



## Joshua 9 They Didn't Seek God

As we have been moving through the book of Joshua we have noticed that God does things differently. He takes a different approach, has different priorities than we do.

And last week we saw the consequence of violating those priorities when Achan took some things for himself that should have been left for God. As a result at least 40 people lost their lives and Israel suffered their first military defeat. And we said that was disappointing, because this was supposed to be the Promised Land, this was supposed to be a place of peace, a nice neighborhood with good schools, a great place to raise a family; after spending 400 years in captivity in Egypt, Israel was supposed to be getting a break.

But sin is what makes life hard – sin in our lives and sin in the lives others. And it turns out that the sinful, selfish orientation in our hearts tends to follow us wherever we go, so even as the nation of Israel enters the land of Israel problems follow.

We're going to see another one morning.

Read with me if you will,

**Joshua 9:1** And it came to pass when all the kings who *were* on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite—heard *about it*, 2 that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.

That's a little preview of what we'll find in Chapter Ten next week. When all these kings heard that Israel had defeated Jericho and Ai, they gathered together in a coalition to fight against Joshua.

But the people of Gideon took another approach; they tried to trick Israel into making a deal, signing a treaty:

3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, 4 they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, 5 old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* moldy. 6 And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us."

So here's what you need to know about Gibeon. First of all, Gibeon is a city, and as we'll learn later, there was cluster of smaller cities around it like any big city today.

The people who lived in Gibeon would have been called Amorites – that was their region. Like you might be a Virginian who lives in Fairfax. And we read in the next chapter that Gibeon was “a great city, like one of the royal cities” it was greater than Ai, which Israel had just defeated, “and all it's men were mighty” (Joshua 10:2).

They tell Joshua that their city is located far away, which is really stretching the truth. The Scripture says Joshua was in Gilgal, but the word just means circle and some people think it means a campsite. So he could either be up in valley of Shechem where we last saw Israel at the end of Chapter Eight, if so, that's a distance of about 45 miles. It would be a 14 hour walk from Gibeon to Shechem, which would be like walking from here to Fredericksburg, Annapolis, or Ft Meade.

If Gilgal is down by Jericho, it's about 15 miles away. Making it about a 6 hour walk from Gibeon to Jericho – that's like walking from here to Dulles or Bethesda, or the White House.

But these guys show up looking like they've just driven cross-country in the minivan with the kids, two dogs, and a cat.

So why do they go through all of this, why do they put on costumes and come up with props and make it seem like they've travelled so far? Simple: to save their lives. They've heard what happened at Jericho and Ai, and they're afraid they're next. They've heard about this nation, and their God and even though they are a big city with mighty men, even though their neighbors are going to stand together against the threat, the people of Gibeon decide to see if they can make peace and submit.

Which brings us to the issue some of you have been struggling with for a few weeks now – why was God sending the Jews in to destroy all these people and take away their land anyway?

Friends, I cannot soften what God has done, but I can tell you, if this is what troubles you most about God, you don't understand Christian theology, because you don't understand that *everyone* outside of Christ is headed for eternal destruction.

And may I gently ask: when you struggle with the thought of wiping out an entire city, do you care more about the fact that they were killed or *where* they were headed for eternity? Which one really gets your attention? You see, most of us are bothered far more by their death than their destination. But friends, we must remember that the end of earthly life brings the beginning of eternal judgment.

That's why, in part, God was doing all of this, it was to set the stage for Christ to come and save us from sin, to give us an eternal hope. For the Christian, the end of earthly life brings the fullness of eternal life lived in the presence of our Lord. That is what Christians have

believed for 2000 years. You're either headed for life or headed for judgment; death is just the door you pass through to get there.

So, let's keep that in mind, and then let me give you a few more data points.

First, remember they're coming into this land because it's the place God had promised to Abraham four centuries earlier. Abraham was an older man who didn't have any kids, and whose wife was past the point of having kids. Yet God came to him one day and said, 'Abraham, I'm going to use you as the starting point for the most amazing thing that ever happened in history. I'm going to start with you, and give you children, and then give them more and more children, and soon they'll be like the number of stars in the sky, and I'm going to give them all a place to live, and they're going to be a blessing to all of mankind.'

His children became known as the nation of Israel, and that blessing was the coming of God's Son, Jesus Christ who was born to Mary, an Israeli woman, and who grew up and allowed Himself to be sacrificed for the sins of men in the Israeli capital of Jerusalem.

The place God was giving to Abraham, the place where all of these other things would happen, is a little strip of land on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea that we still call Israel today. Back then it was known as Canaan, and when God made that promise to Abraham, way back in the first pages of your Bible, in Genesis 15, the Amorites were already living there.

The problem was, they didn't know or care much about God. Instead, archaeological evidence from this period shows that they knew everything we know about sexual activity today and more: pornography didn't start with the Internet; the Amorites put it on their pottery and there was no limit to their depravity. History also shows us that they made child sacrifices, burning infants to death to appease their gods. If you're concerned about today's headlines, don't go reading history – you learn that man was never a noble savage.

And yet, God was still being patient with these people. After God tells Abraham everything that He is going to do for him, He shifts gears and says "But, you're only going to live to see part of it." Listen:

**Genesis 15:15** [God tells Abraham] Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation [your offspring] shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

Why didn't God just take Abraham right to where he wanted him to live? Because the Amorites were already there, and their iniquity – that is, their sin, was not yet complete. God was waiting for them, giving them room, giving them space to repent, to turn from their wicked ways, but they never did.

And while God was waiting, so were Abraham's descendants. In fact, you Bible Scholars know what happened during those four generations, right? Where were they spent?

In Egypt.

As slaves.

So think about that: while God is being patient with the Amorites, allowing them time to repent of their sin, to turn from their wicked ways, waiting because their “**iniquity is not yet full,**” the Jews are serving as Egyptian slaves building monuments and pyramids and eventually having their kids taken from them and put to death. Do you remember all of that from Exodus?

And do you know what Moses told the people of Israel before they inherited this land? He tells them ‘Don’t think God is doing this because you’re better than them, He’s doing this for His own reasons.’ He explains in

**Deuteronomy 9:4** “Do not think in your heart, after the LORD your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land’; but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD is driving them out from before you. 5 *It is* not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart *that* you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 6 Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you *are* a stiff-necked people.

That’s pretty clear, right? Moses tell them, ‘God’s not doing this because you’re so good Israel, He’s doing it because they’re so bad.’ So don’t go getting a big head.

And notice, that Moses says, “**the LORD is driving them out before you.**” It’s important to understand that Israel is swinging the sword, but God is the one in charge. He is the one at war and everyone understood that, right? When Rahab took in the spies she told them she heard about *what their God had done*, and later when the Gibeonites are told to explain themselves, they say the same thing, we’ve heard *what your God* has done.

Back in Exodus God had told Moses all this would happen:

**Ex 23:23** “For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. 24 “You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their *sacred* pillars.

So, you have to see this: God says *He’s going to be the One bringing the judgment*, and He wants these people totally wiped out because He doesn’t want them to corrupt what He’s trying to do through Israel.

In other words, He doesn't want the neighbors to be a bad influence on His kids. Parents, you understand that, right? What kind of steps do you take to protect your kids from ungodly influence?

Well, the Gibeonites had heard about the judgment being poured out by the God of Israel and decided to see if they could do anything to escape so they offer a complete surrender.

And that's important too if you have a hard time accepting the destruction of entire cities, notice the difference here – when the Gibeonites heard what God was doing, they came to surrender, while all their neighbors rallied together to fight. Think about that.

So they concocted a scheme – they'd see if they could forge a treaty, a covenant with the Jews for peace. They'd have to lie to do it, but if they could secure a yes, they could preserve their own lives. So, they set off to find Israel and tell them their lie, and now watch how Israel responds:

7 Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?"

They're suspicious, and that's good, right?

8 But they said to Joshua, "We *are* your servants."

And Joshua said to them, "Who *are* you, and where do you come from?"

9 So they said to him: "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, 10 and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth.

11 Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, "Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We *are* your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us." 12 This bread of ours we took hot *for* our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy. 13 And these wineskins which we filled *were* new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey."

They're lying through their teeth because their lives are on the line – there's a much better way to go about it, they could have just told the truth – they've come to surrender, they're saying as much – they're saying, "look, we don't want to fight, and we've heard amazing things about your God, be our friends." But they take something that could be so good and they infect it with their lies.

Friends, have you ever done the same thing? Have you ever lied, about who you really are and what you've really done? Maybe you even lie to God – you've heard great things about Him, just like the Gibeonites, and you want to come to Him, you want to be on His side, but you don't want to tell the truth about who and what you really are.

Friends, you need to do that. God will accept you the way you are, He might not let you stay that way, but you don't need to try and lie about it, you don't need to try and cover up your identity, if you're going to come to God, if you're here to surrender, be open and honest about what that means. He sees through all your disguises anyway. And he knows, as I heard someone say recently, "we're all broken, but none of us are freaks."

Tell the truth about who you are and where you've come from if you're really ready for wherever God is going to tell you to go and what He's calling you to be. Learn from the lesson of the Gibeonites, and look at the problems their deception caused.

We jump back in with verse 14, one the most ominous verses in the Bible:

14 Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD. 15 So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them. 16 And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they *were* their neighbors who dwelt near them. 17 Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities *were* Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim. 18 But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers.

When I was growing up one of the sayings I learned from my mom was, "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." The Gibeonites were trying to do a good thing, but they went about it the wrong way, and the Israelites didn't catch it because they didn't seek God.

Christian, can I ask you a painful question? What kind of things have you been talked into by people who seemed like they could be trusted? You never prayed about it, you never sought Scripture on it, you just went with what seemed like a good idea and it blew up in your face. What kind of business ventures, purchases, or relationships do you now regret because you didn't seek God?

This is a very important lesson for those of us in any form of ministry leadership. It's something that the elders of the church need to keep in mind it especially as we are pursuing so many improvements around the building. But it's also important for other ministry leaders to keep in mind.

We prayed this week about two specific meetings we were going to have: one regarding the HVAC system and another regarding the swamp out front, both of those meetings produced amazing results. Very encouraging things. We sought God before we took action. Stephen actually grabbed the HVAC guy and said can we pray before we go and look at the system?

Now, I don't think you always need to grab someone and say do you mind if we pray before this presentation, or staff meeting? That might not be appropriate in your circumstance. But you can still do it yourself. When people come to you asking for advice or asking for

guidance you can utter a quick prayer “Father, help me to answer well. Help me to know your will.”

That’s kind of the idea behind Proverbs 3:5-6, right?

**Proverbs 3:5** Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
**6** In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.

Neglecting prayer leads to a loss of discernment. Keep the door open, in all your ways, acknowledge Him and He WILL direct your path.

Be careful with telling yourself this or that is just common sense, or drawing borders around God’s sovereignty as if, “these are God’s issues, or church issues, and this is ‘real life’ or this is ‘business’ or this is work.” Church should be different, it should be a safe place, but faith and an awareness of God, a dependence on God, a looking to God for guidance must be integrated into every part of our lives.

So let me ask: when are you most tempted to handle things on your own?

Would you pray about dating that person? I know both Christian men and women who have been sucked into relationships with someone they thought was much more spiritually mature than they turned out to be. Keep your eyes open and your ear open to God before you commit to something you will regret.

Would you pray about joining that team? Or do you think that’s too spiritual?

Would you pray about firing that person?

Would you pray about starting this new thing?

Are you willing to look at all areas of life with a spiritual lens, especially knowing that God does things differently and ask Him for His take?

And don’t let yourself be rushed into hasty decisions. Wait upon the LORD and dictate the pace instead of being dictated to. Be willing to say no or let the opportunity pass if necessary while you “[ask counsel of the LORD.](#)”

“OK,” you say, “But what if I find myself already here? What if I’ve already compromised, what if I’ve already committed? Do I just have to live with it?” Well, the Israelites ask the same question, and listen to the response of their leaders:

**19** Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them. **20** This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them.” **21** And the rulers said to them, “Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them.”

The leaders of the nation say there's no way we can break our word. If we did, it would dishonor God's name among these foreigners and bring God's wrath upon us because we made this covenant in His name.

Many years later, when Israel was finally settled in the land and David was king, there was a famine for three years and David prayed to God asking why and God answered, it's because of Saul, who was king before you and the fact that he killed some of the Gibeonites (1 Sam 21:1). God took their covenant seriously.

We have a low value of a man's word today, we think it's nostalgic that people would seal a deal with a handshake.

But in Psalm 15 David asks the question

**Psalm 15:1** LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?  
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

And part of the answer is

**4** He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change

Even if it makes your life difficult, God still expects you to keep your word.

The only way out I can think of is if your oath leads to open, blatant, sin. Then break it, but if keeping your word leads to discomfort or sacrifice, don't assume it's automatically wrong.

Think about what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

**1 Cor 7:12b** If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.... **16** For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?

God has the ability to turn situations around, to transform our 'mistakes' if we are faithful for His sake. Keep your word, and who knows what will come of it?

Let's finish the chapter and I'll tell you a little more of what God did with the Gibeonites.

**22** Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We *are* very far from you,' when you dwell near us? **23** Now therefore, you *are* cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves—woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."

**24** So they answered Joshua and said, "Because your servants were clearly told that the LORD your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; therefore we were very



much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. 25 And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us.” 26 So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. 27 And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.

Some people read this and think the Israelites were wrong, they never should have done this, but I see things differently, and here’s why: look at verses 24 and 25 – they’re totally submitting, totally surrendering to Israel and their God. They’re not trying to be friends or allies, they’re not saying, let’s be equals. They’re totally surrendered.

And because of that they wind up being brought into a position where they’ll learn even more about God – they become servants who facilitate worship. Like some of you who show up early and set up coffee or prepare communion or wipe down tables – you’re servants of the Lord and the congregation.

And don’t we sing a song about that? Better is one day in your courts, than thousands elsewhere? Did you know that song is taken from Scripture? And do you know what it goes on to say?

**Ps 84:10** For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

God can turn a curse into a blessing. The Gibeonites facilitated worship, which may have led to their own salvation.

As time went on, the Gibeonites became servants at the tabernacle, just as Joshua had commanded.

After Israel had conquered the whole land, they divided it up among the tribes. Gibeon became a priestly city and the Ark of the Covenant was often kept there in the days of King David and King Solomon before they built the Temple (1 Chronicles 16:39-40 and 21:29).

And then, after Israel fell and was taken away into captivity in Babylon, Gibeonites were among those who eventually returned with Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:7 and 7:25).

In other words, God has the ability to save a people who were doomed to destruction, and to make them servants and worshippers even though they went about it all wrong.

And, God has the ability to critique the actions of His people – to say, “you should have consulted me, and shame on you for not doing it, but as you keep your word, I’ll re-write a better story.”

As we close, I want to remind us of that passage in Deuteronomy where Israel was told, they weren't receiving the land because they were so good, but because the people in the land were so bad. I want to remind us all that God is real, He is watching, and He is judging. But He has provided a way to escape the judgment if we will simply come, like the Gibeonites, in total and complete surrender.

Let's pray.