

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 9

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION

With the conquest of Ai, the central control of the land of Canaan was completed. Israel had now formed a wedge through the backbone of Canaan. The Land of Promise is now divided into two parts so that any alliances made by the enemies of Israel cannot be a united front but a divided one. This central control served as a beachhead for Israel to launch future attacks on the regions in the north and in the south. Israel's fame and conquests would have spread to these regions.

Chapter 9 informs us of the terror that had stricken the remaining kings of the nations in Canaan and their response to the inevitable campaign against them by Israel. However, there were other Canaanites who would approach Israel and try to establish a peace treaty with her, and save their own lives rather than be killed. This chapter narrates how one of these Canaanite nations deceived Israel into making friends with them thus Israel lost her right to kill them.

It is not uncommon to be deceived. This is part of the learning process. Very often, the deception stems from a fault that lies with us as well as the deceiver. But the one deceived is not guiltless either. Time-shares scams have robbed many Singaporeans of their hard earned cash. Ponzi schemes are no different. The schemers lie and deceive the victims. But the victims were greedy for the promise and guarantee of a fat pay check and more money when they retire. Playing on the victims' weakness, the deceiver fleeced their victims.

We can give this chapter the title: "To be deceived and to deceive". The following is a suggested outline of the chapter: 1) Forming an alliance (9:1-2); 2) To deceive and to be deceived (9:3-15); 3) Keeping your Word (9:16-21); and 4) Slavery or Death (9:22-27).

COMMENTARY

Forming an Alliance – 9:1-2

The kings of the Canaanite nations which were on the west and the coastal regions gathered themselves together to form a military alliance. They had no choice. With a larger army they thought they would have a better chance against their common enemy who is intent on getting "their" land, homes, and killing their families the way they killed the kings of the Trans-jordan region. This was the way of the world then and now. These kings were probably at odds with one another. But when there

is a common enemy, enemies become friends . . . for the moment, until the common threat is removed. Such alliances are short lived. They help one another as long as their own personal agenda is met. If the equation changes, today's friends could very well be tomorrow's enemies.

The "Great Sea" is the Mediterranean Sea and the coastal areas were inhabited by the Phoenicians, Tyrians and Sidonians (in the north-west) and the Philistines (in the south-west). These kings heard of the fall of Jericho and more recently the defeat of Ai. They were next on line. And so they formed a military alliance. This seemed to be the most prudent step they could take under the circumstances in order to stop the advancement of the Israelites.

But they did not know that they were doomed to fail because they were not actually fighting against the Israelites *per se*, but fighting against the living and true God. How can puny man thwart or delay the will and plan of God Almighty? Their resistance reminds us of what Pharaoh at one time said to Moses.¹ "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go."

¹ Exodus 5:1-2 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. 2 And Pharaoh said, Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

Kicking against the pricks is what the enemies of God are doing. The harder they fight against Him, the harder they hurt themselves and the deeper would the wounds be. Despite these grievances to themselves, the enemies of God will still fight on. This is the foolishness of mankind throughout the ages. He does not seem to learn that submission to God's will and obedience to His Word is balm to the soul.

To Deceive and to be Deceived – 9:3-15

But there was one nation of the people of Canaan who heard about how Joshua had taken Jericho and conquered Ai and also defeated Og and Sihon. They were the inhabitants of Gibeon, a city which was greater than Ai (10:2). The inhabitants were strong and brave. The city was about 15 kilometres from Gilgal, where the Israelites were encamped. It seems that the Gibeonites had no king: that means they were a republic. They collectively came up with a cunning plan to deceive the Israelites to make a treaty with them, thus saving their lives.

When lives are at stake and there is a will, there will surely be a way. The Gibeonites did their homework well. Not only did they know about the fall of Jericho and Ai, they were knowledgeable about what God had told Moses. God would give the land of Canaan to the Israelites, and the Israelites were to destroy all its inhabitants. They were terrified of

that prospect and therefore they decided that their only way was deception. The preparation for deception was thorough and faultless. As far as they were concerned, the evidence presented to Israel would be irrefutable.

They trekked the fifteen kilometres of rough terrain to Gilgal where the children of Israel pitched their camps. They pretended to be ambassadors from a far away country. They dishonestly proved it by showing to them that their sacks and wine bottles (leather containers) were old and worn out for they were new when they first started their journey. Their shoes were old and worn out, so were their garments which they wore, and the bread which they brought was dry and mouldy. Their request to Israel was to make a treaty with them. The men of Israel, probably the leaders, asked them a very pertinent and rather naïve question, *“Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you?”* It is like asking the seller of fried rice if his fried rice is good to eat! They did not reply directly, they merely declared, *“We are thy servants.”* Then Joshua asked them, *“Who are ye? and from whence come ye?”*

The questions from Joshua were direct and to the point. But if these people were bent on deception, would they answer truthfully? Again the questions were also quite naïve.

Conversely, the reply of the Gibeonites was carefully crafted with

the aim to deceive. Joshua 9:9-13 – *“And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth. Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us. This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy: And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.”*

Observe the obtuse reply of the Gibeonites. An honest answer would be straight to the point and not to beat around the bush. To the question *“who are you and from whence come ye?”* the Gibeonites replied *“from a far country.”* This is not an answer at all! The reply was enigmatic and deliberately meant to mislead.

They lied that they came from a far country. To prove their point, they used irrefutable scientific evidence. Firstly, they said that they heard of the greatness and might of the LORD Israel’s God and all that He did in

Egypt even though the news was 40 years old. The defeat and conquest of Og and Sihon were carefully choreographed. Secondly, they wanted to be Israel's servants. This will be good for Israel's ego especially when they had been servants for the past 430 years. Now suddenly they will become masters overnight. Such ego trips are effective in tickling and stirring the heart of pride. Thirdly, they produced their scientific evidence. Everyone knows how long it takes for new wine bottles to become old and torn, freshly oven baked bread to turn mouldy and new shoes and clothes to become torn and old. It takes lots of time. These things could not become so old looking if they had come from a near country. Therefore based upon these "irrefutable" evidences, the Gibeonites must be telling the truth.

The Gibeonites were sly and cunning not to say anything that happened in Canaan recently—the fall of Jericho and Ai. They knew very well that if they had mentioned about the recent conquests in the land of Canaan, their true identity would have been exposed. News could not have reached their far country so quickly especially when they said that it was because of the fame of the Egyptian Exodus and the defeat of Og and Sihon that prompted the elders of Gibeon to come and make a treaty with Israel. Otherwise they would be utterly destroyed like the others. Their explanation about how they arrived at the decision to come to meet the

children of Israel was another fabrication to support their story and deceive Joshua. The men of Israel inspected the bread, but the inspired writer commented that they "asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD" (verse 14). This was a matter concerning the nation Israel in which the interest and honour of the LORD their God was intimately linked. They should have asked counsel from the LORD.² They did not and Joshua also did not pray. Joshua based his judgement on superficial evidence and on human observation, which cannot give a proper diagnosis of the situation.

Joshua and leaders thought their decision was right. He was deceived. He received the Gibeonites with open arms and signed a peace treaty with them. It was also ratified by the elders of Israel who gave their oath to them. It is amazing! They had just experienced defeat at Ai because they did not seek the counsel of God. Now they committed the same mistake in making a peace treaty with the Gibeonites. How easily man forgets! Will man ever learn?

Keeping your Word – 9:16-21

Three days later when the children of Israel travelled to their cities, they discovered the truth. The Gibeonites were their neighbours! And moreover, the Gibeonites represented three other neighbouring

² Numbers 27:15-23.

cities — Chephirah, Beeroth and Kirjath-jearim — to make peace with Israel. The Israelites might not kill the inhabitants of these cities because of their peace treaty. But the congregation of Israel murmured against the elders probably for obvious reasons. They were afraid that they might have sinned against the LORD and will face more defeats and deaths against their enemies.

Joshua was in a difficult spot. He could kill all the Gibeonites and their allies on the grounds that he had been deceived. But that action would have dishonoured the holy name of the LORD God because the leaders of Israel had sworn by the LORD to uphold the peace treaty. So the elders stood by their sworn word. The real issue was not the peace treaty itself, which they made with the Gibeonites. The real issue was the vow made in the Name of the LORD God of Israel. So the children of Israel did the right thing by not killing the Gibeonites.

The Gibeonites were made hewers of wood and drawers of water for the Israelites.

Slavery or Death – 9:22-27

Joshua made the Gibeonites slaves working as wood-cutters and water carriers. Their work included assisting the priests and Levites in looking after the altar of burnt offering. The fire on this altar must be kept burning for perpetuity. Therefore the offering of wood was part of the arrangement where lots were taken to see who would collect wood for the

altar of burnt offering. Now this task was given to the Gibeonites.

The Gibeonites chose slavery over death. They knew they could not fight against the LORD of Israel. They admitted to Joshua their fear and it was a decision between death or slavery. They chose slavery and they were spared.

There was no indication that God reprimanded Joshua for being deceived. However, he did well in solving the difficult situation. The Gibeonites were faithful in their service and the LORD blessed them as shown in subsequent years.³

PRACTICAL VALUE

What can we learn from this chapter? The Gibeonites used deception and lies to save their lives. Lying is an abomination to the LORD, but they that deal truly are His delight (Proverbs 12:22). Under no circumstances, no matter how expedient it might be, a child of God should not lie. God, who does not lie, will preserve His child when he is obedient to him. Perhaps if the Gibeonites had come and sought peace, renounced their idolatry, pledged their allegiance to the LORD God and worshipped Him, they would have lived on more honourable terms. Just as Rahab was spared because of her willingness to renounce her idolatry and turn to the LORD God.

³ 2 Samuel 21:2-9. Ezekiel 17:18-19.

The same would have been accorded to the Gibeonites.

We should also see the importance of a solemn oath. When a child of God takes an oath, he does it in the name of God, even though he does not literally use His Name. As a Christian, he already bears the name of God in himself. Therefore, whatever oath he takes, it is a solemn and serious act. If he breaks his oath, he not only commits a breach of trust, but also dishonours the name of God. God would be displeased. King David, whom God said that he was “a man after His own heart”, wrote that a child of God should not change even when he had sworn to his own hurt.⁴ In Christian marriages, the couple takes their vows before the LORD God, and they must under no circumstances break that vow, not even when they find out later that they are incompatible. The only ground that the marriage covenant may be broken is under the condition of unrepentant

moral infidelity.⁵ When we make a vow, see that we keep the vow.⁶

Sometimes people, places or things are not what they appear to be. Joshua and the elders of Israel were deceived by the appearance of the Gibeonites, who were liars. In addition our adversary, the devil, is capable of appearing as “an angel of light.”⁷ Does it mean that God does not want us to trust others? The answer is “No.” But to avoid being deceived, the first thing to do is to pray to the LORD for wisdom and discernment. We must realize that there are many wolves in sheep’s clothing out there. We need to be on guard and carefully investigate the evidences before our eyes. Joshua was deceived because he based his judgement purely on outward circumstances. We have the resources to make a more accurate judgement of what we see. We have the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, seek the counsel of God. Will we ever learn?

We can be easily led astray by making superficial judgements that are not based on the Word of God. Satan is a subtle enemy, and lying is one of

⁴ Psalm 15:4. 1 Samuel 13:14. Acts 13:22. 1 Samuel 13:14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee.

⁵ Mark 10:11-12. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. 12 And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

⁶ Ecclesiastes 5:4-5. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5 Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 11:14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

his *modus operandi*. Our Lord Jesus Christ called him the “father of lies.”⁸ Make no mistake - Satan has his agents in the world. He delights in deceiving, robbing and destroying Christians. Evidence is deceptive and based upon fallible interpretation and false assumptions as this chapter indicate clearly. We need therefore to put on the whole armour of God to counter his subtle design. So read and study the Bible by using good principles of interpretation (like the grammatical, historical, cultural, literary method), and depend on the Holy Spirit. What may look harmless may be the most dangerous of all. That is the hallmark of an angel of light! AMEN

WEDNESDAY: Joshua 9:1-27; Deuteronomy 7:1-2; Psalm 3:5-6.

THURSDAY: Joshua 9:1-27; Psalm 15:1-5; 2 Samuel 21:2-9.

FRIDAY: Joshua 9:1-27; Genesis 9:25; 2 Peter 3:17.

Discussion Questions

- 1. “Today’s friends can be tomorrow’s enemies” is this saying true of Christians?

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Joshua 9:1-13; Exodus 5:1-3; Romans 8:7.

TUESDAY: Joshua 9:13-21; Deuteronomy 20:16-18; Ephesians 6:11-12.

- 2. What are the hallmarks of deception? List them. Which is the most effective?

⁸ John 8:44 Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

3. Why did Joshua honour the treaty made with the Gibeonites when it was made by way of deception? Did God honour this treaty with the Gibeonites?

4. Would you choose a life time of slavery over death?

5. What other practical lessons can we learn from this chapter?
