

# The Lord Your God Goes Before You

## God's Work in the Book of Joshua

### *An Unwise Alliance*

9:1-27

#### **Focus Attention:**

*A dentist's mistake is pulled out.*

*A lawyer's mistake is imprisoned.*

*A teacher's mistake is failed.*

*A printer's mistake is corrected.*

*A pharmacist's mistake is buried.*

*A postman's mistake is forwarded.*

*An electrician's mistake could be shocking.*

<Anonymous author as quoted by Wiersbe, p 106>

“Joseph Conrad wrote, ‘It’s only those who do nothing that make no mistakes.’ In Joshua’s case, however, doing nothing *was* his mistake [in the next episode of Israel’s conquest].”

<Wiersbe, p 106>

Satan is a crafty adversary. In his war against God, he would love nothing more than to rob the inheritance away from those to whom God is giving it. Anyone who has been aware of Satan’s schemes for any length of time soon learns that he does not always work in the same ways. As we open up Joshua 9, we are given insight into another one of the Evil One’s strategies against God’s people, and how God’s people will either fall for his deceptions or remain vigilant against them.

#### **Focus on the Word:**

##### **A. Believing the enemy (vv 1-15)**

1. *Meanwhile...* The story at the beginning of Joshua 9 is like watching a drama on television. For the moment we are viewing what is happening with the main character, and then the scene changes to events that are unfolding in another place.
  - a. At the end of chapter 8, the Israelites are found celebrating God’s faithfulness and recommitting themselves to their covenant with Him in the valley between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim.
  - b. As chapter 9 opens, we are taken to a new vantage point as two of Israel’s enemies plot against God’s people in the land of promise.
    - i. One group is planning for war. The land of Canaan was made up of several city-states who often had animosity for one another and frequently made war against each other. With the threat of a new, seemingly unstoppable enemy in the land, several city-states decide to join together to deal with this new

danger. Three confederations are formed: the hill country of south Canaan, the western foothills through the middle of the land, and the coastal regions extending far north. The enemy Israel must face is about to be better prepared and more strongly equipped than the previous foes.

- ii. Another group is planning a much different strategy. The inhabitants of Gibeon – along with its closely allied neighbors of Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim – adopt a different a different slogan: “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” Their plans for self-preservation involve deception rather than confrontation.

☞ Satan schemes sometime involve an all out frontal assault on the people of God, tempting them with the desires of their flesh (1 Thess 3:5). At other times, Satan is like a lion on the hunt, devouring those who become complacent and unprepared, striving to cause doubt, fear, and eventual quitting on faith (1 Pet 5:8-9). There are still other times when Satan stealthily deceives, even appearing at times as a messenger from God, offering things that seem right and good but are instead detrimental to God’s purposes and holiness (John 8:44b; 2 Cor 11:3-4, 13-14). What does this tell you about the way we should prepare ourselves for our enemy?

2. What Gibeon *did*. (vv 3-5)

- a. Gibeon was only 25 miles from the Israelite camp at Gilgal. Apparently, they had done their homework. God had commanded through Moses (Deut 20:10-18) that the people of Canaan were to be completely destroyed. Other peoples outside of Canaan could be offered terms of peace. For their own protection, the Gibeonites decided to use God’s word to their own advantage. (Our enemy will also use God’s word as a means to defeat us if we are not vigilant, as he demonstrated even when he attempted to pull Jesus away from His God-given purposes in Matt 4:5-7.)
- b. A delegation was assembled and provided with props to appear as if they had traveled from a far off land. They planned out every detail in their attempt to deceive the leaders of Israel.

3. What Gibeon *said*. (vv 6-13)

- a. Lies are often much easier to speak than the truth – especially if it will get a person out of trouble. Lies are also often much easier to believe – especially when the father of lies is orchestrating them.
  - i. The Gibeonites lied about their homeland.
  - ii. They lied about their provisions.
  - iii. They lied about themselves, pretending to be ambassadors for a foreign power.
- b. To bolster their claims, they selectively acclaimed God’s mighty work of conquest. They mentioned Egypt and the Amorite kings east of the Jordan, but they left out the victories over Jericho and Ai. Logically, a delegation at the end of a lengthy journey would not have had knowledge of those more recent developments.

- c. Above all things, they lied about what they were ultimately seeking. They implied that they desired to serve the God of Israel. In reality, they were seeking to save their skins.
4. Why Gibeon *succeeded*. (v 14)
- a. The answer to how Gibeon succeeded in their ruse is simple and straightforward.
 

*The men of Israel sampled their provisions  
but did not inquire of the Lord.*

Israel *sampled* and did not *inquire*.
  - b. Put in other terms, Joshua and the other leaders of Israel chose this opportunity to walk by sight instead of by faith (2 Cor 5:7). “The leaders of Israel took the ‘scientific approach’ instead of the ‘spiritual approach.’ They depended on their own senses, examined the ‘facts,’ discussed the matter, and agreed in their conclusions. It was all very logical and convincing, but it was all wrong. They had made the same mistake at Ai (chap 7) and hadn’t yet learned to wait on the Lord and seek His direction.” <Wiersbe>
  - c. Interestingly enough, Joshua and the other leaders were aware of a possible deception taking place (v 7). But they were all too quick to trust their senses and forgot to seek God’s will in matters that involved God’s purposes for them.
5. What Gibeon *got*. (v 15)
- a. “Joshua made a treaty of peace with them ... and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.” This was more than just a handshake and nod of the head in agreement. The Hebrew of the passage indicates a covenant confirmed by sacrifice. The text also indicates it was ratified with an oath to the Lord.
  - b. That is what is most problematic about this whole situation. Joshua and the leaders of Israel were acting on behalf of God with the Gibeonites. The covenant agreement was made not just between Israel and Gibeon, but between *God* and Gibeon. It was sealed with an oath. Joshua had made a covenant of peace on God’s behalf without ever consulting God for His approval or disapproval.
6. Why did Israel comply? Why would the leaders so easily and willingly give themselves to this covenant of peace?
- a. Out of goodwill? Israel had just experienced another mountaintop with the destruction of Ai, and had followed up with a spiritually invigorating ceremony at Gerizim and Ebal. Perhaps Israel was feeling good about herself and wanted to share the joy with others.
  - b. Out of compassion? Some weary travelers had come among them claiming to be seeking God. God had been merciful and compassionate to them. Perhaps they wanted to share the same compassion towards others.
  - c. Out of a desire to obey God? Moses had said they should extend peace toward foreigners who sought peace with Israel. Perhaps they saw this as an opportunity to obey God’s directions toward outsiders.

- d. Whatever the reason, Joshua and the other leaders of Israel had set themselves up for some potentially bad outcomes. At best, it threatened to distract them from fulfilling the purpose for which God had taken them into Canaan. At worst, it could have been the agreement that would lead them away from their covenant relationship with God.
- ☞ “Like Joshua and the nation of Israel, God’s people today are living in enemy territory and must constantly exercise caution. When you believe the enemy instead of seeking the mind of the Lord, you can expect to get into trouble.” <Wiersbe, p 110>
  - ☞ What voices, philosophies, ways of life, and other influences are around Christians today begging to be followed? What comparisons do you find with Joshua’s experience with Gibeon? How are followers of Christ, who are listening for the voice of God, to relate with the influences that daily surround us?

### **B. Enlisting the enemy. (vv 16-27)**

1. It did not take long for the leaders of Israel to discover their blunder. These men had not been emissaries from a foreign power seeking to establish peaceful relations with the God of Israel. They were instead from among the condemned peoples of Canaan with whom God had commanded Israel never to establish alliances.
  2. “The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders.” For what reason?
    - a. Perhaps they were upset that they would not be able to enjoy of the spoils of these rich cities. Gibeon was among the most powerful and affluent cities of the land (10:2).
    - b. Perhaps they were concerned that the leaders had set them up for another punishing lesson from God, as the mistake at Ai had been.
    - c. Perhaps, just coming away from the reading of the law at Gerizim and Ebal, they knew how this alliance would displease God and the Gibeonite pagan influence threatened their future with Him.
  3. “We must give the leaders credit for being men of their word. To violate their oath would have been to take the holy name of Jehovah in vain, and this would have brought about divine judgment. Years later King Saul violated this oath; and God judged the nation severely (2 Sam 21).” <Wiersbe, pp 110-11>
  4. “Joshua and his associates teach us an important lesson: If you make a mistake, admit it; *and then make your mistake work for you!* The leaders put the Gibeonites to work hauling water and wood for the service of the tabernacle, where both water and wood were used in abundance...” Later the tabernacle would be moved to Gibeon (2 Chron 1:3). “There is no evidence in Scripture that the descendants of the Gibeonites created any problems for the Jews. It’s likely that their service in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, influenced them to abandon their idols and worship the God of Israel.” <Wiersbe, pp 111-12>
- ☞ The old adage says, “Two wrongs do not make a right.” Joshua and the leaders could have instead gone by the slogan, “All’s fair in love and war,” and destroyed the Gibeonites. They could have made excuses for themselves when the mistake was discovered. They could have broken their vow in order to do what God would have

wanted them to do if the vow had never been made. To the contrary, they determined to do what was right even in the aftermath of something that was wrong. In what ways do you need to do what is right even though it falls on the heels of something that is wrong?

- ☞ We need to give God the opportunity to bring something good to us out of our mistakes by resolving to do the right thing even after we have done something wrong. God does this very thing for Joshua, as chapter 10 will describe.

## ***Focus on Tomorrow***

How has the church fallen prey to the deception of Gibeon?

Paul says the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16). We are ambassadors of Christ making His appeal to the world on His behalf (2 Cor 5:20). When the church partners with something or someone (an outside group, philosophy, methodology, movement, etc.), it acts on behalf of Jesus Christ as His representative in this world.

Sometimes the Gibeonite deception visits the church when the people of God make treaties with philosophies or theologies that, though they sound good, are in fact opposed to God's truth. In attempting to seem "modern" or "sophisticated," the church is sometimes tempted to compromise with what the world calls "New Age Enlightenment," or "Politically Correct Tolerance," or "Religious Multiculturalism." Christians sample what the world values and offers, and finds that there are things to be desired. Christians investigate the claims of the world and find ways to rationalize the good in the world's approaches. We must remember, though, that anything that changes the focus away from the gospel of Christ and the cross is an enemy to the people of God. Religious syncretism is fatal to the people of God.

At other times, the Gibeonite deception threatens the church when the people of God take on purposes other than that which God has called us to accomplish. Followers of Christ have been called out of this world to make disciples. But how many philosophies have found their way into the life and thinking of the church that have distracted the church away from its primary mission?

- ✦ The church as a civic organization. There is a lot of call for community and service in our world. Churches are often expected to provide opportunities to promote activity and service to their neighborhood. The church can be a place whose primary goal is to promote common ground among people in the world.
- ✦ The church as a benevolent institution. James said pure religion is to take care of widows and orphans. Many in our world are hurting economically or socially. We have a moral imperative to share the blessings God has given us with others who are in need. It is a way of doing good to all men. The church can be a place whose primary goal is to improve the living standards and conditions of those in need.
- ✦ The church as family enrichment. The family is under attack in our culture. The church has the answers families need to help strengthen marital bonds and parental responsibility. The church can be a place whose primary goal is to strengthen families and equip them to enjoy better, more fulfilling relationships.

- ✦ The church as an agent of social justice. A lot of injustice is perpetrated in our world, especially on those who have little power or influence in our society. Christ's instructions to love one another and to be salt and light in this world spur Christians to seek ways they can bring about righteousness and justice in a world that is often void of such qualities. The church can be a place whose primary goal is to right the wrongs of our society.
- ✦ The church as a place to maintain truth. The world is full of falsehood and relativistic messages. The church must be a place where God's truth is upheld and strictly defended. It must be the keeper of all that is good and true and right. The church can be a place whose primary goal is to be the guardian of truth isolated from the corrupting influences of the world.
- ✦ The church as a patriotic activist. The principles upon which this country was founded are under attack. The freedom future generations will have to worship God without fear of reprisal is in jeopardy. The people of God must be active in the policy making institutions of our society to protect what the founding fathers envisioned. The church can be a place whose primary goal is to be agents of change in the political arena.

Is there anything wrong with these images for the church? Each of these is a worthy cause. Each is something that is desperately needed in our world today. The deception of the Evil One occurs, however, when we decide one of these is *the purpose* for our existence as the people of God. (After all, each of these can be found in God's word as something His people are to be concerned about.) Our alliance with the world by accepting these expectations for us endanger our true identity, distinctiveness, and purpose in Christ.

People have many expectations for the church. There are a plethora of methodologies, philosophies, organizational structures, causes, and the like that others would like to covenant with the church. We have been called out of this world to make disciples. That is our reason for existence. When one of these other priorities helps fulfill that mandate, it becomes a godly endeavor. When one of these threatens to replace our reason for existence, it is no longer something that is done because we have sought God's will.

What ministry do you perform for the cause of Christ? Are you doing it with the purpose in mind of leading others into a disciple-shaping relationship with Jesus Christ? Or have you allowed the world's expectations to shape your thinking?

The basic outline for this lesson has been adapted from *Be Strong* by Warren W. Wiersbe.