



Covenant Renewal and a Convincing Deception Joshua Chapter 8:30-9:27

Introduction

The Israelites, led by Joshua, were well into the land, possessing their possessions with two victories behind them. Now, as Moses had commanded, they paused to worship God.

“Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 27:4-8).

Outline of Joshua 8:30-9:27

- I. Pause for Renewal and Worship - Joshua 8:30-35
- II. Ploy by the Gibeonites - Joshua 9:1-27
- III. Paul's Prayer - Ephesians 1:15-23

I. Pause for Renewal and Worship - Joshua 8:30-35

- A. Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim - Joshua 8:30 and 33

One can see for great distances from a mountain top. Moses never entered Canaan, but he viewed the land from Mount Nebo and named Mount Ebal as the place the Israelites were to pause and worship the LORD their God. From the heights of Nebo, Moses could easily distinguish the two mountain peaks on either side of Shechem. Mount Gerizim on the south rises today to a height of 2,890 feet and Mount Ebal to the north reaches to 3,083 feet, with the valley between them a natural amphitheater. Both mountains are higher than Mount Nebo's 2,631 feet.

Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim are about forty miles north of Jerusalem, near the center of Palestine. Mount Gerizim would later become the site of Samaritan worship. The remains of a temple have been found there, a temple which had disappeared in Jesus' day but to which the Samaritan woman referred when she said to Jesus, *“Our fathers worshipped on this mountain”* (John 4:20).

B. Covenant Renewal – 8:32-35

The nation paused to have family devotions. “Moving northward, Israel assembled in solemn convocation in the vale of Shechem, between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. There the Law was read and a copy of the Mosaic Law was inscribed on stone” (Baker's Bible Atlas, Charles Pfeiffer). This place near Shechem was revered for its association with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

1. The blessings and the curses - 8:33

Six tribes on Mount Ebal affirmed the blessings and six tribes on Mount Gerizim affirmed the curses. “History can furnish few scenes so impressive in moral grandeur as that of a nation thus solemnly embracing God's law as the rule of its life and the condition of its prosperity” (From the Exodus to the Monarchy, William Fairweather). It was a momentous occasion when Joshua declared God's Law to be the law of the land.

2. Law publicly read – 8:34-35

And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and curses, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them. Many scholars think it was Deuteronomy Chapters 5-25 that Joshua read. No one could claim ignorance of the law.

II. Ploy of the Gibeonites - Joshua 9:1-27

A. Canaanite Strategy - Joshua 9:1

After worshiping in the heart of the land, Israel returned to camp at Gilgal. In the meantime, the alarmed tribal and city-state kings of Canaan began to formulate a strategy. Israel was clearly out to possess the land and not just a few cities in it. An attempt must be made to stop them. Israel's initial defeat at Ai may have encouraged the Canaanite resistance.

B. Combative Kings - Joshua 9:1-2

The kings in the hills, valleys, coasts, as far as Lebanon, of the various tribes, the Hittite, Amorite, Perrizite, Hivite and Jebusite - all the Canaanite kings - united to fight against Joshua and Israel. However, no such

battle took place. The reason is unknown. Perhaps the kings were unable to develop a unified strategy, or their league simply fell apart.

C. Conciliatory Gibeonites - Joshua 9:3-27

1. A different strategy - 9:3-4

The inhabitants of Gibeon devised a non-combative strategy. They *worked craftily* or “*wilily*” (KJV). It appears that Gibeon may have been a democracy, unlike other Canaanite cities, since no king or leader is mentioned. They hoped by a ruse to avoid war, save their lives, and protect their land.

2. A clever disguise - 9:4-5

The Gibeonites pretended to be ambassadors from a faraway country, outside Canaan. Did they know that Israel was to conquer Canaan and not beyond? They put old sacks on their donkeys, took old torn wine skins, wore old shoes and clothes, and even included dried, moldy bread. Their disguise was certainly deceptive.

3. A convincing deception - 9:6-13

a. From a far country

“*We have come from a far country now therefore make a covenant with us.*” This was the second deception. Gibeon was only six miles north of Jerusalem.

b. The very long journey

“*Perhaps you dwell among us,*” said Israel's leaders. They knew compromise with the people of the country was not possible unless, like Rahab, they were coming sincerely to worship the God of Israel as their God. The Gibeonites' answer was, “*We are your servants.*” This was a polite way of saying they came peaceably. Joshua questioned them further, “*Who are you, and where do you come from?*” They repeated that they came from a *very far country* as “*servants...because of the name of the LORD your God,...His fame, and all that He did to Egypt and to the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og.* To confirm this they drew attention to the worn condition of their clothes and their rotting food.

4. A deceived Joshua - 9:14-15

Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions but they did not ask counsel of the LORD.

a. Prayerlessness

Why were the leaders of Israel, including Joshua, deceived into believing the Gibeonites? They neglected to pray before entering into negotiations. Consequently,

they did not have the supernatural wisdom that is always available to God's children (James 1:5). “The secret of failure is failure in secret” someone has said. Often there is only a prayer between failure and success. For instance, the success of Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem centuries later was in his prayer life. (See Nehemiah 1:4; 2:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14.)

b. Compromise

So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

5. Consequences - 9:16-21

a. Reality

It took only three days for the truth to dawn. The Gibeonites lived in a neighboring metropolis of four cities, Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim. Later, in Nehemiah's time, the Gibeonites had been absorbed into Israel and the four cities were still their possessions (Nehemiah 7:25, 29).

The Israelites were ready to attack and destroy them as before, until the leaders of Israel made known the agreement and the oath. *And all the congregation complained against the rulers.*

b. Explanation to the people

There are always difficulties when we run ahead of God, move without His direction, or are disobedient. Joshua and the elders had not knowingly disobeyed the LORD but they had been negligent in acting without direction from Him. Now they had to explain to the people why these Canaanites from Gibeon would not be destroyed.

c. Living up to their word

“*We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel, now therefore we may not touch them.*” According to the law they had just affirmed at Mount Ebal, their oath could not be broken. Two wrongs do not make a right. Even though a person may have sworn out of God's will, nevertheless the oath is binding, whether it is a marriage vow or a business agreement. To break the oath compounds the original wrong, it does not correct it.

d. Avoiding God's wrath

We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath. In this way, the leaders carefully worked their way through their error while avoiding another one.

e. *Woodcutters and water carriers*

The leaders closed the matter by limiting the role of the Gibeonites in society to perpetual servanthood. Their lives were spared and they retained their land but with restrictions. This was fair and even advantageous to both Israel and Gibeon.

6. Joshua's decision - 9:22-27

Up to this point, Joshua had let the leaders handle the situation, for evidently they had made the treaty. Joshua, however, had to make the final decision. Dealing directly with the Gibeonites, Joshua gave them protection from the army of Israel and proclaimed them slaves.

D. Discernment

1. God's will for us

God does not want us to be deceived. *In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths* (Proverbs 3:5-6). *Do not be deceived* (Galatians 6:7). *I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren* (1 Thessalonians 4:13). *Be wise as serpents* (Matthew 10:16). *If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach* (James 1:5).

2. Satan's opposition

Satan is the arch deceiver and master of deception. He is the father of lies (John 8:44). His first interaction with mankind was to deceive Eve (Genesis 3:1; 1 Timothy 2:14). He has many deceivers in every field of human endeavor, business, media, the arts, science, education, entertainment, government, the church, and the home. Jesus warned us that there would be tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30). God is against all deception. He does not tempt people, although He will allow us to be tempted, and He provides a *way of escape* (James 1:13; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

3. Individual choice

A Christian can avoid being deceived by knowing and obeying God's Word. In the Book of Acts, the Bereans received the gospel preached by the apostle Paul *with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so* (Acts 17:11).

Prayer is another primary resource as is God-given mental capacity for reason. The apostle John called believers to *test the spirits* and be aware of false prophets in the world (1 John 4:1, 5-6). A moral, godly lifestyle is also protection against deception (Ephesians 5:15-17). The prayers of Paul, the apostle, frequently mention the believer's need for help in knowing truth.

III. Paul's Prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23

The apostle Paul first visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey and preached the gospel there (Acts 19:8-41). He had a great love for the church at Ephesus and was committed to praying for them.

Knowing of the Ephesians' faith and love for Jesus Christ, Paul wrote a letter thanking God for them, letting them know he prayed continually for them. He prayed for their wisdom, enlightenment, and the realization of the mighty power of God at work in them.

A. For Wisdom and Understanding - Ephesians 1:17

Paul prayed, *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him*. This wisdom is available to all believers, as Paul had revealed in Ephesians 1:7-9: *According to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure*.

God's wisdom and will are revealed in His Word. Through His Holy Spirit, He opens our minds to comprehend. All one needs is the desire and commitment to learn and understand. How strong is your desire to know the wisdom and the will of God?

B. For Enlightenment - Ephesians 1:18

Paul prayed this prayer because he wanted his readers to "*know*". To that end he prayed that the eyes of their understanding would be enlightened. "*Eyes*", "*understanding*", and "*enlightened*" are words that describe knowing all God wants us to know, rather than being hindered by ignorance, apathy, and failure coupled with opposition from our enemy, Satan. Paul listed three things he specifically wanted his readers to know about God.

1. *The hope of His calling* - 1:18

All believers have a sure hope for the future that springs from God's calling to salvation. Just as God had called Joshua and Israel to enter and take possession of the Promised Land, He calls believers to take possession of our promised inheritance in Christ, which is nothing less than the riches of all our blessings in Christ. If you are not aware of these riches, please read Ephesians 1:1-14 to discover all the *spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ* which are yours.

2. *His inheritance in the saints* 1:18

Not only has God provided an inheritance for those

who are His, Paul wants believers to realize they are God's inheritance. If you are a Christian, you are part of that inheritance which is valuable ("*the riches*") and glorious ("*the glory*"). God's inheritance is valuable to Him because He paid to redeem us with the blood of His Son. It is glorious because when Christ returns we will be glorified in Him.

3. *The exceeding greatness of His power* - 1:19-23

Paul knew a power far greater than the power of the Roman Empire or any power on earth. It is the power of God that raised Christ from the dead, the greatest demonstration of power known to man. That same power is at work in all who believe. Paul described *the exceeding greatness of His power toward us* (1:19). It is the power that:

- Raised Christ from the dead.
- Seated Him at God's right hand in heaven.
- Placed Him *far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion.*
- Exalted His Name far above *every name that is named, not only in this age but in that which is to come.*
- *And He put all things under His feet*
- *And gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body.*

"If God's 'call' looks back to the beginning, and God's 'inheritance' looks on to the end, then surely God's 'power' spans the interim period in between" (The Message of Ephesians, John R. W. Stott).

As a Christian, one who has been called by God, do you know all the riches that are yours in Christ? Are you experiencing the power of God in your life? If you feel you are not, will you begin to step out in faith and obedience, just as Joshua and the Israelites did, to possess His promises to you?

Applications

1. Have you ever dedicated your home to God and declared His Word to be your guiding standard to live by? Why wait another day to gather those who live with you and seek their cooperation in establishing Jesus Christ as the head of your home and committing yourselves to the study of His Word and to prayer? He promises to bless such action.
2. Where are you being deceived today? Just like Israel, God's people today need not only to worship God but to prayerfully seek His wisdom and spiritual discernment for protection from deception. How might your life be less complicated and more secure if you dedicated time to prayer and seeking God's will?
3. Will you pray Paul's prayer for enlightenment for yourself and others? For whom will you pray Paul's prayer right now?
4. Will you commit to know the truth through God's Word? Will you value truth and promote it at all times? How will you begin to do this?
5. How do you exalt Christ in your prayers and daily relationships?