

Joshua

The LORD is Salvation

Chapter 9 *The Gibeonite Deception, but an Honored Oath*

Sins of action are obvious, but there are serious sins of both commission & omission ^{Genesis 3}.

9:1-2 After the victories at Jericho and Ai, all but one of the Canaan nations (Girgashites ^{Joshua 3:10}) allied to war against Joshua and Israel (alliances against Israel will be discussed in Chapter 10).

The pride of worldly men is so strong, they even think they can war against the LORD - both here and twice in the end times ^{Revelation 19:19, 20:7-9}, but God laughs at their vanity ^{Psalms 2:1-5}.

9:3-6 The only people who did not join the coalition against Israel were the Hivites ^{v.7} from Gibeon and a few neighboring cities ^{v.17}. Based on their knowledge of the recent Israelite victories, they decided that trying to make peace was better than fighting. And with an awareness of the Biblical principles of war*, they resolved to use deceit to gain a treaty with Israel ^{Genesis 26:28}. The Hivites sent men to Joshua at Gilgal with rotten food, as well as worn out clothes, sacks and wineskins, to make it look as if they had traveled a long way, in order to ask for the treaty.

Gibeon was a city ~6 miles northwest of Jerusalem and ~15 miles west-southwest of Gilgal.

*God instructed Israel to make war with different rules against enemies inside and outside the PL:

☆ Inside the PL: Make no treaty, show no mercy, totally destroy. ^{Exodus 23:31-33, Deuteronomy 7:1-11},

☆ Outside the PL: Make an offer of peace. If accepted, subject people to forced labor.

If the offer was rejected, lay siege, and when God delivers the city, kill all the men with swords and take the women, children, livestock & everything else as plunder. ^{Deuteronomy 20:10-20}.

9:7-8 The Israelites were skeptical, remarking that the men could be locals, and because of God's directives, they could not be given a peace treaty ^{Exodus 23:32, Deuteronomy 7:2}. The men of Gibeon continued their ploy by ignoring those comments and saying they were servants of Israel. Joshua asked them a direct question about who they were and where they had come from.

9:9-13 The Hivites never answered Joshua's question, but kept up the deception by responding with praise for and fear of the God of Israel. They told Joshua about hearing of their victories in

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Egypt and in the two kingdoms east of the Jordan. The Gibeonites went on to indicate that their country had decided it was better to be servants of Israel than to be conquered by them, so they sent the men off on a “long journey” to request a treaty, hence the worn articles and putrid food.

The Hivites used deception to entice the Israelites to sin for their benefit, much like the spiritual trials Christians face against Satan, who induces sin as the “father of lies” ^{John 8:44}, with wily “schemes” ^{2 Corinthians 2:11, Ephesians 6:11} and “cunning” deception ^{2 Corinthians 11:3}.

Note the Gibeonites were shrewd enough to not mention Israel's recent/local conquests of Jericho and Ai, because knowledge of these may have spoiled their deceptive strategy.

9:14-15 Without hearing an answer to his question or calling on God for direction, Joshua made a peace treaty with the Gibeonites, and the Israelite leadership approved the treaty with an oath in the name of the LORD ^{v.18}. Joshua ‘glanced’ at the provisions of the Hivites, but he committed a sin of omission by believing what he saw instead of seeking God’s counsel ^{Jeremiah 33:3, James 1:5}. In reality, Jesus had prophetically warned them years earlier of this sort of situation ^{Exodus 34:12}. Joshua’s wrong decision is a reminder of his human response ^{Joshua 7:2-5} to the spies’ Ai report. In addition, Joshua did not follow the principles he should have learned from his mistakes at Ai: properly prepare, be obedient to God’s plans and allow the LORD to lead. ^{Exodus 16:28}

Remember from Chapter 7: Joshua failed to follow the LORD's directive that Joshua must always “stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him” ^{Numbers 27:18-21}. These types of sins often happen as the result of action taken in a hurry ^{NKJV: Isaiah 28:16} and in trusting in man’s senses instead of God’s righteousness and infallibility ^{Proverbs 3:5-6}.

9:16-19 However, within a few days, the Israelites found out the Hivites were “neighbors” from four cities less than 25 miles west-southwest of Gilgal, and not from a distant country. The Israelites went to the cities, but in spite of the grumbling of the Israelite people ^{Exodus 15:24} they could not “touch them”, because of the oath the leaders had sworn was in the name of the LORD God.

Everything they did (and Christians do ^{Matthew 5:33-37, Colossians 3:17}) is in the name of the LORD.

In spite of the “mistake” of the Israelites, the cities involved (Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim) were all included in the inheritance of the tribe of Benjamin ^{Joshua 18:25-28}, as well as cities assigned to the Levites (Gibeon was given to descendants of Aaron ^{Joshua 21:17}).

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Some lies are discovered quickly by man ^{v.16} and others are never uncovered; however, man can do nothing without God's full awareness ^{Psalm 33:13-15, Proverbs 5:21, John 16:30, Hebrews 4:13}.

9:20-21 In order to ease the complaining of the assembly, the leaders decided to carry out the commitment under God's guidelines, as if the Gibeonites were, in fact, from a country outside of the Promised Land, by making the Hivites their servants (woodcutters and water carriers).

9:22-23 Joshua questioned the Hivites why they created a deception (even though the answer was obvious: they wanted to live, and they saw this as the only way for them to stay alive, even if it meant becoming slaves – they actually followed two other Biblical principles described by Jesus: counting the cost ^{Luke 14:31-32} and acting shrewdly ^{Luke 16:1-12}). Joshua informed them that, because of their fraud, they were under a curse from God, and as a result, their servitude would not be temporary (e.g., they helped Nehemiah rebuild the Jerusalem walls ^{Nehemiah 3:7}).

This curse may have been a partial fulfilment of the earlier curse Noah placed on his son Canaan ^{Genesis 9:24-27}, who was an ancestor of the Hivites ^{Genesis 10:15-17}.

9:24-25 The Gibeonites had heard of the commandment of God through Moses about how the Israelites were to proceed in conquering the PL. Not only were they aware, but they were clearly resolute in their belief God would continue to provide for His people's success, so the Hivites were ready to submit to whatever the Israelites decided to do ^{Jeremiah 26:14}, short of killing them.

9:26-27 The assembly wanted to ignore the oath and kill all of the Hivites, but Joshua intervened. He assigned them to be servants for the people and God's altar. Having learned his lesson, Joshua trusted the LORD to guide him ^{Proverbs 3:5-6} in where the Hivites would serve Him.

According to tradition, the Bible refers (later in the OT) to ancestors of the Hivites, when it mentions "temple servants" ^{NIV1984} ("Nephtim" ^{NKJV}) ^{1 Chronicles 9:2, Ezra 2:43, 8:20, Nehemiah 7:60}.

Closing: The Critical Nature of Oaths for Believers in the God of the Bible

The LORD considers any oath in His name as binding ^{Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:1-2}, even if it turns out to be harmful ^{Psalm 15:4, Ecclesiastes 5:1-7} to the one who took the oath.

God always keeps His promises ^{Numbers 23:19} and Christians must do the same ^{Matthew 5:37}.

One of the most obvious signs of the degradation of a society is the lost sanctity of commitment, which is expressed in a most obvious way in most American marriages.

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