

The Gibeonite Deception

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[0 : 0 0] Joshua 9. So it's Pentecost today. We haven't mentioned it yet, but today is the day that the church remembers.! It's seven weeks after Easter that the church remembers Jesus giving his Spirit to his people and all the nations from all across the earth coming in As his disciples are first full of fervor and the Spirit and start to speak in foreign tongues and preach the gospel and then spreads all across the world.

Everything in one sense starts there. And I'm going to read us what is a very Pentecostal passage in Joshua, but it might not look like it when I first read it to you. We will get there.

But I'm going to start. So we're going to work our way through the whole story, Joshua chapter 9. I'm going to read it kind of in three sections and just kind of take us through. But I'm starting in verse 3. When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they took on their...

Excuse me. They on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended with worn-out patch sandals on their feet and worn-out clothes.

And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, We've come from a distant country, so now make covenant with us.

[1 : 2 0] But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, Perhaps you live among us. Then how can we make a covenant with you? They said to Joshua, We are your servants. And Joshua said to them, Who are you?

Where do you come from? And they said to him, From a very distant country your servants have come because of the name of the Lord your God. For we have heard a report of him and all that he did in Egypt and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to Sion, the king of Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashteroth.

So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, Take provisions in your hand for the journey and go to meet them and say to them, We are your servants.

Come now. Make a covenant with us. Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you.

And now behold, it is dry and crumbly. These wineskins were new when we filled them. And behold, they have burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey.

[2 : 3 0] So the men took some of their provisions but did not ask counsel from the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them to let them live. And the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

This is the word of the Lord. Okay. I will keep reading in a moment and we will see how the story unfolds. But just to make sure we are all on the same page and know where we are. So these guys, they are from a place called Gibeon which is sort of, you know, in the middle of Israel.

It is not far from Jerusalem. It is a large popular city. It is rich. It is a wine town. This is not the kind of fortified places they have encountered so far. This is a big popular city.

And for whatever reason, these people are thinking, well, it tells us why. They have seen what has happened to some of these other towns that Joshua has come across and they are like, I do not want that to happen to us.

I know. The only thing we can possibly do is trick them. And so what they decide to do is make it look like they have come from a very, very long way away and that they are not from the land at all, that they are outsiders.

[3 : 32] They have dressed themselves in warm clothes. They have put dry crumbly bread in their sacks and they do this whole performance where they are like, look how far we must have come if we have worn out our shoes and our clothes on the journey.

And so Joshua and the people think, oh yeah, that must be the case. You must have come from a very long way away. Okay, we will make a covenant with you.

And they make promises to each other. And then the narrator in verse 14, now I don't know if you have noticed so far in Joshua, the narrator very rarely makes a comment. Usually we just get the story. The narrator says in verse 14, so the men took some of their provisions but did not ask counsel from the Lord.

As in the narrator is telling you exactly what they think of this. They're like, oh, if only they'd asked, this might have gone a little bit differently. As we'll see in a minute, they're about three days away from Gibeon and they're walking towards it.

They literally had to wait three days to find out the answer, find out who these people were. But no, they should have asked the Lord. You ever been there? That thing when you're like, oh no.

[4 : 41] This was all very avoidable and now I find myself in the middle of it and I've got to fathom my way through it. And you're like, if only I'd asked the Lord. Joshua had the same problem. I mean, we need to try not to do that.

But Joshua had the same problem. I mean, but why is this a problem? Because you might in the face of it think, why could they not just go and say, let's make a covenant together? So in the law that Joshua's been given in chapter 20 of Deuteronomy, they are forbidden to make treaties with people from the land that God is giving them because the point is this is their land that they're going to go and take.

But they can make a treaty with anyone from who is outside of the land. And however they might have figured it out, the Gibeonites have figured that out. And so they're like, oh, they can't make a treaty with us unless they think we're from a very long way away.

And Joshua is suspicious, clearly, because he asks a couple of times, where are you from? But he is eventually swayed by their pantomime and their dry bread and their warm clothes and all the rest of it.

And he's like, yeah, sure, okay, it appears to be the case. And the funny thing is, the Gibeonites, their deception, we'll see what happens to them in a bit.

[5 : 54] It's perhaps slightly surprising, but their deception is a really poor choice because we've already seen in the book of Joshua that people from the land, people from these various cities have been able to join Israel.

Rahab would be the most obvious example. By her saying, no, no, I swear allegiance to your God, I want to be part of your people, I leave my people behind, Joshua and people are like, great, in you come.

It's clearly the case, actually, that anyone from the land could have gone to them and said, we want to follow your God. We want to be part of your people, we want to leave our cultures behind.

We want to be with you. And they would have been accepted. That's why this is not, in a sense, a genocide that's happening because anyone can come in and join the people of Israel as long as they actually join them.

The Gibeonites weren't necessarily up for that. I mean, we've seen the same thing in Egypt. When they traveled out of Egypt, lots of Egyptians came with them and became part of the people of Israel. Even in just in the previous chapter, verse 33 of chapter 8 says, and all Israel, sojourner as well as native-born, and then goes on.

[7 : 05] Sojourner means someone who is staying with you, like visitor, foreigner. All Israel, foreigner and native-born. So the point being, Israel is not just specific people who are part of that ethnic line.

People can come and join them. So it clearly was possible, which some people are very cross about, clearly was possible for Gibeon to come and join them, but they don't want to do that. That would have required them kind of giving up themselves, giving up their culture, choosing to become part of Israel.

But they had a better choice. But so did Joshua. It says in, it wasn't written at the time, but it says in the book of Proverbs, chapter 18, verse 17, the one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him.

That's true, right? Someone says something really persuasive to you and you're like, oh yeah, that sounds like it would be true until you hear the other side of it and then you're like, oh, it seems somewhat more complicated than I first thought.

And that thread of wisdom is in the law. What Joshua should have done is, well, he should have asked God, but he also should have waited, thought, asked more questions, not rushed in.

[8 : 15] He had in one sense heard one side of the story. The prudent choice would be to consider and ask. We need to think the same thing, right? We need to be wary of deception from the world.

I'm going to make this point very briefly. There's hundreds of examples I could give, but it's very tempting if you look at something and you think that looks nice, or they look nice.

It can't be bad if it makes me happy, right? That's not true. Surely the Bible doesn't really mean that, and there'll be lots of voices in our culture that might make you wonder that.

We need to be wary of deception, of voices that would say things different to the words of God, and then we should follow the words in whatever it tells us to do. We need to be the kind of people that when someone comes with a persuasive sounding, this, this, this, this, this, we're like, okay, what's the other side of that?

Let's just, let's pause, let's think, let's weigh at what does the word say, which is not what Joshua does. Okay, but what happens next?

[9 : 26] Let me keep reading to you. This is verse 16. At the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were neighbors, and they lived among them, and the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day.

Now, their cities were Gibeon, Heparah, Beruth, and Kiriath-Jerim, but the people of Israel did not attack them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel.

Then all the congregation murmured or grumbled against the leaders, but all the leaders said to all the congregation, we have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them.

This we will do to them. Let them live, lest wrath be upon us, but because of the oath that we swore to them. And the leaders said to them, let them live. So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them.

This is the word of the Lord. So what happens next? They arrive at Gibeon. They suddenly discover it's this league, actually, of four quite large cities. This is not quite who they thought they were dealing with. And the people at large look at cities and think, but God told us to take the land.

[10 : 45] Surely we take the land. And the leaders are like, we can't. We've sworn an oath to these people. We can't break that oath. That would genuinely be really bad. So no. No, they get off scot-free.

And there's clearly behind this quite an uneasy situation where the people are grumbling, again, like they're having the desert many, many times, and the leaders feel like, oh, my word, we've made a really terrible decision, but actually to reverse it would be worse.

And there's just sort of tension forming between them that they're not quite sure how to resolve.

Again, essentially, you might think, well, why can't they just do what they want? The problem is that one sin to fix another generally makes things worse, not better.

They've made a promise, an oath. And so to break that would not help. Again, I wonder if you've ever been in that situation where you've done something that's stupid. You know it was wrong.

And you think, I know what will fix this. This other really stupid thing. I suspect many of us have.

Now, you don't think like that, obviously, because you're like, oh, I'm not going to do stupid things. But trying to fix one sin with another is pretty common.

[11 : 52] Particularly, we lie to cover the thing that we did. And we think, oh, and it just, it spirals. And it gets more and more and more. Sin to fix sin never works.

And then they make this suggestion that they should treat them as if they were people who were outside of the land. So in the law, it said, you can make a covenant with people outside the land.

They'll come in, there'll be drawers of water for you and cutters of wood. And so they said, well, let's just do that. Let's, they told us they were, they were lying, but let's just act as if that were true. Let's just try and be honorable in what we did.

And we find this strange situation where these foreigners, as a nation, have come into Israel. Now Joshua does something different in a minute. That shifts it.

But even now, we've seen already the idea that Rahab could come in. She joined them. The Egyptians could come in. They joined them. The Gibeonites come in. They don't quite join them. They sort of sit on the edge. But there's a hint here of the event that happened 1,993 years ago today of Pentecost.

[13:05] Of this moment when all the nations of the earth suddenly were offered the gospel. The disciples, the disciples of Jesus, they get filled with the Spirit and then they start to go out and talk in different languages and say to people, Jesus is the Messiah.

You can come and be rescued. And then as it spirals over the next few years, they find that actually not just, you don't even have to be Jewish. All the people can come in.

And the world is turned upside down by this message that Jesus dying on the cross can free you from your sins and you don't even have to leave your culture. You don't have to become part of the people of Israel.

All the different cultures can knit together into this wonderful thing that they call the church. No longer do you have to join Israel as I say but instead they discover Jesus is true Israel.

And as Paul says in the book of Romans, we are grafted into him to become part of the people if we're not ourselves born Jewish. And all of this looking forward to that day described in Revelation 7 where one day what will the world look like?

[14:19] It will look like the church and it will look like the church made up of every tribe and every nation and every people and every culture that there has ever been. There will be someone, hopefully many people, from every group of people united together.

That's the future vision of the church. That's the future vision of the world. That's the thing that can be accomplished only through the gospel. And yet, there's a hint of it here where these people, they're outsiders, they're sort of, oh okay, you shouldn't really be allowed to but come and stay with us anyway.

The Gibeonites who, they didn't really want to join with God but they were scared of him. They find it's like, well you can stay. This maybe is a slightly, slightly difficult analogy but let's go with it.

The, it's not super unlike, there are a number of people in the room and there are, most weeks, who don't know Jesus. Now, most of you will be like, yeah, okay, I'm not 100% sure by what you mean by know Jesus, maybe you're thinking but, yeah, that's me.

There are people here every week with us who are just sort of, they're looking in, they're curious, they're wondering about all this or they feel drawn to church, they don't know him. And it is possible to be comfortable in that position that there's something in this that you're like, I kind of like it, I like the community, you know, I don't, sort of interested, learning a little bit.

[15:54] You can sit there if you want for a long time and in some ways that's a little bit like being a Gibeonite as in that they get to kind of come in and sit on the edge but not really part of the people.

Now, the difference is if you want to become part of the people, you actually just can. If you'd like to meet Jesus, this Jesus who we sing to, who we believe died on a cross for our sins and then rose to glorious life and is now seated at the right hand of the Father reigning forever and ever who gives his spirit to his people, that Jesus, believe that you can meet him.

Like, personally meet him. And if you'd like to, we're going to, you know, this is not the most kind of gospel appeal passage I've ever preached from by a long shot but we are going to at the end do a little, hey, do you want to meet him?

And so if you're in that position where you're kind of coming on to church a bit and you're like, I don't know, I'm all that over. I've got one more paragraph to read and talk about but mull it over. Would you like to meet him?

Because you can, I'll talk you through how in a little bit. And then towards the end of the meeting we'll come to the table which is bread and wine, come to communion which is just for Christians. But if you meet him just before, you get to come to the table too because you're suddenly exactly the same as everyone else.

[17:16] Okay, let me read the last paragraph to you. So I'm in verse 22. Joshua summoned them. He sees the problem. He thinks I need to get involved. It's partly his fault. And he said to them, why did you deceive us?

He's talking to the Gibeonites saying, we are very far from you when you dwell among us. Now therefore you are cursed and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.

They answered Joshua, because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you.

So we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing. But now behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it.

So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel and they did not kill them. But Joshua made in that day cutters of water, excuse me, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord to this day in the place that he should choose.

[18:26] This is the word of the Lord. Okay. Joshua gets involved. On the face of it, on a first read, you might be like, it doesn't look like much changed. But two things to notice.

The first is, clearly, a number of the people of Israel are getting quite agitated by this because he's like, he stops them from being killed. So it's clearly something of a mob thing forming. People want to storm these cities anyway even though they've been told not to.

But the difference between what happened in the previous paragraph when the leaders said, cut our wood, draw our water. And this one is, Joshua says, cut the wood and draw the water for the house of God.

This is a change. What he said is, no, no, don't serve the people. Come serve the temple. Well, at this point, come serve the tabernacle. Come serve the tent where we believe that God lives, where he travels with us.

What Joshua's doing is actually a remarkably clever thing. He's found a way to both continue with their oath and do what God told them to. So the thing that God told them to do was devote all the peoples of the land, as in devote them to destruction and all their goods.

[19:38] And all the goods of the land are supposed to come to the temple to belong to God. And so what Joshua goes is, okay, we're still going to devote these people. We're going to devote them to the temple.

Let's make sure that all the work they do is directly for God. And they honor the oath by saying, well, obviously, we're not going to kill you because we said we wouldn't. And so he finds this way to do both things.

He treats them like the objects they took from Jericho and he kind of brings them into the house of God and he doesn't break the oath. Strangely, this great mistake turns into great mercy, which, of course, is the heart of God.

Hundreds of years later in the time of Nehemiah when the people, they've settled the land, they've lived in it, they've been exiled from it and they've come back again and they're trying to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem among the many, many different groups of people that we find putting their arm to rebuilding the walls is we find the Gibeonites just alongside everyone else fully believing in the Lord as their God putting their arm to the rebuilding of the walls.

The ultimate outcome of this is that these people for their whole lives come into, excuse me, for the whole history of their people come into the people of God. He finds a way to do both things and in fact, it gets better than that because it says verse 26, he said, he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel.

[21:01] So Joshua manages to deliver them such that these people are added to the people, this nation become part of the people of Israel. But more than that, he delivers them from the people of Israel.

And the thing we should think reading this as Christians is but Jesus wasn't delivered from the hand of the people of Israel and he wasn't delivered from the hand of the people of Israel so that all of the nations of the earth could come in.

That what Joshua is doing at this point is like a little echo of what Jesus would later do on the cross where he allows himself to be killed so that all the nations of the world can come in to worship him. It's Pentecost. He wants everyone to come and be with him. So who are we in this story? I mean, I've given a few little applications to attempt to think oh, we're Joshua, we make mistakes like that. Sure, that's true. I think probably most of us we should think of ourselves as the Gibeonites. We're a people who are or at least we're the Gibeonites as they pretended to be.

[22:12] We're a people from far off. We're weary. Our clothes are worn out. All we've got is crumbly bread and we've run out of wine and the skins have burst.

And what does Jesus say to a tired people from far off who have rubbish bread and they've run out of wine? He says, come to my table. Come to my table.

There's the bread of life. His own body. And there's the wine of joy. His own blood that he wants to offer to us. Come to the table.

That's what we're going to do in a minute. We're going to come to the table and you'll be like, oh no, that bread's been sat in this room for a long time. It might be crumbly. I know. We'll be okay. But the actual thing that he offers us that the sign is to help us feast on in the heavens is himself.

And Jesus is not crumbly, if you'll forgive the slight irreverence of that comment. He is life to us. He wants to keep giving us life. He wants to be joy to us.

[23 : 16] And you're feeling, because you've listened to me talking for a bit now and it's hot in here and all the life and all the joy is sapped out of your feet. I get it. But he wants to gift us life and joy and we are invited to his table.

So we're going to do that. So a band are going to come. I'm going to do what I said. I'm going to create an opportunity if anyone would like to meet Jesus for the first time. And then we're going to take communion together. So, just while the band come and sort themselves out, what do I mean by meet Jesus for the first time?

Essentially, I'm going to pray a little prayer where you say, I trust you to take my sin away. I want to turn away from all the things I've done wrong. That'll be the essence of it.

If you'd like to do that, and I'm going to ask everyone to shut their eyes in a moment, and then if you'd like to do that, just kind of pray along with me in your heart. And I'm going to ask you to indicate to me if you've done that. While everyone's eyes are shut.

Because it'd be helpful if we could have a chat afterwards. But we deliberately create this opportunity. We know there's lots of people here who don't, who kind of come in and looking in, deliberately create opportunities for you to meet him if you'd like to do so.

[24 : 19] And we're going to keep doing that. So it might be that someone comes to meet him now, it might not. That's okay. Why don't we shut our eyes and pray along with me if you'd like to. Lord Jesus, I want to believe all these things are true.

Would you help me believe them? I choose to trust that somehow, even if I don't understand it, your cross took away the penalty and the pain all the wrong things that I have done.

I choose to believe that you took my sin for me and I trust you. I want to turn away from all the things that I've done in my life that aren't following you.

Will you help me? I'd like to meet you. Will you come to me? Amen.

Just keep your eyes closed for a moment, if you would. If anyone did pray that for the first time, could you just kind of wave people's eyes a shark? Could you just kind of wave at me? Okay, that's helpful.

[25 : 38] Well, if you just waved your hand at me, if you want to come chat to me afterwards, that'd be great. Okay, guys, let's open our eyes. What we're going to do now is we're going to come to the table that isn't, we hope, crumbly bread and isn't, certainly not, juice that's burst out of its skins and run all over the ground.

This is a meal for Christians. This is the sign that Jesus gives us of our togetherness. This is the meal that he gives us to feast on him. And so the band are going to lead us in a song.

I think it's going to be quite party vibe? Party vibe. Great. Which you're thinking, I'm hot, and that message didn't sound like a party. No, okay. But this is, Jesus says, his table is a place of celebration because he has rescued us.

So, hey, you can even dance down to the table if you'd like, and all the English people are like, that's not happening. But maybe some other people might. Band are going to lead us in a song. While they do that, come down and get a piece of bread and a cup of juice.

I keep gesturing here because that's the nearest one to me, but there are multiple around the room. It might, the nearest one to you may be behind you. There's a couple at the back. Come and get your piece of bread and your cup of juice.

[26 : 44] Take them back to your chair and in a moment we will all eat the bread together and all drink the cup together and I will lead us through that. Is that okay? Wonderful. Right. Go for it.

Oh, sorry. Stand. Stand. If you're able. Thank you.