

## Deception, Gullibility and Grace

Joshua 9:1-18

September 7, 2025

The story of Joshua and the Gibeonites is about deception, gullibility, and grace.

### I. A Story of Deception

The Gibeonites faced the problem of how to survive the conquest of the Promised Land. In facing this problem, the Gibeonites are like Rahab in that they had knowledge of the Lord's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of the two Amorite kings, the giving of the land to Moses, and the defeat of Jericho and Ai. With their lives threatened, what can they do? They resort to deception to save themselves.

Lying, using deception, is not something we do under normal circumstances. Deceitfulness undercuts the essence of human community and human relationships. When you lie and use deceit, you undercut truthfulness. And when you undercut truthfulness, you destroy the ability of people to trust one another and the ability for people to love one another and live together in community.

Deception is not something we want to be party to. That's why we have the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment telling us, "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*" Truthfulness is required in human relationships.

The Gibeonites deception is found out. But Joshua and the leaders have to let the Gibeonites live because they have made an oath to the Lord. Joshua rebukes them for their deceitful action and puts them under a curse where they are to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of Lord. Yes, their lives are spared by this ruse, but they are reduced to the most menial positions of servitude in Israel.

### II. A Story of Gullibility

Joshua and the leaders are infected with gullibility as they deceive themselves into believing what they are told because of the flattery they receive from the Gibeonites. Joshua is suspicious, but also flattered by the fact that this delegation has come from such a long distance to ratify a treaty with Israel. They want to be Israel's servants. Well, that doesn't sound so bad on the surface of things. And so Joshua deceives himself in thinking everything is fine with these people because of the flattery he receives.

Self-deception leads to misplaced confidence as "*the men of Israel sampled their provisions, but did not inquire of the Lord.*"

Misplaced confidence leads to overconfidence, "*Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.*"

Gullibility is a serious spiritual problem that fails to fully submit oneself to the Lord in all matters. This story serves as a strong warning to us in the church, and especially to anyone taking a leadership role in the church. Self-deception, misplaced confidence,

and overconfidence are serious problems infecting us all. As Jeremiah wrote, *“The heart is deceitful above all things”* Jer. 17:9.

When it comes to our relationship with God, there is only one thing we can do for combating gullibility, and that is to humble ourselves in prayer and fervently seek the Lord’s will in our lives. Are we doing this on a regular basis? It’s something everyone of us in the church needs to take very seriously.

### **III. A Story of Grace**

The Gibeonites' deception paid off because the Lord was involved in the covenant that was made. Here we see how the Lord is much more merciful than anything we could ever imagine. But not only do we see the Gibeonites being spared, they are also made the Lord’s servants. When Joshua cursed them to a life of servitude to the Lord, they willingly accepted this. And by willingly accepting this as their lot in life, they ended up living as children of light who received an inheritance from the Lord and became a blessing to Israel.

Later when Joshua divided the land among the Israelites, Gibeon was one of the cities given to the high priestly line of Aaron, and so became a very special place where God could be known and sought out. About 200 years later, David put the tabernacle at Gibeon. The altar and priesthood also resided there at this time. Then, much later, when the Jews returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity, the Bible tells us that there were 500 Gibeonites among them. In his writings after the captivity, Ezra the priest tells us they were totally committed to the Lord and his house. Nehemiah says that there were Gibeonites involved in the rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. In the end, these Gibeonites were given a future in the Promised Land and became a special blessing of the Lord to Israel.

In a strange twist of God’s divine providence where good comes out of evil, a curse becomes a blessing that teaches us how to risk our lives and our all on the Lord. Submit yourself to the Lord in all things and your future with him will be secure.

The writer of Proverbs echoed this same thought: *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths,”* Prov. 3:5,6.

Years after these words were penned, we see this principle embodied in the person of Jesus Christ who trusted in the Lord and sought his will in all things, even death on a cross. This is the pattern for living God calls us to follow. Trust in the Lord for all things and lean not on your own understanding. It is a risk that will pay off big time in a future with the Lord.