

Joshua

October 11, 2009

Joshua 9

I. Gibeon's Deceit

As with Rahab, the Gibeonites seek to have peace with Israel and appear to be willing to accept the LORD as supreme. As with Rahab, the Gibeonites use falsehoods. As with Rahab, they will integrate fully into Israel. There are no examples in the Bible where someone legitimately seeks the Lord and is denied acceptance. (Theologically, we would assume that their belief is prompted by the Lord.) As Paul will write about 1500 years later:

Rom 10:13

13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

NIV

At the same time, the Israelites accepting the Gibeonites (and also accepting Rahab) break their covenant with God. Also, it establishes a precedent for others of the condemned people to continue living in the land. Many of these people do not accept the Lord or integrate into Israel.

What would the LORD have said if the Israelites had sought His advice? We will never know since they did not inquire of Him. Their lack of not inquiring of the LORD was wrong. If they inquired, I would guess that the Lord would have told them to accept them (re: Rom 10:13).

If we assume for the moment that the LORD would have accepted the Gibeonites if the Israelites had inquired of Him, what do you think that this chapter is included?

II. Word Spreads of the Victories: Josh 9:1-2

Josh 9:1-2

9:1 Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things — those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)— 2 they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel.

NIV

Basically the whole country heard about Ai, Bethel, Jericho, and maybe other victories, not recorded. The LORD promises to make them afraid, and presumably now they are, although this verse does not say that they are afraid. We cannot be sure as to which war is being referenced. Is this looking forward to the Northern and Southern campaigns, or is it additional war in the central part of the country? One point that this verse makes, though, is that the Israelites will no longer be able to pick off one city after another. The kings of the land are coming together to fight collectively against the Israelites realizing that a single city alone does not have much of a chance.

III. Gibeon's Lies: Josh 9:3-6

Josh. 9:3-6

3 However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, 4 they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. 5 The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. 6 Then they went to Joshua in the camp

at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us."
NIV



Gibeon is with five mile Jerusalem and not much further the Israelite base at Gilgal than is Ai.

We are not told how the Gibeonites or anyone else heard about the Israelite victories since all the enemy combatants had been killed. However, clearly spreading the news of these victories was part of the methodology promised by God for their victory in the land.

The Gibeonites lie outright here. In addition, the conditions of verse 4 and 5 have been construed by them to hoodwink the Israelites. If they were from a distant country, why would the Gibeonites need a treaty with the Israelites? Joshua and the Israelite leaders must have been rather naïve to have believed their story.

IV. Did Not Inquire of the LORD: Josh 9:6-15

Josh 9:6-15

7 The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?" 8 "We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?" 9 They answered: "Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the LORD your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, 10 and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan-Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. 11 And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, 'Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; make a treaty with us." ' 12 This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. 13 And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey." 14 The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD. 15 Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.

NIV

Note the similarity of the Gibeonite words to Rabah's words in 2:9-12.

Verse 7 Did the Israelites know that they were Hivites, or is this just an addition later by the commentary to point out the error of the Israelites? Given that the first listing of people in Palestine (Gen 10:17) omits the Hivites, they might also have resided elsewhere. So, the Israelites might have known that they were Hivites. Others say that the Hivites were Horrian or Hurrian who also lived in Mesopotamia.

Verse 8 Joshua's question implies that he believed the Gibeonites, and might be paraphrased as "from where did you come as you passed by here."

Verse 9 "Come" has the sense of "arrive." So, while Joshua is interesting as to why they were "passing by," the Gibeonites are saying that they have arrived at their destination.

- Verse 11 The Gibeonites refer to their leaders, but do refer to their king.
- Verse 14 The Israelites test the Gibeonites by sampling their provisions, which mislead them. They do not seek counsel from the LORD, which would not have misled them. Not inquiring of the LORD was wrong. How easy it is for us to take His blessings and guidance for granted!
- Verse 15 The details of the treaty are apparently not fully disclosed here. There were likely a mutually assistance in case of attack by a third party. At least, we know that the Gibeonites call for support from Israel when threatened with attack. It is likely that their enemies would not be attacked if they would join those attacking Israel.

V. Deception Discovered: Josh 9:16-21

Josh 9:16-21

16 Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. 17 So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroh and Kiriath Jearim. 18 But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, 19 but all the leaders answered, "We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. 20 This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them." 21 They continued, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community." So the leaders' promise to them was kept.

NIV

- Verse 16 Eventually, the Israelites hear of the deception...again, we are not told how. Apparently as verse 17 shows, by the time of this verse, they know where the Gibeonites are living.
- Verse 17 The four cities are all within the boundaries of the land to be given to the tribe of Benjamin.
- Verse 17 Apparently on hearing of the deception, many Israelites started out to destroy the Gibeonites.
- Verse 18 The Israelites are bound to honor their side of the agreement even though it was made through deception by the Gibeonites. Apparently, the rank and file of the Israelites wanted to kill the Gibeonites, but their leaders, presumably led by Joshua, did not let them. So the people grumbled. Motivating factors in this episode were:
- The Israelites had been ordered to make no treaties with the people of the land and had now violated this command.
 - The Israelites had suffered at Ai when they broke another of God's commandments.
 - Not to honor the treaty once made was to break another of God's commandments.
- By not inquiring of the LORD, the Israelites put themselves in a no-win situation.
- Verse 20 Later King Saul, of Benjamin, would kill some Gibeonites, which resulted in the Israelites being punished with a famine in the land.

2 Sam 21:1

21:1 During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."

NIV

Verse 21 A strategy is found around the oath. They are unable to kill them, but they can make them to be forced laborers to help the Israelites. This is the penalty for captives from cities outside the land, but it does not apply to Hivites within other parts of the land (who must be killed):

Deut 20:10-11

10 When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. 11 If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you.

NIV

VI. Aftermath: Josh. 9:22-26

Josh 9:22-26

22 Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, "Why did you deceive us by saying, 'We live a long way from you,' while actually you live near us? 23 You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." 24 They answered Joshua, "Your servants were clearly told how the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this. 25 We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you." 26 So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them. 27 That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD at the place the LORD would choose. And that is what they are to this day.

NIV

While we see the fear first in their statement, we also see acknowledgement and therefore faith that the LORD can do what He says. They are willing to submit to Him and to the Israelites. The Gibeonites put themselves in the hands of the Israelites and the LORD. Apparently the Israelites have already told the Gibeonites what they intend to do to them. If the Israelites consulted the LORD on this path forward with the Gibeonites, it is not recorded.

VII. Today

We see the Israelites not fully obeying the LORD. At Jericho, they made a treaty with Rahab and her family without consulting the LORD; in this Gibeonite incident, they make a treaty with another Canaanite group against the commands of the LORD.

Why did not consult the LORD in these situations? Why did God not punish them concerning the first treaty with Rahab to keep this insubordination from happening again, especially in light of the severe punishment because of Achan's sin? Why did God not punish the Israelites immediately for making a treaty with the Gibeonites? (NOTE: Given that the Gibeonites would be servants, we might speculate that their treatment led to other Canaanite groups being used as servants rather than being killed. This would come back to haunt the Israelites.)

For the Christian today, the lesson is to follow the LORD fully. When we do not, we should expect problems. The problems might not be immediate; we might even know that we have deviated from the LORD's commands. When we deviate, our one sin will likely become larger and affect additional parts of our lives.

How do we make sure that we are following God fully in our lives? If we find we are not following Him fully, what should we do?

The answers to these last two questions should be relatively obvious, but are we applying them?