Commentary by Ron Thomas

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The Gibeonite Deception

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Text:

Joshua 9:1-27,

1. Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)—
2. they came together to make 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. The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy.
6. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us."
7. The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us. How then 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 men of Israel 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, Beeroh 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 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 for the entire community." 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 cease to serve 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 community and for the altar of the LORD at the place the LORD would choose. And that is what they are to this day. (NIV)

Commentary:

I. Joshua Failed to Appeal to the Lord. 9:1-15

A. Joshua 9:1-15, Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)—they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel. However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us." The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?" "We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?" 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, 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. 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."' 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. 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."

The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD. Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath. (NIV)

1. The kings of Canaan gathered together to fight Israel. 9:1-2

   a. Joshua 9:1, 2, Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)—they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel. (NIV)

   i. Earlier, Israel was able to fight with one city/state at a time.

   ii. Now a confederation formed.
iii. The confederation was not city/states by name, but peoples.

iv. These were Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

2. The deception of Gibeon. 9:3-13

a. Joshua 9:3-13, However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us." The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?" "We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?" 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, 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. 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.'"'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. 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." (NIV)

i. But there was another confederation that just wasn’t quite ready to tangle with Israel.

ii. They knew they were but “dead men” so why not see if they could make a league with Israel.

iii. The Gibeon confederation was Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim (9:17).

*Joshua 9:17, So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. (NIV)*

3. Gibeon presented itself to Joshua/Israel as people from a distant land.

a. Though they prepared themselves to be servants, Keil & Delitzsch mention that this is not as it appears. They wished for a friendly alliance that would allow them to have their territory and full liberty (p. 97).

b. Madvig thinks Gibeon offered to become Israel’s vassals (a tenant; one who holds land of a superior) (p. 296).

4. Joshua was suspicious, but his suspicion did not result in him inquiring of the Lord (9:14).
a. Joshua 9:14, The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD. (NIV)

   i. He asked the right questions and should have been quite hesitant, but whatever hesitancy he had did not keep Joshua from making a covenant between Gibeon and Israel.

   ii. If they were from a very far country, why would a covenant proposal be needed when there would have been no threat?

5. A good lesson is to be learned here.

   a. The Lord told Israel to make no covenants with any of the people of the land (Exodus 23:32; 34:12). Yet that is what they did.

      i. Exodus 23:32, Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. (NIV)

      ii. Exodus 34:12, Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. (NIV)

   b. It is true that Joshua was unaware of the deception of these people, but as the next verse says, their problem lies in the fact that from God they sought no guidance.

   c. What a great lesson we can learn from this (cf. James 4:13-17).

      i. James 4:13-17, Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that

city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (NIV)

6. Israel made a covenant with Gibeon. 9:14-15

a. Joshua 9:14, 15, The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD. Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath. (NIV)

i. Were they impressed by the stale “evidence” (9:12)?

*Joshua 9:12, 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. (NIV)*

ii. Evidently so. Taking part of their “moldy” provisions was indicative of a friendly gesture.

iii. Since the Gibeonites told (lied to) Joshua concerning their origin, Joshua believed he violated no express command of the Lord.
iv. Keil & Delitzsch mentioned that in Deuteronomy 20:11 the command of the Lord was that in battle with a foreign nation permission was granted to seek peace (p. 98).

*Deuteronomy 20:11, If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. (NIV)*

II. At the End of Three Days. 9:16-27

A. Joshua 9:16-27, Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. 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, but all the leaders answered, "We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them." They continued, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community." So the leaders' promise to them was kept. 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? You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." 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. We are now in your hands.
Do to us whatever seems good and right to you." So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them. That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD at the place the LORD would choose. And that is what they are to this day. (NIV)

1. Israel learned about the deception. 9:16-17

a. Joshua 9:16, 17, Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. (NIV)

i. Almost before the “ink dried” on the covenant “paper,” Israel learned they had been deceived.

ii. In 9:17, the children of Israel journied to the confederated cities, arriving on the third day.

iii. Madvig thinks more than curiosity took them there.

*Was Israel set on retaliation?

iv. However, this is where leadership exhibits itself.

2. The people murmured against Joshua and the leaders of Israel.

a. If the people of Israel sought to “punish” the Gibeon confederation, Joshua and the leaders prevented it.
b. They bound themselves to the covenant even though they were lied to.

   i. In today’s society, if one lies to another and makes a covenant, that covenant is not binding. (Wade Baumgartner, an attorney working at LSU, emailed me with an affirmative answer – though context of understanding in binding covenants is crucial).

   ii. Why the difference? Because the Israelites were bound to God more than they were to men.

   iii. These men bound themselves to doing the right thing; they did not want to bring disrepute to God’s name (9:18-20).

* Joshua 9:18-20, 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, but all the leaders answered, ”We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them.” (NIV)

iv. Israel had to live with their poor decisions.
c. The confederation, however, did not get off without a stern rebuke and, perhaps, an intensity of servitude (cf. 9:15 with 9:23).

i. Joshua 9:15, Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath. (NIV)

ii. Joshua 9:23, You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." (NIV)

d. They feared for their lives because they understood the edict against them (9:24). Cf. Numbers 33:52; Deuteronomy 7:23-24 and 20:15-17.

i. Joshua 9:24, 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. (NIV)

ii. Numbers 33:52, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. (NIV)

iii. Deuteronomy 7:23, 24, But the LORD your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. He will give their kings into your
hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them. (NIV)

iv. Deuteronomy 20:15-17, This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby. However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. (NIV)
Questions

Joshua 9:1-27

(Questions based on NIV text.)

1. A confederation was formed among the __________ of the __________ to fight against __________ and __________. This confederacy consisted of __________, __________, __________, __________, and __________. They came from the __________ __________, the __________ __________ and along the __________ __________ of the __________ __________ as far as __________.

2. Why did the people of Gibeon engage in a ruse with Israel? What was this ruse? What is the difference between a ruse and a blatant lie? ____________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. What did Israel do to determine that the Gibeonites/Hivites were telling the truth? What crucial thing did they fail to do? ____________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. “Then __________ made a __________ of __________ with __________ to let them __________, and the __________ of the __________ __________ it by __________.”
5. How long was it before Israel realized they had been duped? What did Israel do and why? What did they not do and why? ______________

6. Would Israel have been justified in disregarding their treaty with Gibeon? Why or why not? ________________________________

7. How much is your word worth? When, if ever, is it right to not keep our word? See Matthew 11:1-12 and Proverbs 15:4. ________________________________

8. The __________________ ________ __________________ against the ______________. Did this bring about any change? Does similar behavior change things in our day? ________________________________

9. What final decision was made by the leaders of Israel in regard to Gibeon? ________________________________
10. Why did the Gibeonites lie to Israel? Did lying benefit them? _____

11. How important is it for us to always tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Are there ever times when it is permissible to speak less than the whole truth? Cite several ways people lie? How honest are you? ____________________________________________

12.”The day ___________________ made the ______________________ and ________________ ________________ for the ___________________ and for the ________________ of the ________________.” For how long did this slave labor continue? _____

13. What potential benefits did a confederation have for Israel’s enemies? ____________________________________________________________
14. How important is it for us to get all the facts and seek the Lord’s guidance in all our decisions? Relate times when you have done this and times when you have failed to do this? What differences accrued from these two approaches?

15. What lessons does this chapter teach us?