

JOSHUA BIBLE STUDIES

CONQUERING: JOURNEYING WITH JOSHUA

LESSON #10

JOSHUA CHAPTERS 8:30-35 & 9:1-27**“A DEDICATION AND A DECEPTION”**

The Christian life is analogous to Israel's conquest of Canaan. We have been delivered from a life of slavery and, having been freed by Christ, are marching forward in His army equipped with the armor of the Christian soldier. (Eph. 6) As we study the book of Joshua, we are seeing the hardships that Israel endured as they took possession of their Promised Land. They were not on a playground but a battleground. Likewise, the Christian life is a battleground. We, like Israel, have enemies that battle, beguile and try to block our every advance.

In our battles against the world, the flesh and the devil we will experience some defeats as well as victories; some set-backs as well as steps forward; there will be some “downs” as well as “ups”; we will make mistakes like Israel did, but we must recover and continue to move forward until we overcome.

In this study we will see Israel dedicating themselves to God anew, which certainly was a positive development, but shortly thereafter, we will see that they fell into a trap, which certainly was a negative development; we see them at their strongest and then shortly afterward at their weakest; we see them taking a step forward and then taking a step backward. From our present-day perspective, that was a pattern in the history of the nation. Unfortunately, that is also a pattern in many Christian's lives. As we study the book of Joshua let us learn how to be consistent as we see their inconsistencies.

In Joshua chapters 8 and 9 we see prayerful dedication by Israel followed by preying deception by the Gibeonites.

I. DEDICATION - THE ALTAR AT EBAL. Joshua 8:30-35

“Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: “an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool.” And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.”

A. Moses' Commandment – Deut. 27:1-8

Joshua led the people in the fulfillment of Moses' command in Deut. 27. The command was two-fold:

1. Construct an altar – Deut. 27:1-6
2. Celebrate – Deut. 27:7

B. Joshua's Ceremony – Josh. 8:32-35

The valley between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal is a natural amphitheater so that the people in the valley could hear the words being spoken from either mountain. An experiment was conducted which verifies this as follows:

“In 1860 a Mr. Mills, Williams and Edwards tested the acoustics at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. They recorded their experiment as follows: “We had pitched our tent in the valley, near the foot of Gerizim, on the line between the two mountains, where I have supposed the ark stood. I clambered up Gerizim, and Mr. Williams up Ebal and Mr. Edwards remaining with the men at the tent. Having reached the lower spur, I found myself just as if I stood upon a lofty pulpit, and my friend found himself on a similar one on Ebal. I opened my Bible and read and every word was heard distinctly by those at the tent, as well as by Mr. Edwards on Ebal. My friend then read and we all heard every word and syllable” ('Journal of Sacred Literature,' October, 1863, p. 178; see also 'Land of Promise,' p. 371).

I have had the privilege of visiting this site. It is as described above. In that setting between the two mountains, Joshua led in a ceremony that involved three things that have a message and significance for us today:

1. The Altar – v.30-32. *The altar represents the approach to God.*

In the Tabernacle in the wilderness the first item one came to was the altar. We enter the presence of God via the altar. Heb 13:10 reminds us that “We have an altar...” That altar is Calvary. Jesus is our sacrifice making it possible to approach God. (Heb. 10:19-22)

2. The Ark – v.33. *The Ark represents the presence of God.*

In Exodus 25:21-22 God promised that He would: “meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony.” The Israelites knew that the Ark was not God but represented the presence of God. They were made conscious that as they gathered at Mt. Ebal with the Ark of the Covenant in their midst that God also was there.

We do not have a visible symbol reminding us that God is present with us for we have the presence of God Himself indwelling us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. The consciousness of His presence is both a corrective and a comfort.

3. The Book – v.34-35. *The Book contains the message of God.*

We do not have a tangible altar or ark but we have the tangible Book – the Word of God. Let us regularly approach God in prayer; be constantly aware of the presence of God and read and heed the Book of God.

This dedication at Mt. Ebal was a pause that refreshed. The worship services of the Church of Jesus Christ are a similar gathering. As we corporately enter into God's presence by way of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, we celebrate and rejoice with our praises and communicate the message of God for our edification. This refreshing pause needs to be repeated regularly.

After the pause at Mt. Ebal the Israelites moved on to continue their conquest of the land of Canaan, but not without experiencing a new type of danger. Before long they were tested again. This time by an entirely different ploy of the enemy. Chapter 9 records the somewhat humorous yet sad development.

II. DECEPTION - THE ALLIANCE WITH GIBEON. Chapter 9

Joshua and the Children of Israel were given specific instructions for destroying the inhabitants of the land. (Exodus 23:31-33, Deuteronomy 7:2,16.) As Joshua led the Israeli army forward they encountered ambassadors from the city of Gibeon who came to meet the invading army. I can think of a couple of titles for the story which follows: "The Sad Sacks Are Coming!" or "A Sucker Is Born Every Day". Notice what happened:

A. The Subtlety Of The Gibeonites. 9:1-15

Gibeon was located only twenty-five miles from the camp of Israel at Gilgal and was on Joshua's list to be destroyed. God stated that Israel must destroy all the cities in Canaan (Deut 20:10-18). The residents of Gibeon realized that they would be destroyed. They were desperate and so they resorted to trickery to save their skins. They formed a masquerade brigade and hood-winked Joshua. (They claimed to have known about Sihon and Og, but did not mention Jericho and Ai.) This was a crafty crowd! From the Gibeonites perspective we can understand their actions. They went to great lengths to fool the Israelites in an effort not to be destroyed by the Israelites. Their actions were ingenious. From God's perspective it was quite a different matter. These were pagan peoples who had rejected God and whom He had ordered annihilated.

B. The Subjugation Of The Gibeonites. 9:8 & 16-27

Israel had made a covenant with the Gibeonites. When Joshua found out that he had been deceived, he would not break the covenant he had made, but placed Gibeon in submissive slavery. They became wood choppers and water carriers. The Gibeonites were willing to submit to humiliating service rather than be killed.

C. The Sequel For The Israelites.

Note the results of the hasty decision that Israel made:

1. *They incurred criticism from their own countrymen.*
"And all the congregation complained against the rulers." (v.18)
2. *They had to live with the consequences.* – (vs.19-27)
3. *They had to protect the Gibeonites from their enemies.*
Israel had to defend the people they were supposed to defeat! – (Chapter 10)

When we run ahead of the Lord by failing to consult Him; when we make decisions apart from divine wisdom; when we judge based solely upon appearances or emotions we usually will live to regret it.

Proverbs 3:5-6 is fitting counsel for us all: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." The leaders of Israel leaned to their own understanding and did not, in all their ways, acknowledge the Lord.

We often quote the above two verses from Proverbs 3, but the next verse, v.7, puts the finger on the real problem: "Do not be wise in your own eyes." That was Israel's problem and at times ours as well. The results of being "wise guys" when dealing with the "guys in disguise" caused Israel many problems.

What are some of the lessons we can learn from Israel's leaders being wise in their own eyes?

LESSONS TO LEARN FROM ISRAEL'S MISTAKES:

Although the Israelites probably didn't consider themselves very gullible, they were deceived for a number of reasons:

1. They Failed To Give The Devil His Due.

- *Satan is the master of deceit.*
The guile of the Gibeonites reminds us of the devil. He uses deceptive methods & deceptive words. After all, he is the master of deception:
"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." (Rev.20:7 & 10)
- *He is a counterfeiter and masquerades as an angel of light.*
"Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve." (II Cor. 11:14-15)
- *His mission is to thwart individual believers and the work of God in general.*
"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:8-9)
He wants to get us to fall into traps that are disastrous or detrimental to ourselves and to God's work in the world; he has been on this mission since he fell, and he will be on it until he is thrown into the lake of fire.
- *His message is to make a lie to appear or sound like truth and/or to make truth appear or sound like a lie.*
In John 8:44-45 Jesus said of the devil: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning,

not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

2. They Judged By Appearance. (10:1-13)

They took things at face value. Who would have thought that old wine skins moldy bread torn clothing and run-down heels would have compromised Israel? Jesus said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (John 7:24) How many times have we heard it said, “appearances can be deceiving”? What you see is *not* what you always get!

3. They Acted On Impulse.

What was the hurry? Why couldn't they have taken time to investigate the claims of the Gibeonites? They rushed headlong into an alliance which they had no right to form without permission from the Lord. Here we see the folly of haste. Impetuous decision-making is dangerous: “Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” (Prov 29:20) Beware of making important decisions without proper deliberation!

“When voices tell you that action is urgent, that something must be done immediately, refer everything to the tribunal of heaven. Then, if you are still in doubt, dare to stand still. If called on to act and you have not time to pray, don't act. If you are called on to move in a certain direction and cannot wait until you have peace with God about it, don't move. Be strong enough and brave enough to dare to stand and wait on God, for none of them that wait on Him shall ever be ashamed. That is the only way to outmatch the devil.” [Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living: Studies in the Book of Joshua*. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming Revell Co., 1955).

4. They Did Not Use Their Sanctified Senses!

They assumed that they were being told the truth. (Vs. 14-15) They were gullible. They could have checked out the story first. This is the first Trojan Horse trick!

- *Their actions were based on insufficient information.*
It provides a lesson for us, to be sure we know all the facts before we make an agreement. We may have to live with the embarrassing agreement for a long time.
- *They put too much trust in others.*
Not every person can be trusted. There will be people who will lie to you. Every drug dealer is a liar. Every drug user becomes a liar to himself or herself. When faced with the temptation to make a deal with the devil we must decide to do the right thing.

Illust. Scottish preacher Alexander MacLaren said, “In making our decisions, we must use the brains that God has given us. But we must also use our hearts which He also gave us. A man who has not learned to say, ‘No’ – who is not resolved that he will take God's way, in spite of every dog that can bay or bark at him, – will be a weak and a wretched man till he dies.”

There are wolves in sheep's clothing! Again, Jesus warns: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." (Matt. 7:15) Use your sanctified senses, know how to spot wolves who parade around disguised as sheep.

5. They Failed To Consult God. Vs. 14-15

In the transaction with the Gibeonites, Joshua and Israel's elders "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." This is the peril of an independent spirit. Here again, like at the first battle for Ai, they acted independently of God. Servants should not act independently of their Masters. "We don't seek God's will like customers considering our *options*, but like servants listening for *orders*." - Warren W. Wiersbe

*"Oh, what peace we often forfeit!
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer."*

6. They Failed To Be Vigilant.

Eternal vigilance is the price of victory. "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be strong." (I Cor. 16:13) We need to be on our spiritual toes constantly.

The children of Israel were fooled because they were not on guard. We are astonished at their conduct in this situation, yet how often is similar negligence or unbelief exemplified in the lives of many of us? We must ever be on guard.

HOW TO KEEP FROM BEING DECEIVED

"Be not deceived" Gal. 6:7 ~ *"Let no man deceive you"* I John 3:7 _____

1. Ask questions – get answers! - v. 7

He asks the hard question - he just doesn't stick with it until he gets an answer. Notice that they did not answer Joshua's question of verse eight, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" Instead they said, "Oh, we are so far away that you would have never heard of us."

The Gibeonites not only were deceptive about their origin but they also lied about their intentions. They told Joshua that they wanted a covenant because they had heard about the wonders of the Lord God. Verse nine they say that they 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." They gave the impression that they longed to honor God. But notice they did not offer to repent; they only offered to serve.

2. Realize that compliments don't make you more competent. - v. 8.

The answer that they gave Joshua was an attempt to butter him up a little bit. "You are in authority - we are merely your humble servants." Sometimes the compliments are sincere. Other times they are shared with a hidden agenda. It's easy to get off track when someone starts throwing compliments your way. Don't get sidetracked just because someone is saying nice things to you.

3. Know that God's name being invoked is no guarantee.- vv. 9-13 (also vv. 4-5)

This is a weakness for a lot of Christians. We presume if the name of God comes up then it's definitely a green light. I wish I could say that is true, but the sad reality is that there are a lot of people who invoke the name of God while having other agendas. There are people who will talk about God while lying to you. Charlatans!

4. Understand that a "good offer" is not the same as a "God's offer."- v.15.

The offer of peace seems to be a good one. Why not take it if it's a good offer? Well, the fact that it was a good offer doesn't mean it was what God wanted them to do. In fact, it was not God's will at all. Just because we get a "good offer" doesn't mean that it's what God wants us to do. If the offer seems too good to be true it often is!

5. Know that many bad decisions have consequences that God will not magically erase.

You just have to live with them. (vv. 18-19) Once they've made the peace treaty, even though it's not God's will, they cannot go back on their word. The die has been cast.

6. Do not walk by sight, that is, by strictly human logic; instead walk by faith.

II Cor. 5:7 *"For we walk by faith, not by sight."*

*"Wait for His reasonable aid,
And though it tarry, wait.
The promise may be long delayed
But cannot come too late."*

- William Cowper

SUMMATION

1. The human aspect of this story reminds us that our lives will be filled with battles. These battles are not physical battles but our battles are spiritual in nature.
2. The mistakes we make are embarrassing, especially those mistakes that are caused by running ahead of the Lord and not seeking His will. But God is merciful and mighty and He can turn our blunders into blessings, our stumbles into stepping stones.
3. We need to remember that no mistake is final for the dedicated Christian. God can use even our blunders to accomplish His purposes.

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