

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 14, Joshua 9

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session number 14, Joshua 9, Gibeonite Treaty.

Okay, in this section, we're going to be looking at Joshua chapter 9 and this immediate chapter would be called something that I would say maybe call it the Gibeonite Treaty, the treaty that the Israelites made with the Gibeonites.

But this is the beginning of a section of three chapters that are kind of linked together. It expands the horizons of the book's actions. The first set of battles are just very closely connected geographically, Jericho and Ai, chapters 6 to 8, chapters 9 through 11.

In each of these chapters, we have coalitions of kings coming against Israel. In chapter 9, verses 1 and 2, we see that. Chapter 10, there's a coalition of five kings from the south banding against Israel.

Chapter 11, there's a coalition of many northern kings. So the unifying thread in these three chapters is these coalitions of enemy kings coming against Israel and they're having to deal with that and then the battles. These battles become more formulaic and more kind of dealt with in a summary way, especially at the end of chapter 10 and in chapter 11.

We don't have the details that we see in Jericho or certainly in Ai. But anyway, let's look at the passage here in chapter 9. We've mentioned already in earlier part of our discussions that Israel's reputation had preceded it. Rahab mentions that in chapter 2 where we have heard what your God has done to the Egyptians and to Sinai and Og.

In chapter 5, verse 1, we saw that the coalition of kings there had heard what God had done and they were very afraid. So in those first two cases, we see the Canaanites being afraid of the Israelites. Here now, there's a change.

In chapter 9, verse 1, it says that as soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country in the low land along the coast, great sea toward Lebanon, et cetera, in verse 2, as soon as they heard it, they gathered together as one to fight Joshua and Israel. So now there's a change. Whereas earlier when the Canaanites heard about Israel's God and the victories that God gives, they were afraid, here they're not.

They launch into an offensive, an offense against Israel. And I think the reason is because now Israel has shown vulnerability. They have lost the battle.

They had gotten to Ai and been defeated. So that maybe gave these kings some extra courage. So, they come to fight against the Israelites.

This motif of the king's hearing is found back in chapter 2, verses 9 to 11, chapter 5, verse 1, chapter 9, verse 1, chapter 9, verse 3 as well. When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard, and then they did something different, they responded in a different way. But notice in chapter 10, verse 1, it says the same thing.

As soon as Adonai Zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua captured Ai, then he led a coalition against the Israelites. And then chapter 11, verse 1, when Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this, he sent and brought a coalition together. So the idea of Israel's reputation being known is one that we see throughout.

It's a thread, running thread throughout the book. So now let's look at, see what the Gibeonites themselves actually do in response to what they heard. And it's different from what the other kings have done in chapter 9, verses 1 and 2, and what they do, later kings do in chapters 10 and 11.

Because verses 2 and, verses 3 and 4 kind of give us, set the stage. When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they went on, they on their part, acted with cunning. And they went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys and wineskins, worn out and torn, and so it goes.

And what's behind this is that somehow they had some knowledge of Israelite practice or Israelite, what God had told Israel. Because the backdrop to this is in two passages in the Pentateuch. One is in Exodus 34, verses 11 and 18, which we won't look at.

But another is in Deuteronomy 20, especially verses 15 to 18. So, I will have us turn to that. We've looked at this passage once or twice before in other contexts, but we'll remind ourselves of this.

In Deuteronomy 20, in the middle of God's instructions for what they're to do in Canaan. So, look at verse 10, for example, when you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace. If they respond positively, then everything's good.

But if not, you shall go to war against them, put the mail to the sword, et cetera. But then it goes on to say in verse 16, in the cities of these people that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. In other words, in the cities in Canaan proper, you shall save alive nothing that breathes.

But you shall devote them to complete destruction, Hittites, Amorites, et cetera, that they may not teach you to do according to their abominable practices and so on. So, the point being the cities within Canaan itself are to be devoted to destruction by the Israelites. So somehow the Gibeonites know about this provision.

We don't know how. But so, their approach to Israel is from a different angle. They are interested in their own survival.

They're perhaps not sure if they can defeat Israel. It makes it pretty clear. In chapter 9, verse 3, when they'd heard what God had done, what Joshua had done to Jericho at Ai, great defeats of the Canaanites, they thought, well, we need to try a different way.

So, they dress up and bring provisions and so on that make it sound like they've arrived here to where Joshua is in the camp at Gilgal, verse 6. I mean, just a parenthetical word about Gilgal. The first place you've encountered Gilgal is right across the Jordan River, not too far from Jericho, where they did the circumcision, and the word Gilgal is related to the word Galal, to roll away, and the reproach of Egypt is rolled away. That's a significant site, but there is more than one Gilgal in the Old Testament.

This one here appears to be in the middle hill country, not down by the Jordan River. It's probably the same place that Samuel goes by in 1 Samuel 7, and there may be even one or two other Gilgals. Scholars are a little bit differentiated about that, but there's not just one, there's at least two.

This is the one in the central hill country, and what they say in verse 6 says, we have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us. The point is, that we've come from a place not under the ban. We're okay.

We're not part of what you should be destroying. Now, to their credit, the Israelites, in verse 7, said, maybe you live among us. How can we make a covenant with you? And they said, nope, we are your servants, and then they showed them all of their provisions.

Look at this, verse 12. Here's our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses.

Now it's old and crumbly, and the wine skins were new, but now they're old, and so on. So, this is a very cunning and very smart deception on the part of the Gibeonites to try a different way to get along with the Israelites, and the Israelites fell for it. Verse 14 says the men took some of the provisions, so they're fellowshiping together.

They're going to make this covenant. They're going to break bread together, but the fatal flaw here is at the end of verse 14, because it says, they did not ask counsel from the Lord. So, this is a problem, and God is angry with his people because of this, but we can't fault Joshua and the elders for being deceived.

If the deception was smart enough and wise enough, it would have fooled them. What we can fault them for, though, is not asking God's guidance here, and God would have then undoubtedly said, no, these are locals, and you need to destroy them as well. So that's the fault here.

It's one of the few places in the book of Joshua where Joshua, well, first of all, Joshua does not even appear at this point. It says, they did not ask counsel, so Joshua doesn't seem to be exercising his proper leadership function here. It's one of the places where he doesn't, he seems to be failing in his leadership, and so as a result of this agreement to make this covenant, this agreement with the Gibeonites, Joshua, verse 15, made peace with them, made a covenant with them to let them live.

The leaders of the congregation swore to them. So that's a big problem, but the idea of making a covenant, a swearing oath, is very fundamental in not only the Bible, but in the ancient Near Eastern context. This is something, a solemn thing that you make, enter an agreement with, and it's not something that's lightly broken.

So, when they discovered, verse 16, at the end of three days after they made a covenant with them, they learned that they were their neighbors and they lived among them. So there, but verse 18, but the people of Israel did not attack them because their leaders had sworn by the Lord. The rest of the chapter shows the aftermath of that and shows how Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and says, why have you done this? Why did you deceive us? Verse 22, and therefore, because of this, you're cursed.

We're not going to kill you, but you're going to be our servants, cutters of wood, drawers of water. Verse 23, and Gibeonites say, okay, fine. We'll be happy to do that.

They've at least survived. So, in verse 27, Joshua made them that day cutters of wood, drawers of water at the congregation, and the altar of the Lord to this day. So whenever the book was written, it lasted for at least decades, if not some centuries.

So, the Gibeonites were another group of Canaanites who survived. I guess we can say there's three groups of Canaanites that survived in the book of Joshua. They escaped the command to completely destroy them.

One is Rahab on the basis of her faith. Second is the Gibeonites from a different angle on the basis of their deception, but they were spared. The third is all those

peoples that whatever tribe were not able to drive out from their territory that we'll read about in the later chapters.

The story of Rahab is a great one with a happy ending. She is part of the line of Jesus. She's part of the hall of faith in the New Testament.

There is a happy ending to the story of the Gibeonites as well. It happens about a thousand years later. We read about that in the book of Nehemiah.

So, if you open to Nehemiah chapter 3, we will see the Gibeonites mentioned there. Nehemiah chapter 3, now the context here is this is about a thousand years later. It's after the exile from Jerusalem into Babylon.

And then they've come back. Nehemiah has come back with a commission from the governor of Persia, the king of Persia, that he is going to be the governor of the area of Judea around Jerusalem. He is a political and administrative leader as well as a spiritual leader.

And one of the things that Nehemiah helps them to do is to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem. And you may remember that everybody pitches in and does their part. And chapter 3 is the chapter that gives all the people who were involved in that project and who did their part across from where they lived.

And so, it's just a kind of almost meaningless chapter for us 21st-century people. We don't know the people, the names, and all that. It's just this long list.

It kind of reminds me of the monuments in the town square of a small town in America where the list of the World War I veterans or the World War II veterans are there. But that's important because people, descendants, and others can honor the names and know that these were there. These did their part.

Here's the same thing. The names of the lists of the individuals are preserved here in the book of Nehemiah chapter 3. And in the middle of that whole list, look at verse 7. Next to these previous ones repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province, etc. So, we see here just as a matter of fact, there's no big deal made of it. But as a matter of fact, among this list of all the Jews who are rebuilding the walls, all the people of God who are doing this, we have Gibeonites.

They have survived. They are now not the woodcutters and the drawers of water. They are full participants in the life of Israel.

So, at some point, they had assimilated into the life of Israel. And I would say it embraced the God of Israel in a way such that they are now a thousand years later

full participants in the life. So, they entered the family of Israel by a deceptive fashion.

But in the end, there's a happy ending to their story. Just also to mention another little piece in chapter 7 of that same book, Nehemiah chapter 7, which is a list of people who came back from exile. So, these are people that have been taken away, captured from Jerusalem into Babylon, had stayed there close to 70 years, 50, 70 years, and now are coming back.

And again, in these listings, looking in, you know, just list the sons of so and so, how many of their descendants came back. And look at the verse, starting in verse 21, the sons of Atter, namely of Hezekiah, 98 survivors. Verse 22, the sons of Hashum, 328. The sons of Bezai, Bezai, 324. Verse 24, sons of Hariph, 112. And verse 25, the sons of Gibeon, 95.

So again, a thousand years later, there had been Gibeonites who had been seen as Jews, taken captive by the Babylonians, and 95 of them returned now under the returning exiles. So, there is a happy ending to that story, even though the Gibeonites entered a relationship with Israel by trickery. God ultimately was gracious and they were also foreigners who became part of Israel, doing their part.

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