

Projects

Choose one or two activities.

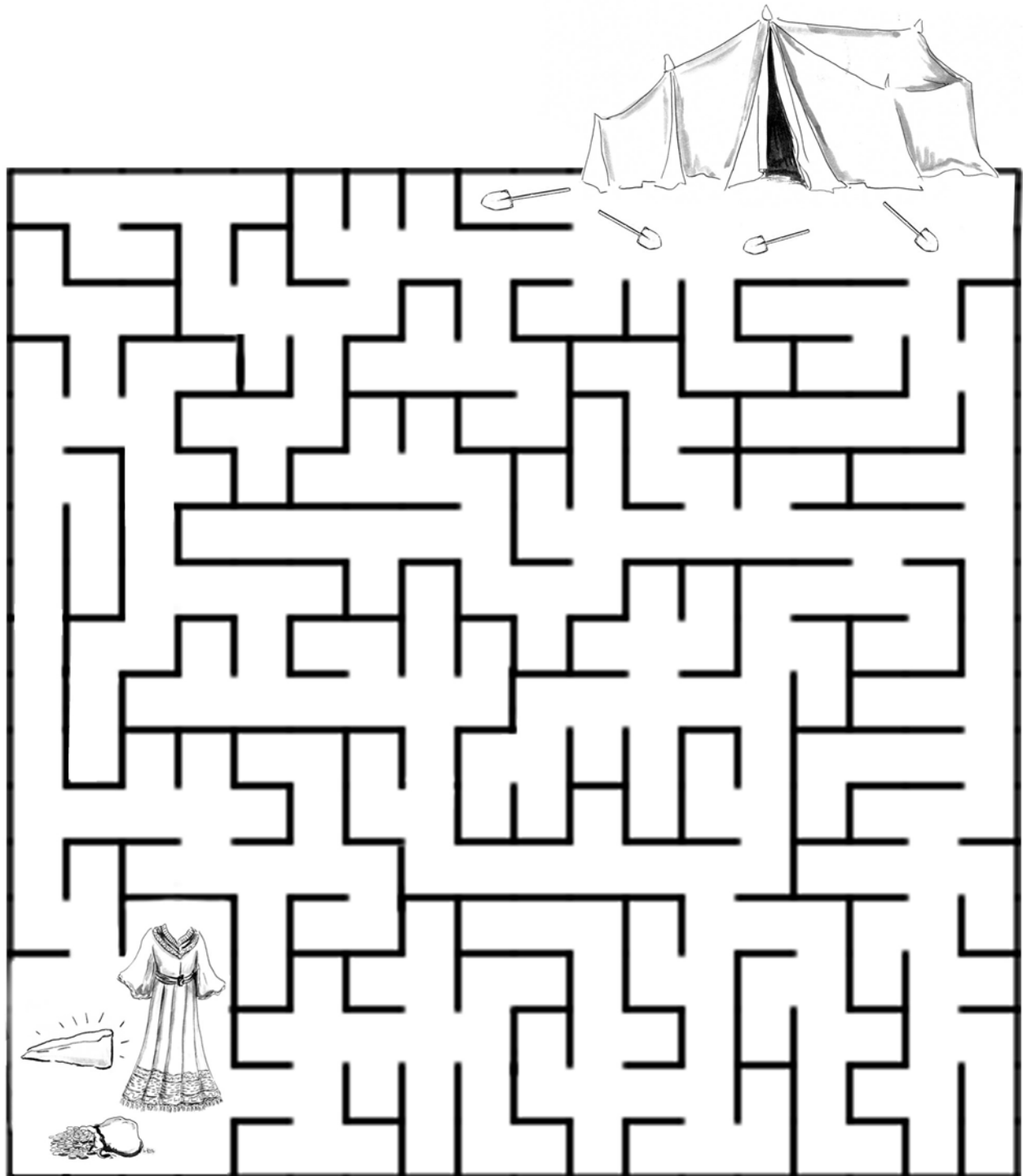
- Achan's Tent Maze
- What's the Problem?
- Picture to color—Achan's Theft (Joshua 7)

Additional Activity Ideas

- Have you ever taken something and hidden it? Did anyone discover what happened? How did things work out for you?
- Hide something such as a toy, book, or favorite food. Think about whether you want someone to find it easily, or to make it difficult to find. Invite someone to look for it.
- For additional review questions about Achan's go to <https://www.newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-achans-sin-review-questions-joshua07.pdf>.
- The Word offers many examples of people who obeyed the Lord, and people who disobeyed Him. Discover who chose to follow the Lord, and who chose to not to through a fill-in-the-blank activity online at <https://www.newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-who-obeyed-or-disobeyed-the-lord.pdf>.

Activity 1 | Achan's Tent Maze

Help Joshua and the children of Israel discover why they could not defeat the city of Ai. Follow the maze to discover what is hidden under Achan's tent.



Activity 2 | What's the Problem?

Achan couldn't resist keeping something for himself when Jericho was destroyed. The Lord had forbidden everyone from taking *anything* for themselves. Achan thought he could get away with doing this by hiding what he took in his tent, under the ground. But his theft caused a terrible problem. What kinds of attitudes might be problems for us, in our own journey following the Lord to heaven? Read the sentences below and choose a word from the word bank that names each problem. Write the word in the blank. Discuss why these attitudes might cause problems.

greedy	rude	disobedient
coveting	vain	hateful
selfish	mean	dishonest

1. I don't care what you think. _____
2. I look better than everyone. _____
3. I don't have to do what my parent has told me to. _____
4. Who cares if I eat it all? _____
5. She/he is such a loser. _____
6. I don't need to hold the door for anyone. _____
7. Give me that! I saw it first. _____
8. You've had it long enough. It's mine. _____
9. Nobody saw me do it. I'll hide the evidence. _____

