

## A Study of the Book of Joshua

### Sermon # 8

#### "Living With A Bad Decision"

Joshua 9:1-27

*"A wealthy eccentric died and left a million dollars to his nephew, John. When the will was read at the lawyer's office, the lawyer said to John, "According to your uncle's instructions, payment of your inheritance will depend on choices that you must make." The lawyer held his two fists out in front of him and asked, "Do you choose what is in my right hand or in my left hand?"*

*John decided to take what was in the attorney's right hand. The lawyer opened his left hand to reveal a gold coin and a silver coin. "Had you chosen this hand," he said, "you would have received a substantial share in a gold mine or a silver mine in Chile." Then he opened his right hand to reveal a nut and a coffee bean. "These represent a million dollars' worth of nuts or coffee from Brazil," said the attorney. "Which do you choose?" John decided on the nuts.*

*A week went by before John arrived in Brazil to take charge of his holdings. In the interim, fire destroyed a huge warehouse where the nuts that John had inherited were stored and coffee prices doubled. Since John hadn't gotten around to insuring his holdings, he soon was bankrupt.*

*He barely had enough for his airfare home to New York or Los Angeles, where he could stay with a friend. He chose Los Angeles.*

*Just before he took off, the New York plane came out on the runway—it was a brand-new super jet. For the connecting flight to Los Angeles, the plane was a 1928 Ford trimotor with a sway back that took half a day to get off the ground. It was filled with crying children and tethered goats. Over the Andes one engine fell off. Our man crawled up to the cockpit and said, "Let me out if you want to save your lives. Give me a parachute." The pilot agreed but said, "On this airline, anybody who bails out must wear two chutes."*

John jumped from the plane and as he fell he tried to make up his mind which rip cord to pull. Finally he chose the one on the left. It was rusty, and the wire pulled loose. He pulled the other handle. The chute opened, but its shroud lines snapped. In desperation the poor fellow cried out, "St. Francis save me!"

*Suddenly a great hand reached down from Heaven, seized the poor man's wrist and let him dangle in midair. Then a gentle voice asked, "St. Francis Xavier or St. Francis of Assisi?" [Bits & Pieces, May 25, 1995, pp. 6-8 as quoted in [www.bible.org/illus/decisions](http://www.bible.org/illus/decisions)]*

We all make many decisions each day. And all of us have made decisions that we regretted. Bad decisions happen in all our lives. Some of them are serious and others are not.

Tonight we want to examine a decision by Joshua and the other elders of Israel which would have grave consequences.

## 1. BLESSINGS AND BATTLE CAN OCCUR AT THE SAME TIME (vv. 1-6)

I want you to notice that blessings and battles can come at the same time. Even while Israel had gathered to worship (8:30), her enemies had gathered to plan an attack on Israel. (vv. 1-2). *“And it came to pass when all the kings who were on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite—heard about it, (2) that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.”*

While Israel was worshipping God and reviewing God’s law’s the kings of the Canaan rallied to form an alliance to meet the challenge of the invasion by Israel. Though all the kings gathered to form this military alliance, the Gibeonites decided on a different course of action, verse three; *“But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai,”*

The Gibeonites heard the same reports that Rahab had but they did not allow that knowledge to lead them to proper actions. They had heard about the strength of Israel and may have even realized that the power of God was behind that strength. Rahab heard about the God of Israel and she had a heart that was open to learn more of him and worship Him. As far as the Gibeonites are concerned they had only enough knowledge to lead them to fear and doing anything necessary to save their skins. Many people today still live by the Gibeonite philosophy, expediency rules. They do what ever is expedient, to get them through the difficulties of life. If the Gibeonites would have simply turned to God in repentance: as Rahab had, then no deception would have been necessary.

But instead of repenting the Gibeonites decided to deceive the Israelites, verse four; *“they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, (5) old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. (6) And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, “We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us.”*

They selected tattered old clothing, and the stale, dry bread and cracked old wineskins all of this was done to try to give the impression that they had traveled a long way to reach the camp of Israel. They wanted to deceive Joshua about their origin. We do not know whether they knew that God had told Israel not make any alliances with the people of Canaan or that just drawn a natural conclusion that although Joshua might not make an alliance with neighboring nation that he might make one with a country that was far off.

## 2. BEWARE OF MAKING DECISIONS BASED ON SUPERFICIAL EVIDENCE (vv. 7- 15)

*“Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, “Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?” (8) But they said to Joshua, “We are your servants.” And Joshua said to them, “Who are you, and where do you come from?” (9) So they said to him: “From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, (10) and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan ... (11) Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, ‘Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, “We are your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us.””*

Notice that they did not answer Joshua's question of verse eight, *"Who are you, and where do you come from?"* Instead they said, *"Oh we are so far away that you would have never heard of us."*

The Gibeonites not only were deceptive about their origin but they also lied about their intentions. They told Joshua that they wanted a covenant because they had heard about the wonders of the Lord God. Verse nine they say that they have come *"... because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt."* They gave the impression that they longed to honor God. But notice they did not offer to repent; they only offered to serve.

Then they presented their credentials – the moldy bread, patched wineskins, and ragged clothes, verse twelve; *"This bread of ours we took hot for our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy. (13) And these wineskins which we filled were new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey."*

It seems incredible they accepted as evidence things that were highly questionable. Envoys with the power to conclude a treaty with another nation should have had substantial credentials. However, verse fourteen tells us, *"Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD. (15) 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."*

Perhaps the reason why Joshua neglected to consult God, and ended up drawing the wrong conclusion was the he thought that the evidence was so strong that it was not necessary to ask God. Perhaps Joshua did not ask God because his decision looked so right, it was seemed so obvious.

*"It is like watching a television commercial about some leading anti-acid that soaks up much more excess stomach acid than its competitor. There is no way to prove its claims, but it seems convincing because of this demonstration. Two beakers are filled with a liquid, equivalent, I suppose to stomach fluid and – sure enough – the one anti-acid shows itself markedly superior to the other. Now that is not really convincing proof at all, but it appears credible because of this visible, tangible, so-called scientific demonstration. It conveys the impression of solid evidence."* [Dale Ralph Davis. No Falling Words: Expositions of the Book of Joshua. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) p. 76]

Alan Redpath has some sound advice on taking things as they appear to be, *"When common sense says that a course is right, lift up your head to God, for the path of faith and the path of blessing may be in a direction completely opposite to that which you call common sense. When voices tell you that action is urgent, that something must be done immediately, refer everything to the tribunal of heaven. Then, if you are still in doubt, dare to stand still. If called on to act and you have not time to pray, don't act. If you are called on to move in a certain direction and cannot wait until you have peace with God about it, don't move. Be strong enough and brave enough to dare to stand and wait on God, for none of them that wait on Him shall ever be ashamed. That is the only way to outmatch the devil."* [Alan Redpath, Victorious Christian Living: Studies in the Book of Joshua. (Westwood, NJ: Fleming Revell Co., 1955) pp. 143-143]

So Joshua made a treaty with the Gibeonites without first bring the matter before God. This treaty was not only a promise to spare their lives but a promise to protect them if they were attacked.

### 3. BE AWARE THAT DECEPTION WILL ALWAYS BE DISCOVERED (vv. 16-20)

“And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them.

The writer of Proverbs (12:19) says, *“a lying tongue is only for a moment.”* The story of this deception says that dishonesty, may work temporarily but it is never a permanent solution. Sooner or later trickery and deceit will be exposed and the truth will come out.

When Israel checked out the story in verse seventeen they discovered the truth, *“Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. ... (18) But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers.”*

The people of Israel complained bitterly against Joshua and the leadership accusing them of being gullible. Joshua and the leaders, aware that they had been tricked did not defend themselves. But they did acknowledge that a covenant was a covenant and could not be taken lightly, verse nineteen, *“Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them. (20) This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them.” (21) And the rulers said to them, “Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them.”*

### 4. RECOGNIZE WHEN YOU MAKE A BAD DECISION YOU WILL HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE CONSEQUENCES (vv. 22-27)

“Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, “Why have you deceived us, saying, ‘We are very far from you,’ when you dwell near us? (23) Now therefore, you are cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves—woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.” (24) So they answered Joshua and said, “Because your servants were clearly told that the LORD your 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 very much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. (25) And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us.” (26) So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. (27) And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.”

It took only three days to discover that they had made a mistake, but they had to live with it for a lifetime. The story of Joshua reaction to the deception of the Gibeonites shows us how critical it is to keep our commitments even when it is difficult. The well-being of other people may depend on it. Sometimes God’s people are called upon to live obediently amid mistakes of their own making.

An obvious present day application is marriage. Some times a Christian will marry outside the will of God. What can be done then? The world has an answer. The world says, *“Just get a divorce. You have a right to be happy. Just do what is right for yourself.”* But the word of God says that it is

something with which the Christian must live (1 Cor. 7:10-11). Some will offer the advice, *“Certainly you can escape the consequences in that way.” But the truth is that you can not!*

Joshua and the leaders of the nation erred in failing to consult the Lord about the Gibeonites, trusting in their own impression and judgment but they did not compound it by going back on the covenant that they had made.

Some Christians are under the misconception that when we sin if we confess and seek the forgiveness of God there are no consequences to sin. Although this action does bring cleansing it does not erase the consequences of our sin. That is the great problem with a failure to consult the Lord in all matters: we must live with the consequences of our wrong actions.

Israel was called upon to honor the covenant with the Gibeonites soon after the agreement had been made. Five kings of the Amorites, angered and threatened by the Gibeonite strategy, decided to attack the Gibeonite cities (10:3-4). Joshua was obligated to defend them. This covenant between Israel and the Gibeonites was respected for centuries. On a later occasion, when King Saul, broke the covenant, God sided with the Gibeonites and brought judgment upon Israel (2 Sam. 21:1). In their defense the Gibeonites appeared to be loyal once they made their decision. In all the years of that war went on between Israel and the nations of Canaan there is not one record of even one Gibeonite going over to the other side.