

The Deception of the Gibeonites

Joshua 9:1-15

Joshua 9:1-15 - *“And it came to pass when all the kings who were on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite—heard about it,² that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.*

³ But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai,⁴ they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended,⁵ old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy.⁶ And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, “We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us.”⁷ Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, “Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?”⁸ But they said to Joshua, “We are your servants.” And Joshua said to them, “Who are you, and where do you come from?”

⁹ So they said to him: “From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt,¹⁰ and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroath.¹¹ Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, ‘Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, “We are your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us.”’¹² This bread of ours we took hot for our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy.¹³ And these wineskins which we filled were new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey.”¹⁴ Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD.¹⁵ So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.”

Background Notes

The overall strategy for conquering the land of Canaan was first to divide the country in two with a central campaign, and then to conquer the south with a southern campaign, and then finally head north to conquer with a northern campaign. The victories over Jericho and Ai (chapters 6-8) were part of the central campaign, designed to break the backbone of the enemy.

With the defeat of Ai, Israel now had a toehold in the hill country of Canaan. The city state of Gibeon was only a few miles from Ai, and the Gibeonites realized that they were probably next in line to be conquered. The Israeli fighting machine

was sure to move in their direction to complete the central campaign. So the Gibeonites decided to try to trick Israel into making a peace treaty by dressing up and making it appear that they were ambassadors from a foreign nation. And the plan worked!

Apparently the Gibeonites knew what God had told His people under the Law, that Israel was to wipe out all the pagan inhabitants of the land of Canaan. They were not to make peace treaties with any of the Canaanites -- but they could make peace treaties with nations and city-states outside the land. Deuteronomy 20:10-11 - *“When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it.”*¹¹ *And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you.”* And verse 15: *“Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations.”*

Notice the reason why the Israelites were to wipe out the Canaanite peoples in Deuteronomy 20:16-18: *“But of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive,”*¹⁷ *but you shall utterly destroy them... just as the LORD your God has commanded you,*¹⁸ ***lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God”*** [emphasis added].

The Gibeonites knew about this commandment, so they decided to trick Joshua and the children of Israel into thinking that they were from a very far country, and thus make a peace treaty with them. The deception worked! Joshua and the leaders of Israel made a peace treaty with them – look at Joshua 9:15 *“So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.”*

But notice verse 14: *“but they did not ask counsel of the LORD.”*

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Deception is a trademark of the enemy.

The book of Joshua is not only the inspired account of the military conquest of Canaan; it is a handbook for spiritual warfare. All the tactics of the enemy in the book of Joshua illustrate for us the tactics that Satan uses to try to defeat us, and that is certainly true here in Joshua 9. Deception is a trademark of the enemy.

The New Testament clearly teaches that one of Satan’s primary tactics is deception. Ephesians 6:11 says, *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”* And 2 Corinthians 11:14 says. *“...Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”* Satan doesn’t just come at us head-on – he is very deceptive. He will even appear to susceptible people to be an angel of light. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that we must be aware of Satan’s tactics: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour...”*

This is what the Bible teaches. This is doctrine. Deception is a trademark of the enemy. Just as the Gibeonites knew exactly what God's Law said, so Satan knows what God's Word says. Satan will try to trick us into making mistakes and doing the wrong thing. He may even use Scripture, as he did in the temptations of our Lord.

We can be sure that whenever we have to make a major decision, Satan will try to trick us into making the wrong decision. If you're don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can be sure that Satan is trying to deceive into thinking that Christians are just a bunch of religious fools who are "playing church." He'll try to make you think you would be kissing your brains good-bye to receive Christ as your Savior. And if you are a Christian, you can be sure that whatever decisions in life that you're facing right now -- job change, marriage, buying or selling a home, Christian service, whatever -- Satan is trying to deceive you into making a wrong decision. You can be sure of it!

Deception is a trademark of the enemy, and the wrong decision will look so right! The Gibeonites certainly looked right – they looked like they came from a foreign country. Old sacks, worn out wine skins, patched clothes and sandals, moldy bread, and they certainly talked a good line as well. Notice that they didn't mention the recent victories over Jericho and Ai, only victories on the other side of the Jordan. Verses 9-10: *"So they said to him: "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth."* They didn't mention Jericho and Ai. Why? Well, after all, if they were from a far country they wouldn't know of these recent victories. Very crafty! Be careful, fellow believers -- deception is a trademark of the enemy.

2. Deception is a trap of the enemy!

The Gibeonites were not just interested in deceiving Joshua and the Israelites -- this was just the means to the end. They wanted to trick Israel into making a covenant. A covenant with Israel would permit them to stay in the land and keep Israel from fully possessing the Promised Land.

Do you see the spiritual lesson here for us? Satan is interested in more than just tripping us up and tempting us to sin -- he wants to trap us into making covenants and decisions that will compromise our testimonies long-term. He wants to entangle us in this world for a lifetime. He wants to keep a foot in our lives so that we are ineffective Christians and not fully possessing and enjoying the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. Satan doesn't want us to fully possess the spiritual land that God has given us.

Satan loves to get a believer married to an unbeliever! Think of the potential to glorify God that is lost when a believer makes the mistake of disobeying the Word of God and marries an unbeliever – maybe even is tricked into it. Satan loves to get a believer entangled in this world in some way. He knows that a Christian operating on mixed principles is ineffective, and that he can still "claim a piece of the territory" in their lives that is not totally dedicated to the kingdom of God.

And the snare will look so normal! Traps are designed that way – or else they wouldn't be traps! How can it be so wrong when it looks so right? Deception is a trap of the enemy!

Practical Application

Let's look before we leap.

You've heard that expression before, right? It's a good warning, and it certainly applies here. We must "look before we leap" when we're making decisions and choices. Check it out!

We should look vertically and we should look horizontally. Look vertically -- look to the Lord. Look horizontally -- check out the situation. Israel didn't look vertically (v14): "*Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; **but they did not ask counsel of the LORD***" [emphasis added].

They didn't look horizontally either (v7): "*Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?"* That's as far as Israel looked. The men from Gibeon said that they were from a very far country, and Israel never even asked what country! Israel didn't check out their story; Israel didn't even ask for any credentials. After all, the Gibeonites looked and seemed so honest -- and they even talked about the Lord!

What a lesson for us! I know Christians who leap onto any "ministry bandwagon" if they see a sign or wonder taking place. They don't check it out. They don't pray about it. In Matthew 7:22-23 our Lord said, "*Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*" Notice He doesn't say, "I once knew you and now I don't" but "I never knew you!" and "...depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" Be careful! Look before you leap!

Many other examples could be given. When Christians don't look before they leap, they may end up entangled in situations that they never thought possible. Let's not give the enemy a chance to "stay in the land." Let's look before we leap!