

## August 10

**Scriptures:** Read Joshua 9

**Key Verse:** “The men of Israel... did not ask counsel of the Lord. So Joshua... made a covenant with them to let them live.”

### Overview

The defeats of Jericho and Ai opened up Israel’s way of advance inland and brought great terror to the inhabitants. The kings of the city-kingdoms in the southern part of Canaan joined forces to increase their chances against the Israelites. The Hivite people of Gibeon and the neighboring towns, however, did not join this coalition. Their fear of Israel and the God of Israel prompted them to take a very different course of action; they sought to make peace with Israel, but this was accomplished through clever deception. The Gibeonite representatives were convincing actors, pretending to be from a distant land and allowed the Israelites to let those of distant nations live as subjects and pay tribute to Israel, but all the inhabitants within Canaan were to be completely wiped out (Deut.20:10-18).

Joshua and the elders of Israel made an oath of peace with the Gibeonites and entered into a covenant on the basis of circumstantial evidence. This is Joshua’s first recorded blunder, for he had not consulted God in prayer or high priest’s Urim and Thummin to discover the will of God. Joshua had overstepped his authority. He did not first seek advice from his Commander-in-chief, the Lord - Israel’s King—whose mission they were on. This illustrated well that followers of the Lord must seek His guidance in every important decision.

When the truth of the Gibeonite deception was discovered, Joshua and the Israelite elders journeyed from Gilgal to Gibeon (about nine kilometers northwest of Jerusalem) to confront the deceivers. One might think that because the vow had been made by fraudulent means, it could be declared null and void. This was not possible, however, for it had been ratified by the Name of the Holy God of Israel (Ex.20:7) and was therefore sacred and binding (Num.30:2). Though the congregation of Israel murmured against the elders for making such a mistake (v.18), they dared not break the solemn agreement for fear of bringing God’s wrath upon themselves (e.g. 2 Sam.21:1-6). The Israelites honored their oath, yet punished the Gibeonites for their wood and drawing water for use in the house of God. The Gibeonites graciously agreed to do whatever Israel commanded.

We read that Joshua, not God, put a curse upon Gibeon (v.23). Could God have allowed the Israelites to be deceived as compensation for the deception Simeon and Levi had perpetrated against the Hivites long before, when they killed all the newly circumcised townsmen (Gen.34—Note: the inhabitants of Gibeon were Hivite people)? Could it be that God allowed this to happen on behalf of those who feared Him and believed in Him, just as Rahab was granted grace and spared? God did not harden their hearts to go to war with Israel as He did with the other nations (11:19-20); He even miraculously preserved the people of Gibeon from extinction (Josh.10).

We learn later that the Gibeonites were a blessing and not a curse to Israel. It is probable that they were later called the “Nethinim” (meaning, “those given”) that helped with the work of

God's house (Ezra 8:15-20). Those so involved were known to be blessed (Psalm 84:4). For a time, the tabernacle was set up in Gibeon (2 Chronicles 1:3). There is no record that they let Israel into idolatry, as did the other nations which Israel disobediently allowed to remain living in the land. Rather, it seems that later many of the Gibeonites became a part of the congregation of Israel and worshipped the One true God (e.g. 1 Chron.12:1, 4; Neh.3:7).

We can never put limitations on God. His grace and loving kindness is truly beyond our understanding.

## **Prayer**

O Lord, help us not to blunder by failing to consult You before we make our decisions, particularly about people and circumstances where we do not already have a specific word from you. Thank You that You can ever bring good out of our mistakes.