

THE CRAFTINESS OF THE GIBEONITES

[BIBLE TEXT](#) : Joshua 9 :1-27

LESSON 174 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

[BIBLE TEXT in King James Version](#)

Joshua 9:1-27

¹ And it came to pass, when all the kings which *were* on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard *thereof*;

² That they gathered themselves together, to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord.

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

[BIBLE REFERENCES:](#)

I The Gibeonites and Their Scheme

- 1 The kings of Canaan combined their armies to defend themselves against Israel, Joshua 9:1, 2
- 2 The inhabitants of Gibeon sent an embassy for peace, Joshua 9:3-6
- 3 Joshua and Israel questioned the Gibeonites to ascertain their nationality, Joshua 9:7-13

II The League

- 1 The men of Israel made the league that the Gibeonites desired, without asking counsel of God, Joshua 9:14, 15
- 2 Three days later Israel found that the Gibeonites were their near neighbors, Joshua 9:16, 17
- 3 Israel respected their league, Joshua 9:18-20;

Psalm 15:4

⁴ In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. *He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.*

III Servitude, the Result of Deceit

- 1 The course that Gibeon followed was prompted by fear, Joshua 9:24, 25
- 2 The Gibeonites remained alive, but they were sentenced to bond service, Joshua 9:21-23, 26, 27

[NOTES:](#)

Israel's Adversaries

When the kings of Canaan heard of all that God had done for Israel in utterly destroying Jericho and Ai, they gathered to fight against Israel. Probably these kings had never been able to agree on anything before this time, but now that this common danger confronted them, they realized the time was at hand for concerted action.

It was a late hour to plan a defense now that Israel, God's destroying army, was at their very door. Why hadn't they done something long before, while there was time and opportunity? Sinners today stand condemned before God for their sins, and know surely that judgment will fall unless they repent. How much better to turn now, while God's Spirit **in** mercy is pleading. To wait until your sins have found you out may be waiting too long. It will mean eternal death to keep those sins until they come following you to the judgment (**1 Timothy 5:24** ²⁴ Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some *men* they follow after:).

Gibeon's Idea

None of the Canaanites had any real heart for war, however, for the Most High had filled their hearts with terror. They might attempt any defense they pleased, but nothing could stand before the wrath of God. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished" (Proverbs 11:21). Israel had no need to fear the gathering of Satan's emissaries against them. "The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect" (Psalm 33:10). God takes care of His children just as carefully today as He took care of Israel in that day. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels,

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.

¹² This our bread we took hot *for* our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy:

¹³ And these bottles of wine, which we filled, *were* new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.

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*

nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39). If any man is separated from Christ, it is the result of that man's failure in his duty to Christ.

While the kings of Canaan were plotting what proved to be an un-availing defense against Israel, the inhabitants of Gibeon and three confederate cities planned a different method of escape. These cities were situated in a pass that was the key to central Palestine, and would be the logical target for Joshua's next military operation. The Gibeonites had to act quickly if they hoped to be spared.

Note the extent of the Gibeonites' knowledge of God's Word. They knew that God had commanded Israel to destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan (verse 24). They seemingly knew, too, that the Children of Israel were at liberty to make peace with the cities which were very far off from Canaan (**Deuteronomy 20:10-15** ¹⁰ When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. ¹¹ And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, *that* all the people *that* is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. ¹² And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: ¹³ And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: ¹⁴ But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, *even* all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. ¹⁵ Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities *which* are very far off from thee, *which are* not of the cities of these nations).

People feign ignorance of God's Word today. When we read: "Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Romans 10:13), we are led to believe that men know more of God's Word than they are willing to acknowledge. No man will be judged for what he does not know, but he will be held accountable for every ray of light that he does have. "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9)

False Ambassadors

The Gibeonites took advantage of this knowledge and worked cunningly to save themselves alive. They feigned to be ambassadors from a far country coming to Israel to worship the Lord whose fame had spread far and near. To lend credence to their story of a long journey, the Gibeonites displayed old garments, worn-out shoes, dry moldy bread, and wine bottles torn and bound up. They declared that all these items had been new and fresh at the outset of their journey.

Joshua seemed to distrust the ambassadors from Gibeon; their story did not ring quite true. He asked what country they were from, pointing out the fact that no league could be made with the inhabitants of Canaan. The Gibeonites answered to the effect that their country was so far away Joshua probably had never heard of it, so why tell the name? Did not their shoes, clothes, and provisions tell more than words ever could tell? They were not asking Joshua for a very great favor, at least so they reasoned. "Make ye a league with us," is all they wanted.

Some people seem to enjoy leaguings themselves with Christian people, but they are not willing to live a Christian life. Others, like Balaam, desire to die the death of the righteous; but in order to die a righteous man's death, it will be necessary to live a righteous man's life. A league or affiliation with men might possibly prolong the span of life on this earth, as in the case of the Gibeonites, but it will never avail for eternal life. To secure eternal life, a covenant must be made directly with God and an overcoming life practiced day by day; then fellowship with fellow Christians will

unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them.

²⁰ This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.

²¹ And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them.

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.

have the true meaning.

No Counsel From God

Joshua and the princes of Israel made the league that Gibeon desired. The princes of Israel probably made a feast for the men of Gibeon. To the present day, eating together in the Eastern countries is a true indication of steadfast friendship. We are told that those who thus eat together feel bound thereby to a permanent covenant of peace. "The men took their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD" (verse 14). These are the saddest words spoken concerning Joshua in the whole Bible. Why did not Joshua seek counsel through the Urim and Thummim, oracles of God given for such circumstances as this? Men can often fool their fellow men, but they can never fool the Lord. "Jesus . . . needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:24, 25).

Do you not think that God is grieved with His children if they rush about day after day and never seek His counsel? Did not Jesus reprove Martha for having too much worldly care, and did He not commend Mary for sitting at His feet to learn of Him? These sad words spoken of Joshua should be such a lesson to us that similar words will never be spoken about us. Failure to ask counsel of the Lord in even one thing may lead to a mistake that will cause suffering the remainder of our lives.

Worldly Wise

The Gibeonites proved to be worldly wise, but the Lord has said: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. . . . Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (I Corinthians 1:19, 20).

Many people are worldly wise today and have concocted religions that they trust will take them safely through to Heaven. The codes and theories of men are almost as numerous as men themselves, each man having a little different opinion; but codes and theories are insufficient. As surely as the Gibeonites' wise scheme came to a sad ending, so surely will anything else end in utter ruin except God's plan of salvation.

The Right Way

Who *is* right, or what is the right way? Among the many truths of God's Word, the Bible plainly declares two fundamental truths: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28); and, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus expressed the same thought again: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Paul declared to the Corinthians: "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2). This is the true foundation stone of all acceptable worship of God, and to know Christ is to live every day like Him. Anything less will never stand in the day of judgment.

There is no back door into Heaven. Jesus said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. . . . I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved" (John 10:1, 9). Too many people are like the Gibeonites! They think only of their physical safety and are not much concerned about their spiritual welfare.

The Respected Agreement

The Gibeonites, by craftiness and guile, obtained the league they sought with Israel. Three days later Israel heard that Gibeon and their confederate cities were within a few days' march from

Gilgal, so Israel journeyed thither. The congregation of Israel wanted to destroy the cities, but Joshua and the princes of the congregation told the people about the league that had been made with Gibeon. Though the covenant had been made through false representation, yet it had been made before the Lord, and the rulers of Israel determined that it must stand. How much more must a covenant with God, made in sincerity and with a knowledge of God's will for man, be honored in men's hearts today. Some people make vows to God when they are in trouble, then consider it a light matter not to pay those vows after God has answered the prayer and cleared away the trouble. How much better to be like Joshua and the princes of Israel on this occasion, and keep the covenant that has been made before God. When a covenant with God is kept, then the sunshine of God's love is manifest to that heart.

Fraud's Payment

The Gibeonites' fraud resulted in their being sentenced to perpetual servitude as drawers of water and hewers of wood. Cannot you see how a lie will degrade a man? These once mighty men were reduced to bond servants because they were not men enough to tell the truth.

What would have happened to the Gibeonites had they told the truth and had come in true repentance? Would not the same God who spared Rahab and her family from the destruction of Jericho have spared these Gibeonites? Did not the same God later pronounce complete destruction upon Nineveh, yet alter His decree when the inhabitants sincerely repented? Nineveh was finally destroyed, but repentance lengthened the tranquility of that city from 40 days to more than 200 years. "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ezekiel 33:14, 15). Thus we have every reason to believe that the Gibeonites would have found mercy in coming openly to God. There is only one way to escape the judgment of God, and that is to flee to His mercy.

Willing Servants

Did it please God to have these bond servants working for Him? It seems that He allowed it to show His approval to Joshua and the princes of the congregation for their respect to the covenant made before God. However, this could not have been God's perfect plan. He does not desire drafted soldiers in His army; only volunteers will be accepted. The Levites stand as God's pattern to all who desire to work for God. When Moses cried out in dire need: "Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me" (Exodus 32:26), all the sons of Levi came up to God's help. Another worthy example is Isaiah, who answered: "Here am I; send me," when he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8). These are the types of men and women — willing servants — that God is looking for today.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What reaction did Israel's victories over Jericho and Ai have upon the kings of Canaan?
- 2 What did the inhabitants of Gibeon do when they heard of Israel's success?
- 3 How far away from Israel's encampment at Gilgal was the city of Gibeon located?
- 4 What was the Gibeonites' one request of Joshua and the princes of Israel?
- 5 How did the ambassadors from Gibeon obtain their request?
- 6 Do you think it is profitable to use fraud to obtain anything in

this world?

7 How were the Gibeonites punished for telling a lie?

8 On the day of judgment what will happen to all liars?

9 What type of people does the Lord seek to serve Him?