

Not
one
Failed
Promise.

Life Group Study Series

Joshua: Week Seven

26th February 2017

Bible

Joshua 9 (NIV)

The Gibeonite Deception

1 Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—the kings in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Mediterranean Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)— **2** they came together to wage war against Joshua and Israel.

3 However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, **4** they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. **5** They put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and mouldy.

6 Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the Israelites, “We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us.”

7 The Israelites said to the Hivites, “But perhaps you live near us, so how can we make a treaty with you?”

8 “We are your servants,” they said to Joshua.

But Joshua asked, “Who are you and where do you come from?”

9 They answered: “Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, **10** and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. **11** And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, ‘Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, “We are your servants; make a treaty with us.”’ **12** This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. **13** And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see

how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey.”

14 The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. **15** Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.

16 Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them.

17 So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim.

18 But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the Lord, the God of Israel.

The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, **19** but all the leaders answered, “We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. **20** This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that God’s wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them.” **21** They continued, “Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers in the service of the whole assembly.” So the leaders’ promise to them was kept.

22 Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, “Why did you deceive us by saying, ‘We live a long way from you,’ while actually you live near us?”

23 You are now under a curse: You will never be released from service as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.”

24 They answered Joshua, “Your servants were clearly told how the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this. **25** We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you.”

26 So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them.

27 That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the assembly, to provide for the needs of the altar of the Lord at the place the Lord would choose. And that is what they are to this day.

Sermon Summary

Joshua 9 begins a new section that extends to the end of chapter 12 and is focused on the conquest. To this point in the narrative there have only been three battles, but in this next section that all changes! The interest of the narrator has been on the 'religious' aspects of the conquest: the consecration of the people, the crossing of the Jordan, the circumcision of the wilderness generation, and the Passover. Even the battles have been focused on the obedience/disobedience of the people. Even in this new section the interest is not exclusively military as we see in our text.

In Joshua 9 the kings west of the Jordan, who have heard all that the Lord has done for Israel, respond by gathering for war. All except the Gibeonites who resort to a ruse. Dressing up in old clothes and bearing old wine skins and mouldy bread, they appear in the Israelite camp claiming to be a delegation from a long way off. They had heard of the fame of the Lord and what he had done to Egypt and the kings east of the Jordan and have come to make a treaty with Israel.

There was provision for this in the Law: Deuteronomy 20:10-15 the Lord commands the people to offer cities outside of the promised land peace through forced labour. However, the men of Israel, who had just heard the Law read (8:30-35) have no way to verify that this group is actually from far off. But they sample their goods and without inquiring of the Lord they made a treaty with them.

Three days later they find out that the land far, far away was only just up the road and march up to confront the Gibeonites. The treaty they made cannot be broken (see 2 Samuel 21 for an illustration of how serious this treaty was) but Joshua curses them and makes them woodcutters and water bearers in the community.

End of story.

Or is it? For there are a number of curious features of this story that suggest more is going on that first meets the eye. To begin with, Joshua asks the Gibeonites why they lied to Israel and the Gibeonites respond by saying they feared for their lives. At first glance this seems totally unnecessary dialogue. However, it actually points to something quite significant and that is that the Gibeonites, who heard what all the kings west of the Jordan had heard, hadn't hardened their hearts and turned to battle, but had feared for their lives and sought to approach the God of Israel.

On top of that, the narrator tells us that the Gibeonites remained among the people of Israel "to this day". While we don't know when "this day was", we know that the Gibeonites remained among the people until after the exile (Neh. 3:9; 7:25). Furthermore, the "curse" of Joshua was to serve the community and the tabernacle of the Lord. Nowhere else in Scripture is serving before the Lord seen as a "curse" (see Psalm 84 for one opinion on being at the temple). And finally, there is the silence of God. He doesn't rebuke Joshua for not inquiring of Him or for making a covenant with some of the land's inhabitants or express anger that some of them "got away".

It seems that what we have here is another example of the Lord's interest to save rather than judge. Like Rahab, who's deception of the king of Jericho and confession of faith saw her incorporated into the people of God, so the Gibeonites are included in God's people.

The conquest narratives that follow ought to be read in the light of this opening section: though God's judgment has come on the people of the land for their idolatry, immorality and wickedness, those who turn towards Him – even in unconventional ways – are saved with no complaint from Him. It is the Old Testament illustration of 2 Peter 3:9!

So, this week, consider what this attitude of the Lord means for you and for our stance toward our wider community.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a LifeGroup discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Where have you been surprised by God's work in your life or the world around you? This might include a time where you have seen God answer a prayer in a surprising way, or do something in your life, that upon reflection, you never expected He would do.
2. Take some time to read Joshua 9. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something new from a text that might be familiar). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
3. The narrator points out that the people of Israel didn't inquire of the Lord about what they should do with the Gibeonites, but doesn't make any editorial comment on this whether it was good or bad. What do you think? And if they had inquired of the Lord what might He have said?
4. If God's primary stance towards humanity is to look for anyone that is open to Him, what implications does this have for repentance of sin? We are still called to repent, but if God is looking for good, rather than bad, how does that change things?
5. In summary, Jesus says in John 17:16, that believers no longer belong to the world, that our values, priorities and behaviours would be different to the world around us. But if God's stance towards us and towards our world is one of looking for good, for those who are open to Him, how might this shape our attitude towards our world?
6. Are there any potential "Gibeonites" in your workplaces, school, and neighbourhoods? What are indicators that someone might be open to hearing more about Jesus? What does this story suggest about our approach towards them?

Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. Who do we know that might be open to hearing a little more of this life that Jesus has invited us into? Pray for openness, courage and opportunities.