

Studies in the Book of Joshua

Lesson 8 - Joshua 9:1-27

The Abundant Life

Gibeon's Deception

The heathen tribes of Canaan were divided into many little “nations” with key cities as their centers. They usually fought each other, but when God’s people arrived, these petty kings united to oppose Israel. It is amazing how enemies unite against God! However, the people at Gibeon, the next city to be taken, decided to use deceit instead of force. They dressed themselves to appear like men who had been on a long journey, with old sacks, patched shoes, and moldy food, and their plan worked. God had commanded Israel to make no covenant with the nations in Canaan, but the Gibeonites knew that if they did get a covenant, Israel would keep it. They lied when they said they came from a far country. Note also that they said nothing about Israel’s victories at Jericho and Ai.

Joshua and his leaders failed to seek God’s mind in the matter; instead, they judged by appearances. The Gibeonites story sounded reasonable; the food and clothing certainly seemed to be old and worn out; and everything appeared to be in order. Consequently, Joshua made a pact with the men and then discovered that they were from Gibeon! Three days later, Israel came to Gibeon and its allied cities, but they could not attack them because of their promise. This caused murmuring among the people, who probably wanted more spoils. But God’s people could not go back on their word. All Israel could do was make slaves out of the Gibeonites. They put them to work cutting wood and drawing water for the tabernacle service. At least they made their mistakes work for them!

What Jericho could not do with walls, or Ai with weapons, the Gibeonites accomplished with deceit. Satan tries one device after another to defeat God’s people, and we must constantly be on guard. Note that it is usually after a great victory that Satan begins his subtle attacks. It was after the victory at Jericho that Israel was defeated by Ai, and it was after Israel’s defeat of Ai that Joshua was deceived by Gibeon. We must beware of “judging after the flesh” and depending on our own wisdom. James 1:5 promises that God will give us wisdom if we ask for it. Christians must beware of worldly alliances. We shall see in chapter 10 that Joshua was forced to defend his enemies because of his hasty covenant. Moses warned Israel in Deut. 7 that friendship with these heathen nations would only lead Israel into sin, and that is exactly what happened.

Read Joshua 9. Pray and answer the following questions:

1. How did the leaders of Canaan react to the news of Jericho and Ai?

2. What did these people do, when they decided that individually they could not defeat Israel?

3. The Gibeonites figured out that Israel intended to destroy all the natives of Canaan. How did they hope to escape destruction?

4. Why were Joshua and the leaders wrong to make a peace treaty with Gibeon? (See Deut. 7:1-6, 20:10-18)

5. What would of happen if Israel had broken an oath sworn in the Lord's name? (9:19-20).

6. What did the leaders decide to do with the Gibeonites?

7. What does this tell you about God's nature and the way He regards the use of His name?

8. Israel gave the Gibeonites a small role in the community, but it kept them close to the Lord and His people. What do you learn about God from the way things eventually worked out for Gibeon?

9. Do non-Christians ever do to Christians what Gibeon did to Israel? Have you ever experienced this? If so, how can we guard against it?

10. Why do you think the story of Gibeon is included in detail in the book of Joshua? What message does it add to the book?

Peace
But at What Price?
Joshua 9

Leadership often involves negotiation, diplomacy, and keeping the peace. But peace alone is not a worthwhile goal, as the treaty with the Gibeonites suggests (9:15). God had instructed Israel to destroy the Canaanites. Note how Joshua failed in this assignment with the people of Gibeon:

1. The decision was made on the basis of appearances rather than careful study, reflection, and investigation. (9:12-14). The text suggests that Joshua and the elders of Israel came to a hasty decision. They failed to check the facts of the Gibeonites story, and were apparently satisfied with circumstantial evidence.
2. The decision was made without seeking counsel from the Lord. (9:14). This was Israel's worst mistake. Normally, Joshua was known as a leader that moved only after worshiping God and seeking His direction. On this occasion he acted on his own, with the result being a bad bargain.
3. The direction was poor but the deal was honored nevertheless (9:18-20). To the nations credit, it followed through on its commitment to spare the lives of the Gibeonites.

This incident with Gibeon is a useful case study for anyone in leadership. It challenges one to ask: On what basis am I making decisions? Am I seeking God's wisdom and timing? Do I follow through on the agreements I make, even if it costs me?

Commentary provide by Warren Wiersbe and others