

September 21, 2025 (Lesson 3)

## LEARNING TO SEEK GOD'S GUIDANCE

1. **Prayerlessness Leads to Deception** (Joshua 9:1-15)
2. **Living With the Consequences** (Joshua 9:16-27)
3. **God Answers Prayer and Gives Victory** (Joshua 10:1-15)

**Central Truth:** God is faithful to help those who seek His guidance.

**Focus:** Acknowledge the danger of failing to seek God's guidance and determine to seek His direction.

**Evangelism Emphasis:** God is faithful to save all who seek Him.

**Golden Text:** "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Israel's campaign to conquer Canaan began with great success. The story of Joshua's victories over Jericho and Ai spread throughout the region. Joshua and the leaders of Israel must have felt very confident in their accomplishments. But this confidence led to a laxness in seeking God, with regretful consequences. This lesson is about the Gibeonites and their deceptive ruse to ensure they would not be destroyed like Jericho. Their ploy worked because Israel failed to seek God's guidance.

This lesson readily applies to us today. When we experience the blessings of God, it is easy to become overly confident. If we are not careful, we can slip into an attitude of trusting in ourselves rather than trusting in God. We have to constantly be on guard. We can do this by keeping Proverbs 3:5-6 in mind: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." The Gibeonites' story seemed reasonable to Joshua because he was leaning on his "own understanding." If we are not careful, we can be fooled by the wiles of the devil or the ways of the world because we have not sought God as diligently as we should.

### 1. PRAYERLESSNESS LEADS TO DECEPTION

#### A. The Shrewd Gibeonites (Joshua 9:1-13)

<sup>3</sup> And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, <sup>4</sup> They did work wilyly, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and

rent, and bound up; <sup>5</sup> And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy. <sup>6</sup> And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us. <sup>7</sup> And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you? <sup>8</sup> And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye? <sup>9</sup> And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the Lord thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt.

The people of Canaan were terrified at the presence of the Israelites on their border (Josh. 2:8-11). Their fear grew with the defeat of Jericho and Ai. Jericho was a prominent city, well known for its strong fortifications. Israel's conquest of Jericho in such a dramatic, supernatural manner sent shock waves throughout Canaan.

The land of Canaan was not inhabited by just one group of people. There were many different groups, including the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (9:1). Each of these groups was ruled by their own king. That the leaders of the various city-states were called "kings" is borne out by the Amarna Tablets—ancient records from the time of Joshua. These were letters sent to the pharaoh of Egypt that record the various Canaanite groups and their respective kings. The Amarna Tablets also mention an invading people called the *Habiru*, which possibly is a reference to the conquering Hebrews.

To counter the advancement of Israel, the kings of the various peoples in the land formed a coalition to fight against the Israelite army (vv. 1-2). Previously, Joshua had fought against individual city-states. Now he would face a confederation of peoples.

One of the people groups, called the *Hivites*, inhabited several cities in central Canaan—Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim (v. 17). Gibeon was the most significant among them. This was a city about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. In ancient times, Gibeon was considered an

“important city” (10:2 NIV) known for its wine production. The people would store the wine in animal skins. For export, they would use clay jars. Archaeologists have discovered jars of wine with “Gibeon” inscribed on their handles. The city was also known for its abundance of water. Scripture refers to the “pool of Gibeon” (2 Sam. 2:13) and the “great pool in Gibeon” (Jer. 41:12 NIV). The men of this prominent city had heard of Israel’s history, including the Exodus, the conquest of Og and Sihon to the east of the Jordan, and the recent defeat of Jericho and Ai (Josh. 9:9-10). Filled with fear, they plotted to deceive Israel into making a compact with them.

After crossing into the Promised Land, the Israelites set up their camp at Gilgal, which was between Jericho and the Jordan River. Gibeon was about sixteen miles west of Gilgal. The Gibeonites sent a delegation from their city to Gilgal, pretending they had traveled a great distance. Wearing worn-out clothes and shoes, carrying moldy bread, and bearing damaged and worn wineskins, they presented themselves to the leaders of Israel. The condition of their clothes, food, and wineskins was offered as proof of the great distance they claimed to have traveled. Thus, they lied to the Israelites even while proposing to enter into a treaty with them. It is possible they knew the Israelites were commanded to completely destroy the people of Canaan and were not allowed to enter into any treaties with them (see Deut. 7:2; Ex. 34:12). The Gibeonites thought their ruse was necessary in order to preserve their city.

\$ *Why was Joshua so easily deceived?*

\$ *In Matthew 24:24, what deception does Christ warn about?*

## **B. The Deceived Israelites (Joshua 9:14-15)**

<sup>14</sup> And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.

Joshua and the elders of Israel were completely taken in by this deception. They “took some of their provisions” (v. 14 NKJV). In other words, they examined their appearance and their food and accepted at face value what they were told. However, their biggest mistake was failing to seek the “counsel of the Lord.” In the beginning of his work for God, the Lord had told Joshua to always “meditate” on the Law of God (1:8). If Joshua had given himself to the Word of God in this instance, things would have turned out very differently. God had promised the Israelites that if they would seek Him, He would be found by them (Deut. 4:29).

When Joshua was called to succeed Moses (Num. 27:15-23), the Lord gave him specific instructions about seeking Him for guidance. Joshua was told to go to the high priest to inquire of the Lord. Using the Urim and Thummim, God would direct Joshua as to his course of action. The Urim and Thummim were a device the priests used to determine God’s will (Ex. 28:30). They were apparently sacred gemstones, used in a manner like casting lots. These were available for Joshua and the Israelite elders to use for inquiry in this situation, but they failed to do this. For Joshua personally, this was at least a matter of careless neglect, if not outright disobedience.

Fooled by the Gibeonites, Joshua made a treaty with them. He agreed to their requests and promised he would not destroy them. From this time on, the Gibeonites would be under the protection of Israel. This treaty was agreed on by Joshua and Israel’s tribal leaders.

### **Is Something Missing?**

Two explorers, backs laden with abundant supplies, approached veteran missionary Elisabeth Elliot. They did not seek advice about going into the jungle, only asking about a few Indian words. She reflected: “Sometimes we come to God as the two adventurers came to me—confident and, we think, well-informed and well-equipped. But has it occurred to us that with all our accumulation of stuff, something is missing?” Like ancient Israel, that something may be godly guidance.

## 2. LIVING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES

### A. Truth Uncovered (Joshua 9:16-21)

<sup>16</sup> And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbours, and that they dwelt among them.

<sup>18</sup> And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes. <sup>19</sup> But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them.

The children of Israel had been specifically commanded not to enter into a treaty with any of the people of Canaan (Ex. 23:32; Deut. 7:2). God told them if they did so, the Canaanites would cause them trouble (Ex. 34:12; Num. 33:55). The greatest danger lay in the temptation to follow after the gods of the Canaanites. Tragically, the history of Israel demonstrates this is exactly what happened. In this situation with the Gibeonites, the troubles began immediately. Israel soon would be called on to engage in military action in order to honor their treaty.

It did not take long for Joshua to discover not only were the Gibeonites not from a great distance away, but they were “neighbors” (Josh. 9:16). Joshua had raised this possibility in his first encounter with them (v. 7). Now, the Israelites discovered the Gibeonites “were from the local area and lived nearby” (v. 16 NET). The Israelites then traveled to the land of the Hivites, arriving on “the third day” (v. 17).

Once there, the Israelites had two immediate reactions. First, they were justifiably angry with their leaders (v. 18). Second, they affirmed the treaty. They vowed to do no harm to the Gibeonites. This decision was based on their compact with them (vv. 18-20). They maintained their integrity by not violating the covenant they had made with the Gibeonites. Some have suggested they could have viewed the treaty as void because it was based on deception. Or, they could have used the Mosaic Law itself as justification for renouncing the agreement since God had forbidden them to make

treaties with the people of Canaan. However, the tribal leaders insisted that they would not go back on their word, for they had sworn a solemn oath in “the name of the Lord God of Israel” (v. 19 NET). Because they had sworn in God’s name, to reject the terms of the treaty would cause His name to be disgraced in the eyes of the Canaanites.

Consider how a righteous person is described in Psalm 15:4: “He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.” Keeping our word is a priority. If we want to please God, we will do this even if it causes us harm. Integrity in what we say is that important.

§ *Why is it vital to carefully consider the consequences before making a vow?*

### **B. Woodcutters and Water Carriers (Joshua 9:22-27)**

<sup>22</sup> And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us? <sup>23</sup> Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God. <sup>24</sup> And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the Lord thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing.

The leaders of Israel stood by their word to not harm the Gibeonites. But it was appropriate for them to be punished for their deception. So the tribal elders pronounced judgment on them. They would serve as “woodcutters and water carriers” (v. 23 NKJV). Joshua told the assembled Gibeonites they were “cursed,” and would serve in Israel for all future generations. Apparently, woodcutters and water carriers were considered among the lowest segments of Israelite society. In Deuteronomy 29:10-11 there is a social ranking of tribal leaders downward, with woodcutters and water carriers at the bottom. Thus, Joshua condemned the Gibeonites to perpetual servitude at the lowest level of society.

Joshua specifically mentioned them as working in service to “the house of my God” (Josh. 9:23). They were required to perform their menial tasks for the tabernacle and later for the temple. They would serve not only the Israelites but the God whose name bound Israel’s leaders to their oath (v. 19). This would fulfill the obligation laid on them to serve the entire congregation of Israel (v. 21), not individuals within the congregation.

What was the future of the Gibeonites? They are mentioned again in 2 Samuel 21. Here we read there was a prolonged famine in Israel. When King David inquired of the Lord regarding the cause of this famine, God revealed to him it was the result of his predecessor’s action. King Saul had apparently destroyed many of the Gibeonites, which violated Joshua’s covenant with them. Even though this was four hundred years after the time of Joshua, his oath was still binding. This shows us how highly the Lord regards our solemn word. The famine ended only when David asked the Gibeonites what they required to make things right. At their request, David took seven of Saul’s descendants and had them executed to atone for the blood Saul had shed (vv. 6-9). David’s action was following the demands of the Law (Num. 35:33), where the Lord says when the land has been polluted with bloodshed, the blood of the offenders must be shed to atone for the offense.

Joshua concluded his instructions to the Gibeonites by telling them they were to serve the house of God wherever it was located (Josh. 9:27). During this period, there was no permanent location for the tabernacle. At this time, it was probably located with the Israelites in Gilgal. Later, it would be moved to Shiloh (18:1), where it remained until the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 4:3).

### **Keep Your Word**

“When you make a vow to God, don’t delay fulfilling it, because He does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. Better that you not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it” (Eccl. 5:4-5 HCSB).

### 3. GOD ANSWERS PRAYER AND GIVES VICTORY

#### A. Victory Promised (Joshua 10:1-8)

<sup>6</sup> And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us. <sup>7</sup> So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour. <sup>8</sup> And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee.

In their conquering of Jericho and Ai, and the treaty with the Gibeonites, Israel now was in control of the central area of Canaan. This effectively cut the land into two parts. Such an action demonstrated the military expertise of Joshua—basically, divide and conquer. His attention would soon turn to the southern cities of Canaan.

“Jerusalem” (v. 1) is an ancient city once known as “Salem.” During the time of Abraham, it was ruled by a God-fearing king named *Melchizedek* (Gen. 14:18-20). The ruler during Joshua’s era had a similar name, *Adonizedek*, meaning “the Lord my righteousness.” However, in the centuries since Abraham, the rulers of Jerusalem had fallen into pagan idolatry. Adonizedek had heard of the conquest of Jericho and Ai and Israel’s treaty with Gibeon, which was reckoned as a “great city,” known for its “mighty” warriors (Josh. 10:2). Also, Gibeon was only about six miles from Jerusalem.

Adonizedek called on the kings of southern Canaan to join with him to attack Gibeon (v. 3). He saw Gibeon not only as an adversary but as a traitorous people, having allied themselves with Israel (v. 4). Thus, a southern confederation of city-states was formed. Their first objective was to lay siege to Gibeon (v. 5). Gibeon’s leaders immediately called on Israel to honor the treaty by coming to their aid. In their appeal, they referred to the southern coalition as a group of “Amorites.” The southern region of Canaan was a land of hills and low mountains, while these Amorites were mountain-dwellers. In a larger context, the Amorites were an ancient people who lived in what is

present-day Israel, Jordan, and Syria. The kings Og and Sihon, defeated earlier by Israel, were also Amorites (Deut. 31:4).

The Gibeonites responded to this siege by sending word to Joshua. The type of treaty between these two peoples implied protection when needed. Joshua acted immediately: He mustered the Israelite army and “went up from Gilgal” (Josh. 10:7 ESV). This would have been a literal uphill march for the Israelites. Gilgal was in the plain of the Jordan; Gibeon was located on an upland plain in central Canaan.

Although Joshua responded with haste, he had learned his lesson. He sought the Lord before engaging in battle. We know this because God’s message to him is recorded in verse 8. God told Israel to not be afraid and assured them of complete victory.

### **Prepare for Battle**

The reason many fail in battle is because they wait until the hour of battle. The reason others succeed is because they have gained their victory on their knees long before the battle came.

Anticipate your battles; fight them on your knees before temptation comes, and you will always have victory.—R. A. Torrey

### **B. Supernatural Intervention (Joshua 10:9-15)**

<sup>11</sup> And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Bethhoron, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword. <sup>12</sup> Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. <sup>13</sup> And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. <sup>14</sup> And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel.

Joshua marched all night from Gilgal to arrive at Gibeon, surprising the Amorite coalition (v. 9). His arrival may have been in the early morning, since both the sun and moon were visible in the sky (v. 12). God gave a great victory to Israel that day. Several factors contributed to this.

First, God “confounded” the Amorites when facing Israel (v. 10 NKJV). The Hebrew word means “a great panic or terror.” The Lord put an overwhelming fear in the hearts of the Amorites. Second, the Israelites fought with great effectiveness. They slaughtered their enemies and then pursued them as they fled. Third, God supernaturally worked in Israel’s behalf. The Lord sent a powerful storm that rained down hailstones on the Amorites. Verse 11 says more men died from the hailstones than from Israel’s weapons. This was not the only time God used the forces of nature to fight for His people (see Judg. 5:20; 1 Sam. 7:10).

After the initial victory, Joshua was not satisfied. As the Amorites fled, Israel’s armies pursued them. They chased them to the nearby towns of Bethhoron, Azekah, and Makkedah (Josh. 10:10). Bethhoron was a town about four miles from Gibeon, on the road to Azekah. It was a descent—all downhill from Gibeon.

To give Israel complete victory over the Amorites, God performed one of the greatest miracles in history. It was probably early morning when Joshua’s surprise attack occurred. By the time the initial fight was winding up, it was about midday. To make sure Israel would absolutely win the day, Joshua expressed utter trust in God as he spoke to the sun and moon telling them, “Stand thou still” (v. 12). God heard his request and stopped the movement of the sun and moon for about twenty-four hours (v. 13).

This passage has stoked controversy. Some believe it is only poetic and not to be taken literally. Others assert it is mythological and not true history. Nothing in the text indicates this is anything other than a supernatural work of God. We may have confidence that God heard the plea of one of

His faithful servants and stopped the movement of the earth in response. Remember, our God can do the impossible!

This event was “written in the book of Jasher” (v. 13). Apparently, this was a poetic account of the wars and heroes of ancient Israel. It is also mentioned in 2 Samuel 1:18. However, this document is now lost. After the marvelous work of God and the total defeat of the southern Amorite confederation, Joshua and the Israelite army returned to Gilgal.

§ *In essence, aren't all prayers to God requests for Him to act supernaturally?*

### **TRUST GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY**

When we read the Bible, it is easy to think of the heroes of the faith as larger-than-life figures (“saints” without flaws), but this is not the case. The Scriptures present people with their “warts and all,” as the saying goes. Joshua stands out in the sacred pages as a monumental example of courage, faith, and trust in God. Yet, even he faltered. When he should have sought God’s guidance, he neglected to do so. But this is not the end of his story. After this brief failure, the Lord led Joshua into greater victories. Let us learn from Joshua that seeking God is a must: We need divine guidance and wisdom in all things. Let’s also learn that God offers forgiveness if we fail, and He continues to use us for His glory.

#### **Daily Devotions**

- M. The Curse of Sin (Genesis 3:8-19)
- T. Rely Solely on God (2 Chronicles 16:7-14)
- W. God’s Great Faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-26)
- T. You Reap What You Sow (Galatians 6:7-9)
- F. God’s Promises (2 Timothy 2:11-13)
- S. Heed God’s Word (Hebrews 2:1-4)