

The Consequences of the Gibeonite Deception

Joshua 9:16-27

Joshua 9:16-27 - *“And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them. ¹⁷ Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim. ¹⁸ But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers. ¹⁹ Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them. ²⁰ This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them.” ²¹ And the rulers said to them, “Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them.” ²² Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, “Why have you deceived us, saying, ‘We are very far from you,’ when you dwell near us? ²³ Now therefore, you are cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves—woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.”*

²⁴ *So they answered Joshua and said, “Because your servants were clearly told that the LORD your 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 very much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. ²⁵ And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us.” ²⁶ So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. ²⁷ And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.”*

Background Notes

Israel wasn't defeated by the Gibeonites, but they were deceived by the Gibeonites. God had said in no uncertain terms that all the immoral and idolatrous pagan nations were to be completely eliminated from the Promised Land. The Lord didn't want His people contaminated by paganism in any way, shape, or form. I'd like you to take note of this because you're going to get the following question somewhere along the line: “How could a **good** God say that that all those nations in Canaan must be wiped out? How could a **good** God allow all that killing?” When you get that question, remember this reference: Deuteronomy 7:1-6.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6 says, *“When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you..., seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to*

them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth." Remember that chapter, Deuteronomy 7.

When God's people were deceived by the Gibeonites and made a peace treaty with them, verses 17-18 indicate that the covenant was made with more than just the city of Gibeon -- it was actually made with all the Hivites (v7). It included the cities of *Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim* as well as the city-state of Gibeon.

Verse 18: *"But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers."* The Israelite leaders had sworn to a covenant to the Gibeonites by the Lord God of Israel. The reason the congregation complained was that they would not be able to inhabit the cities with which the covenant was made! God had said that only certain cities, like Jericho, had to be completely destroyed, but the Israelites could take over and live in the rest of the cities. Deuteronomy 6:10-11 - *"when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant..."*

So the congregation of Israel complained because Joshua and the leaders of Israel were tricked into a peace treaty with the Hivites, and as a result these cities and their vineyards and olive groves were off limits to the children of Israel. They would not be able to enjoy the houses and the farms of this portion of the Land.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Serious covenants made before God must be honored.

Verse 16: *"And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them."* And verse 19: *"Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them."*

Joshua and the leaders of Israel were deceived into making a covenant with the enemy, and it had to be honored. We might think, "Why not just admit the mistake, break the covenant, and do away with the Gibeonites and the rest of the Hivites?" Why not? Because it was a covenant made before God!

Serious covenants made before God must be honored. Do you know of any serious covenant that a believer could make before God today, that must be honored – even when making the covenant was a mistake, and that mistake has been realized and confessed? The obvious example, of course, is the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever. The Bible clearly states that a believer should not marry an unbeliever. In 2 Corinthians 6:14: *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”*

But what if a believer was deceived before the marriage – didn’t check things out, and didn’t pray about it, or was “blinded” by love, or was convinced that his/her fiancé would become a believer after marriage? Then (like Israel) this believer wakes up after the honeymoon and discovers his/her mistake! What now? Should he/she just get a divorce and start over? No way! A covenant was made before God. A foolish covenant, yes, but the covenant must be honored. 1 Corinthians 7 clearly states that divorce is not the solution to an unequal-yoke type of marriage with all its potential problems.

The “unequally-yoked” marriage is not the only example of a serious covenant made before God that must be honored. What about a serious financial commitment – like buying too large a house, or buying a car that’s beyond our means? Before God, we must make those monthly payments – it would be wrong to renege on that commitment. And just try selling a new car that you foolishly bought, and now you have to sell because you can’t make the payments. It’s not easy. You’re entangled!

A few of my students have had to drop out of Emmaus Bible College because they foolishly purchased a vehicle (or something else) that was way beyond their means. They’re entangled in that commitment, and they have had to drop out of school and get a full-time job in order to make those payments. Think your decisions through carefully before you make binding commitments, because serious covenants made before God must be honored.

2. Foolish covenants made before God may have long-term consequences.

The consequences of Israel’s covenant with the Gibeonites were not short-term. Israel had to live with those consequences for years to come. In 2 Samuel 21, we read of the tragic repercussion that followed when King Saul didn’t honor the covenant and murdered some Gibeonites. Seven of Saul’s descendants were hanged as a result.

We can be sure that bad fallout will follow foolish commitments that we make – sometimes for years to come. Again, think of the sad results that can come from a believer marrying an unbeliever. Children may be affected – sometimes for generations. Think of the bad fallout that results for years to come when Christians entangle themselves with worldly commitments. I know of a Christian family that bought a small hotel as a business, but they continued to operate the tavern associated with the hotel, because that’s where the profits were! It has led to all kinds of long-range problems for that family, and for lots of other people as well.

Now there is some good news in this chapter. Verse 27 says, “...*Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.*” The Gibeonites became servants for the Levites. They helped with the work of the tabernacle, and later with the work of the Temple.

Furthermore, in 1 Chronicles 12:4 we learn that one of King David’s mighty men was a Gibeonite. And in Nehemiah we find that a group of Gibeonites assisted in the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah 3:7 “*And next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, repaired the residence of the governor of the region beyond the River.*” So God does pick up the pieces in spite of our foolish covenants. God is gracious!

I know a Christian woman who married a very wealthy unbeliever. Since that time she has realized her mistake, but there have been sad, long-term consequences because of that marriage. However, she is once again walking with the Lord, and through that marriage she has been able to channel a lot of money into the Lord’s work. I like to think of this wealthy unbeliever as one of the Gibeonites who has become “a woodcutter and water carrier” for the service of the Lord!

Do you see the illustration? God has ways of “picking up the pieces.” The scars of our mistakes remain, but He can still fashion something beautiful out of the mistaken situation. Romans 8:28 says that “*..we know that God works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are the called according to His purpose.*” All things are not good, but God can work all things together for good, including our foolish mistakes and the consequences that follow -- even though it would have been much better, of course, to never have made the mistaken covenant. Foolish covenants made before God may have long-term consequences.

Practical Application

We don't have to be deceived.

As we come to the close of this chapter, you may be saying to yourself, “Wow! Satan’s deception is so subtle! There’s no way I can avoid being deceived, even if I’m praying about it. After all, Satan disguised as an ‘angel of light’ can be very convincing!” Listen to the words of 1 Corinthians 10:13, a wonderful promise for the believer: “*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*”

What a promise! Notice that God will not allow any deceptive tactic of Satan to be so subtle or so deceptive that we’ll never detect it. We don’t have to be deceived!