

**IV. Even when you make a bad decision, keep your word (9:18-27)**

The text tells us that once the ruse was discovered, the people grumbled against their leaders because they judged them to be responsible. **Apparently, in view of verses 19-21, the people also wanted them to disregard their covenant and destroy the Gibeonites.** However, though they erred by leaning on their own understanding rather than consulting the Lord, they honored their agreement with the Gibeonites. Had they not been men of honor and integrity, they might easily have sought to cover their tracks by destroying the Gibeonites, but they honored their pledge because it had been ratified in the name of *Yahweh*, the God of Israel. **To break the covenant would dishonor God's name and bring down His wrath. "In fact, such a judgment from God would later come to pass during David's reign because Saul disregarded this agreement. (see 2 Sam. 21:1-6)."**

While they could not go back on their pledge, the Gibeonites had deceived them, so a punishment fitting their sin had to be prescribed. First, Joshua rebuked them for their dishonesty and then sentenced them to perpetual slavery. In the ruse of the Gibeonites, they had offered to be the subjects of the Israelites (vss. 8, 11). By this they were merely offering to become Israel's vassals. In return they expected Israel, the stronger of the two, to protect them from their enemies (see 10:6). This backfires on them and they had to become Israel's slaves. They would become woodcutters and water-bearers for the Israelites, especially in relation to the tabernacle service. In God's grace, this turned out to be a great blessing.

... to keep the Gibeonites' idolatry from defiling the true faith of Israel, their work would be carried out in the tabernacle, where they would be exposed to the worship of the one true God.

**V. God can turn any failure into a blessing. (Joshua 10:10-14)**

As a result, the very thing the Gibeonites hoped to retain—their freedom—was lost. **But the curse eventually became a blessing.** It was on behalf of the Gibeonites that God later worked a great miracle (see Josh. 10:10-14). Later, the tabernacle of the Lord would be pitched at Gibeon (see 2 Chron. 1:30, and the Gibeonites (later known as Nethinims) would replace the Levites in temple service (see Ezra 2:43 and 8:20).

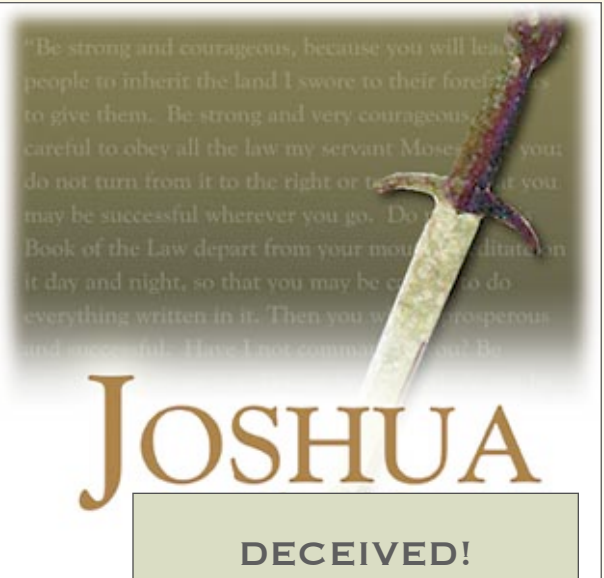
That is the amazing way the grace of God works. **He is still able to turn a curse into a blessing.** While it is true that the natural consequences of our sin generally have to run their course, God in His grace not only forgives but in many cases He actually overrules our mistakes and brings blessing out of sin.

In verse 27 we read, "... and that day made them woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD at the divinely chosen site. (They continue in this capacity to this very day.)" How tremendous and gracious of God. They had the privilege of being brought close to the Lord and spiritual things on a regular basis. **It is interesting that in later years, when the Israelites would go into idolatry, the Gibeonites would still be standing at the altar where the true God ordained that sacrifices should be made for sins.** As a result of what they had seen God do for Israel, they became convinced, like Rahab, that Israel's God was the true God. **Like Rahab, they evidently became loyal believers.**

For many years after this incident, there was war between the citizens of the land and the invading Israelites. Yet never once in the record of that long conquest do we hear of any Gibeonite defecting to his original side.

# AGAPE

## PULPIT SERIES



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In chapter nine of Joshua, though somewhat cautious, Joshua nevertheless failed to inquire of the Lord through prayer. Looking at the evidence, he supposed he could wisely discern what they were facing. He was wrong and ultimately, he was guilty of presuming on the Lord.

In the depths of winter at Valley Forge, George Washington went to his knees in prayer, certain that unless God aided his bedraggled and discouraged army, all hope for the fledgling United States was lost.

During the Civil War, when the fate of the nation again hung in the balance, Abraham Lincoln confessed to a friend that he was often driven to his knees to pray because he had nowhere else to go.

In our text today, we see the danger of failing to commit their way to the Lord, the danger of prayerlessness and the danger of walking by sight—making decision on the basis of how things appear.

As we have seen, Israel's failure at Ai was to a large degree the result of failing to consult the Lord. Now again the failure of the leaders to commit their way to the Lord was about to produce another crisis. It reminds us again how susceptible we are to acting before praying.

There is another related problem here. The problem of trusting in our victories and our religious experiences. The context here is most significant. The people had just returned from a mountain-top kind of spiritual experience after hearing the Word of God read to them from Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. They had heard God's promises of blessings and had affirmed their commitment to follow the Lord. It had been a time of spiritual victory, a spiritual high, but this is an important time for walking circumspectly knowing that such is also a time when often Satan attacks because he knows we are apt to trust in our experiences rather than in the Lord (see 1 Cor. 10:12). The moment we let down our guard and think we have it made because of our spiritual experiences, we are most vulnerable to the devil's attacks. The judgment of God's word here is that they "... did not ask for counsel of the Lord" (9:14).

(1) As Christians, *we are involved in deadly spiritual warfare* with a power far superior to our own strength.

(2) To be delivered from our opponent and his wicked schemes, *we must clothe ourselves with our spiritual armor as given us in Christ.*

(3) The offensive weapons given to us by the Lord are *the Word of God* and *prayer*. Without the Word and prayer, we are sitting ducks.

(4) When God's people are victorious or are prospered, it seems Satan *doubles his efforts in attacks against them.*

### I. Enemies will form alliances against the righteous (9:1-2)

The record given here is typical of Satan's strategies. Powerful alliances began immediately to form in both the north and the south of Canaan. Where tribal warfare had gone on for years, suddenly deadly enemies were brought together in alliances as they united against the invasion of God's people into the land.

When righteousness becomes aggressive and bent on an objective, it has a way of uniting the forces of righteousness and the enemies of righteousness. It happened this way when Jesus Christ launched his earthly ministry. His aggressive ministry of healing, preaching, and the confrontation of sin galvanized his own followers—but it also welded together three groups which had formerly been enemies, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians. The more boldly the Christian faith advances, the more vocal and violent the opposition will become.

### II. If the Enemy can't defeat he will deceive (9:3-15)

Not all were willing to openly go against Israel in view of Israel's victories. The Gibeonites, which included a league of cities (see vs. 17), concocted a clever ruse designed to deceive the Israelites and hide their true identity—a typical strategy of Satan, the deceiver. Their goal, which was successful, was to convince the Israelites they were from a country outside the land (vs. 6). They evidently somehow knew that God had commanded the Israelites to totally destroy all the inhabitants of the land. Their claim was that they were impressed with the great things Joshua had done and so they wanted a treaty allowing them to live because they were not of the land of Canaan.

It is hard not to admire the Gibeonites for their scheme. In view of verse 9, it appears they really did believe in the power of the God of Israel much like Rahab. The Gibeonites were not cowards (cf. 10:2). They knew they could not withstand the power of God and did the next best thing in their thinking; they turned to deception through disguise. This resulted in two major approaches:

(1) **They played on their sympathies by appearing as weary travelers who had been on a long journey.** Their

garments were dirty and worn, their food was dry and moldy (or hard, crumbly), their wineskins old and patched, and their sandals worn and thin.

(2) **They played on their egos and their sense of pride.** They insisted they came from a great distance to show their respect for the power of the God of the Israelites and wanted to be allowed to live as the servants of Israel. Caught off guard, **Joshua and the leaders of Israel listened to the ruse of the Gibeonites and they made two mistakes:**

(1) **They made the mistake of allowing the Gibeonites to play on their emotions.** They accepted the evidence, though questionable, without further and more reliable evidence. Here we see *the peril of sight versus faith and fact.*

(2) **The primary mistake, however, is not seeking counsel from the Lord.** They should have sought direction from the Lord. Here we see *the peril of presumption through prayerlessness.*

It is always a mistake for us to lean on our own wisdom or judgment and make our own plans apart from God's direction. It was a mistake then ... and it still is. The exhortation of God's Word is: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil* (Proverbs 3:5-7).

**Before entering into any alliance**—taking a partner in life, going into business with another, yielding assent to any proposition which involves confederation with others—be sure to ask counsel at the mouth of the Lord. He will assuredly answer by an irresistible impulse—by the voice of a friend; by a circumstance strange and unexpected; by a passage of Scripture. He will choose His own messenger; but He will send a message.

Though Satan surely knows he can never really defeat the Lord and that he is a defeated foe, he nevertheless turns to his many tricks and deceptive devices to defeat God's purposes for and with His people

### III. Deception will always be discovered (9:16-17)

Within only three days the deception was discovered, but as is often the case with the consequences of sin, they would live with their decision for the rest of their lives. Proverbs 12:19b is pertinent here which says, "Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment." Words of truth are consistent, and stand all tests, while lies are soon discovered and exposed.