

### JOSHUA

#### Lesson 13 - Chapter 9

The Law of Moses is, of itself, but theory and an expansive statement of God's divine ideals. The real rub for the faithful is in finding ways to put it into practice in our lives as we operate in our diverse cultures, using the principles of the Law as the motor to drive our lifestyles.

That may sound like a prescription and challenge for the modern day Jew or Christian (or more pointedly the modern Believer who has decided to accept and explore the Hebrew roots of our faith). And while that is true in fact it is also the backdrop for the book of Joshua in general and the subject of today's lesson, Joshua chapter 9, in particular.

Joshua chapter 9 focuses on an encounter the Israelites had with a nation of people called the Gibeonites. This encounter would form an uneasy relationship between the two groups, one that would endure for centuries; and this because it was founded on deception on the part of one party and sin on the part of the other. The renowned Biblical and Hebrew scholar O.V. Gerlach says this about the events of Joshua 9: "This account is a warning to the Church of God of all ages against the cunning and dissimulation of the world, which often seeks for a peaceable recognition on the part of the Kingdom of God, and even for reception into it; whenever it may be its advantage to do so".

I would take that statement one step further and say that it is a warning not only to the Church but also to the Jewish people of the 21st century, especially since the Lord has mercifully returned them from exile and placed them back into their own land. In light of what is happening today in the modern state of Israel the book of Joshua is most contemporary and enlightening and its cautions and predicted consequences ought to be heeded.

Let's read Joshua 9 together.

#### **READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 9 all**

A new paradigm is now in operation; whereas God told Israel that their enemies would flee before their onslaught, and that the hearts of the many Canaanite kings and their people would melt in fear of Israel, here we find that several Canaanite city-states banded together to fight against Israel. Six separate and independent groups of people got together and formed a formidable military alliance: the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and the Jebusites. No doubt it was as the result of Israel's defeat at Ai (before they regrouped and then conquered Ai) that this group of six determined that if they fought against Israel as a

single army victory was possible.

What a great lesson this is for us. Recall that the defeat at Ai was a result of Achan's violation of the Law of Herem (the ban) that the Lord God had placed on Jericho. As a result of Achan's sin Israel bore the burden of the consequence of misappropriating God's holy property and thus (coupled with a healthy dose of arrogance and self-confidence) they did NOT seek the Lord's guidance and so lost the battle for Ai. This was the first time since crossing the Jordan River that Israel had known defeat. The leaders of Israel confessed their complicity before God, repented, identified the culprit (Achan) who stole the Lord's banned property and punished him per the Lord's instructions; as a result God's people received restoration in their relationship with Yehoveh. It would seem what began as a terrible misadventure was heading towards a happy ending, especially when the Father instructed Joshua to again attack Ai and that this time they would win handily (which is what happened). But chapter 9 paints another picture.

Even though the God of Israel had forgiven His people and restored their relationship with them, that doesn't mean the consequences for their actions had ended. Israel had unwittingly set into motion a whole series of events that would trouble them as a nation throughout their history. Often the errors of our past, before we submitted to the will of God or prior to our being reinstated into His good graces, seem to pop up and haunt us when we least expect it. Sometimes these things follow us to our graves and we're relieved of them only when we leave these bodies to join our Savior in heaven. There was no erasing the reality of Israel's initial defeat at Ai; there was no stopping the surrounding tribes and people from hearing of it. And it was inevitable that the knowledge of that defeat would cause some of those nations (who would otherwise have either surrendered to Israel or been destroyed by their army) to gain courage and assume that Israel was vulnerable and could be driven back. It made them assume that the Lord God who led Israel was perhaps not as invincible and all-powerful as they had feared.

Redemption (which Christians more commonly call salvation) does not mean that our immediate circumstances necessarily change. Being saved indeed gives us a new spiritual and eternal life with God, but it isn't a universal divine mulligan, which pardons us from the earthly ramifications that result from our earlier rash and rebellious actions. Israel would painfully relearn that lesson over and over again.

On the other hand not all the nations in the Promised Land felt the same confidence as the 6 nation northern alliance, which formed an army to come against Joshua's invading forces. The leaders of Gibeon remained fearful of Israel and decided to try and avert the inevitable.

Let me make a point I haven't made in awhile. We are going to start encountering the names of many of the primary tribes and nations that lived in the Land of Canaan. The Land of Canaan was a name for a region. The Land of Canaan was not a sovereign nation. Saying, "Land of Canaan" is not unlike saying the Middle East or Europe. There is no nation of Europe, nor is there a single people group, race, tribe, or nationality of Europe. When we speak of a European we mean anyone who lives in that region. But Europeans identify themselves according to specific nationalities: French, British, Irish, German, Polish, etc.

Therefore in our list of the 6 nations or city/states that decided to work together and gang up on Israel, we see one of them identified as the “Canaanites”. So the Bible will loosely refer to any and all residents living in the general region of the Land of Canaan as Canaanites. But that’s not how they spoke of themselves. Those who identified themselves as Canaanites were from the tribe of Canaan; Canaan was the grandson of Noah who was cursed for the actions of Canaan’s father, Ham, of walking into Noah’s tent and seeing him naked and drunk. And while the Land of Canaan was named for this tribe they only held some of the villages and cities. Scores of other tribes and peoples populated the Land the Canaan.

The Hittites were an enormous and advanced society that centered in what is modern day Turkey. They also established cities in the region of the Land of Canaan. But the Hittites were NOT descended from Canaan; they were from Japheth. Amorites we’ve of course heard of before and they were perpetual enemies of the Hebrews. They were originally from Mesopotamia and very likely Abraham was one of them. The Jebusites were the original founders of the city of Jerusalem long before it was called Jerusalem. The Perizzites are thought NOT to be the name of a tribe or a city-state but rather a kind of nickname for various peoples who lived in the northern hill country of Canaan. The identity of the Hivites is more difficult. There is NO extra-Biblical mention of such a people or group or tribe so information about them is so far limited to the Torah. They apparently were headquartered near Shechem and their influence was probably limited to that surrounding area. The King of Shechem that Jacob’s sons killed was called a Hivite. So it may have been a description more than the formal name of a people group.

It is more than a coincidence that in Joshua 9 we hear of this Canaanite military alliance of those particular 6 nations. God, through Moses, many years earlier identified these exact nations by name (in the book of Exodus) that Israel MUST drive out of the land or kill them all without mercy.

**CJB Exodus 34:11 *Observe what I am ordering you to do today. Here! I am driving out ahead of you the Emori, Kena'ani, Hitti, P'rizi, Hivi and Y'vusi. 12 Be careful not to make a covenant with the people living in the land where you are going, so that they won't become a snare within your own borders. 13 Rather, you are to demolish their altars, smash their standing-stones and cut down their sacred poles; 14 because you are not to bow down to any other god; since ADONAI- whose very name is Jealous- is a jealous God. 15 Do not make a covenant with the people living in the land. It will cause you to go astray after their gods and sacrifice to their gods. Then they will invite you to join them in eating their sacrifices, 16 and you will take their daughters as wives for your sons. Their daughters will prostitute themselves to their own gods and make your sons do the same!***

Sometimes we think (and frankly are taught) that ancient cultures were ignorant, unsophisticated, isolated and short on communication. Nothing could be further from the truth. These people knew what was going on around them, and news spread quickly. Nations had spy networks and some had far flung military outposts to keep an eye on their neighbors. Trade caravans were the equivalent of the post office and the Pony Express. Those 6 nations banded together because they were targeted for elimination and it was common knowledge.

For them (because of God's decree) surrender wasn't even a choice. Either they left the region.....hundreds of thousands of them....or they fought. Those were their only options.

With that, let's get back to verse 3 where it states that the people of Gibeon heard what happened to the residents of Ai and Jericho and decided they needed to make a treaty with Israel. Gibeon was a small confederacy of cities and villages who wanted no part of war with Joshua's army. So they came up with a clever plan; they would deceive Joshua and the leaders of Israel into thinking that they had come from far away to make peace. Why did it matter whether they came from nearby or from a long distance? Because the Gibeonites apparently knew that Israel's charter from their God was that they were to destroy all the cities and people who lived in Canaan. And that Yehoveh prohibited Israel from making peace treaties with any of the residents of Canaan. Gibeon was located in the Land of Canaan. They basically had the same options before them as the 6 nation northern alliance: fight or move away. But the leaders of Gibeon came up with an alternative solution: trick Israel into believing they were from a region OUTSIDE of the Land of Canaan, make a treaty with them, and presto! It would be too late for Israel to back out and Gibeon would be in the clear.

So to make the ruse work, the ambassadors from Gibeon equipped themselves with clothing and food and supplies that looked like they were old and decrepit, and journeyed south a couple of days until they met up with Israel's army, and they were taken to Joshua. As we can easily imagine the suspicious Israelite leaders began questioning these foreigners and the deception was sprung. The men of Gibeon explain they have come from a long way off (a lie), and say they want to make a covenant (the truth). A better word for covenant in this context is peace treaty. They want to be under Israel's military protection as opposed to being the enemy.

They begin their plea with the words, "we are your servants". This was simply flattery. It was Middle Eastern courtesy. When a weaker force asks something of a stronger force the protocol is for the weaker force to be greatly humble towards the stronger force. By no means did they communicate, "we've come to submit and be slaves for you."

Then the Gibeonite representatives continue their cunning strategy by heaping more flattery on Israel. They explain that they heard about what happened to those people over on the EAST side of the Jordan River; Sichon of Heshbon and Og of Bashan. They heard about the powerful god Yehoveh who dealt with the Egyptians on Israel's behalf. Interestingly (and wisely) they say nothing about Jericho and Ai. Because these battles happened in the Land of Canaan, and the Gibeonites are feigning as having come from the far North or East, better to pretend they had not yet heard about Ai and Jericho, which were actually but a few miles from their territory. The Gibeonites undoubtedly had observers on the scene as Israel destroyed Jericho and then Ai.

Bottom line: we want to be your friends and besides we are outside of any instruction your god may have given you concerning the land you are in process of conquering.

The Gibeonites were anxious to show Israel's leaders what were essentially stage props that they had prepared for the deception: spoiled food, burst wineskins, and tattered clothing.

Verse 14 explains that some of the men of Israel sampled the alleged spoiled food of the Gibeonites and it apparently convinced them that these travelers were telling the truth. But, says the second half of the verse, the leaders of Israel didn't seek the advice of Yehoveh before deciding how to respond to the Gibeonite request for a treaty. Sound familiar? Yes, they had just made the same mistake at Ai; Israel attacked without first consulting the Lord and it was terribly costly. They were about to do it again.

How, exactly, would the leaders of Israel go about consulting Almighty God on this matter, had they chosen to? Joshua was not a Mediator and so he could not enter the Tent of Meeting and directly confront God as Moses did for all those years. Rather this statement about seeking God is making an indirect reference to the method Israel would use for centuries to come when they wanted to "seek the advice of the Lord": the Urim and Thummim. The Urim and Thummim were those two stones that the High Priest of Israel carried in a special pouch attached to his ephod. The leaders of Israel would bring a matter of importance that needed a decision from Yehoveh to the High Priest, and the High Priest would use the Urim and Thummim to discern God's answer. No one knows exactly how the stones were used to indicate God's answer but the ancient Hebrew sages say it was common knowledge that the only type of result these stones could give were yes or no; or in another sense it allowed only for a choice between two options. Lots were the other way Yehoveh was consulted and decisions of the Lord were handed down to Israel, but the lots did NOT have to be drawn by the High Priest. Any authorized leader could use lots. A distinction between lots and the Urim and Thummim is that lots allowed for multiple options; lots provided more than a simple either/or, yes or no type of response.

Apparently Joshua and the leaders of Israel used their own wisdom and decided to make the treaty. Such a treaty, of course, spared the lives of the people of Gibeon. A treaty or a covenant was established by making a vow. A vow was by definition the invoking of the name of the tribe or nation's god as witness and overseer of the terms.

Now this kind of treaty was what is often called a Suzerain. It is an agreement between two men or nations to be at peace. However it also generally set up one party as the superior and the other as subservient. It was agreement among un-equals. A common name in more modern times is a vassal treaty; one party was the king the other was the vassal. In other words it is not like NATO, or like the Alliance of WWII where all signatories were considered to be equal and co-operative. The alliance of the 6 northern nations that is mentioned at the outset of this chapter was an alliance of equals.

What this means is that the Gibeonites agreed to be under the protection of Israel, and that Israel's rule extended to them. However it did NOT mean that Israel would absorb Gibeon, or that the people of Gibeon were like slaves taken as spoils of war.

The ambassadors of Gibeon accomplished their mission and went home with exactly what they sought: a guarantee of continuation of their people. But it didn't take long for Israel to find out they had been duped. Three days after making the treaty with Gibeon Joshua discovered that Gibeon was only about 20 miles from Israel's encampment in Gilgal, so he sent a contingent of tribal leaders to Gibeon to see for themselves just what the extent of their foolish

arrangement wrought.

When they arrive they of course discover that the Gibeonites were located in the Land of Canaan (a fact which the Gibeonites had totally misrepresented to Israel) but also that they were much more than some small isolated group of people. Rather the Gibeonites controlled several substantial satellite cities and we're given the names of 3 of them: Cephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-Jearim (this is in addition, of course, to the capitol city of Gibeon). Every one of the cities resided in the territory allotted to the tribe of Benjamin, and likely there were several outlying villages and towns that were part of the Gibeonite confederation.

Israel now has a severe dilemma on their hands, and verse 18 tells us their decision; Israel decided NOT to attack Gibeon as the Lord had expressly directed them to do, back in the days of Moses. And WHY did they choose this? Because the leaders of Israel had made a vow to be peaceful with Gibeon, and a vow cannot be broken because it automatically invokes the name of their god, Yehoveh. And here we have the classic result of what happens when we ignore God's commands and eschew seeking Him out for direction: at this point Israel was damned if they do and damned if they don't destroy the Gibeonites.

If they DID attack Gibeon they would be breaking their vow based on God's holy name. If they didn't attack Gibeon they would be committing a direct and known sin of disobedience by refusing to destroy that which God said to destroy. They weighed out which was the least of the two evils and decided that keeping their vow to God was more important. We've talked about vow making in earlier lessons on the Torah so if you want more in-depth understanding of the protocols and impact of vows go back and review it for your self. In a nutshell vows were a usual and customary part of Middle Eastern life in the Bible era; it was by no means a Hebrew invention. And it was also the norm that whatever god the participants pledged allegiance to, his name was invoked as a witness, a party, and as the guarantor of the contract or covenant. So making a vow was very serious business. Since most vows were public and often written down, and just as often had to do with a real and tangible political or financial or civil matter (as opposed to a making some kind of private vow of faith between you and your god), there were also real and tangible penalties for breaking the vow. It could mean losing your property, starting a war, or even being jailed or executed. This was all in addition to the vow breaker being subjected to more supernatural punishments inflicted by his now-angry god whom he has insulted and offended by not following through with the terms of the agreement to which the god's name was attached. The Hebrews and the pagan nations all pretty much believed the same way on this issue of vows.

Vows were so serious that even a vow made based on deception by one party (or both) remained as binding. That is the case here; for one might think why wouldn't Joshua just annul the treaty since the entire basis for it was a lie perpetrated by the ambassadors of Gibeon? Yet to the ancient mind that was not a good enough reason to overturn the vow; in fact (especially to the Oriental mind) putting one over on friend or enemy elevated the status of the one who came out on top. Lying and cheating, if done cleverly and affording the liar an advantage, was seen as something to brag about; it was a badge of honor worn proudly. It was simply outsmarting your opponent. In Western culture that does not play well in our society but truth-be-known, we are the exception to the rule. Most societies in the world have much different

rules and views concerning making agreements, and what constitutes fair play, than we are familiar with.

We'll see several occasions of vow making in the Bible that on the surface seemed so good but had disastrous results. One of the most infamous concerns Jephthah, a story that appears in the book of Judges. Jephthah is an Israelite general who is going to lead Israel into battle and he makes a vow to God that if God will give him victory he will sacrifice the first thing that walks out the door to greet him when he returns from battle. Thinking that this "thing" would be an animal (likely a sheep) it never occurred to him that his own daughter would be the object of sacrifice. Even though he was devastated, due to the mindset of the Middle Easterner in that era, Jephthah concluded that he could NOT break his vow even though it meant killing his own daughter and then burning her body on an altar.

By the way, do NOT take Israel's decision to spare Gibeon or Jephthah's decision to kill and sacrifice his daughter as the correct ones. This is NOT a directive from God to do something evil and wrong just because you made a rash vow to the Lord. The point of it is that a) it is better to not make vows at all, b) our long ago and forgotten sins can suddenly pop up to bite us with tragic results, and c) by disobeying the Lord we set off on a path that can ONLY lead to more sin and disobedience in circumstances that we could never in our wildest dreams have imagined.

So in Joshua 9:20, the leaders of Israel agree that they will let Gibeon live but they will make Gibeon their servants and give them menial tasks.

Before we continue and finish up Joshua 9 I am going to editorialize for a few minutes because I am convinced of the critical nature of what I am about to tell you. Because of the mindset that Israel adopted over 3000 years ago (as illustrated in the story of Gibeon) we find the consequences playing out over and over again in Israel's history. In modern Israel they would do well to take the message of Joshua to heart and change course. Our American government would also do well to read Joshua and see that our incessant threatening, bullying and pushing Israel to do something they should NOT do is to join our fate with theirs. The so-called Roadmap to Peace is exactly as it was between Gibeon and Israel. It may well be a roadmap to peace between Israel and her neighbors (for a brief time), but it is also a roadmap to war between Israel and God.

Israel is NOT to give God's enemies a foothold in the Promised Land. Israel is to drive out those who do not join Israel, give up allegiance to false gods, and become a friend of Yehoveh. If those enemies who will not leave Israel will also not join Israel; if those who insist on remaining loyal to Allah and to foreign governments decide to resist being driven out by fighting to the death, they are to be destroyed. That is the direct command of God as given to Moses, and Moses made Joshua swear to carry it out. That directive has NEVER been abolished. Obviously when Israel's disobedience and rebelliousness led to their exile, and they didn't inhabit or govern the Holy Lands during those times, then such a directive was in suspended animation. But Israel is back as a sovereign nation, in the God-given place it inhabited 3000 years ago, and that divine directive is once again active.

That the world doesn't recognize this is completely understandable. They know nothing of the God of Israel or the Word of the Lord. But too much of the church does not recognize this either because it says Jesus abolished every directive and command of God that came before His advent. Therefore God's mandate to rid the Holy Lands of false gods and their places of worship, and of the people who would rather die than either leave the area or abandon such abominable worship practices is also abolished and everyone should be allowed their piece of the pie that is called Israel. After all that is the peaceful and merciful thing to do. That's what Jesus would want.

By abandoning some of the Word of God and picking and choosing the parts we prefer, Believers have fashioned for ourselves a prison of confusion. We find ourselves in predicaments that seem to have no good answer (like happened with Israel and Gibeon), because either way we turn we find ourselves in confrontation with the Lord. The Jewish people of modern Israel have done the same and now are in an impossible position that the best and brightest minds in the entire world cannot figure how to untangle. Back tracking is possible only to a degree, and it is invariably a painful and costly experience.

Gibeon came to Israel on false pretenses, just as the various factions of the Palestinians come to Israel on false pretenses. They say that with just a little more of the Holy Land placed in their hands, with a least part of Jerusalem given over to them, with Israel agreeing to let back into Israel a few thousands of Palestinian refugees who want nothing to do with the God of Israel, that there will be peace. It is a lie, and just as Joshua suspected and confirmed as concerned the confederation of Gibeon, there were ulterior motives for this false peace treaty. And even more appalling is that once Joshua found out that little if any of what the ambassadors of Gideon said was true, he went ahead with the agreement anyway! And we see Israel doing precisely the same thing as we live and walk today. The government and people of Israel know full well that the Palestinian leadership doesn't want peace; they want Israel! And yet they seek more agreements and more promises that go directly against Yehoveh's commands and intents.

And in further parallel with modern Israel we see Joshua and the leaders of Israel say that it would be wrong and evil to break the vow and the stupid agreement they made with Gibeon, even though it was entirely based on lies and deceit. And here we have, today, the government of Israel going ahead with making agreements to give away sovereignty over portions of the Holy Land to their enemy knowing from experience that the enemy has no intent of honoring any agreement, and that whatever weak promises the Palestinian leadership makes are simply based on more lies and deception. And they do this crazy thing in the name of the God of Israel; they say that the long-held Jewish values of mercy and kindness and humanitarianism compel them to seek peace with God's enemies. And upon Israel's back, like a jockey on a thoroughbred as he races towards the finish line, is the United States government applying the whip to hurry and make it happen!

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters in the faith, we are living today as if in a time warp. We are back in the days of Joshua and the primary participants are utterly blind to it. Israel may be deceived, our US government may be deceived, but we don't have to be deceived. Believe the Word of God. Trust the Word of God. Obey the Word of God. And let the chips fall

where they may.

In an ironic twist, verse 18 has the people grumbling and chastising their leaders for their sin, as opposed to when Moses and the leaders of the Exodus chastised the people of Israel for their sin. So in verse 22 we have Joshua summoning the leaders of Gibeon to explain themselves. And sure enough, they had indeed heard of Moses' directive to drive out or kill all the inhabitants of Canaan and THEY believed it. So they wanted to see what could be done to find a compromise.

Instead of killing the Gibeonites Joshua made them choppers of wood and drawers of water. Joshua did something that the Gibeonites really didn't expect; he enslaved them to a degree. But as we'll find later in the Old Testament, the Hebrews were not cruel to Gibeon, and Gibeon and Israel got along fairly well.

Chopping wood and drawing water were the lowliest of duties. Obviously that was not the ONLY two tasks assigned to the Gibeonites; rather it is but a way to show that both males and females were under Israel's thumb. Chopping wood was a traditional man's duty, and drawing water was a traditional woman's duty.

But just to demonstrate how sloppy Joshua and the leaders of Israel were in following God's Law, we find in verse 27 that some of the Gibeonites were used to chop wood and draw water for use at "the altar of Adonai". In other words here we have foreigners who worship other gods being assigned to supply wood for the holy fire on Israel's sacrificial altar, and to bring water for the many God-ordained Temple rituals that involved ritual hand washing, bathing, and even cleaning up the blood. This was supposed to be the sole duty of the Levites! So as you can imagine what we have here is some of these Gibeonite slaves being given to the Levites and the Levites having the Gibeonite slaves do what God said ONLY Levites were authorized to do: all of the menial tasks necessary for sanctuary service to God.

In some ways Joshua 9 contrasts with the story of Rahab, the prostitute/innkeeper of Jericho. She too sought to save her and her family's life, but she did so by being truthful with Israel and deceiving her own people. She forsakes her gods for the God of Israel. She proved her loyalty and faithfulness first by helping Israel, then by living outside the camp of Israel, then being allowed to live INSIDE the camp as a member of Israel.

The representatives of Gibeon sought to save their and their families' lives, but did so by being dishonest with Israel while being truthful to their own people. They kept their gods, but showed just enough respect for the God of Israel to be allowed to live nearby. They didn't prove their loyalty to Israel in order to establish a relationship, they simply used lies to trap Israel into a treaty that played on Israel's out-of-balance view on the value of a vow in comparison with the basic value of following God's commands to begin with.

We'll start on Joshua 10 next week that continues in this same theme.