

## Deception Exposed

### Joshua 9

*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.  
Galatians 6:7*

**Introduction:** There are really only two kinds of people in the world: those who like being surprised and those who don't. I was able to attend a surprise birthday party for a dear friend this weekend, and though she was deceived, put on, and misdirected, the payoff was a hearty surprise from friends and family. She responded with genuine surprise and gratitude. If I was put in that place, I would be out of sorts with uncomfortable responses, facial expressions, and faux greetings of enjoyment. Whether or not you like surprises, no one likes being deceived, lied to, or taken advantage of, and when any of those happen, there is consequence to relationship and life that we have to deal with.

Joshua and Israel found themselves in a position where they were taken advantage of. Worse than that, they were duped hook, line, and sinker, and they didn't need to be. If they had consulted the Lord, they would have seen through the blatant lies of the Gibeonites, who were fighting for their life. However, they refused to seek the Lord, trusting their own wisdom and judgment, and made a commitment that would have consequence for generations to come.

Joshua 9 picks up after Israel had soundly defeated the city of Ai and read the book of the Law at Gerizim and Ebal. By now the news of Israel's defeats beyond the Jordan (Josh. 2:10) and the destruction of Jericho and Ai had made its way around the land. This would be equivalent to hearing that Camarillo and Newbury Park had been burned to the ground and we knew Simi Valley was next. The cities of Canaan were made up of city-states, where each city had a king, an army, and autonomy. These kingdoms would fight with each other, but in this case, they bound together to face the coming onslaught of the Israeli offensive. Joshua 10:3 tells us that there were 5 main kings that came together in a mutual treaty to fight Israel.

However, there was one city-state that decided to take a different tactic. Instead of lining up with their enemies to fight a greater enemy, they tried a more cunning, deceptive, bloodless tactic. The text makes their plan very clear: they would trick Joshua and Israel into making a treaty with them. This was risky, for sure, since they were not sure if it Joshua would buy it, and risked offending the other kingdoms around (which they clearly did – 10:5). A few things that we glean about the Gibeonites at this point:

- **This was no small city** – This was a great city, like one of the royal cities, was bigger than Ai, and all the men were warriors (10:2)
- **They were conversant with Israel's protocol** – Much like Rahab knowing about Israel's history and God, it seems that the Gibeonites knew of at least 2 commands God had given Israel. **1)** Deuteronomy 7:2, which said to make no treaty with cities in the land and devote them to destruction, **2)** Deuteronomy 20:10-18 which made provision for peace to cities OUTSIDE of Canaan. The Gibeonites knowledge of this was apparent in how they went about making a treaty.
- **They were wrong, but its hard to blame them** – Gibeon used cunning, trickery, and deceit to stay alive. This in no way was acceptable, but clearly understandable given the circumstances. They faced annihilation. They faced having their kids die. They faced this with certainty. This was a 1 in a million shot, but it was worth taking based on the alternative.

- **They made effective use of deception** – They made sure to only mention the military conquests beyond the Jordan and did not mention Jericho or Ai (9:10). They used **flattery**, making sure to praise the name of the LORD for His fame, much like Rahab (9:9). They used **trickery** by using stale bread, burst wine skins, and worn out sandals (9:12-13). Their story made sense, the dots connected, and their plan worked.

As a result, Joshua and all of Israel made a binding covenant with a group of people living about 6 miles away from Jerusalem. Three days after they made this treaty, they discovered that they had been had (9:16).

Imagine how you would have responded if you were in Joshua's shoes. Have you ever been in a situation where you made a **bad decision** based on incomplete or deceptive information? How did you feel? What did you do? This is what Joshua and all the people of Israel did and learned through, and as they learned, so do we. We all are called to make hundreds of decisions all the time, and how we come to those decisions and what we do after them make the difference between **glorifying the Lord or glorifying ourselves**. We want to learn from the trap of deception Israel fell into, expose it, and avoid them in our future. Before we can deal with our response, we must understand our propensity to be deceived.

### I. **Understanding our propensity to be deceived (9:1-16)**

**Joshua 9:3-4** But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, <sup>4</sup> 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,

#### A. **The constant barrage of deception**

Life is not neutral. We do not go about life with a world system that is for us, but is rather against us. The battle ground in all of life is for your mind (see 2 Cor. 9:3-5; Col. 2:8-10; Eph. 6:10-12; Gal. 5:16-17). This battle rages all the time, in a constant fashion whether you think it does or not. This battle goes back to the garden, where Satan deceived Eve, convincing her that she could go against God's will and not face the consequence of death (Genesis 3:4 – *you will not surely die*). Eve was deceived by the crafty words of the devil, and we have been prone to the same deception ever since. There are three active ways that we are prone to being deceived.

### **3 Areas of persistent, potential deception:**

- **SATAN** – Far from being passive, Satan is the master of anthropology, knowing how mankind thinks and how to lead him astray. Satan is clever. Satan uses **cunning** (2 Cor. 11:3), **schemes** (Eph. 6:11), **deception** (Revelation 12:9), and **systems** (Col. 2:8-9) to do anything he can to blind eyes (2 Cor. 4:4), make ineffective, and accuse believers (Rev. 12:10). We know that he is the prince of the power of this world (Eph. 2:1-3), so he has delegated power over the systems and structures. He makes dark things seem light and light seem dark. He tries to inundate the system we live in with information so that truth is out there but its like a needle in a haystack. Because he is always active like a lion, our countries governmental system, education system, and moral normative have all been turned upside down. The trick to the whole thing: make people believe they are actually doing right, are actually the most tolerant and compassionate, and turn on anyone who says different. In other words, we have a **cunning, effective, proactive enemy who seeks to deceive**.

- **OTHER PEOPLE** – We are also up against those who have flesh and blood. The Bible is clear that we can easily be deceived by others. There will be those who seem to be godly but will really be imposters who will deceive and be deceived (2 Tim. 3:13). They will deceive with empty words (Eph. 5:6) and with lifestyles that influence (1 Cor. 15:33). Whether this happens directly or indirectly, intentionally or not, there will be others in our lives who will deceive, who will lead us away from the truth and ultimately away from Christ.
- **SELF** – The height of deception is that which comes from us. We can easily deceive ourselves (1 Cor. 3:18), convincing ourselves that we are wise in our own minds. We can convince ourselves that we are in good standing with God, even though our actions betray us (1 John 1:8). This takes place when we are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin itself, and we begin to justify our sin to ourselves (Heb. 3:14-16). This is when we start making up our own standards, we start taking the place of God in our own thinking, and fail to see sin and redemption properly (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11). This is why the NT says 3 different places: **“Do not be deceived”** (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16) and **let no one deceive you** (1 John 3:7). This type of deception is exactly why we need to be in fellowship with each other to the extent that people know us, love us, and speak the truth to us.

“I can handle this” is a dangerous statement for a Christian to make, but is one that we are all prone to. Deception is real and active against us and falling victim to it is easy but hugely consequential. This is exactly what happened to Joshua and the leaders of Israel, even though they thought they had done their due diligence.

### B. The constant need to expose deception

**Joshua 9:14** So the men took some of their provisions, ***but did not ask counsel from the LORD.***<sup>15</sup> 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 pivotal verse of the whole chapter. This is where the narrative is clearly explained and motives are exposed. The reason that Joshua and the leaders made such an egregious mistake is that they literally **did not seek the mouth of Yahweh**. They trusted their own logic, their own judgment, and their own experience to make a huge decision (this was not like deciding what to wear or what to eat that day, this was making a binding treaty, a lasting covenant). They did not prayerfully consider what the LORD would have them do, but **assumed** or **presumed** they knew what God would have them do. Even though God would have informed them exactly what was going on, they refused to walk through the simple yet dependant step of asking God and seeking His face.

How often have we done this? How often do we make decisions, plan for the future, and draw conclusions without seeking God for wisdom?

Seeking God’s wisdom is not only when we **feel desperate**, but because we **ARE ALWAYS DESPERATELY DEPENDANT on Him**. *Oftentimes we crave God’s power but ignore God’s wisdom.* We want God to bless, want His will, but do not want to seek Him out for counsel. This does not mean that God’s will is revealed in the particulars, and does not mean we will not make decisions that have hard consequences. But it absolutely means that we must seek God’s wisdom in a **dependant, consistent, and prayerful way**. James said it this way when it came to believers understanding and dealing with trials:

**James 1:5** *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, **who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.***

Joshua seeking counsel from his fellow leaders was good, but it was not enough. He did not prayerfully consider the situation. We have been given each other to help in decision making, but we also have **God's Word and God's Spirit** to understand what God's will is and what we should do. The Spirit guides us in the truth and the Truth sets us free to make faith driven decisions that will help us be holy, help us grow, and help us reach others.

This is a warning against cocky, self-sufficient, prideful independence. Prayerlessness in decision making screams of a declaration of independence. So the question posed is this: how often do we trust ourselves in decision-making? How often do we give token prayer or no prayer at all to what we should do? How often do we take into account the whole counsel of God in His Word when considering our future? Joshua and the leaders of Israel learned the hard way of the consequence of disregarding God and opening themselves up to be deceived.

## II. **Upholding God's honor after we are deceived (9:17-21)**

**Joshua 9:19-21** 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.**"<sup>20</sup> This we will do to them: **let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them.**"<sup>21</sup> 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.

### A. **The cost of upholding God's honor**

The story clearly does not end with a bad decision but thankfully goes on and explains what happened as a result. Often the measure of our maturity is not the first decision but the second or follow-up decision. What we do with the second will tell us everything we need to about what we believe about God, His sovereignty, and His grace. For Joshua and the leaders, it meant sticking to their word. I'm sure the thought crossed the minds of all involved to simply go back on their covenant, and they would be tempted to convince themselves that this would be the right and justifiable thing to do ("it's what we should have done in the beginning", "it's what God would have wanted", "it will be a lot easier in the long run"). However, Joshua and the leaders decided to do the hard thing and the right thing. **Often the hard thing is the right thing, and the right thing is that hard thing.** We live in a day that believes the path of least resistance is best, but that is not part of God's economy, since much can be learned by doing what is hard. But it comes at a cost:

- **Personal Discomfort** – This decision meant that they had to oversee the work and service of the Gibeonites. They would become woodcutters and water drawers, but it meant they would be in a covenant relationship also. This meant that when other nations attacked, Israel would have to defend this group, meaning men could lose their lives defending an enemy that should have been wiped out already.
- **Reputation hit for leaders** – Notice in the text it was not just Joshua, but all the leaders were indicted for this decision. This led to the people **murmuring against the leadership**. Their reputations took a hit ("these guys are idiots", "what were they thinking"). Leadership in the home, church, and community means that when you make a bad decision, it will affect those who follow and affect how they view you. Leaders will always have a target on their back, and they must be willing to absorb some blows since they are easy targets. They must be willing to be unpopular and not liked in the moment in order to do the **right and hard thing**.

- **Future limitations** – It is amazing to watch this covenant treaty play out, because it was still in play **400 YEARS LATER!** In other words, God upheld this treaty for generations because a treaty made in His name was binding. In fact, when Saul broke faith and the covenant hundreds of years later (2 Samuel 21) and killed some in Gibeon, the recourse David took was to hand over seven sons of Saul to be hung by the Gibeonites.

### B. The purpose of upholding God's honor

Why is this all so important? Because God is a covenant keeping God

- **Brings about the wrath of God**

Joshua and the leaders made the covenant out of their own free will. It was not forced on them. This is similar to making a vow in the OT. A vow was a promise, a free will decision to do something or not do something as unto the Lord. Ecclesiastes 5:4 says that you don't have to vow, but if you do, pay it, because God takes no pleasure in fools. In other words, you may not take it seriously, but He does and He expects that we will live up to what we declare. When we do not, He will levy consequences for our lack of keeping our vow.

- **God's name would be mocked among the nations**

The second consideration for Joshua and us is this: when we go back on what we declare before the Lord, we make a mockery of His name before others. We actually show people who do not know God that we don't care what He thinks and that it does not matter what He thinks. We lower what people should expect of God and show others that we truly do not fear Him, nor should He be feared.

### 2 thoughts on application:

- **Be careful what you sing** – We typically don't make vows like they did in the OT, but we do often commit ourselves to the LORD. Think about the songs we sing (and even what we sang today). We often declare things in the form of praise or song that often is done flippantly or without thinking through what we are actually saying.
- **Live up to your vows** – There are many other illustrations of vows and decision making, but the clearest one is that of **marriage**. We enter into marriage with our free will and make vows before God and man, declaring our commitment and love for one another. Marriage is a covenant created by God, and the commitment is binding (see Genesis 2:18-26). This is where there must be much **wisdom and dependency on the Lord** exercised before one gets married, **commitment to keep a vow once you are married**, and sometimes a willingness to **do the hard thing because it is the right thing** when the marriage was not what one thought or intended.

### III. **Undeserving Grace in spite being deceived (9:22-27)**

**Joshua 9:25-27** And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it." <sup>26</sup> So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. <sup>27</sup> But Joshua made them that day 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.

### A. God's grace is greater than disobedience

**Romans 5:20** Now the law came in to increase the trespass, **but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more**, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Grace is amazing because it is effective and given even when we sin. Grace is simply given so that we can obey or *because we obey*, it is given when we are desperate in our sin. This is the hope that we have in ALL of our decisions. We can seek the Lord, trust Him, pursue righteousness, and make faith driven decisions, and NO MATTER THE OUTCOME (good, bad, suffering, consequences), we can rely on God's grace to redeem it. This clearly does not mean we presume upon it (as Paul anticipated in Romans 6:1), but we have hope in God's grace whether things turn out well or not. Why do we take heart of this from this passage?

### **B. God's grace flips conventional wisdom on its head**

God was gracious to the Gibeonites, despite the way they went about it, because Israel made a covenant with them in His name. They were to become forced labors, but they had a unique position to serve at the altar of the LORD, the place of sacrifice and covering of sin. Gibeon was given to the line of Aaron as the land was divided. David put the tabernacle here nearly 400 years later. One of David's trusted mighty men came from Gibeon, and Solomon made burnt offerings at Gibeon. In other words, though they came under wrong pretenses and were liars/deceivers, hundreds of years later they were still there among God's people. They came into the land in a different way than Israel, and even than Rahab, but it would not be a leap to deduce that some of the Gibeonites became true followers of God as a result of this ironic drama.

We are reminded that God works in and among us in all different ways. We are reminded from this story that we are all products of God's grace, and not one of our stories is truly greater than the other, because they are all reasons to glorify God, not ourselves. God's grace can save anyone and the means that God uses to bring in His own vary, but the constant remains: we are saved by His grace, not our effort. We are saved for His glory, not our own. We are saved by Christ's sacrifice, not one we could give.

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