

Israel's Wily Enemy



Topic

Seeking God

Theme

God is faithful to give wisdom and knowledge to those who seek Him.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will acknowledge his limitations and purpose to seek God and His Word for direction in life.

Materials

• Resources 1 and 10

Scripture Focus

Joshua 9

Summary

Having witnessed the futility of fighting the Israelites on their own, the cities in the southern part of Canaan tried different ways to defeat Israel. The Gibeonites used deception. Unfortunately, Joshua believed he had the wisdom and knowledge to make a decision about the treaty on his own. He made the treaty without consulting God and had to then face the consequences.

Outline

I. Canaanites Strategized to Survive (9:1–6)

- A. Coalition's power strategy (9:1, 2)
- B. Gibeon's psychological strategy (9:3–6)

II. Israel's Leaders Played Detective (9:7–15)

- A. The leaders raised suspicion (9:7–13)
- B. Joshua made the decision (9:14, 15)

III. Israel's Leaders Scrambled to Save Face (9:16–27)

- A. Discovery of Gibeon's wiliness (9:16–18)
- B. Declaration of Gibeon as woodcutters and water carriers (9:19–21)
- C. Determination of Gibeon's wisdom (9:22–27)

Memory Verse

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

GETTING STARTED

Fumblerooski

If you have Internet connection and the availability of equipment to show video, search the Internet for the 1984 Orange Bowl fumblerooski play run by the Nebraska Cornhuskers football team against the Miami Hurricanes. The fumbler-ooski is a trick play. The quarterback fumbles the snap on purpose but acts like he has the ball. The guard next to the center then picks up the fumble and rumbles unnoticed for a big gain. In the 1984 Orange Bowl, the play went for a touchdown.

ASK: What did you think happened when you first saw the play?

ASK: Why was the play so effective? It used deception. The defense was expecting a brute force play from the run happy Cornhuskers.

The fumblerooski, first run in 1933, is one of the greatest trick plays of all time. However, both college and professional football have now banned it in its traditional sense.

In our lesson for today, we will see one of Israel's enemies use deception instead of brute force. We could even call their strategy psychological warfare. Unfortunately, it worked, and Israel's leaders had to scramble to pick up the pieces of their unwise decision.

Wile E. Coyote

Consider playing a clip from the Roadrunner cartoon to remind your learners about Wile E. Coyote's miserable failures.

ASK: What is your favorite Wile E. Coyote moment? (Q1)

ASK: Why was he never successful at catching Roadrunner? (Q2) *Roadrunner was either too fast or too smart for the Coyote's wily ways.*

It didn't matter how wily the Coyote got, Roadrunner always foiled his plan. One of Israel's enemies used wiliness as a weapon against Israel. But unlike Wile E. Coyote, the enemy was successful at fooling Israel. We will examine what happened and what could have prevented Israel from being fooled.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Joshua 9 provides a stark contrast with the previous eight chapters. There is a complete lack of communication between God and Israel. It is this absence of communication with the Lord that helps us understand the point of the passage. Joshua learned that his human knowledge and wisdom were not enough to lead God's people. God offered wisdom to Joshua, but he needed to ask for it. Because Joshua and the rest of Israel's leaders acted on their own, they made a grave mistake that proved embarrassing and costly.

I. Canaanites Strategized to Survive (9:1–6)

Word was spreading throughout Canaan that the Israelites were in the land and their God was giving it to them just as He promised. The Canaanite were worried and looking for strategies to ensure their survival and protect their territory in Canaan.

A. Coalition's power strategy (9:1, 2)

Having heard the reports of the defeats of Jericho and Ai, the leaders of the strongholds in southern Canaan realized that they would need a different approach to the war with Israel. Jericho tried hiding behind their secure walls. They ended up entombed in those very walls. Ai tried to overrun Israel's army, chasing after them. After a small success, they ended up dead, having been duped into leaving their city open for attack as they aggressively pursued Israel.

Several of the kings in the south moved to make an alliance to attack Israel with as much man power as possible (9:1, 2). The record of a southern alliance is recorded in Joshua 10. The next lesson will consider that battle.

READ: Joshua 9:1, 2. **ASK:** What would you predict would happen to the combined brute force of the southern coalition of kings? (Q3)

ASK: What word would you use to describe their plan? (Q4) *Perhaps foolish or futile.*

B. Gibeon's psychological strategy (9:3–6)

The Gibeonites had a different strategy for survival. They didn't think even a united force would stop Israel. They believed Israel's God could not be beat with a sword (cf. 9:24). But rather than turning to God in repentance, they were wily instead (9:4). They practiced to deceive, pretending to be ambassadors from a far-away country and perhaps appealing to Israel's pride.

Apparently the Gibeonites were shrewd enough to learn the details of Israel's law. They knew that trying to come to a diplomatic agreement with Israel would result in Israel annihilating them, for Israel was not allowed to make treaties with anyone living in Canaan (Exod. 23:31–33). So the Gibeonites pretended to be a foreign people from a long way away. Furthermore, the Gibeonites must have known that Israel thought enough of their God to honor any treaty made in His name. In reality, it was God Who held Israel to the covenants they made with other peoples. When king Saul broke the treaty Israel eventually made with Gibeon, God sent a famine to Israel as punishment. It wasn't until king David stepped in and made amends with the Gibeonites that God lifted the famine. In the end, Saul's actions cost seven of his sons their lives (2 Sam. 21:1–9).

With the possibility of getting a treaty with Israel in mind, the Gibeonites prepared a delegation of pretend ambassadors to look as if they had just come from a far-away place.

READ: Joshua 9:4, 5. **ASK:** What do you think of the Gibeonites' attempt to look like they had come from a far-away land? (Q5) *It appears they went way over the top to make themselves and their provisions looked aged.*

Unless conditions are extremely harsh, it would take a long journey for wine-skins to deteriorate to the point of needing patched and one's sandals to wear out to the point of needing repair. The Gibeonites obviously knew that. They purposefully made it appear as if they had come from a very distant place. Their thinking must have been that the longer they appeared to have traveled, the more likely Joshua and Israel's leaders would believe their story and think lightly of the decision to grant them a treaty.

There is also the thought that the farther the men appeared to have traveled, the more flattered the leaders of Israel would be by their unexpected appearance. The conquest was just beginning. To have a group of men show up so soon at Israel's camp all tattered and worn from a long journey would have stroked Israel's egos. It is hard to think that Gibeon didn't take that into account as they planned their wily scheme. No doubt they imagined what it would be like to have such a group of visitors come to their doorstep. Human nature responds to positive strokes. Many a person has been duped into a bad decision by a flattering tongue. Proverbs 29:5 relates the deceptive nature of flattery.

READ: Proverbs 29:5. **ASK:** Rewrite the meaning of this proverb in your own words. (Q6)

The Gibeonites essentially attacked the minds of Israel's leaders. They wanted Israel's leaders to want to believe their story about traveling across the globe just to see them. The Gibeonites knew Israel could never be bested by force. They surmised that their only hope was to trick Israel into thinking they wanted to be their servants and had come a very long way just to tell them that. From God's perspective, the Gibeonites gave Israel's leaders an opportunity to grab some of the glory that belonged to Him alone. Of course He had a lot to say about that if they would have only asked Him.

ASK: How would you feel if a group of haggard and worn out people showed up at your door and told you they had traveled a great distance because they heard how wonderful you were? (Q7)

The Gibeonite ambassadors arrived in Gilgal after their short twenty-five-mile journey. They promptly asked Joshua to make a covenant with them. The treaty was the reason they were there. They cut right to the chase. Asking for the treaty was also part of the Gibeonites' mind game with Israel's leaders. What a feather in their cap to have a distant people be so fearful of them that they wanted to get a treaty with them before they dominated the world!

II. Israel's Leaders Played Detective (9:7–15)

A. The leaders raised suspicion (9:7–13)

Israel's leaders were immediately suspicious of the Gibeonites. They smelled a rat and questioned the ambassadors immediately about their origin, stating that they were not allowed to make covenants with anyone in Canaan (9:7). We have to commend Israel's leaders for being so perceptive. Perhaps there was something about the Gibeonites that didn't look like they had come from a far country.

The Gibeonites ignored Israel's question of their origin and simply told Joshua that they were his servants (9:8). The question about their origins no doubt made the Gibeonites uneasy. Were they that bad of liars? Were they that easy to see through? So they left the topic immediately and tried to steer the conversation to what they had to offer Israel.

Joshua in turn ignored the Gibeonites offer to be Israel's servants. He again questioned who they were and where they were from (9:8). Joshua was being prudent. The strangers' origin was the key piece of information he needed to ascertain if he was going to make a decision about their request for a treaty.

The ambassadors wouldn't be able to wriggle off the hook. They had to present their case that they had indeed traveled from afar. They began by saying they had come from afar because they heard about what God did in Egypt and on the other side of the Jordan (9:9, 10). Of course they were careful not to mention Jericho or Ai. Admitting they knew about those victories would have blown their cover. The ambassadors continued by saying their elders sent them to offer themselves as servants and to make a treaty that said as much (9:11).

The Gibeonites went on to show Joshua and the leaders of Israel their dry and moldy bread (9:12). Without any preservatives, bread dries out and molds after just a few days. Moldy bread is certainly not hard evidence for a long journey. In fact, it could have acted as evidence against the fact that the men were ambassadors. For actual ambassadors most likely would not bake more bread on the day they left on a long journey than they could eat right away (9:12). And they certainly would not keep it once it molded. A normal traveling party would have grain with them to make more bread as they went. An honest look at the moldy bread and the overly aged wineskins and clothes (9:13) should have showed that the ambassadors were lying. The whole fact that the ambassadors were so prepared to demonstrate their long journey should have set off warning bells in the minds of Israel's leaders. People who are lying about something tend to overkill their defense of the lie. That was certainly the case for the Gibeonites.

READ: Joshua 9:11–13. **ASK:** What is your reaction to the Gibeonites' stack of evidence for traveling from afar? (Q8)

ASK: What raises your suspicions? (Q9)

B. Joshua made the decision (9:14, 15)

The men of Israel considered the ambassadors' case plausible enough to examine the evidence for themselves (9:14). But they didn't take the matter to God. Of course if the travelers were from afar, then Israel already had permission to make a treaty with them. But their origin was the very question Joshua should have taken to God.

READ: Joshua 9:14. **ASK:** What are some characteristics of God that make consulting Him on issues like a treaty a no-brainer? (Q10) *He knows everything and He is wise beyond our comprehension.*

ASK: Whom did Joshua ultimately rely on for his decision? (Q11) *He relied on what the Gibeonites said about themselves and on their interpretation of the evidence.*

For Joshua consulting God would have been far more than seeking a second opinion. It wasn't as if Joshua would have considered God's thoughts as just one part of his decision-making process. To consult God is to know the truth. Joshua knew better than to ignore God. His relationship with Moses going all the way back to Egypt had certainly taught him the importance of consulting God on weighty issues. It seems the only explanation for ignoring God even after suspicion was raised is that Israel's leaders were enamored with the attention from the Gibeonites and let their desires direct their decision. They let the evidence represent what they wanted it to represent. They wanted the ambassadors to be from a far-away place. That was the truth they were interested in believing.

As a result, Joshua made an oath in the name of the Lord without even consulting the Lord. That is a lapse in judgment and showed he deceived himself into thinking he was knowledgeable and wise enough to make a decision on his own. Unfortunately for Israel, the treaty made between the rulers of the congregation and the Gibeonites was irrevocable. They would have to live with the treaty for the duration of their time in the land.

III. Israel's Leaders Scrambled to Save Face (9:16–27)

Israel's leaders must have been on a bit of a high after signing the treaty with the ambassadors from a far-away land. But it wasn't long before they realized they had been bamboozled.

A. Discovery of Gibeon's wiliness (9:16–18)

Israel's leaders got a report that the ambassadors apparently didn't have much of a trip home. They were in fact neighbors (9:16) from just down the way.

ASK: Suppose you were one of Israel's leaders. How would you have responded to the report concerning the Gibeonites? (Q12)

After a short investigation in the allegations, the Gibeonites' wiliness was indeed confirmed. They were from four cities about twenty-five miles down the road (9:17). Of course Israel's hands were tied because they made the covenant in the name of the Lord God of Israel. To break the covenant would be to take God's name in vain. As mentioned earlier, king Saul later found out that God punishes those who break covenants made in His name when he broke this very covenant (2 Sam. 21:1–9).

The people predictably complained for their leaders' lapse of judgment (Josh. 9:18). Joshua and the rest of the leaders must have had a hard time facing the people without blushing with embarrassment. The people understood that the blunder would have been completely avoidable. All the leaders needed to do was pray.

B. Declaration of Gibeon as woodcutters and water carriers (9:19–21)

In an attempt to save face, Joshua declared that the Gibeonites would live on

in the land as their woodcutters and water carriers, both menial jobs around the tabernacle. Having the Gibeonites to fill those takes would relieve Israelites from doing them. But not having the Gibeonites around at all would have been far better. Joshua made it clear to the people that that was no longer an option (9:20, 21).

Joshua called the Gibeonites to let them know of their servant status. But first he questioned why they had deceived him (9:22, 23).

C. Determination of Gibeon's wisdom (9:22–27)

READ: Joshua 9:22. **ASK:** What question did Joshua need to answer about his own actions? (Q13) *Why didn't you have enough faith and trust in God to consult Him about the treaty?*

Joshua's question of the Gibeonites seems almost childish, as if he thought they were really to blame for his bungling of the situation. Their answer showed wisdom and thought, a sharp contrast to Joshua's unwise and hasty decision.

READ: Joshua 9:24. **ASK:** What did the Gibeonites think of Israel's God? (Q14) *They believed He keeps His word and therefore is to be feared.*

Though the Gibeonites didn't repent and put their trust in God, they had enough sense to respect Him and to act wisely to avoid annihilation. Even after they were caught, they maintained their willingness to exist in the land as Israel's servants (9:25). Perhaps their deception of Joshua and his lapse of judgment were round about ways of God's will being accomplished anyway. It is not out of the possibility that some of the Gibeonites put their faith in God for salvation as they worked around God's altar and came to understand redemption from sin (9:26, 27). It is worth pointing out the subtle change in the very last verse of the passage. The Gibeon woodcutters and water gatherers served Israel according to God's choosing. In other words, though God was left out of the decision to make the treaty, He was consulted on how and where to use the Gibeonites in His service.

Except for the last verse, God's voice was silent in this passage because He was never consulted. It is a little strange to read the chapter and not come across a direct word from the Lord. We should be aware of such times of silence in our own lives. If God isn't speaking to us in a spiritual sense, it is because we aren't talking to Him.

RESOURCE: Display resource 10 to summarize reasons to pray.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

A Believer Who Prays

Having previously learned by the debacle at Ai that he can't put his trust in Israel to always be faithful, Joshua learned the lesson that he can't trust in himself either. His knowledge and wisdom are held back by his finiteness and sinfulness. We don't know how much Joshua's desire to believe the Gibeonites was a result of his pride. No doubt it played a role. It is easy to see how he would want to grab



some of God's glory for himself. But either way, the answer to his limits was to consult the limitless God. God is still available to us today. And we need to talk with Him about our decisions and relationships. We need God every day.

ASK: What does a believer who prays believe about God? (Q15) *That God is interested in his life, wants to hear his prayers, and desires to answer his prayers.*

ASK: Does your life reflect those beliefs in God? Explain. (Q16)

I've Got Limitations

ASK: How convinced are you of your limitations? Explain. (Q17)

ASK: How has your understanding of those limitations affected your prayer life? (Q18)

Encourage your learners to humble themselves enough to acknowledge they need God in order to live as He wants them to live. Challenge them to be faithful in asking God for wisdom.

● God's Faithfulness	
1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.
7.	

Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add the following statement about God's faithfulness: *God faithfully gives wisdom to those who ask.*

Encourage learners to memorize James 1:5. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.