

1. Gibeon against the Nations (9)

Israel has entered the land.

They have crossed the Jordan and are beginning to take possession of Canaan.
Jericho has fallen.

But then Achan took some gold and silver from Jericho,
along with a cloak from Shinar (probably a priestly garment),
and buried it in his tent.

Achan has taken items devoted to God,
things that should have been put into the treasury of the tabernacle,
–the tent of God–
and has put them into his own tent.

He has set himself up as a priest over against the priests of God.
And so, with a false priest in their camp,
the hosts of Israel cannot overthrow the little “heap” of Ai.

But once the false priest is put to death,
and Israel is restored to God’s service,
they quickly dispatch Ai and reduce it to a heap
burying its king under a heap of stones–
just as Achan was buried under a heap of stones.

In other words, what we saw last week was the need for *holiness* in spiritual warfare.
If Israel is not holy – then they will not inherit the land.

If Israel is not faithful to God – if they pursue their own wealth and glory
then they will become just like the Canaanites.

We have seen that in the conquest - in Joshua’s day –
Israel was supposed to be the angel of death
bringing judgment upon the wicked,
as a picture of the final judgment.

If you are going to serve as a stand-in for Jesus,
then you had better be holy!

Tonight we see a curious example of the *mercy* of God.

I say curious because the Gibeonites were supposed to die.
They are among the condemned tribes.
They are supposed to be exterminated.

And – as we’ll see – there is a strong hint in our text
that if Israel had consulted with the LORD,
the LORD would have ordered the death of the Gibeonites!

But they didn't!

And in his great mercy, God used that in order to bring salvation to the Gibeonites!

a) The Gibeonite Covenant (9:1-15)

As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard of this, ² they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.

But when the kings of the land hear of the coming of Israel,
they gather together to fight as one against this upstart Joshua.

And in so doing they bring the curse of God upon them.

God has already declared that their wickedness is full (Dt 9:4-5),
but there is a special curse for those who curse the seed of Abraham.

God had said in Gen 12 that those who bless Abraham's seed will be blessed –
and those who curse the seed of Abraham will be cursed.

And so by coming to fight against Israel, God's curse falls upon them.

All except Gibeon.

³ But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, ⁴ they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, ⁵ with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. ⁶ And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us." ⁷ But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?" ⁸ They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?"

Note that they have come "because of the name of Yahweh, your God."

⁹ They said to him, "From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God. For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, ¹⁰ and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth.

They have heard of what he did to Egypt, to Og and Sihon
(though of course, not Jericho or Ai, since that would betray their proximity!)

The deception of the Gibeonites is performed in faith.

They believe God's promises,

and so know that their only hope for life is to deceive Israel!

¹¹ So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, 'Take provisions in your hand

for the journey and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us."'¹² Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and crumbly.¹³ These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey."¹⁴ So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD.¹⁵ And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

And Israel falls for it.

Israel was supposed to destroy every single one of these reprobate nations.

But Gibeon tricked their way into salvation.

Israel should have inquired of the LORD.

And if they had, God would have told them no.

But in God's providence, Israel failed.

And so - the blessing of Abraham comes to Gibeon!

b) The Unbreakable Oath (9:16-21)

¹⁶ At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbors and that they lived among them. ¹⁷ And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim. ¹⁸ But the people of Israel did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. ¹⁹ But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. ²⁰ This we will do to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them." ²¹ And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them.

But three days later, Israel realizes what has happened.

And it takes them three days to march to Gibeon.

How many days is that?

Six days after the covenant is made with Gibeon,

Israel stands at the gates of Gibeon.

And thus, on the seventh day, Gibeon enters Israel's rest.

I want you to think about how seriously God takes your oaths and covenants!

Psalm 15 says of the blessed man that he swears an oath to his own hurt –

and does not break it!

If you say that you are going to do something,

then you need to do it!

Proverbs says that the only way out after you have sworn an oath

is if your neighbor releases you!
So the only way that Israel could attack the Gibeonites
would be if the Gibeonites released Israel from their oath!

Obviously it is unlike that Gibeon would do that directly! (Sure, go ahead, kill us!)
But the other way that Gibeon could release Israel from their oath
would be if Gibeon violated the terms of the oath.

Henceforth, they will share in the blessing of Abraham—
but because of their deception they are relegated to hewers of wood and drawers of water
a status they willingly accept!

C) The Gibeonite Curse (9:22-27)

²² Joshua summoned them, and he said to them, “Why did you deceive us, saying, ‘We are very far from you,’ when you dwell among us? ²³ Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.”
²⁴ They answered Joshua, “Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you—so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing. ²⁵ And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it.” ²⁶ So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. ²⁷ But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place that he should choose.

There is a certain irony here.
They are blessed and yet cursed.
Blessed because they now live as members of the people of God,
but cursed because they are forever servants.

But the response of Gibeon is that they would rather be hewers of wood and drawers of water
in the house of Yahweh,
than remain in idolatry any longer.
This is reflected in Psalm 84 –
where the Psalmist says
that he would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord
than dwell in the tents of sin.

In 2 Samuel 21, we hear that King David received a complaint from the Gibeonites
that his predecessor, King Saul, had slaughtered the Gibeonites without cause.

Saul had sought to destroy the Gibeonites—to cut off their place in Israel
(Samuel portrays it as a misguided effort to complete Joshua’s job)

And the punishment fits the crime:

Saul had sought to cut off their place in Israel –
and so Saul's offspring are cut off so that now Saul has no place in Israel.

David atones for Saul's sin –

making clear that the Gibeonites are *not* to be mistreated!

The image of the Gibeonites lived on in Christian imagination.

The Gibeonites were not destroyed – but were definitely treated as an underclass –
subordinated to the service of Israel's God.

One 19th century author used the image of the Gibeonites
to describe what modern society is doing to Christians!

William Henry Ruffner was an Old School Presbyterian pastor – who wrote this in 1853:

“Few seem to perceive what appears fearfully evident to the writer, that our existent Christianity is almost universally corrupt, and is becoming more so continually; that unless its present tendencies be speedily reversed, a state of worse than medieval darkness will soon settle upon Christendom; not a state of intellectual decrepitude and enslavement, but one of intellectual triumph and haughty independence; not a state in which the Church, like a besotted despot, will drag men in chain-gangs behind her bloody car, but one in which man will rise in proud supremacy, and either trample the Church under foot, or else spare her in Gibeonite degradation, to become a ‘hewer of wood and drawer of water’ about the gorgeous Temple of Mammon! Or, to say the very least, the Church and the world will move on in harmony, neither disposed to assert its own peculiarities.” (William Henry Ruffner, *Charity and the Clergy*)

The church has too often adopted a Gibeonite servitude to the power of Mammon.

The church is supposed to be the place where the kingdom of God
is made visible on earth.

(Notice how I said that – it's not that the church *is* the kingdom –
but the church is the place where the kingdom of God is made visible on earth).

What Ruffner is saying is that when the church loses sight of the kingdom of God,
then the church becomes like the Gibeonites –
servants of some other kingdom.

Ruffner noticed that pastors were trying to attract the wealthy –
the “important people” –

and so preached sermons for the rich and the influential.

They didn't care about the poor.

That's why he says that the church will become “hewers of wood and drawers of water”
for the gorgeous temple of Mammon.

And sure enough, within 40 years the mainline churches had drifted into liberalism.

But notice what happens to Gibeon in our text:

2. The Nations against Gibeon (10)

a) The Five Kings Attack Gibeon

10 As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua had captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction,^[a] doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, ² he^[b] feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors.

Now the five kings of the Amorites hear that Gibeon has gone over to Israel,
and so they come against Gibeon
Led by Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem,
they march against Gibeon.

Who was the first king of Jerusalem named in the Bible?

Melchi-zedek (king of righteousness).

Now Adoni-zedek (lord of righteousness) rules on the throne.

He is quite possibly Melchizedek's own flesh and blood.

He is certainly Melchizedek's heir.

But this king of Jerusalem is proud and does not heed the word of the LORD.

He does not bless Abraham's seed,

and thus the curse of Abraham comes upon him.

³ So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, ⁴ "Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon. For it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel." ⁵ Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it.

Adoni-zedek leads the five kings against Gibeon.

When you hear about all of these kings in the land –

it is worth pointing out that these are very minor warlords.

Most of the "cities" in Canaan would have had a population of a few thousand at most.

So this is like saying that the king of Roseland, the king of North Liberty,
and the King of Wakarusa,

gathered to fight against the king of Sumption Prairie!

This is a smart strategic move for these five kings.

After all, they don't want more Canaanite cities going over to join Israel!

If they can smash Gibeon – then they can nip that in the bud,
and hopefully avoid more defections!

b) The LORD Fights for Joshua (10:6-15)

So the Gibeonites cry out to Joshua for help.

⁶ And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, “Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us.”

Having made a covenant with Gibeon,

Joshua will honor his word.

When Gibeon sends word that the kings of the Amorites have come,
he marches his men all through the night.

And Yahweh himself declares:

“Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands.” (10:8)

There may have been some who feared that because the Gibeonites
were supposed to have been devoted to destruction,
that therefore God would now judge them

by giving them into their enemies hands;

but God here assures them that he will fight for them.

This is final proof that God desired the salvation of the Gibeonites,
and that it was according to his will that these Gentiles be delivered
by the hand of Israel.

And God fought for Israel (v10-11)

⁷ So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. ⁸ And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you.” ⁹ So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. ¹⁰ And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who^[c] struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. ¹¹ And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword.

Read verse 12:

¹² At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

*“Sun, stand still at Gibeon,
and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.”*

Who is the “he” in “he said in the sight of Israel?
While most have said “Joshua,”
it is entirely possible that this is God speaking.
(Especially because man—even Adam in the garden—does not have authority
over the heavenly bodies)

Still,

¹³ *And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,
until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.*

*Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not
hurry to set for about a whole day. ¹⁴ There has been no day like it before or since, when the
LORD heeded the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel.*

¹⁵ *So Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.*

Verse 14 goes so far as to say that Yahweh obeyed the voice of a man.

So far, Joshua has been portrayed as someone somewhat lesser than Moses,
but here we see Joshua’s greatness.

Never before or since has God obeyed a man,
but Joshua is God’s anointed conqueror.

Now, as to the stopping of the sun,

two main options have been entertained by the orthodox:

1) a miracle that actually stopped the earth’s rotation

2) a hailstorm (some have suggested that “stop”

could quite plausibly refer to the stopping of the light and heat of the sun)

Habakkuk 3 seems to plainly suggest the former.

But the marvelous part of all of this, is that God does this for Israel,
after Israel foolishly entered into a covenant with a nation devoted to destruction.

Is 28:21—the strange deed of the Valley of Gibeon

that God should arise and fight for the Gentiles (indeed, for those condemned to death!)

Even so Isaiah says that it strange that God would arise and fight *against* his people

But part of what God is teaching his people is what happens when holiness and mercy collide!

God’s promise to Abraham was that all nations would be blessed through his seed.

But God also said that he would curse those who curse you.

How can God be just – and still justify the ungodly?!

Because justifying the ungodly requires God to show mercy

while still remaining just and holy!

The Valley of Gibeon reminds us that the collision of God's holiness and mercy will shake the heavens and the earth!

Indeed, the course of the sun and moon are affected when God delivers Jew and Gentile from the powers of death at the cross of Jesus!

(Verse 15 is the conclusion to the quotation section that speaks of God's fighting for Israel now we return to the details of battle)

c) The Death of the Five Kings (10:16-28)

¹⁶ These five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah. ¹⁷ And it was told to Joshua, "The five kings have been found, hidden in the cave at Makkedah." ¹⁸ And Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave and set men by it to guard them, ¹⁹ but do not stay there yourselves. Pursue your enemies; attack their rear guard. Do not let them enter their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand." ²⁰ When Joshua and the sons of Israel had finished striking them with a great blow until they were wiped out, and when the remnant that remained of them had entered into the fortified cities, ²¹ then all the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah. Not a man moved his tongue against any of the people of Israel.

²² Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave and bring those five kings out to me from the cave." ²³ And they did so, and brought those five kings out to him from the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. ²⁴ And when they brought those kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the men of Israel and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, "Come near; put your feet on the necks of these kings." Then they came near and put their feet on their necks. ²⁵ And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight." ²⁶ And afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees. And they hung on the trees until evening. ²⁷ But at the time of the going down of the sun, Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and they set large stones against the mouth of the cave, which remain to this very day.

²⁸ As for Makkedah, Joshua captured it on that day and struck it, and its king, with the edge of the sword. He devoted to destruction every person in it; he left none remaining. And he did to the king of Makkedah just as he had done to the king of Jericho.

The five kings are captured,
their armies are dead or fled back to their strongholds.

And Joshua brings his captains to the cave at Makkedah,
and has them put their feet on the necks of these kings.

This is a reminder of what God has promised.

"Thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight."
The seed of the woman is crushing the head of the serpent.

Do you believe this?

Because this is what our Lord Jesus has done.

He has cast Satan down,

and trampled the head of the serpent.

And now he destroys all his and our enemies,

as he brings salvation to his people.

It may not look like it,

but this is equally true today.

The church must never forget–

you must never forget–

that the church of Christ is advancing with power,

and the gates of hell will never prevail against it.

When mercy and holiness collide,

the result is both genuine mercy – and genuine holiness!

With the result that the kingdom of God