

The kings in the region of the River Jordan hear about the conquering Israelites<sup>□1</sup>. They can see that their wicked ways are about to come to an end. No one stands out as very praiseworthy in this chapter.

□1 9:1

**1. The pagans unwillingness to surrender to God's plans – 3 possible responses**

1. **The pagans were unwilling to surrender to God's plans.** Consider the deceit of the people of Gibeon. There are three things that the pagan nations could have done. They could (i) **react with violent opposition**, seeking to prevent the judgement of God upon their lives. This is what various nations in the area did. Israel's territory to the west of the Jordan falls into three sections<sup>□1</sup>. There is 'the hill country', the hilly ridge that runs north-south just west of the Jordan river, which also flows from the north to the south into the Dead Sea. West of the hills is the Shephelah (the 'foothills'), the central area which is lower than the mountains but higher than the coastal plain. Then still further west there is the coastal plain alongside the Mediterranean sea. There were a number of pagan tribes living in these areas. Joshua 9:1 b mentions six of them including the Hivites; Genesis 15:19–21 mentions ten. The pagan tribes resolve to attempt to fight Joshua and his armies<sup>□2</sup>. They decide to react with violence, and attempt to overthrow the punishment of sin coming upon them.

□1 9:1  
□2 9:2

**(i) The pagan tribes' response - violent opposition**

There was another procedure the wicked Canaanites could have followed. They could (ii) **find a way of co-existence with God's people without having faith in the God of Israel.** This is what the Gibeonites did. They had heard about the conquering Israelites and they decided that there was no hope of defeating Israel<sup>□1</sup>. They knew of Israel's intention to destroy only the nations that were a threat to them in Canaan. More distant nations that were willing to become subject to Israel were offered peaceful co-existence (as Deuteronomy 20:10–15 said). So the people of Gibeon (who were actually a part of the Hivites) pretend to come from outside the Canaanite area altogether. They act as if they have come from a long distance<sup>□2</sup> and ask to become a people subject to the Israelites<sup>□3</sup>.<sup>1</sup>

□1 9:3  
□2 9:4–5  
□3 9:6

**(ii) The Gibeonite response - find a way to co-exist with God's people without having faith in their God**

**• Israel deceived**

The Israelites asked whether these people were actually among those they had to destroy<sup>□1</sup>; whether they were a people with whom no covenant should be made. God had said 'You shall make no covenant with them'<sup>□2</sup>. But the people of Gibeon have a story ready to tell to persuade Israel that they come from afar<sup>□3</sup>. They are submitting to Israel reluctantly and with deceit. They have no desire to turn from their wicked past and lose their identity as pagans altogether. They want to continue their pagan idolatry but somehow to find a way of co-existing with the people of God. And they succeed in finding a way. There is such a thing as reluctantly admiring God's kingdom without submitting to it.

□1 9:7–8  
□2  
Exodus 23:32  
□3 9:9–13

**(iii) Rahab's response – renounce paganism and have faith in the God of Israel**

There was a third approach they could have chosen. They could (iii) **do what Rahab did.** She expressed her faith in the God of Israel, asked for mercy and incorporated herself into Israel, renouncing her connection with her pagan past. She ceased to be a Canaanite and became an honorary member of 'Israel', the people of God.

**2. The people of God are negligent in consulting God**

2. **The people of God are negligent in consulting God.** For the second time the Israelites trust in their own judgement. This had happened before when they trusted the spies who had surveyed Ai. Joshua was a great soldier but it is obvious that he could be impulsive and run ahead of God's will.

• *Joshua trusts his own judgement and fails to consult God*

Joshua and his people join in a covenant-making meal-of friendship with the people from Gibeon<sup>1</sup> and do not think of asking any advice from God<sup>2</sup>. It is a covenant-of-submission, a law-covenant, in which the people make an oath of loyalty and obedience to Joshua<sup>3</sup>.

1 9:14  
2 9:15  
3 9:15

Shortly afterwards the Israelites find out the truth<sup>1</sup>. But a covenant has been made and God regards a covenant as a very serious matter. The keeping of a covenant was more binding than the command to slaughter the Canaanites. The people of Gibeon had found a deceitful way of preventing their execution<sup>2</sup>. God would be angry if the Israelites broke a sworn covenant.

1 9:16  
2 9:17–20

It is foolish to sometimes take it for granted that we already know God's will. Joshua assumed that he was able to assess these people of Gibeon without making any mistakes. He was trusting his own judgement. Actually the people of Gibeon were deceivers.

• *The great sanctity of a covenant*

We notice also the very great sanctity of a covenant. Once a covenant was made Joshua did not feel he could break it. The keeping of a covenant was more binding than the command to exterminate the wicked Canaanites. All that Joshua could do was allow the people of Gibeon to live as a slave-people within the land<sup>1</sup>. Joshua interrogates them and they now tell him the truth<sup>2</sup>. The covenant has already been fixed and it does not matter now that they tell him the truth. A covenant cannot be changed after it is ratified. Joshua decrees that the Gibeonites should become a permanent slave-class within Israel<sup>3</sup>. He cannot break the covenant, no matter what the people the people of Gibeon might have done.

1 9:21  
2 9:22–25  
3 9:26–27

• *God's oath is sacred to him*

This principle applies in the Christian's relationship to God. Once God gives us an oath He cannot change it, no matter what might happen and no matter what we might do. David sinned very seriously in connection with Bathsheba. Adultery and murder and treachery came into David's life but it did not stop God's purpose to preserve the line of David. God had given an oath! When God gives an oath it is sacred to Him; He will never abandon anything that He has sworn to do.

**Note** 1. If 'Gilgal' (9:6) is the same place as the one of Joshua 5:10 it means that Joshua had made a kind of headquarters there and had taken some soldiers back there to recover and plan the next stage of events. But perhaps there was a second place named Gilgal nearer to Shechem.

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