



A Failure to Communicate
Joshua 9

NKJ Joshua 9:1 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 Ashtaroth.

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.

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.

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.

How many times do we here of someone being placed in a position of responsibility over children whom a simple background check would have revealed to be a predator with a long rap sheet. But the problem is often that we see only what we want to see, the person seemed so nice, so genuine. We disregard what we know about human nature, the discernment that God counsels his people to pursue, and we determine we know better, we are in control.

The Gibeonites were a league of 4 Canaanite cities just West of Jerusalem. I am told you can actually see their location from Jerusalem. In essence, Israel is on one side of the mountains, and they are on the other. They know that Israel will be rolling through soon. They know that unlike many of the other conquerors of the time, the Israelites do not merely subjugate and take tribute, they are cleansing the land.

Gibeonites know that the Israelites have been commanded not to make a treaty with any of the Canaanite nations, lest they become a snare, a stumbling block to Israel, but they do know that they are permitted to make treaties with nations that are afar off and not inhabitants.

Deut. 20: 10 " 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.

12 "Now if the city will not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it.

13 "And when the LORD your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword.

14 "But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the enemies' plunder which the LORD your God gives you.

15 "Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations.

16 "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: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, 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.

So they determine a ruse:

Old Clothes, Old food

Notice also that they report OLD NEWS

Had they known about the defeat of Ai and Jericho they would have been suspect.

So they mention nothing

The people of Israel could have inquired of the Lord and that would have been the end of the ruse. But they do not, they accept the testimony of their senses and they conclude the treaty:

Now what would such a treaty have looked like

(1) Gibeon's acceptance of the God of Israel; (2) Gibeon's observance of the duties of a vassal; and **(3) Israel's acceptance of the duties of a lord, mainly that of defending their vassals.**

This last provision will be particularly important...

Now perhaps you are asking, wait a minute, if they accept Yahweh, what is the difference between that and conversion?

However, national identity, especially explicit identification with one's own ancestors in one's own land, was precious to people of the ancient biblical world. The Gibeonite league was interested not only in preserving their lives, but also in preserving their lives in such a way that their historic identity could also be preserved, even if under a new religious umbrella. This is the real issue of the Gibeonite deception. Their strategy is to gain a treaty with Israel by pretending that they have come from a great distance even though this implies acceptance of Israelite lordship and, ***at least formally***, religion.

Big issue is that they were not part of the people of God, incorporated into Israel, but foreigners

Had they owned their country but renounced the idolatries of it, resigning the possession of it to Israel and themselves to the God of Israel, we have reason to think Joshua would have been directed by the oracle of God to spare their lives, and they needed not to have made these pretensions. - MH

Was this deception wrong absolutely! They did evil that good might come of it, using an elaborate lie to maintain an evil national identity and hoodwink the people of God.

They journey a little to the West and immediately bump into the Gibeonite cities.

The people grumble against their elders, because they rightly perceive that they have done wrong, and that if the conquest continues like this...

Now should the Israelites have kept their oath under these circumstances?

I'm not amazed that many moderns would say no. What I Amazed at is that several modern comentators also say NO...

Answer is clearly yes – FROM THE WORD!

NKJ 2 Samuel 21:1 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, "It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites."

2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.

3 Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?"

“ The obligation of the oath binds even when a man swears to his own disadvantage. (Ps. 15:4.)

(3) Nor is the obligation impaired when the oath is extorted either by violence or fraud. Thus the oaths imposed by conquerors upon the vanquished bind, because they are voluntarily assumed in preference to the alternatives presented. And thus Joshua kept the oath which the Gibeonites had induced him through deceit to swear in their behalf.(Josh. 9:3–27.)” - CHARLES HODGE

So Joshua makes them servants to Levites, watercarriers and woodchoppers to assuage the people.

This has the good effect of bringing them under the converting influence of Israel's religion

Later for instance we see Gibeonites recorded in the lists of those who worshipped and served Yahweh.

What does this teach US?

1) When one makes a covenant before the Lord, one must keep it regardless. MARRIAGE APPLICATION

Should never follow a bad decision with a worse one.

2) To look to the counsel of the Lord not to trust the evidence of mere senses: Applications of this are immense

SCIENCE, dealing with our enemies, the World, the Flesh, the Devil, etc.

3) God will use his own means to bring others to saving faith – they meant it for evil, the Lord means it for Good.