

UNIT 1: JOSHUA AND JUDGES

Lesson 3

Learning to Seek God's Guidance

God is faithful to save all who seek Him.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

Joshua and Israel once again made a decision without seeking the Lord's counsel. The Gibeonites, fearing they would be destroyed as Jericho and Ai had been, devised a plan to deceive Joshua into thinking they were from a distant region and posed no threat to Israel. Joshua and the leaders of Israel made a league with the Gibeonites, thereby promising they would not conquer them. When the deception was discovered, Israel honored their vow but required the Gibeonites to be servants in Israel. When other inhabitants in Canaan heard of this, they attacked Gibeon, but Israel defended them and routed the enemy with the miraculous lengthening of a day.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The events of Joshua 10:12-14 are amazing and miraculous. Various theories have been offered on how this could happen, including an eclipse, a passing meteor, and massive solar flares. The text clearly says, *"The sun stood still in the middle of the sky and not set for about a full day"* (v. 13 MEV), which essentially means the rotation of the earth slowed to forty-eight rather than twenty-four hours (*"about a whole day"*). The same God who spun the earth into orbit can also slow its rotation and, at the same time, maintain natural order without massive tidal waves or other catastrophic events that would normally be associated with such an event.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. PRAYERLESSNESS LEADS TO DECEPTION *Joshua 9:1–15*

- A. Desperation Devises a Deceptive Plan (1-7)
- B. Decision Made Without Seeking God (8-15)

2. LIVING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES *Joshua 9:16–27*

- A. Deception Exposed and Dealt With (16-21)
- B. The Deal Kept With Conditions (22-27)

3. GOD ANSWERS PRAYER AND GIVES VICTORY *Joshua 10:1–15*

- A. Joshua Keeps His Promise (1-7)
- B. God Keeps His Promise (8-15)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. PRAYERLESSNESS LEADS TO DECEPTION *Joshua 9:1–15*

A. Desperation Devises a Deceptive Plan *Joshua 9:1–7*

Following Israel's defeat of Jericho and Ai, the inhabitants of Canaan were afraid. They had even heard about what God had done forty years earlier to bring Israel out of Egypt (9:9). Several of the tribal kingdoms from the hills and the valleys of Canaan and along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea were fearful that Israel would be coming to conquer them as well. Because they were facing Israel as a common enemy, some of those kingdoms came together to fight Joshua and Israel (v. 2). One of the cities in the region was Gibeon. Hearing of Joshua's recent victories, the leaders of Gibeon had no confidence in an alliance with other nations against Israel. Instead, they devised a plan to deceive Israel into thinking they were from a distant land, and thus not a kingdom the Israelites would want to conquer.

The Gibeonites sent some men to Israel who pretended to be ambassadors seeking a peace agreement. To fool Joshua and the princes (tribal leaders) of Israel, these men dressed in clothes and sandals that looked ragged and worn from a long journey. They even carried food and drink in old containers, with bread that was stale and moldy. They went to Joshua and the men of Israel saying, *"We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us"* (v. 6 NKJV). They were seeking a political treaty to ensure Israel would not conquer them. However, the men of Israel were somewhat suspicious, asking, *"Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?"* (v. 7 NKJV). However, even with their suspicions, neither Joshua nor other leaders of Israel inquired of the Lord concerning the matter.

B. Decision Made Without Seeking God *Joshua 9:8–15*

Joshua probed a little further, asking who they were and where they were from. Their response was a lie mixed with truth. The lie was that they were from far away, but it was true that they had heard *"of the name of the LORD thy God ... and all that He did"* (vv. 9-10). They told Joshua they were sent from a far country to entice Israel to make a peace treaty with them. They took a submissive approach, telling Joshua twice, *"We are your servants"* (vv. 8, 11). They were willing to accept servitude over annihilation.

To show they had traveled a far distance, they pointed out that their clothes and sandals were worn, their bread was moldy, and the flasks of wine, which they said were new when they left home, were now worn and torn (vv. 12-13). Verse 14 states, *"Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the Lord"* (NKJV). That the men *"took some of their provisions"* probably means they took them to inspect. The critical point in this account, however, is that no one from Israel bothered to seek God's guidance in this matter. Instead, verse 15 says, *"Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them."* The leaders of Israel committed the entire nation to an agreement without seeking God's counsel.

2. LIVING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES *Joshua 9:16–27*

A. Deception Exposed and Dealt With *Joshua 9:16–21*

Though the men from Gibeon claimed to be from a far land, the cities represented by these *"ambassadors"* (v. 4) were only about twenty-five miles from Gilgal. When the people of Israel discovered the agreement their leaders made with these men, they were unhappy (v. 18). However, the leaders told the people, *"We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them"* (v. 19). They had invoked the name of the Lord when they swore not to conquer or kill the people of these cities. Therefore, breaking their oath would cause

God's name to be used in vain, violating their covenant with God. They could not revoke their agreement, but they would amend it.

The leaders told the people of Israel to let the Gibeonites live, *"but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation"* (v. 21 NKJV). The Gibeonites had come to the Israelites *"because of the name of LORD thy God"* (v. 9), and now they would become laborers in support of the tabernacle of the living God.

B. The Deal Kept With Conditions *Joshua 9:22–27*

After the leaders told the Israelites what the fate of the Gibeonites would be for their deception, Joshua called the Gibeonite men to stand before him. He revealed that he knew they had been deceptive by claiming to come from a far country when, in fact, they were inhabitants of Canaan. Then Joshua told them they would not be killed, nor would they be free. They would be servants of Israel as *"bondmen"* in service to *"the house of my God"* (v. 23).

The men from Gibeon willingly accepted this sentence. As they told Joshua, when they heard that God told Moses to give all the land to Israel and to destroy the inhabitants, they were afraid for their lives. They completely surrendered to whatever Joshua decided: *"We are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do"* (v. 25). The people of Israel had been ready to kill the Gibeonites, but because Joshua made an agreement in the name of the Lord, Joshua prevented Gibeon from being destroyed. Instead, he made them manual laborers *"for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD"* (v. 27). This arrangement remained in place for generations. In 2 Chronicles 1:3, the Bible reveals the tabernacle was later pitched at Gibeon, and many years later, the Gibeonites helped to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:7).

3. GOD ANSWERS PRAYER AND GIVES VICTORY *Joshua 10:1–15*

A. Joshua Keeps His Promise *Joshua 10:1–7*

Five miles south of Gibeon, the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-Zedek, feared Israel's advance into Canaan. Like Gibeon, he had heard of Israel's conquests over Jericho and Ai and was afraid. However, unlike Gibeon, he did not intend to seek peace with Israel. Instead, he formed a coalition of five cities, including Jerusalem, to defeat Gibeon. Adoni-Zedek reached out to four other kings with the following invitation: *"Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon: for it hath made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel"* (v. 4). The goal was to punish Gibeon for their arrangement with Israel and to dissuade any other cities from trying to do the same.

The *"five kings of the Amorites"* (v. 5), who represented cities of the hill country of Canaan, came together in battle array against Gibeon, preparing to attack. However, messengers were sent to Israel with a plea for help: *"Do not forsake your servants; come up to us quickly, save us and help us"* (v. 6 NKJV). Gibeon was facing almost certain defeat, and although they had tricked Israel into making a treaty with them, they ran to Israel for help. When Joshua made the agreement with the Gibeonites, it was with the understanding that they were a faraway country, so it is unlikely he would have committed to providing military protection for them in that treaty. However, this was an opportunity for Israel to conquer five kingdoms that had conveniently gathered in one place. Therefore, Joshua mustered Israel's army to ascend to the hill country of the Amorites.

B. God Keeps His Promise *Joshua 10:8–15*

This time, Joshua heard from the Lord before going to battle. The text does not say whether Joshua sought the Lord's guidance or if God sovereignly chose to speak to him, but before the battle was enjoined, Joshua heard this word from the Lord. *"Fear them not: for I have delivered*

them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee" (v. 8). This was an encouraging word, so Joshua and the army marched all night from Gilgal to Gibeon—a journey of over twenty miles involving a climb of more than three thousand feet. The army of Israel may have been tired from their march, but the Lord had gone before them and *"discomfited"* (v. 10) or *"routed"* (NKJV) the enemy, so Israel was easily able to overtake them.

In addition to Israel's attack, God intervened with giant hail, which killed more of the enemy than Israel killed by the sword (v. 11). The only thing needed for a total victory over these kings was more time. Therefore, *"Joshua spoke to the LORD ... and he said in the sight of Israel, 'Sun, stand still over Gibeon; and Moon, in the valley of Aijalon' "* (v. 12 NKJV). This was a plea of profoundly impossible proportions, but verse 13 states the sun and the moon did indeed stand still. This means daylight was lengthened to accommodate Israel's complete defeat of their enemies. The writer of Joshua cited another book familiar to the people of his time, the Book of Jasher, which also recorded this historic event. The writer of the Book of Joshua said, *"And there was no day like that before it or after it"* (v. 14), by which he meant both the lengthening of a day and the intervention of God at Joshua's request. After the decisive victory, Joshua and Israel returned triumphantly to their base camp at Gilgal.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

We are called to stand with one another when Satan attacks. As Israel came to the defense of Gibeon, we should be prepared to pray with and for one another as we engage in spiritual warfare.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

There are times when bold faith is required, and we must believe God will miraculously move. At times, churches may need to be reminded of major moves of God in the past to help us pray in faith for God to move mightily once again.

WORKSHEET

Why Ancient Israel's Conquest of Canaan?

Why Did Ancient Israel Wage War to take possession of the land of Canaan from the seven Canaanite nations (Deuteronomy 7:1-6)? Because God had promised the land of Canaan to Abrahams descendants (the Israelites), God commanded Israel to fulfill that promise by taking possession of Canaan.

Why Did God Give the Land of Canaan to Israel? The moral justification for God taking the land of Canaan from the Canaanites, and giving it to Israel, was the extreme evil of the Canaanites as a consequence of their worship of false gods (see Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24-28; 20:22-24).

The basic principle underlying Gods decision to give the land of Canaan to Israel is that God exercises His sovereign power and authority to establish the length of existence and territorial boundaries of every nation on earth:

He [God] has made from one blood [one man, Adam] every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings (The Apostle Paul, Acts 17:26 NKJV).

The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses (Daniel 5:21 NKJV)

Also see Genesis 11:1-2, 4, 8.

Earthly Governments Establish Their National Boundaries, but, in fact, God is the One who establishes national boundaries and determines how long each nation will continue as a nation. The Bible warns, *The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God* (Psalm 9:17 NKJV). Because the ancient Israelites forgot God, He, in righteous judgment, took the land of Canaan from them and gave it to the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:11-12; 721 BC), and then to the Babylonians (2 Chronicles 36:15-20; 586 BC), until, following their repentance, He restored them to Canaan under the rule of the Persians (Ezra 1:1-4; 536 BC).

Looking Back and Forward

1. Explain the three uses of the word "*brought*" in Joshua 24:5-7.
2. What would it take for the Israelites to serve the Lord "*in sincerity and in truth*" (v.14)?
3. What did the Israelites credit God for doing (vv. 17-18)?

Why was this important?

4. Explain the statement, "*He is a jealous God*" (v. 19).

Is this a positive or negative truth for us?

5. How were the Israelites witnesses against themselves (v. 22)?

How is this true for us as professing Christians?

6. As Christians, what do we need to "*throw away*" (v. 23 NIV), as Joshua commanded the people to do?