

## Notes on Joshua 9

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### Alliance with Gibeonites (Josh. 9)

Verses 1,2

1. What plans did the people of the land make to deal with Israel?

#### *An alliance against Israel*

This story begins by describing a plan determined by the inhabitants of Canaan. They decided that they would gather together to fight against Israel. There is strength in unity. Israel had proved they could defeat individual cities, so other people united to fight them.

This may not refer to any one specific alliance but simply to a general plan that the peoples of the land decided to follow. There was no war with the people of some of these areas till considerably later. This would indicate that this was just a general plan.

This story appears to be then set aside for a while as the account tells about the alliance Joshua made with the Gibeonites.

Verses 3-6

2. Who tried to trick Israel? Locate the city on a map.

3. Describe the preparations they made. What request did they make?

#### *The Gibeonites' deceit*

Gibeon was a city actually located just southwest of Ai and north of Jerusalem (see MAP). V17 shows that the Gibeonite people actually inhabited a group of four cities in that area. So these people really lived quite close to the location of Israel's great victories. These people had heard of the victories of Israel and knew they were among Israel's next victims. They realized they were powerless to defend themselves, so they decided to work by deceit.

They pretended they were messengers sent from a far distant country. They put on old patched clothes and sandals, carried old sacks, old food, and old wineskins. They came to Israel while they were still camped in Gilgal. There they asked Israel to make a peace treaty with them. They knew Israel would destroy anyone who lived in the land, so they pretended to be from a far country so Israel would make peace with them. Then they would try to hold Israel to their agreement.

The Waldrons hold the view that this Gilgal is not the one in the Jordan lowlands where Israel camped when they first crossed into Israel. They claim that Israel would have moved further into the land by this time. So this Gilgal would be one higher in the mountains.

Verses 7-13

4. What lies did the Gibeonites tell when Joshua questioned them?

5. Why did they want to make a covenant with Israel?

6. What had God told Israel about making covenants with people of the land? Give **b/c/v**.

#### *Israel questions the Gibeonites*

Joshua and the people were suspicious of the Gibeonites, thinking they might actually be of the land of Canaan, in which case Israel should defeat them.

God had commanded them not to make covenants with the people of the land (Deut. 7:1-6,16; 9:1-5; 20:10-18; Ex. 23:31-33; 34:11,12). Note especially Deut. 20:10-18, which expressly allowed Israel to make covenants with people who lived far from Canaan. But people who lived in the land, Israel was commanded to destroy. So they wanted to make sure these people were not of the land.

But the Gibeonites continued their lie. They said they were from a far country and there they had heard of Israel's great victories against the nations east of the Jordan. They claimed to have heard of the God Israel worshipped, and they wanted to join in alliance with Israel.

They used their old clothes and provisions as proof. They said their elders had told them to take these with them and they were all new when they left home. But in the great travel and long time that had passed, these had become old.

Of course, Israel should have suspected that such would not necessarily be true. But they were new at making war and dealing with crafty enemies. Their greatest error is yet to be described in the following verses.

Verses 14-17

7. What basic error did Israel make that led them to agree to the covenant?
8. When and how did Israel learn the truth?

### ***Israel makes the covenant***

Israel then made a covenant of peace with them, even swearing to them that they would not kill them. But we are told that they did not ask counsel of the Lord. This was a terrible mistake.

It appears that Israel had made this same mistake at their first attack of Ai. In this case there can be no doubt, for we are plainly told that they did not consult the Lord. Had they done so, He would no doubt have told them the truth and they would have destroyed the Gibeonites.

Three days after making the covenant, however, Israel learned the truth. They heard that these people actually lived quite nearby. So Israel continued their journey and came to the cities where these people lived. They included Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim (see MAP).

Imagine Israel's anger and shame at having accepted such a deceit!

Verses 18-21

9. What did the leaders decide to do with the Gibeonites?

### ***Israel decides to make the Gibeonites slaves***

Having learned of the Gibeonites deceit, Israel still determined not to harm them but to honor their treaty. The congregation complained against the rulers about the matter, but the rulers explained that they had made an oath in the name of God. They concluded that they could not hurt the Gibeonites because of that oath lest wrath come upon them.

Nevertheless, they determined they would make the Gibeonites into slaves. They would be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation. The Gibeonites had offered to be Israel's servants (v11). Israel had promised not to kill them, but Gibeon offered to be servants, so that's what was done.

Verses 22-27

10. What explanation did the Gibeonites give for their deceit?
11. List and explain other Old Testament ***passages*** about the Gibeonites.
12. Application: List several lessons we should learn from this event.

### ***Gibeon confronted for their deceit***

Joshua then called the Gibeonites and asked why they had deceived Israel saying they were from far away when actually they lived very close. Gibeon explained, as already discussed, that they knew God had promised to give Israel the land and had commanded them to kill everyone in the land. They feared for their lives, so they plotted this deceit.

Joshua then explained to the Gibeonites that they would be Israel's slaves, as the rulers had decided. They would be woodcutters and water carriers for the house of God (v23), for the altar in the place God would choose (v27). This appears to mean they would perform these tasks for the priests and Levites at the tabernacle and later the temple.

Gibeon agreed to this arrangement. They had offered to be servants and this at least spared their lives. This was what was done, and in this way the Gibeonites' lives were spared. At the time the book was written, the Gibeonites still served in that capacity.

### ***Later information about the Gibeonites***

After Saul became king, in his zeal for destroying Israel's enemies, he had attempted to slay the Gibeonites – 2 Sam. 21:1-9. Because this was a violation of Israel's oath with the Gibeonites in Joshua's day, Israel suffered later during David's rulership. When David inquired of God about this, God explained this was because of Saul's attempt to kill the Gibeonites. Seven of Saul's offspring were then given to the Gibeonites to kill as punishment for Saul's sin.

Later references show that, for many generations the tabernacle and/or a place of worship was located at Gibeon (1 Kings 3:4; 1 Chron. 16:39). Later, a group called the Nethinim were still working as servants to those who worked in the tabernacle and the temple. It is believed that these were the Gibeonites. See 1 Chron. 9:2; Ezra 2:43,58; Neh. 10:28.

### ***Why was this covenant binding?***

The above passages, especially the case of Saul, demonstrate that God enforced the oath Israel had made to Gibeon. Even though the Gibeonites had lied and deceived, and even though He had commanded Israel to make no covenants with the people of the land, God upheld this covenant and punished Saul for not keeping it!

I have serious difficulties understanding why an oath made under these circumstances was binding. First, the oath was unknowingly a violation of God's law, and second it was made only because of false pretenses and lies from the Gibeonites. Why should they be rewarded for their lie by granting them protection? Why should Israel be allowed to continue in violation of God's law under such circumstances? I honestly cannot answer, yet clearly God did hold them to the oath.

#### **Some things to consider are:**

1) Israel had failed to consult God before making the oath. Perhaps keeping the oath served as a punishment to them for their failure to consult God.

2) Gibeon did appear to have faith in God. They clearly believed God would empower Israel to defeat them, regardless of any effort on their part. And they appear later to have served faithfully in the tabernacle and temple. God had said to kill the inhabitants so they would not lead Israel into idolatry. Clearly the Gibeonites did not lead Israel into idolatry. Perhaps their faith made them an exception to the rule that the people of the land should be slain, even as Rahab's faith had made her an exception.

3) The oath Israel made was not just to the Gibeonites but also before God. That said they swore by God. Such an oath was bound, not just by the people but by God himself. This was the specific reason offered by the leaders of Israel why they had to keep the oath. Could it be that, had Israel simply made a promise to Gibeon but then found out that the Gibeonites had lied, Israel could have freed themselves from the oath to Gibeon? But having made the oath before God, and knowing God was faithful not deceitful, perhaps that is why they had to keep it.

#### **Lessons to consider:**

1) Always be sure we consult God's will before making any commitment. Be sure the commitment is in harmony with God's will.

2) Do not lightly enter into any commitment, but especially commitments made to God.

3) Check out the commitment carefully to be sure what you are getting into before making it.

4) Attach conditions to any commitment such that, if it turns out that the information on which you have based the commitment is untrue, then you are free from the commitment.

These principles are especially important for commitments of major importance and long duration, such as marriage, etc.

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