



The Other Side of Faithfulness

Topic

God's faithfulness

Theme

God's faithfulness extends to His warnings about His judgment of sin.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will examine his life for indicators that he tolerates sin in his life.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 9

▶ Scripture Focus

Joshua 7; 8

Summary

Achan tested God's faithfulness to His warnings about His judgment of sin. God proved faithful and Achan experienced God's righteous anger.

Outline

- I. Achan Tested God's Faithfulness (7:1)
- II. Joshua Assumed Israel's Faithfulness (7:2–4a)
- III. God Demonstrated His Faithfulness (7:4b, 5)
- IV. Joshua Questioned God's Faithfulness (7:6–9)
 - A. Joshua's first question (7:7a)
 - B. Joshua's second question (7:7b)
 - C. Joshua's third question (7:8)
 - D. Joshua's fourth question (7:9)
- V. God Exposed Achan's Unfaithfulness (7:10–26)
 - A. God defended His actions (7:10–12)
 - B. God provided for Israel's restoration (7:13–26)

Memory Verse

*"Let your conversation be without covetousness;
and be content with such things as ye have:
for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).*

GETTING STARTED

The Bark Is Worse . . .

Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about! Turn that TV off right now or I'm going to throw it out the window! I brought you into this world and I can take you out! Don't make me pull this car over!

ASK: What are some phrases your parents barked at you as warnings for not following their instructions? (Q1)

ASK: Was their bark worse than their bite? Explain. (Q2)

God gave Israel clear commands (e.g., the Ten Commandments) as part of the Mosaic Covenant. He also gave them specific commands to obey as they took the Promised Land. Along with His commands He warned Israel about how He would judge them for disobeying Him. This lesson helps us understand that God's faithfulness extends to His warnings about His judgment of disobedience. A man named Achan found that out the hard way.

All Bark

Display the picture of the snarling wolf showing his teeth (visual 1, part 1).

ASK: On a scale of one to ten with ten being extremely seriously, how seriously would you take a threat from this wolf?

Display the picture of the snarling, toothless wolf (visual 1, part 2).

ASK: On the same scale of one to ten, how seriously would you take a threat from this wolf?

ASK: What happens when people bark threats but never follow through on them? *Their threats become as non-threatening as the bark of a toothless dog.*

A man name Achan believed God's warnings about disobedience were no more threatening than the bark of a toothless dog. He found out otherwise. This lesson shows that God's faithfulness extends to His warnings about His judgment of sin.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Achan Tested God's Faithfulness (7:1)

God took Achan's disobedience seriously, considering it a sin of the *children of Israel* (7:1). The nation was responsible for policing itself. They were in a covenant *together* with God. If they disobeyed Him, they would suffer as a nation. Consequently, they were responsible for dealing with sin in their camp.

Achan's sin is described as both a *trespass* and a *cursed thing*. To *trespass* means to act unfaithfully or treacherously. The term *cursed thing* was often used to describe sins of sexual perversion, which included adulterous relationships. The

person committing the *cursed thing* showed a disregard for the sacred. The emphasis with both terms is unfaithfulness. Consequently, the narrative of the failed attack on Ai contrasts Achan's unfaithfulness with God's faithfulness. It teaches that God's faithfulness extends to His warnings about sin.

Achan knew God's warning about taking spoils from Jericho. The spoils belonged to God (6:19). Joshua called the plunders *accursed* (6:18). The word he used could be translated *devoted*, meaning the goods were to be set apart to God.

READ: Joshua 6:18, 19. **ASK:** What reasons might Achan have used for stealing what God so clearly said belonged to Him? (Q3) *He was just one person; his sin would be too small to affect the nation; as a soldier he deserved a cut of the plunder; God wouldn't care about missing such an insignificant portion of the plunder.*

By stealing the goods, Achan put God to the test to see if He would really bring Israel trouble for stealing treasures from Jericho. Would God be faithful to His warnings about sin? Achan didn't think so. Could God be taken advantage of since He obviously loved Israel and promised the nation such wonderful blessings? Achan counted on it. He essentially believed God would be unfaithful to His warning about stealing the plunder while remaining faithful to His promises to bless Israel. The error of that belief soon became evident.

II. Joshua Assumed Israel's Faithfulness (7:2–4a)

The terrain between Jericho and Ai was not easy to traverse. It included a rise in elevation of about thirty-three hundred feet over fifteen miles. For this reason, Joshua sent spies to check out the country (7:2). The spies observed both the terrain and the city of Ai, concluding that Ai's relatively small size would require only two or three thousand soldiers (7:3). Sending any more would tire the extra soldiers out unnecessarily. Erring on the side of caution, Joshua sent three thousand troops and fully expected them to bring Israel another rousing victory (7:4a).

The number of troops Joshua sent to Ai was not the contributing factor in Israel's eventual defeat. Their problem was neither overconfidence in their military nor a bad assessment of their enemy. Rather, Israel was overconfident in their faithfulness to God. Apparently Joshua and his leaders failed to ask whether all of Israel had been faithful to God after the attack on Jericho. Had all the soldiers refrained from taking the plunder that God had specifically commanded to be devoted to Him? The answer was *no*, but the leadership presumably didn't know that. The children of Israel should have been more diligent to make sure no one took plunder from Jericho. They should have trusted God to be faithful to his warning to bring them trouble for violating His command. Knowing God is *always* faithful to both His promises and warnings should have caused them to be overly cautious before moving on to attack Ai. At the very least, they should have inquired of the Lord concerning Israel's faithfulness as a nation.

III. God Demonstrated His Faithfulness (7:4b, 5)

God caused Israel's army to flee Ai's soldiers (7:4). Thirty-six soldiers died in the defeat (7:5). Ai's warriors struck them down as they chased Israel down the descent back to Israel's camp. Thirty-six casualties might seem like a rather inconsequential number, but remember the soldiers had family members. The soldiers

were fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers to their grieving loved ones. Naturally the mournful families had a downer effect on Israel's camp. The reverberating joy from the victory over Jericho was silenced as the thick, dark cloud of defeat settled over the camp. *The hearts of the people melted, and became as water* (7:5). The people's courage failed as they assumed their innocence and God's guilt. They believed He had failed them. And if they could not trust God to be faithful, then they were doomed to defeat and utterly hopeless.

READ: Joshua 2:8–11. **ASK:** Why did the hearts of the inhabitants of Jericho melt? (Q4) *They saw what God did for Israel and concluded their gods could not stand against the One Who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.*

In reality, Israel's defeat should have encouraged them to some degree. For it showed that God was indeed faithful. If He had let them defeat Ai, then He would have been proven *unfaithful*. His warning about heeding His command concerning the plunder of Jericho would have been exposed as merely a toothless threat. Instead of assuming God was unfaithful, the people should have examined themselves for unfaithfulness.

ASK: Why is it so dangerous to conclude that God has been unfaithful? (Q5) *It keeps a person from understanding any deficiencies on his part; it affects the person's relationship with God on all levels.*

IV. Joshua Questioned God's Faithfulness (7:6–9)

Before God talked to Joshua about the true cause of Israel's defeat, He allowed Joshua to voice his heart. The leader's words revealed what he thought might be the reasons for the devastating loss. All of his reasons either directly or indirectly questioned God's faithfulness.

Joshua began with an outward display of his inward feelings. He tore his clothes and put dust on his head to demonstrate his heartfelt remorse (7:6). He fell down before the ark of the covenant to vent his frustrations to God. His posture was a sign of his reverence for God, but his words betrayed his frustration with God.

A. Joshua's first question (7:7a)

First of all, Joshua thought that perhaps God had been unfaithful to His people (7:7a). He asked God why He had led them over the Jordan if He was going to allow them to be defeated. He questioned God's abilities and motives. Of course, God's track record was perfect. From the crossing of the Red Sea to the crossing of the Jordan, God had been found faithful in all His dealings with Israel.

ASK: Name some ways God showed His faithfulness to Israel as they traveled from the Red Sea to the Jordan River? (Q6) *God delivered Israel from Pharaoh's army, provided them with water, gave them food, kept their shoes from wearing out, and led them to military victories.*

Joshua had no prior evidence that God had ever been unfaithful to Israel. The idea was absurd. He had witnessed every one of God's faithful acts with Israel since Egypt.

READ: Joshua 7:7a. **ASK:** Which of God's abilities did Joshua essentially question? (Q7) *His power, sovereignty, wisdom.*

ASK: Which of God's character qualities did Joshua question? (Q8) *His love, faithfulness, and holiness.*

B. Joshua's second question (7:7b)

Secondly, Joshua questioned whether Israel had *pushed their luck* (7:7b). Had they already gone as far as they could with God? Should they have quit while they were ahead and been content to all live on the east side of the Jordan?

READ: Joshua 7:7b. **ASK:** What do you think of the idea that Israel would have been better off if they had quit the conquest and stayed on the east side of the Jordan? (Q9)

Israel would have *never* been better off by stopping short of obeying God in order to reduce their risk. Their safer and more blessed place was in the Promised Land. The death of Joshua's generation in the wilderness showed that to be true.

This second question of God's faithfulness was as offensive to God as the first one. For it was God Who led Israel across the Jordan. Regretting coming across the Jordan was a backdoor slam on God's leadership. It again showed a lack of faith in both God's abilities and character. And it was a roundabout way of blaming God for the thirty-six deaths in the battle with Ai.

For Joshua to be content to stay on the east side of the Jordan would not have been admirable. Neither would it have been a sign that he was a humble leader who loved God's people too much to put them in harm's way. To follow God into the Promised Land took a lot of faith and courage on his part. It meant stepping away from the comfortable side of the Jordan and into a place with high risk. Joshua exercised his faith by crossing the Jordan. He needed to continue to trust God fully. God had not changed, and He never would. Joshua was not going to find an answer for Israel's defeat in any deficiency on God's part.

ASK: Why is a cautious, better-safe-than-sorry attitude not a wise attitude to have when it comes to following God's leading? (Q10) *It limits both how far one will follow God and what God can do through a person. It shows a lack of faith in God's ability and character.*

Choosing to be content is wrong when the contentment violates God's will. God is not pleased with contentment when it is accompanied by a passive refusal to move forward and do His will.

C. Joshua's third question (7:8)

Thirdly, Joshua wondered out loud if Israel had lost courage (7:8). This question, like the first two, seems to point to God as a possible culprit in the defeat at Ai. Joshua asked what he should say when Israel turns its face from its enemy and runs. The question is meant to dissolve Joshua from blame. He is essentially saying

that the loss was not his fault. God failed to embolden Israel to stand their ground, fight the enemy, and win.

D. Joshua's fourth question (7:9)

Finally, Joshua expressed his concern for the nation's reputation and subsequently God's reputation (7:9). His concern was well founded. News of a defeat at the hands of little Ai could embolden the Canaanites and lead to the annihilation of Israel. Such a result would leave God with a tarnished reputation. Joshua, showing genuine concern, asked God what would become of His reputation.

READ: Joshua 7:9. **ASK:** What might you expect God to say to Joshua at this point? Would you expect Him to answer Joshua's questions? (Q11)

V. God Exposed Achan's Unfaithfulness (7:10–26)

A. God defended His actions (7:10–12)

God responded to Joshua by telling him to get up (7:10). Joshua's remorse and bewilderment would not bring a solution. God was not going to admit to any wrongdoing. God was not the problem. He laid the guilt squarely on Israel. *Israel hath sinned* (7:11). The emphasis in God's concise statement is on *Israel*. The repetition of the pronoun *they* following the statement further emphasizes Joshua's need to point his finger of blame in the direction of the people. Israel sinned by violating God's covenant with them. They lost the battle with Ai because they showed a lack of faith in God's warning about troubling them for their disobedience (7:12).

It was easy for Israel to trust God to bring them blessings. Believing He would bring trouble was not as easy. It was more palatable to view God as permissive and soft and as One Who applauds obedience and ignores disobedience. But God had never been like that with Israel, and He never would. Israel needed to learn that God is always faithful to His person and His promises. He could not violate His promise to punish their disobedience for doing so would have meant He was unfaithful to His person.

What did Israel do? Achan stole from God by taking goods from Jericho and by deceiving others into believing that all was well. The bounty he took was to be dedicated to God.

ASK: Why would stealing the bounty offend God personally? What did it say about Achan's trust in God? (Q12) *By stealing the bounty, Achan demonstrated that he didn't trust God to provide for his needs and to direct his life satisfactorily.*

Theft is the logical outworking of a lack of faith in God's character. A thief's actions communicate a lack of faith in God's trustworthiness and faithfulness. Achan stole directly from God, making it a doubly offensive sin.

The deception Achan employed in literally covering his sin showed his lack of trust in God's ability to punish and expose sin. The person who thinks he can get away with his sin has a very low view of God's abilities.

ASK: What does a deceiver believe about his abilities? (Q13) *He is able to control his circumstances and fulfill his desires.*

Because God is faithful to His word, Israel was doomed before their battle even began. God flat out told Joshua He would not go with Israel to battle until the accursed things were destroyed from their presence (7:12).

Knowing the problem was not a deficiency on God's part must have been encouraging to Joshua. But knowing that someone in the camp had sinned against God must have been equally discouraging.

B. God provided for Israel's restoration (7:13–26)

God gave Joshua a plan for identifying the culprit in the camp. The people were to begin by sanctifying themselves to God (7:13). To be sanctified to God is to set oneself apart for God's use. Sanctification includes surrendering to God's will and committing to accomplish it. Sanctification leaves no place for selfish desires and deceitful schemes. Once the people were sanctified, God would point out the tribe, the family, the household, and the man who was guilty (7:14). Joshua was then to burn the culprit and all his goods with fire because his actions transgressed God's covenant with Israel (7:15).

If Achan had truly sanctified himself to God, then he would have confessed his sin right away. Instead, he remained silent until the next day when God directed Joshua to the tribe of Judah, the family of the Zarahites, the household of Zabdi, and finally to Achan (7:16–18). Joshua confronted Achan and begged him to confess his sin. Achan broke his silence and admitted to sinning against the Lord by taking a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels (7:19–21). Achan's confession came only as he was singled out by God. He had plenty of time to admit his sin and come clean. His delay betrayed his yet hard heart. He confessed only because he was left with no other choice. True confession is proactive rather coercive.

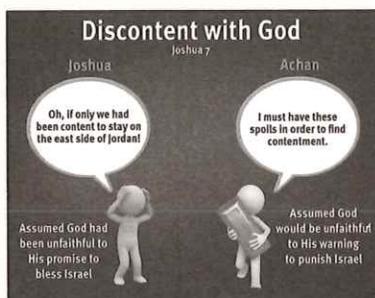
READ: Joshua 7:21. **ASK:** What directed Achan's actions? (Q14) *His covetous desires.*

Achan broke both the eighth and tenth commandments, both part of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 20ff), by desiring and then taking the goods from Jericho. He then practiced deception by burying the goods under his tent. Furthermore, by taking the spoils he essentially took partial credit for the victory. The spoils were his self-issued paycheck. By paying himself, Achan robbed God of His glory, which was to be Achan's focus as he participated in the conquest.

Notice that the subject of contentment arises again in the narrative. Earlier Joshua wished Israel had been *content* to stay on the other side of the Jordan. Such *contentment* would have been wrong because it would have born out of doubt that God would and could bless them in the Promised Land. Achan, on the other hand, was *discontent* and consequently disobeyed God's command concerning the spoils from Jericho. Of course his *discontentment* was wrong. Achan doubted God would be faithful to His warning about disobedience. Joshua's questioning and Achan's coveting were both born out of doubt in God's faithfulness.

RESOURCE: Display resource 9 to show how both Joshua and Achan doubted God's faithfulness.

Joshua sent men to dig up the treasure. They found it just as Achan had said



(7:22, 23). Joshua and all Israel took Achan, the treasures, all his possessions, and his family to the Valley of Achor where they stoned, burned, and buried them all. As a result, God's anger turned away from Israel (7:24–26).

ASK: What attributes did God demonstrate through His interaction with Achan? (Q15) *Omniscience, omnipotence, holiness, justice, righteous anger, faithfulness.*

God faithfully blessed Israel for their obedience. But He was just as faithful to follow through on His warnings about their disobedience, though sometimes He tempered His righteous anger with His patience and mercy.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

My God Is a Tolerant God?

As this course has made clear, we are not under the Mosaic Covenant with its accompanying promises of blessings for obedience and troubling circumstances for disobedience. But we do serve the same God. And His view of the seriousness of sin has not changed in this current dispensation. We must be careful not to view God as One Who tolerates a certain measure of disobedience in our lives.

ASK: What might be some indications that a person believes God tolerates disobedience? (Q16) *He rarely confesses his sin to God; takes no proactive steps to overcoming sin; accepts his sin as just part of who he is.*

ASK: Which, if any, of those indicators are apparent in your life? (Q17)

ASK: What might help you to trust that God is faithful to His warnings concerning sin? (Q18)

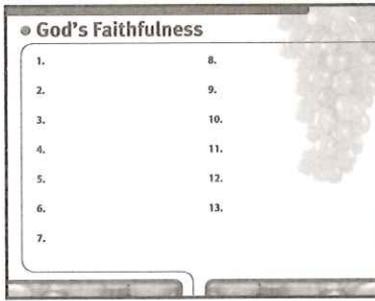
I Want What You Have!

God's displeasure with covetousness is timeless. The desire to have what doesn't belong to us is a universal tendency. No one has ever been completely content all of the time. Therefore people tend to think of covetousness as a *tolerable* sin.

READ: Hebrews 13:5, 6. **ASK:** What truths about God lead us to contentment with our lot in life? (Q19) *The truth that God is always with us; that He is near because He desires to help us; and that we can trust Him with our lives and eternity.*

ASK: How is your view of God affecting your contentment? (Q20)

Encourage your learners to consider the link between their beliefs about God and their level of contentment in life. Also make sure they understand that contentment is not an excuse for saying no when God leads a person to take a step of faith in life. It is sin to claim contentment and say no to God when He directs us to step out in faith and follow Him.



Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add the following statement about God's faithfulness: God is faithful to His warnings about sin.

Encourage learners to memorize Hebrews 13:5. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.