

Joshua

Lesson 9

Chapter 8:30 – 9:27

Upon the death of a loved one, unfinished business always follows. On the last day of Moses' life, the LORD declared through him for a celebration of the people on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. The instructions for that celebration are found in Deuteronomy 27-28. With the victory at Ai completed, Joshua led the camp to the two mounts with the ancient land of Shechem at the foot of the mountains. This land was already owned by the nation of Israel because it was purchased by Jacob more than four hundred years before. A city will be built at Shechem soon in the future, but at the time of this gathering, no city existed. Shechem rested about fifteen miles north of Ai. It rested about twenty miles from Gilgal. We are not told if Joshua moved north from Ai directly to Shechem, but that does not seem possible. All the people needed to be at Shechem who were camping at Gilgal. The Tabernacle complex for the required offerings needed to be there too. The camp must have moved to Shechem from Gilgal temporarily for the celebration and then move the camp back to Gilgal for much of the remainder of Joshua's ministry.

4. The Truthful Campaign in the Promised Land (8:30-35)

a) The Altar Built (8:30-31)

From the third campaign, we now see the truthful campaign in the Promised Land. The campaign is not a battle; it is a time of worship. At Mount Ebal, Joshua has the altar built. Verse 30. *"Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, ³¹ just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones on which no man had wielded an iron tool; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings."* (8:30-31)

Joshua followed the instruction from Moses exactly. The offerings were also followed according to Moses' directive expressly as recorded in Deuteronomy 27-28.

b) The Law Copied (8:32)

With the altar and the offerings, Moses had ordered the law copied. The writer tells us that Joshua did as instructed. Verse 32. *"He wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel."* (8:32)

c) The Leaders Gathered (8:33a)

The writer tells us that in accordance with Moses' instruction, the leaders gathered. Verse 33a. *"All Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as the native."* (8:33a)

d) The Tribes Divided (8:33b)

The tribes were divided. Verse 33b. *"Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had given command at first to bless the people of Israel."* (8:33b)

Here are the tribal assignments for each mountain from Moses. *"Moses also charged the people on that day, saying, ¹² 'When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin.'" (Deuteronomy 27:11). "For the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali."* (Deuteronomy 27:13).

e) The Law Read (8:34)

When all was ready, the writer tells us of the law read. Verse 34 *“Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law.”* (8:34)

f) The Words Heard (8:35)

Then, the words were heard. Verse 35. *“There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them.”* (8:35)

The record of the full ceremony is found in Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28. It was a truthful and important campaign in the nation’s life.

5. The Thorough Campaign of the Promised Land (9:1-11:23)

a) The Conquest in Central Canaan (9:1-10:15)

(1) The Canaanite Kings Unite (9:1-2)

From the truthful campaign, the writer tells of the thorough campaign of the Promised Land. It will start with the conquest of central Canaan, followed by the conquest of southern Canaan, and completed by the conquest of northern Canaan. We begin with the conquest in central Canaan when the Canaanite Kings unite. Chapter 9, verse 1. *“Now it came about when all the kings who were beyond the Jordan, in the hill country and in the lowland and on all the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, heard of it, ² that they gathered themselves together with one accord to fight with Joshua and with Israel.”* (9:1-2)

“... beyond the Jordan” is the land on the west side of the river where the Nation of Israel is taking the land. Jericho is on the side “beyond the Jordan.”

“... in the hill country” means all the land in the mountains. None of the mountains in the Promised Land are very large. In this case, the writer means mountains in the central part of the Promised Land.

“... in the lowlands,” means the lower flatlands, down from the western side of the hills headed toward the coast of the Great Sea.

“... the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon” means the Mediterranean Sea. In this case, traveling west from Gilgal across the mountains, passed the lowlands, and to the coast of the sea. The tribal areas mentioned will extend up the coast toward Lebanon. The mention of Lebanon is to provide a direction, not a destination. Lebanon is considered a neighbor north of the Promised Land.

The passage tells us of the Canaanite tribes in central Canaan Land being the Hittite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite. The Hittites and Amorites are west of the Dead Sea. The Jebusites are above the Hittites and Amorites. From the Jordan, west to the coast of the sea, are the Canaanites, Hivites, Perizzites, and another division of the Canaanites. All are part of the descendants of Canaan and his original Canaanite tribe. Each town in each tribal area had king a of its own. All the kings of all these tribes bound together to fight the Nation of Israel. There sheer volume of men of war bound together in this alliance would surely outnumber the Nation of Israel many times over.

(2) The Gibeon People Fear (9:3-27)

(a) Their Plan of Deception (9:3-5)

Jericho and Ai were Canaanite towns in that tribal area next to the Jordan River. Just west of the Canaanite area, we come to the Hittite area. In that tribal setting was the town of Gibeon. The Nation of Israel had not ventured into the Hittite area. As such, it was not familiar with the people



Five Central Canaanite Tribal Areas

at all. But the news of Israel's success had reached all of Canaan Land, including the Hittites and the Gibeon people feared. The writer tells us of their plan of deception. Verse 3. *"When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, ⁴ they also acted craftily and set out as envoys, and took worn-out sacks on their donkeys, and wineskins worn-out and torn and mended, ⁵ and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and had become crumbled."* (9:3-5)

(b) Their Process of Deception (9:6-25)

(i) The Lie Comes with a Request (9:6)

Once the plan of deception was in place, the writer tells us of the process of deception. First, we hear that their lie comes with a request. Verse 6. *"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.'" (9:6)*

Covenants were big deals in that day. Yes, they were. If a covenant was made, it was binding, even if the covenant was made by deceptive means. Such was the case with the Gibeonites, who portrayed themselves as non-Canaanites. The LORD had ordered that all Canaanites be destroyed; however, all other nationalities could live if a covenant was made and the foreign nations agreed with Israel's beliefs.

(ii) The Request Comes with a Caution (9:7)

But the request comes with a caution from the Nation of Israel. Verse 7. *"The men of Israel said to the Hivites, 'Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?'" (9:7)*

Something was telling the men of Israel that these poor beggars may not be from a distant land. They questioned if a covenant was wise or not.

(iii) The Caution Comes with a Promise (9:8a)

Nevertheless, the caution comes with a promise to Joshua. Verse 8a. *"But they said to Joshua, 'We are your servants.'" (9:8a)*

The promise to be the servants of Israel will strike an uneasiness in Joshua.

(iv) The Promise Comes with an Inquiry (9:8b)

So, the promise comes with an inquiry from Joshua. Verse 8b. *"Then Joshua said to them, 'Who are you and where do you come from?'" (9:8b)*

The poor beggars are now in a situation with Joshua. They must think quickly.

(v) The Inquiry Comes with a Story (9:9-13)

Because of Joshua, with the inquiry comes a story. It is not short. Verse 9. *"They said to him, 'Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of the LORD your God; for we have heard the report of Him 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, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Basban who was at Ashtaroth. ¹¹ So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them and say to them, 'We are your servants; now then, make a covenant with us.' ¹² 'This our bread was warm when we took it for our provisions out of our houses on the day that we left to come to you; but now behold, it is dry and has become crumbled. ¹³ These wineskins which we filled were new, and behold, they are torn; and these our clothes and our sandals are worn out because of the very long journey.'" (9:9-13)*

The story covered all the bases all the way down to the wineskins, clothes, and sandals. It seemed reasonable.

(vi) The Story Comes with a Covenant (9:14-15)

We find the story comes with a covenant. Exactly what the Gibeon beggars wanted! Verse 14. *"So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the LORD. ¹⁵ Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them."* (9:14-15)

Not one word was asked of the LORD about this covenant. Joshua moved to make peace without a prayer one. After all, this kind of covenant was approved for all non-Canaanites. These men did not present themselves as Canaanites.

(vii) [The Covenant Comes with a Problem \(9:16\)](#)

The covenant comes with a problem. Verse 16. *“It came about at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were neighbors and that they were living within their land.”* (9:16)

Someone told the truth, and it got around. The men were Canaanites. It was a problem. They were supposed to be destroyed on the order of the LORD. What now. What could be done? A covenant of peace had been agreed upon.

(viii) [The Problem Comes with a Grumble \(9:17-18\)](#)

The problem comes with a grumble from the Israelites toward the Gibeonites. Verse 17. *“Then the sons of Israel set out and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim. ¹⁸ The sons of Israel did not strike them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD the God of Israel. And the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders.”* (9:17-18)

The descendants of Gibeon, the Hittites, lived in the four cities listed. The name Gibeon means *hill city*. Chephirah means *the hamlet*. Beeroth means *the well*. Kiriath-jearim means *the city of forests*. All four are named such because of the major characteristic of the location.

These four cities were safe from the Israelites because of the covenant. It did not make Israel happy.

(ix) [The Grumble Comes with a Solution \(9:19-21\)](#)

Be that as it may, the grumble comes with a solution. Verse 19. *“But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, ‘We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. ²⁰ This we will do to them, even let them live, so that wrath will not be upon us for the oath which we swore to them.’ ²¹ The leaders said to them, ‘Let them live.’ So they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole congregation, just as the leaders had spoken to them.”* (9:19-21)

If you will remember, the Gibeonites of all four cities promised to be servants of Israel if a covenant was made between the two. Joshua and Israel’s leaders would hold them to the covenant by making them “*hewers of wood and drawers of water*,” the lowliest sort of physical labor. Cutting wood and hauling water. Hard work for all Gibeonites.

(x) [The Solution Comes with a Curse \(9:22-23\)](#)

The solution comes with a curse. Verse 22. *“Then Joshua called for them and spoke to them, saying, ‘Why have you deceived us, saying, ‘We are very far from you,’ when you are living within our land?’ ²³ Now therefore, you are cursed, and you shall never cease being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.”* (9:22-23)

Forever, all men of the Gibeonites will be “*hewers of wood and drawers of water*.” It is a cure. They can never be, or do, anything else, at least until Israel falls into exile in 722 BC, seven hundred and two years into the future.

(xi) [The Curse Comes with a Conviction \(9:24-25\)](#)

The curse comes with a conviction. Verse 24. *“So they answered Joshua and said, ‘Because it was certainly told your servants that the LORD your God had commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; therefore we feared greatly for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. ²⁵ Now behold, we are in your hands; do as it seems good and right in your sight to do to us.’”* (9:24-25)

The translation of the answer of conviction is this. The Gibeonites would live even though they were Canaanites commanded by the LORD to die. They had accomplished their goal to live. Any

servant's job for the Gibeonites was better than death. All generations of Gibeonites to come for at least seven hundred and two years were cursed with the restrictions of this covenant.

(c) *The Conviction Comes with a Confinement* (9:26-27)

Finally, the conviction comes with a confinement. Verse 26. *“Thus he did to them, and delivered them from the hands of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them.”*²⁷ *But Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place which He would choose.”* (9:26-27)

The curse placed on the Gibeonites was great from the first day. They would be *hewers of wood and drawers of water* for all the congregation of Israel. First, in every town and city in every Israelite tribal area, Gibeonites would be assigned to serve the people of Israel – across the whole nation. Second, the Gibeonites would provide wood and water *for the altar of the LORD... in the place which He would choose.”* The phrase *“in the place which He would choose”* has not been used in this record of Joshua. Still, it was used regularly in Leviticus and Deuteronomy in preparation to take the Promised Land. In the Promised Land, the tribes would be so spread out that one central place of worship would be impossible. The travel would be too far. Therefore, in preparation to enter the Promised Land, the LORD foretold that He would choose four cities in each tribal area, forty-eight in all, to be the local place where tithes and offerings would be brought instead of to a central location. In those forty-eight cities, the Levites would accept the gifts and disburse them from there to the needs of others and for the sustaining of the Levite families. The Gibeonites would be assigned job duties for wood and water, even in the holy places chosen by the Lord.