

The Gibeonite Deception

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The Gibeonites deceive the Israelites into making a covenant with them for survival
2. aim – To cause us to not live by lies, to be sure that we are seeking truth in every situation
3. passage – Joshua 9:1-27

b. outline

1. The Deception (Joshua 9:1-15)
2. The Response (Joshua 9:16-21)
3. The Results (Joshua 9:22-27)

c. opening

1. an *introduction* to this chapter
 - a. the destruction of Jericho and Ai by Israel *ends* the *entry narrative* of the people into Canaan
 1. Jericho represents God's judgment now coming upon the native peoples
 2. Ai represents God's promise now coming in settling *his own people* in the land
 - b. thus, **chaps. 9-11** now recount the beginning of the “official” Conquest = the people moving city by city through the land, destroying the people and occupying the conquered territory
 - c. **IOW:** we now turn to **Part Two** of the book, in which Israel “moves out” to conquer the Promised Land, taking *for themselves* what God had promised them 600 years earlier
2. so ... we *start* this section with the *immediate response of the native peoples* ... (***move fast!!***)

I. The Deception (Joshua 9:1-15)

Content

a. the response of the Canaanite kings (vv. 1-2)

1. the word of the destruction of Jericho and Ai spreads to the kings throughout the land:
 - a. a *massive* (new) people has descended upon Canaan, possessing great military strength
 1. **note:** the author describes the area in question as: everything “*beyond the Jordan*” (**i.e.** to the W of the river) to “*the Great Sea*” (**i.e.** the Mediterranean); from the hill country (**i.e.** in the C of the land; by implication, from Shechem), to Lebanon, in the N
 - b. and, this people is led by a “god” that has unrivaled powers to their own
 1. **note (again):** what they understand of Yahweh is *primitive* (at best) – but, they “accept” the power of deities (in a pagan and superstitious way) and know that there is a “god” at work
 - c. and, this people is *bent* on sacking every city in the land and taking possession of everything
 - d. **IOW:** Yahweh has not “kept secret” the coming of the Israelites – he *doesn't care* if the Canaanites know what is coming towards them – in fact, it is *likely* that he has *purposed* this news to spread
2. so ... how do the native kings respond to this threat?
 - a. they make an *alliance* (**i.e.** they “*gathered together as one*”) – they *combine* their forces
 1. because no one city can stand before the military power of the Israelites, but (maybe!) an alliance of multiple cities, working together, can repel the invaders
 2. they make the *logical choice*: the only option (before them) is a **military one**
 - b. **IOW:** they don't appear to even consider an *alternative course of action* – their “reality” is such that they have *no choice* but to respond *militarily* against the invaders *and their God* (**see below**)

b. the response of the Gibeonites (vv. 3-6)

1. the Gibeonites are Hivite natives in C Canaan
 - a. ethnically, this group is Hivite (**v. 7**), although they appear to be a *subset* of the Hivite people
 1. **note:** in **v. 1**, the Hivites are a part of the alliance, implying that *this* group has “splintered off”
 - b. they lived in the city of Gibeon, but also occupied the cities of Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-Jearim (**v. 17**) – Gibeon lies just a few miles to the W of Bethel, NW of Jericho and Ai
 - c. like the list of **v. 1**, the Hivites were targeted for destruction *from the beginning* (**Deut. 20:17**)
 1. and (it would appear), these figured (given their proximity) that they were **next in line**
2. so, *these* Gibeonites (“*on their part*”; **v. 4**) concoct a plan to save themselves from certain destruction
 - a. they “*acted with cunning*” (**v. 4**) = they devised a plan whereby they would attempt to *fool* the Israelites into thinking that they actually were travelers from a distant land (**note the irony of Ai**)

1. they made **props** – they put on worn-out clothing (that they had worn on a journey), and they stocked themselves with dried-out provisions (that had brought with them on such a journey)
 2. they **entered the camp** of the Israelites – they came to Joshua at Gilgal as though they were arriving from a distant land – they bravely entered *right into* enemy territory
 3. they **sought a covenant** with the Israelites – they pretended to be *emissaries* from a distant king seeking an alliance with the Israelites (**see also vv. 9-11**)
 - b. **IOW:** the Gibeonites *pretended* to be something other than they were, in order to get the Israelites to make a promise not to kill them – once the Israelites would *discover* the ruse, the deal was done
 - c. **possibly:** the Gibeonites understood the *covenantal* nature of the Israelites (**i.e.** to their God and to the land), and (maybe!) decided to “take advantage” of that reality ...
 1. **meaning:** **they knew the Israelites treated covenants as central to their existence?**
 2. **note vv. 9-11:** they *readily admit* that their desire for a covenant flows from their understanding of the God of the Israelites – his *power* compels them to seek a covenant with *his people*
- c. the deception of the Gibeonites (vv. 7-14)**
1. the questioning of the Israelites
 - a. the leaders with Joshua are *immediately suspicious*: “perhaps you live among us” (**v. 7**)
 1. Israel had been *specifically* instructed *not* to make *any* covenant with the natives (**Deut. 7:1f**)
 2. so, their question is reasonable: how can we be sure you aren’t Canaanites? (**see below**)
 3. **response:** “we are your servants” = we have come to serve you – the Gibeonites appeal to the *good nature* of the Israelites (**i.e.** we have come to *help*; certainly that must mean *something?*)
 - b. but, Joshua *continues* the questioning: “who are you; where do you come from?” (**vv. 8-13**)
 1. **IOW:** be more *specific*; if you are not natives of Canaan, then *where* are you from?
 2. **response:** “from a distant country ... because of the name of the Lord” – the Gibeonites *deflect* from a direct answer and appeal to the *success* of the Israelites under the power of God (**i.e.** we recognize *your* greatness *and your God*; certainly *that* must mean something?)
 2. the deception of the Israelites (**v. 14**)
 - a. the Israelites “took some of their provisions” = they examined the *props* and were fooled by them
 - b. the leaders “did not ask counsel from the Lord” = they were convinced by what they saw and heard
 - c. **IOW:** they were **easily duped** – failing to investigate the matter thoroughly (**note v. 16**), and failing to seek the Lord’s *permission* to make a covenant, they *blindly* stumbled into the deception
- d. the results of the deception (v. 15)**
1. Joshua made a covenant with them – he promised to “let them live” and the rest of the leaders joined him in this covenant, swearing to them the full protection of the *entirety* of the Israelite people
 2. **principle: the hasty covenant that Joshua made with Gibeonites, as a result of their deception, is an excellent reminder that we “live not by lies”**
 - a. from *A Proper Christology in the Church*: the book “Live Not By Lies” was intended by Rod Dreher to address everything in *W* culture (now) as built on *lies*, and that believers must not *accept* these lies as the basis of living in such a culture (**i.e.** cultural, societal, political, etc. lies everywhere)
 - b. but ... this truth must also be central in our understanding of *eternal, spiritual* matters (as well)
 1. **e.g.** the virtually universal claim (and story!) of transients being “Christian”
 - a. they would *claim* to be Christian 1) to illicit compassion from me; 2) to *shield* from me delving into their *actual* spiritual condition; and 3) to make themselves “feel better” about life
 2. **reality: there are numerous people in the church today living the lie** – they have been told (**lied to**) that to be a Christian is simply to “profess faith” and try to live like a “good person”
 - a. they believe that it is *advantageous* to them = there is value in the delusion – it makes them “feel good” about their spiritual condition **and no one “bugs” them about it**
 - c. but ... this is a warning to us to “live not by lies” (**the consequences are dire**)
 1. **personally:** you can lie to your pastor, you can lie to your friends, you can lie to yourself – but you *cannot lie* to the Judge of All the Earth – he knows your heart (your priorities)
 2. **communally:** the church *must* ask the hard questions in order to ferret out the lie – we must *disciple* everyone to deeper commitment to Christ, to seek *truth* at the center of the life of everyone who claims to be a Christian (**i.e.** it is *dangerous* to leave a person *in the lie*)
 - d. **IOW:** although the Gibeonites use a *deception*, it is the *Israelites* who are to blame – they had the responsibility to investigate *thoroughly* before making a covenant – it is *their failure*
 - e. **the father of lies desires that all men believe the lie – the church must carry out its mission to ferret out the lie, so that no one is deceived concerning the truth of Christ**

II. The Response (Joshua 9:16-21)

Content

a. uncovering the ruse

1. *within just three (3) days*, the actual identity of the Gibeonites is uncovered
 - a. the Israelites reached their cities on that third day – they are *probably* on their way to those cities (**i.e.** as the next cities to conquer) when the delegation from Gibeon arrives (**see above**)
 - b. so, it is *likely* that their arrival at the cities reveals that the delegation is *actually* from there
2. so ... the Israelites leaders (who had made the covenant) *prevented* the people from attacking them
 - a. it would *appear* that the bulk of the people are primed and prepared for the next attack
 - b. but, the leadership stops them – they then “*murmur*” (**i.e.** complain under their breath)
 1. there may have been a sense of *anticipation* amongst the Israelites of *plundering* the cities
 2. or, the Israelites may have realized that this covenant was in violation of the express command of God, and were concerned about how *he* would react to it in leaving the people alive

III. The Results (Joshua 9:22-27)

Content

a. the “curse” over the Gibeonites

1. Joshua confronts the Gibeonite delegation with the obvious question: “*why did you deceive us?*”
2. the Gibeonites respond with the *obvious* answer: “*we feared greatly for our lives*”
 - a. **IOW:** we deceived you because we *knew* what your God had ordered for us through Moses
 - b. so ... “whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it” – **IOW:** since you promised not to kill us, you must let us live, but we will accept whatever *other* punishment you prescribe
3. so ... Joshua “condemns” them to be wood-cutters and water-bearers (slaves) for the people of Israel
4. **question:** is this really a curse over the Gibeonites – or, is it actually a *blessing* from God because he *purposed* for the Gibeonites to be a remnant in Canaan, **in the fashion of Rahab?**
5. **answer (IMO):** God had actually *ordained* these Gibeonites to be saved out of Canaan – although they used a *ruse* to get out from under their destruction, **the ruse was used by God as a means for their salvation (see the following questions):**
 - a. if the Israelites had (in fact) *asked God* for his counsel in dealing with the Gibeonite delegation, **what would have been his response to their inquiry?**
 1. why is our *assumption* that God would have revealed their lie and ordered them killed?
 2. is that true, can we *know that* for certain ... or is that us “reading back” into this text?
 - b. in the midst of the deception, **why didn’t God himself speak to Joshua** and reveal the ruse
 1. God speaks to him *in every other event in this book* (except chap. 2); why not here?
 2. is it *possible* that God (**who never speaks in this chapter**) tells us much by his silence?
 - c. why is the **response of the Gibeonites so very different** from the rest of the Canaanites?
 1. **remember:** the *reprobate* heart always responds *with greater rebellion* against the *announcement of judgment* (**Rom. 1**) – the *elect* heart responds to such with a *plea for mercy*
 2. the Gibeonites *know* they are *worthy to be destroyed*, but they seek mercy
 - a. **principle: what human beings need most from God is mercy (Luke 18:9-14; v. 13)**
“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’”
 - b. **it’s better for us to be slaves of the Israelites than die by the sword of the Israelites!!**
 1. it’s better for us to be assigned a lowly place in the kingdom than perish in hell
 - d. where are the Gibeonites **assigned to work as wood-cutters and water bearers?**
 1. **note:** the place “*that he should choose*” (**i.e.** where the tabernacle was to reside) was at Shiloh (**Joshua 18:1**) – the tabernacle would remain there until the days of David (**1 Sam. 4:3**)
 2. the Gibeonites are to serve “*the altar of the Lord*” (**v. 27**; or at “*the house of my God*”, **v. 23**)
 - a. **IOW:** the “curse” of the Gibeonites is that they are to serve the priests and Levites – true, they will have these *menial tasks*, but they will do so *in a place of great honor*
 - b. **IOW:** Joshua *balances* a punishment over them within the realization that God has, *in fact*, set them aside to be saved, *in much the same way he did with Rahab in Jericho*
6. **application: the mission of the church is to announce the judgment of God coming upon sin, and then lead the elect (who respond) to the mercy of God found in the cross of Christ**
 - a. **we are to ferret out the lie of the Pharisee**, and disciple all to come to God like the tax collector – seeking the mercy of God in humble submission and obedience to Christ