

# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson 7: The Deception of the Gibeonites -- Joshua 9:1-27

Picture a small delegation cresting the hill toward Israel's camp at Gilgal. Their sandals are split and patched, their wineskins cracked and bound up with cord, their bread crumbling into dry green crumbs in their hands. They look like men who have walked to the very edge of the world and back. 'From a very far country thy servants are come,' they say, and they have the worn-out evidence to prove it. Everything about them whispers distance, weariness, harmlessness. And every word of it is a lie. These are not foreigners from beyond the horizon. They are Gibeonites, neighbors who live a three days' march away, and they have come not in weakness but in fear, having heard what the God of Israel did to Jericho and Ai.

Now stand where Joshua and the elders of Israel stand. You have just watched God topple a walled city with a shout and burn another to the ground. You are riding a wave of victory, and here come strangers asking for a treaty of peace. The bread looks old. The wineskins look ruined. The clothes hang in rags. So you do the sensible thing: you examine the evidence. You taste the moldy bread. You finger the cracked leather. It all checks out. And so, the text tells us, the men of Israel 'took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.' One short clause, and the whole disaster turns on it. They looked at the bread. They never looked up.

How many of our own worst decisions could be summed up in that same sentence? We gathered the data, we weighed the appearances, we trusted our judgment, and we asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. The Gibeonites did not defeat Israel with armies. They defeated Israel with a costume and a story, because Israel leaned on its own eyes instead of seeking the God who sees everything the eyes cannot. The evidence was real. The conclusion was wrong. And the difference was one prayer that nobody prayed.

Yet watch what happens when the deception unravels three days later. Israel could have torn up the treaty. The men were frauds; the oath was obtained by lies; surely it could not bind. But the leaders said, 'We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them.' Even tricked, even embarrassed, even angry, Israel kept its word, because a vow sworn in the name of the Lord is a heavy and holy thing. And in the strange providence of God, the very people who lied their way in end up drawing water and cutting wood at the house of God, outsiders who sought refuge among His people and found a place to belong. As we walk through Joshua 9, ask the Lord to teach you both lessons: to seek His counsel before you decide, and to keep your word once you have given it.

**Group Discussion:** When the worn-out clothes and moldy bread all seemed to confirm the Gibeonites' story, Israel examined the evidence carefully but 'asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord' (Joshua 9:14). Why do you think godly, experienced leaders forgot the one step that mattered most, and where do we tend to make the very same mistake?

**Personal Reflection:** Think of a significant decision you made recently. Did you genuinely seek God's guidance before you acted, or did you mostly lean on the appearances in front of you and your own judgment? What was the result?

*Read Joshua 9:1-27*

## **Study Questions**

1. After Jericho and Ai, the kings of Canaan gather to fight Israel together, but the Gibeonites take a different path: they 'did work wilily' and come pretending to be travelers from a far country (Joshua 9:1-6). Look at what they had heard (verses 3, 9-10). What does their fear and their scheme reveal about how the surrounding nations understood the God of Israel, and why did they seek a covenant rather than a battle?
2. The Gibeonites built their whole deception on appearances: cracked wineskins, patched sandals, moldy bread, and a rehearsed story. Where in your own life have you been most tempted to judge by appearances, trusting what looks convincing on the surface instead of asking what is really true?
3. The hinge of the whole chapter is verse 14: 'And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.' Israel inspected the evidence but never inquired of God. What does this verse teach us about the danger of leaning on our own judgment, and how is this a recurring pattern of failure in Scripture (compare Proverbs 3:5-6)?
4. Israel had every tool to make a careful decision: wise leaders, recent victories, hard evidence to examine. Yet they failed at the one point of prayer. When you face a decision, what 'evidence' are you most tempted to trust so completely that you forget to seek the Lord first?

5. Three days after the covenant is made, the truth comes out: these are neighbors, not foreigners (Joshua 9:16–18). The congregation murmurs, but the leaders answer, 'We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them.' Why did Israel consider itself bound by an oath obtained through deception, and what does this reveal about how seriously God regards a vow sworn in His name?
6. Israel kept a promise that was costly, embarrassing, and obtained by trickery, simply because they had sworn it before God. When has keeping your word cost you something, and how did you respond? Is there a commitment you are tempted to break right now because honoring it has become inconvenient?
7. Psalm 15 describes the one who may dwell with God as he 'that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not' (Psalm 15:4). Israel had sworn to its own hurt, and did not change. What does this teach us about the integrity God looks for in His people, and how does this stand against the way our culture treats promises today?
8. The Gibeonites came in fear, hiding the truth, and yet they came seeking refuge among the people of God rather than standing against Him. Have you ever come to God or to His people imperfectly, with mixed motives or out of fear rather than clean faith? What does this chapter suggest about how God deals with those who seek shelter among His people, even imperfectly?
9. Trace the providence running through this whole chapter. Israel sins by failing to seek God's counsel, yet God's purposes are not derailed. The oath stands, the Gibeonites are spared, and they become 'hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord' (Joshua 9:21, 27), servants at the house of God. How does this chapter hold together two truths at once: the binding seriousness of keeping our word, and the

faithfulness and overruling providence of God even when His people err? How does the placement of these former outsiders in service at God's altar point toward the grace that gathers strangers into the household of faith (Ephesians 2:12–13, 19)?

10. Look back over all of Joshua 9, from the moldy bread to the altar of the Lord. Name one specific way this chapter is changing you. What is the Lord teaching you about seeking His counsel before you decide, and about keeping your word once you have given it, that you need to put into practice this week?

### **Digging Deeper**

**Reflect on these passages:** Psalm 15:4, the one who dwells with God swears to his own hurt and changes not, the heart of Israel's decision to keep its oath; Proverbs 3:5–6, trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding, the very step Israel skipped; Numbers 30:2, a vow made to the Lord must not be broken but performed, showing the weight of a sworn word; 2 Samuel 21:1–2, a famine falls on Israel generations later because Saul broke this covenant with the Gibeonites, proof the oath still bound; Ephesians 2:12–13, 19, those once strangers and foreigners are brought near and made fellow citizens, the grace foreshadowed by Gibeonites serving at God's altar.

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