

Lesson 10 - 1 January 2012

The Gibeonites' Scheme

Lesson Scope: Joshua 9

Lesson Focus

With the victories over Jericho and Ai, Israel was poised to divide Canaan through the center. To meet this looming threat, an alliance of Canaanite kings formed. One tribe, however, chose a different tactic. Believing Israel to be unstoppable, the Gibeonites sought to secure a treaty with them. The Gibeonites knew that Israel would not conclude a peace agreement with a neighbor; therefore they resorted to deception.

God had expressly forbidden His people to make leagues with the inhabitants of the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20:10-18). In walking by sight and failing to ask counsel of the Lord, the leaders of Israel led the people of God into disobedience. This would have had disastrous results if the Gibeonites had used their immunity to subvert Israel and destroy them from within. Although the Lord overruled for the good and the Gibeonites served Israel faithfully, this affair boded ill for the future. The precedent was set to put the enemy to tribute. Various Israelite tribes would ultimately fail to drive out the enemy entirely.

The focus is on Israel and the folly of walking by sight. The Gibeonites were of those tribes that were to be destroyed. However, do not be too critical of their efforts at self-preservation. God never condemned them for this, and He punished Israel when Saul violated the oath. We may not judge this account by New Testament standards. However, in refraining from passing judgment on the Gibeonites, neither do we want to promote situation ethics.

God's people often face wily enemies. Relying on human wisdom, rather than seeking divine guidance, leads to disappointments and disasters.

Lesson Aim: To show the folly of walking by sight instead of by faith.

Theme Verse: 1 John 4:1. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Lesson Text:

"They Did Work Wilily"

Joshua 9:3-11 ³ And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, ⁴ They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; ⁵ And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* mouldy. ⁶ And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us. ⁷ And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you? ⁸ And they said unto Joshua, We *are* thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who *are* ye? and from whence come ye? ⁹ And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, ¹⁰ And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that *were* beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which *was* at Ashtaroth. ¹¹ Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We *are* your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us.

"The Men ... Asked Not Counsel"

Joshua 9:14-19 ¹⁴ And the men took of their victuals, and asked not *counsel* at the mouth of the LORD. ¹⁵ And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. ¹⁶ And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they *were* their neighbours, and *that* they dwelt among them. ¹⁷ And the children of Israel journeyed, and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities *were* Gibeon, and Chephirah, and Beeroth, and Kirjathjearim. ¹⁸ And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes. ¹⁹ But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them.

"Wherefore Have Ye Beguiled Us?"

Joshua 9:22-27 ²² And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We *are* very far from you; when ye dwell among us? ²³ Now therefore ye *are* cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God. ²⁴ And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing. ²⁵ And now, behold, we *are* in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do. ²⁶ And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. ²⁷ And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

Questions for Study

"They Did Work Wilily"

1. Why was the strategy of the Gibeonites effective in deceiving the Israelites?
2. What were God's directives on making peace with other nations?
3. How might we be deceived into making a league with the enemy?

"The Men ... Asked Not Counsel"

4. What can we learn from the fact that the Gibeonites' lies were exposed after only three days?
5. Were the princes of Israel obligated to keep the league with the Gibeonites? Explain.
6. How can we profit from the mistakes we have made?

"Wherefore Have Ye Beguiled Us?"

7. Evaluate the difference between the explanation of the Gibeonites in verse 24 and their professed motive in verses Joshua 9-11.
8. What safeguards will prevent our deception by the enemy today?

Analyzing the Passage

These ambassadors were representing a confederation of cities headed by Gibeon (Joshua 9:17). The Gibeonites were part of a nation known as the

Hivites (Joshua 11:19). The Hivites are listed in Deuteronomy 20:17 among those whom Israel were to drive out of the land. By joining affinity with Israel, the Gibeonites alienated themselves from the alliance of Canaanite kings who joined forces to repel Israel (Joshua 9:2). The treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites terrified the king of Jerusalem. He assembled a coalition of five southern Canaanite kings to attack the Gibeonites (Joshua 10:1-5). Israel was then obligated to defend her new ally.

Wily (Joshua 9:4) means "with trickery or guile." Clouted shoes (Joshua 9:5) are patched or pieced together.

Gilgal (Joshua 9:6) was the base of Israel's operations since they had crossed the Jordan River (Joshua 4:19).

The Gibeonites never directly answered Joshua's questions, "Who are ye?" (Joshua 9:8) and "From whence come ye?" (Joshua 9:8). Thus Israel entered into a league with an unidentified nation. God permitted making peace with nations "very far off," but of the inhabitants of Canaan He said, "Thou shalt utterly destroy them" (Deuteronomy 20:10-18).

Principles and Applications

"They Did Work Wily"

1. Self-confidence presents the greatest danger after an impressive victory (Joshua 9:3-4). "Each victory will help you some other to win" is true only when we recognize the enabling power of God. Our natural inclination to take credit for our successes makes us especially vulnerable after victory. Let us always remember that "our sufficiency is of God."

2. The enemy knows where we are vulnerable and feeds our misconceptions (Joshua 9:4-6). It is not difficult to convince a person of something he wants to believe. Under the pressure of wishful thinking, truth becomes relative. This accounts for the popularity of easy Christianity. Do we firmly believe that self-denial and cross-bearing are essential elements of our Christian life? If we entertain hopes that an easier way is viable, Satan will certainly send ambassadors with "evidence" to support this delusion.

3. Suspicion and skepticism cannot substitute for supplication and faith in God (Joshua 9:7-8). In recounting the tales they had heard of Israel's military victories, the Gibeonites did not mention the recent battles at Jericho and Ai, because that would have discredited their story. Thus the Israelites were shrewdly diverted from finding out who these people actually were in spite of Joshua's initial suspicion. If we are trusting in our own wisdom, we

will inevitably meet someone who will outwit us. We face situations for which we have limited knowledge or incomplete information. Supplication to God puts us in contact with the source of all wisdom.

4. Those who rely exclusively on appearance will easily be deceived (Joshua 9:9-11). There was no mistaking that the Gibeonites were carrying moldy bread. It appears that the Israelites even sampled the food to make sure it was authentic. But it proved nothing. All of us, regardless of how analytically disposed, have an element of gullibility. We are easily misled by appearances. Only God can see into the hearts of men and guide us around the snares they have laid.

"The Men ... Asked Not Counsel"

5. Divine direction is needed even when the issues seem obvious (Joshua 9:14). When the path seems clear, we see no need of a guide. We tend to distinguish between important matters for which we need divine assistance and mundane things we can handle on our own. This is an unwarranted distinction. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Only God knows how consequential a specific circumstance is. All of life should be lived in an attitude of dependence on God.

6. Time is a key element in revealing the errors of sight (Joshua 9:15-16). Impatience will cause us to run ahead of God. Answer to prayer may be delayed. Trust in God enables us to wait and rest in His sovereign will. God may reveal the answer as we meditate on His Word or converse with a brother. Sometimes the perspective of years is needed to understand why God directed as He did.

"Wherefore Have Ye Beguiled Us?"

7. Walking by sight brings confusion, discontent, and disunity (Joshua 9:18-19). The princes had made a treaty that bound the entire group. The people murmured when the true identity of the Gibeonites became known. In retrospect, it was obvious that the leaders had acted rashly. But the princes had sworn by God and were not at liberty to renege on their commitment. The people of God today may face situations in which unwise choices have been made. At such times it is imperative that proper acknowledgements are made and that all work together in a spirit of forgiveness and unity to find a solution.

8. Our choices have far-reaching consequences (Joshua 9:20). It is easy to see the results of major decisions. The consequences of a reckless choice

may be felt for years. But our lives are primarily shaped by the cumulative weight of daily choices. We are either drawing closer to God or drifting further away. Our choices indicate as well as dictate our course of travel. Continual self-indulgence in natural things predisposes us to accommodation in spiritual things.

9. God is able to accomplish good despite man's failures (Joshua 9:24-25, 27). The Gibeonites served Israel willingly and did not threaten their spiritual welfare. The purpose of God is not stymied by man's failures. He is patient and does not expect perfection from mortal man. The stumbling blocks in our life can become steppingstones as we humbly submit to God's correction.

Important Teachings

1. Self-confidence presents the greatest danger after an impressive victory (Joshua 9:3-4).

2. The enemy knows where we are vulnerable and feeds our misconceptions (Joshua 9:4-6).

3. Suspicion and skepticism cannot substitute for supplication and faith in God (Joshua 9:7-8).

4. Those who rely exclusively on appearance will easily be deceived (Joshua 9:9-11).

5. Divine direction is needed even when the issues seem obvious (Joshua 9:14).

6. Time is a key element in revealing the errors of sight (Joshua 9:15-16).

7. Walking by sight brings confusion, discontent, and disunity (Joshua 9:18-19).

8. Our choices have far-reaching consequences (Joshua 9:20).

9. God is able to accomplish good despite man's failures (Joshua 9:24-25, 27).

Answers to Questions

1. Why was the strategy of the Gibeonites effective in deceiving the Israelites?

The Israelites drew conclusions based solely on physical evidence. Perhaps they were flattered by the Gibeonites' knowledge of their military victories. They may have been disarmed by the Gibeonites' declaration, "We are your servants." Finally, they did not ask counsel of the Lord.

2. What were God's directives on making peace with other nations?

They were not to make peace with any nation in the land that was to be their inheritance. They were permitted to put other nations to tribute if they desired conditions of peace (Deuteronomy 20:10-18).

3. How might we be deceived into making a league with the enemy?

Government subsidies could entice us into detrimental associations with the world. By imbibing nominal Christianity's religious terminology, we can be led into faulty concepts of Bible doctrine. An emphasis on Christian service at the expense of Biblical obedience opens us to deception. By failing to obey specific Biblical calls to separation, we align ourselves with the world.

4. What can we learn from the fact that the Gibeonites' lies were exposed after only three days?

We should avoid hasty decisions. A little time may clear up a cloudy situation. Take time to pray and allow God to speak.

5. Were the princes of Israel obligated to keep the league with the Gibeonites? Explain.

Yes, they had sworn to the Gibeonites in the Name of God (Joshua 9:19). There was a three-year famine in the days of David because Saul had killed some Gibeonites. This would indicate that God recognized the league as binding.

6. How can we profit from the mistakes we have made?

We must admit our failure and take responsibility for the results. Attempting to save face by shifting responsibility will not help us to grow. If we experience hardship due to an unwise commitment, we need to be more careful in making promises.

7. Evaluate the difference between the explanation of the Gibeonites in verse 24 and their professed motive in verses 9-11.

In their first appearance, the Gibeonites professed to be awed by the fame of God and the impressive victories of Israel. This was calculated to win the approval of Israel. When their deception was exposed, the Gibeonites revealed that they understood the mission of Israel and were acting out of a desire for self-preservation.

8. What safeguards will prevent our deception by the enemy today?

We need to be aware that Satan presents himself as an angel of light. We must rely on the wisdom of God rather than our own understanding. A

close fellowship with a Biblical church is essential to avoiding deception. Our inclination to be impressed with the sophistication of worldly philosophy must be suppressed. In contrast, a love of the simple truth of the Word will safeguard us.

Summarizing the Lesson

From our vantage point, we may marvel at the credulity of Joshua and the princes of Israel. Surely they should have learned from the experience at Ai to consult the Lord before making decisions. We are not immune from the possibility of making the same mistake. The conquest of Canaan is typical of the New Testament believer's Christian life. We will face wily foes. Success depends on our reliance on the infinite wisdom of God.

Research Guide

1. Study Deuteronomy chapters 7 and 20 to understand the directives God had given Israel for making leagues with other nations.
2. Consult a Bible dictionary on the Gibeonites.