

Joshua: Walking by Faith, Growing in Grace

Deception

Joshua 9:1-27

October 12, 2025

HDBC

Maybe you heard about the guy who fell in love with an opera singer. He hardly knew her, since his only view of the singer was through binoculars from the third balcony. But he was convinced he could live "happily ever after" married to a voice like that.

He scarcely noticed she was considerably older than he. Nor did he care that she walked with a limp. Her mezzo-soprano voice would take them through whatever might come.

After a whirlwind romance and a hurry-up ceremony, they were off for their honeymoon together. She began to prepare for their first night together. As he watched, his chin dropped to his chest. She plucked out her glass eye and plopped it into a container on the nightstand.

She pulled off her wig, ripped off her false eyelashes, yanked out her dentures, unstrapped her artificial leg, and smiled at him as she slipped off her glasses that hid her hearing aid. Stunned and horrified, he gasped, "For goodness' sake, woman, sing, sing, SING!" (Swindoll, *Strike the Original Match*).

There is nothing quite like making a decision about something, only to learn that you did not have all the facts. Whether it happens deliberately or accidentally, it can be a frustrating thing to be deceived.

Joshua and his warriors are beginning to move into the heart of the land. Jericho has fallen. Ai has fallen. Other cities would soon follow. This led the leaders of one city to devise a plan of deception that would save their lives. They knew that unless they acted boldly and craftily they were doomed. They knew they could not stand before the mighty Israelites. Therefore they devised an elaborate plan that would lead to a treaty with Israel.

Deception is a common thing in warfare.

In late September 1864 Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest was leading his troops north from Decatur, Alabama, toward Nashville. But to make it to Nashville, Forrest would have to defeat the Union army at Athens, Alabama. When the Union commander, Colonel Wallace Campbell, refused to surrender, Forrest asked for a personal meeting, and took Campbell on an inspection of his troops.

But each time they left a detachment, the Confederate soldiers simply packed up and moved to another position, artillery and all. Forrest and Campbell would then arrive at the new encampment and continue to tally up the impressive number of Confederate soldiers and weaponry. By the time they returned to the fort, Campbell was convinced he couldn't win and surrendered unconditionally!

1. The Determined Enemies (1-14)

It's important to have the right enemies. Your brothers & sisters in Christ are not your enemies. Israel had the right enemies. They were not fighting against one another but against those pushing back against God's revealed plan. Their enemies were those resisting the will of God. There were three enemies that the Israelis faced.

1) Unified Enemy (1-2)

Something has happened to the mindset of Israel's enemies in the Promised Land. They are no longer afraid of the Israelite forces. They have come to realize that Israel is not invincible. They decided to unite together against Israel. After Ai's one victory, they now realize that Israel can lose battles.

All the kings . . . gathered themselves together with one accord to fight with Joshua and with Israel. While the people of God were on the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal worshipping the Lord, the enemies of God were planning a unified attack.

This 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 God's people. **When righteousness advances, it has a way of unifying the forces of unrighteousness.**

It happened this way when Jesus Christ launched his earthly ministry. His advancing ministry of healing, preaching, and the confrontation of sin galvanized his own followers—but it also brought together three groups which had formerly been enemies, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. Scripture predicts that His future return will have a similar effect (See Ps. 2:2; Rev. 19:19.)

The more boldly the Christian faith advances, the more vocal and violent the opposition will become.

It appears that all the city-states in mountainous regions joined forces against Israel as a means of keeping Joshua and his army from attacking one city at a time as had been done with Jericho and Ai. They believed they had a strategy that would win.

2) Deceptive Enemy (3-13)

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:

First, they played on the sympathies of Israel by appearing as weary travelers who had been on a long journey. Their garments were dirty & worn. Their food was dry and moldy (or hard, crumbly). Their wineskins old and patched, and their sandals worn and thin.

Second, they appealed to the superiority of the Israelis. In doing so they were tempting them with pride. They insisted they came from a

great distance **to show their respect** for the power of God and to ask if they could live as servants of Israel. They must have looked like desperate refugees when they arrived. Of course this was a deception, complete with the appropriate props and body language.

The Gibeonites were concerned with self-preservation. They sent their delegation to Joshua at his camp in Gilgal (v. 6). They had one goal in mind and that was to make a treaty with Israel (vv. 6-7). They had done their homework. They knew the gravity of the threat to their lives. **God had told Israel to remove all iniquity, not make covenants with the Canaanites.**

Israel's leaders were somewhat suspicious (vv. 7-13). They looked at the evidence before them. They listened to the appeal of the Gibeonites to submit themselves to Israel without a battle. They flattered Joshua with his military triumphs (vv. 9-10).

3) Inward Enemy (14)

So the men of Israel . . . did not ask for the counsel of the LORD."

Joshua basically trusted his own ability to evaluate the evidence. He took a common-sense approach. In biblical language, he was **walking by sight and not by faith**. He depended exclusively on his own senses and his own reason when he examined the provisions. He was guilty of over-confidence, the same over-confidence that was at work before the first battle for Ai. Then Joshua trusted the spies; now he trusted the Gibeonites, the other leaders, and his own judgment. He took things into his own hands.

But underneath all these aspects is a spiritual problem; failure to ask God for his direction, for how he would be involved in the matter. Joshua neglected the most important Counselor. This happened after the great triumphs of Jericho and Ai and the tremendous time of worship at Shechem, where the word of God was central. There they sat under the reading of the word of God. But here **nobody took**

the time to go back to the Lord and ask him what to do. Israel did everything they could except pray.

Lack of prayer destroys spiritual discernment. They made the same mistake in the defeat at Ai. No inquiry was made of the will of God. The Israelites relied upon their own perceptions and were deceived. They did not stop and consult God.

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).

2. The Bad Decision (15-27)

1) The Covenant (15)

Joshua's thinking must have gone like this: *They are ready to make a covenant and become the servants of Israel. Wow! God must really be a part of this decision. He has already won the victory for us and we didn't even have to lift a finger in battle. What a marvelous God we worship!*

What were the instructions Joshua had received from the Lord concerning the corrupt nations of Canaan? Why did Joshua neglect God's clear word to destroy the pagan nations? Joshua failed to discern their hypocrisy because he failed to remember and obey God's Word regarding the inhabitants in Canaan.

2) The Discovery (16)

Within three days they arrived at the city which was supposed to be in a foreign part of the land. The deception was revealed.

3) The Complaint (17-18)

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.

4) The Compromise (19-27)

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 (22)

Second, Joshua sentenced them to servitude (23)

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.

Third, God brought something good out of something evil.

Over the years this menial activity on behalf of the worship of the living God gradually led to a place of honor for the Gibeonites in the nation of Israel. *When the land was divided at the end of Joshua, Gibeon was one of the cities that was given to the line of Aaron as a city for the Levites, the priestly tribe.*

About four hundred years later David put the tabernacle at Gibeon. The altar and the priesthood were there.

At least one of David's mighty men, was a Gibeonite.

Much later, when the Jews returned to the land after the Babylonian captivity, there were Gibeonites among them.

In Ezra and Nehemiah they were given an honorary title: **the Given Ones**, those who were given to assist the priesthood in ministry.

Ezra, in his writings after the captivity, tells us that they were totally committed to the Lord and his house.

Nehemiah says that there were Gibeonites involved in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after the captivity.

God blessed this people with life in the nation of Israel, and the nation was blessed by their presence and their contribution. They were the only ones, besides Rahab and her family, who were saved out of all of Canaan, the land that was under judgment.

Last week we saw that God is a **God if second chances and new beginnings** through the defeat then victory at Ai. Once more we see God's redemptive work even through the deception of one group and the foolishness of another.

What an amazing testimony to the grace of God and the redemptive work of God. He took the deception of the Gibeonites, and the response of Joshua and brought good out of it. He was bringing beauty out of ashes.

God is still able to turn a curse into a blessing. While it is true that the natural consequences of our sin generally 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.