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Joshua 9 - Deception

Joshua 9

Introduction

As we get to this chapter in the book of Joshua, we find we are surrounded by battles. We've looked at Jericho and at Ai in the last few weeks and we're going to see many more battles in the following chapters.

And it looks like this is going to be another battle chapter at first. Look at the first two verses:

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, they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel. [Joshua 9 v 1-2]

But instead of a battle we're going to head down a different track. Instead of a battle we have a trick, a deception, a misdirection.

I have a friend who loves a bit of misdirection. I remember years ago having a snowball fight with him. His trick was to throw a snowball in a high curving path towards you. While you were looking up to easily sidestep it he would let loose with a hidden second snowball, fast and straight.

How do you deal with that? How do you respond, when you've been tricked? Do you look for revenge? Do you pretend that you weren't fooled at all? Do you laugh it off? Very often the lessons in life aren't so much whether something happens to us, but how we respond to it happening.

Let's look at how the Gibeonites sought to deceive Joshua.

The Gibeonites Ruse

But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, 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, with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. 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." [Joshua 9 v 3-6]

The Gibeonites had kept their eyes on what was happening, just like the city states around them. They had heard about Jericho and Ai being defeated. They could have joined the alliance, which was a strong one. The Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites would be a fearsome force gathered together. But the Gibeonites

saw something different about the Jews. They could see that their god was powerful and was with them. They'd heard about Egypt. They'd heard about the other peoples defeated by Joshua's army. They realised that the only way to win this battle was not to fight.

But they also realised that the Jews were intent on clearing out Canaan. So they pretended that they in fact came from a far land. They put on worn-out and patched clothes, took old wineskins and dried, crumbled bread, and they told a story.

A story can be a powerful thing. It draws us in. If it's told well it all seems to add up, and the physical evidence of their appearance seems to confirm what they were saying. We need to be careful of what people tell us, to discern truth and spot falsehood. Joshua's people were suspicious, but they let themselves be fooled.

The Israelites Fall For the Deception

It's funny because we've already read about several acts of deception in the preceding chapters. Remember Rahab, when she played host to the two spies. She too had heard about the Jews' victories and had also decided that God's way was the way to go. She hid the spies on her roof and told the local officers that they had left the city.

We heard about Achan, who took some of the spoil from Jericho. He hid it by burying it under his tent, but was found out and punished.

And we also read about the Israelites at Ai. Remember how they won that battle? Joshua divided his army. One portion hid off to the west of the city, while the others drew the men of Ai out of the city from the north, pretending they were running away. The hidden men took the empty city and then sandwiched the Ai army.

So they should have been aware and alert to deception. But they weren't. The middle verse in the chapter, verse 14, is key here. Look at this verse and verse 15:

So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord. 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.

[Joshua 9 v 14-15]

That says it all, doesn't it? They did not ask counsel from the Lord. How many times have we got ourselves into bother because we didn't look to the Lord first? How many times have we said "I've got this" and made a mess of things. We talk about prayer being important. But if we think prayer is just asking God to do things **for** us we're mistaken. More prayer should be asking God to do things **with** us. And it's important to ask him for direction, so that we can be where he wants us and serve as he wants us to.

But Joshua doesn't go to the Lord, he believes the Gibeonites story and he makes a covenant with them. He agrees to let them live, and they agree to serve the Israelites.

Realisation dawns

As humans we like to think we are rational beings. That we react to things based on reason, on intellect and not on what we might think as base animal instinct. But sometimes our feelings take over. I'm sure you've had that heaviness in the pit of your stomach when you

realise you've made a mistake. There's that sick feeling when you realise you've been made a fool of. Then there's the burning anger of injustice we feel when we see they've got away with it. It's easy to seek revenge in the heat of the moment. Joshua must have been feeling all these things. And he could easily have acted on his feelings. But let's give credit to Joshua for the way he reacts.

At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbours and that they lived among them. 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. 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. 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. This we will do to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them." [Joshua 9 v 16-20]

It was three days after the Gibeonites left that the Jews realised they'd been tricked. They found out somehow that the Gibeonites weren't from a far away land at all, but lived close by. They lived in an area that the Israelites had planned to invade and take for themselves. They went to the cities, but didn't attack them. They had made a solemn vow before the Lord and they realised the gravity of that. It would be a dangerous thing to break their vow and so they held back from attacking.

The people weren't happy. They murmured against their leaders. But Joshua and the leaders were sensible here. The loss of face from being deceived was nothing compared to the wrath of God that they would face if they broke their promise.

Safe but Servants

They would get revenge of a sort though. Remember the Gibeonites had pledged their service? Well, Joshua took them up on that.

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? 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." 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. And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it." So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. 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. [Joshua 9 v 22-27]

Being woodcutters and water carriers are seen as lowly jobs. But they were better than being massacred. It looks like the Gibeonites took their position with good grace.

Can you find honour in the lowliest of jobs? There are times when we are asked to do things which aren't high profile, aren't noticed for commendation, which might be messy and unrewarding. God calls us to honour him in all we do.

Joshua's test was in how he reacted to being cheated. He seems to have done well in admitting his own failure and making the best of the situation as it now was.

The Gibeonites' test was in how they reacted to being made servants in the nation of Israel. How did they do? We read about them several hundred years later, in 2 Samuel 21, when Saul tried to wipe them out. This was against the covenant that Joshua had made hundreds of years earlier, and Saul's family were punished for their actions. Then we also read in Nehemiah 3 that the Jews all took their part in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. And we find that the Gibeonites are in there, doing their part, seemingly integrated in God's people. We're also going to learn a bit more about them next time, when we look at Joshua 10.

Application

We live in a world full of deceivers:

- That person who called you, saying you need to pay your bill or you'll be cut off
- Those people on social media peddling their crackpot theories
- Those adverts selling wonder foods, magic remedies, amazing supplements

It seems there are people trying to take advantage of us everywhere we look. It saddens me that Christians are often the ones who fall for these deceptions. What can we do about it?

- When Jesus sent his disciples out to preach that the kingdom of God was at hand, he realised the danger. He said *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."* [Matthew 10 v 16] We need to be wary, to apply critical thinking to all we hear.
- We also need to do what Joshua and his leaders forgot to do: *ask counsel from the Lord* [Joshua 9 v 14]. If we're constantly looking to him for guidance and discernment we're much more likely to walk a straight path.
- And we need to be humble enough to admit our mistakes, take stock of where we are, now that the situation has happened, and honour God in our response to it.

Postscript

What happened with my friend? Well I did get my own back. We were playing football one week and he got a penalty. There had been an incident on the telly during the week where a penalty taker had passed sideways instead of shooting, and his team-mate had scored. So I suggested to my friend that he and I should try that. He was very keen to try it. What he forgot was that I was on the other side, and just took the ball up the other end of the pitch.

That was just a bit of fun. Be careful though to consider carefully all that you hear, the stories that you're told, and ask for God's help to determine truth, and to respond in love.