

Godly . . . But Gullible

Second in Command: Life of Joshua – Part V

Joshua 9:1-15

Introduction

I do not believe that the need for discernment has ever been more necessary than it is today. The believer is being ambushed, literally, with thousands of advertisements or commercials.

I once read that the average person is attacked, as it were, by two thousand commercials a day. I also think that most of these commercials must assume we are fairly gullible.

If you watched a football game this weekend, you probably saw the game interrupted by a commercial in which a guy says, “Oh, my nose is stopped up. I can’t breathe. I can’t smell anything.”

Then, someone blindfolds him and places an orange slice underneath his nose. They ask him, “What is this?”

He, of course, cannot tell.

They then give him a pill and amazingly, in thirty minutes or so, or actually, in about five seconds, he says, “Oh, it’s an orange.”

So, are we going to run out and buy this product, or what?

It seems that the advertisers are playing on the gullibility of the American mind. The tragedy is that this has crept into the church.

The church today more than ever, is being confronted with gimmicks and fads and trends that require discernment to uncover whether they are truly godly or are just another thing passing in the night. In addition, companies and even major corporations

today, according to people in our own church, have been forcing their employees to attend New Age seminars, sponsored by the companies and taught by gurus and eastern mystics. The church has within its own realm, I believe, charlatans, schemers, and racketeers, who will take time and money from almost anyone.

If there was ever a time of need for discernment, it is today. That is the reason, I think, the next few verses in the book of Joshua are so relevant and so very important. Please turn to Joshua 9 in your Bible. We will only cover a few verses today.

Three Mistakes That Led to a Nation’s Deception

Let us begin by looking at Joshua 9:1-2.

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, that they gathered themselves together with one accord to fight with Joshua and with Israel.

These people are bitter enemies, but the force of good is uniting the forces of evil, as it always does. Now note Joshua 9:3-5.

When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, 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, 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.

“Crumbled” could be rendered “molded”.

Continue to Joshua 9:6-7. Understand that from Gibeon to Joshua’s camp was about a twenty minute walk.

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.” The men of Israel said to the Hivites [Gibeonites], “Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?”

Note that question. Look at Joshua 9:8-10.

But they said to Joshua, “We are your servants.” Then Joshua said to them, “Who are you, and where do you come from?” 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, 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 Bashan who was at Ashtaroth.

Notice the Gibeonites did not mention anything about the Jordan or Jericho. They were crafty enough to know that if they mentioned that, then it would be obvious that they were certainly not from a far off country because they would not have heard such news so quickly. So they left that part out. Continue to Joshua 9:11.

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.’”

Now I am going to simply uncover what is easily observable in the text, in the form of three mistakes that Joshua and the leadership made in preparing and signing a covenant with these people. These are mistakes, by the way, that we are being threatened to make, on our front, all the time.

1. The first mistake is that Joshua figured the circumstantial evidence was in fact, reality; that it was truth; that it was real.

Look at all of the evidences as they are displayed again in Joshua 9:12.

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.

In other words, the bread is moldy. Continue to Joshua 9:13.

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.

To Joshua, and to the leadership, it all seemed to fit, but in reality, it was all a fraud. They took a look at the wineskins, and the clothing, and the sandals, and thought, “Yeah, it all makes sense.”

That was the problem – it was real to their senses.

2. The second mistake, that is even more subtle, is that Joshua was fooled, I believe, not only by the circumstantial evidence, but by the Gibeonites apparent knowledge of scripture.

We are confronted with this all the time in our day – the use of a verse of scripture. If it is a principle that is supposedly biblical and someone uses a phrase or a verse from scripture, then we are subject to whatever they are teaching and never check to see if it really fits with the Bible.

Now why would I say the Gibeonites had an understanding of scripture? They made reference, three times, to coming from a far off country. They also mentioned, two times, their request to become the servants of Israel. Why did they spend so much time trying to prove that they were not twenty minutes away, but were two days away?

I would suggest the Gibeonites knew the command given to Moses and later, to Joshua, as well as, knew the miracles of which the known world had heard, and had also heard that if you lived far off, you could live, but if you lived within the borders of Canaan, you were dead.

Let us look at Deuteronomy 20:10-11. We will look at this briefly and you can study more on your own. God is speaking to Moses, and He says, “This is what you will do to all of the cities that are very far away from you.”

When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor [servants] and shall serve you.

The Israelites were not to do this in the Canaanite cities, but only in the outlying regions. Skip to Deuteronomy 20:16-17. God is talking about the cities within the region.

. . . in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them, . . . as the Lord your God has commanded you,

So, why are the Gibeonites making such a case to prove they are from a far off country? Ladies and gentlemen, I would suggest that they had a thorough understanding of the command of God to Moses. Word traveled fast that if you lived far away, perhaps you could become a servant, but you would still be allowed to live. However, if you lived twenty minutes away, you might have to die.

Now I would suggest as well, to be consistent with the other passages we have studied in Joshua, that death was not necessarily guaranteed. Do you remember a harlot who was saved? Why was she saved? Because she repented and followed Yahweh, the God of Israel. I have every reason to believe, from scripture, that if the people of Canaan had repented and followed Yahweh, they would have been allowed to live.

The Gibeonites were actually after something that was good – they wanted to live and perhaps, even unite with the Israelite nation. However, the way they went about gaining their goal was wrong.

In other words, there is a right way to do a right thing. As Bob Jones, Sr., said years ago, “It is never right to do wrong, even if it gives you a chance to do something right.”

It might be surprising to learn that in my occupation, there are many shortcuts that can be taken. I spend a lot of time studying to prepare these “meals” that I bring to you. I estimate that I study about an hour for every minute that I preach. You might be surprised to know that I am literally, deluded with requests to take shortcuts to arriving at an expository message; to do it in a quick way.

Let me read the latest request I received this past week. It is called, *Text, Title, and Truth*, and offers, “two year’s worth of expository relevant sermons”. All I have to do is pay a fee to get two year’s worth of expository relevant sermons. It advertises, “Finally, an intelligent sermon help that has convicting power.” Not only do I get sermons, but they are guaranteed to be convicting! And, there is more! It continues to say, “Order all 126 sermons within ten days and receive, absolutely free, a special occasion package.” I am serious! The special occasion package includes two sermons each, for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. Would you like for me to order this exciting package? I will file this someplace.

The Israelites were thoroughly deceived by people who were trying to arrive at a good thing the wrong way.

Four contemporary spheres of deception

Now before we go back to this story, I want to turn our attention to four spheres of deception that we face all the time. These are four arenas in which we must be, not gullible, but perceptive in the way we respond to people who handle God’s word. People can be so convincing that we might be caught off guard.

- The first arena is one in which it is possible, as a believer, to be deceived by people who redefine scripture.

In other words, people take the bold face text of the Bible, but redefine it. In so doing, they obliterate its real value.

For example, Mr. Ted Turner came up with the “Ted Commandments”. He was not comfortable with the Ten Commandments, so he created his own and called them the “Ted Commandments”. He redefined them in a way that he considered to be more comfortable, palatable.

Recently, I did something that I have never done before and will never do again. It is a little humbling to admit, but I was invited to a prayer rally. Now there is nothing in my blood that breathes ecumenism; in fact, I cannot stand it. However, I thought, “This is an invitation to join all the clergymen in our town for a time of prayer. Why not go and give it just one observation?”

I did. It is the last one I will ever give.

Let me tell what happened. I arrived at the location of the prayer rally and there was an audience gathered. The clergymen were each given a different topic of prayer. I got there a few minutes before the starting time and all of the clergymen (I guess we will call them), about thirty-five in all, and I, were gathered together and were given some last minute instructions. Then, just before we were to walk out onto the stage, one of the men said, "Oh, by the way, before we go out, we don't want to offend anybody in the audience. Should we pray in the name of Jesus?"

I stayed only because I had been assigned a slot. The Bible says that there is one mediator between God and man, and who might that be? Jesus Christ.

- Another arena of deception is in those who outright reject scripture – not even taking time to redefine it to sound religious, but just rejecting it.

I have seen people who represent this arena. I was watching public television and the "Boston Pops" was on. This was a neat cultural event and I thought I would get a little culture by at least watching it from my living room. So I was watching it – I enjoy music, as you may remember. They came to the end and said, "As a special treat to all our audience, we are going to have an a cappella group sing the Twenty-third Psalm."

I thought, "This is great!" and turned the volume up a little and settled back.

The group got up to sing and, before doing so, the leader said, "We are going to sing the Twenty-third Psalm in its traditional choral arrangement, but we are going to change the word 'He' to 'she'."

They sang the Twenty-third Psalm and closed it by singing, "Glory be to the Father and daughter and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The crowd erupted with a standing ovation. I hope that upsets you.

Rejection of the Bible opens the door to incredible confusion. Consider the subject of dying, for instance.

I was reading, some time ago, on the subject of cryonics. This is the freezing of the deceased at a certain temperature. It is a very expensive procedure. I read that the doctors refer to these deceased individuals as their patients. The Bible says that death spells the end of this body until the resurrection. It will take the supernatural power of God to ignite life. The deceased can be frozen; they can be wrapped in birch bark and put in high trees, as the American

Indians did; they can be mummified, as the Egyptians did, but it is still the end of the physical body. Medical science will not be able to bring these patients back to life.

Another subject related to death is reincarnation. We read about this frequently in our day. Reincarnation is the belief that the soul progresses from one life form to another, based on one's "karma". Have you heard that word? Karma is the list of one's good deeds or bad deeds. One who has good karma will come back as a higher life form – perhaps a step up the social ladder, until eventually, reaching divinity. One who has bad karma will come back as a lower life form – perhaps as a rat or a horse – or Morton Downy, Jr. No, I just wanted to tell something that he said about karma! He said his karma was so bad that he would probably come back as a battery in someone's flashlight. That is the way he felt. For your information, according to Andrew Greeley of the University of Chicago, twenty-nine percent of the American population believe in the possibility of reincarnation.

- A third form of deception is the deception by people who add to the teachings of scripture.

In Elberton, Georgia, there is a huge monument on which ten guiding principles are written for everyone to see, in addition to the teachings of scripture.

Perhaps you have seen the advertisement for the *Book of Mormon* in magazines. It contains a picture of the New Testament, or the Gospel, laying on a table. Laying on top of the New Testament is the *Book of Mormon*. Underneath the picture, in bold letters, are the words, "The Other Gospel".

These are additions to the teachings of scripture. Additions obliterate the value, because God said, in II Timothy 3:16-17, that,

All Scripture is [sufficient] . . . that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

In other words, we need nothing else.

Another form of divine wisdom comes from the New Age movement in the form of channeling. You may have heard of this. One of the most popular channelers is a woman by the name of J. Z. Knight, who channels Ramtha. Ramtha is supposedly, a thirty five thousand year old warrior from Atlantis. Let me give one quote from his words of wisdom. He says, through Knight, "I expect you to do only what you

feel is right. Always trust the wisdom of your feelings.”

Compare these words with Proverbs 28:26a, which says,

He who trusts in his own heart is a fool . . .

What an addition the words through Knight are.

- That leads to the fourth arena of deception, which is in relation to experience.

Now let us talk about us. We are deceived by imposing our experience, our feelings on top of the Bible. The scriptures may say something, but if it does not fit my experience, I must rewrite it or I must ignore it, so I impose upon it, my feelings.

I think this was probably Joshua’s problem. He was imposing his senses. It looked right; it tasted right; it smelled right; everything, to the senses, was correct. However, in reality, it was wrong; it was deceptive.

There are all kinds of testimonials of experiences. One of the most interesting that I came across in my research, is by a man named Gerald Jampolsky. This guy is supposedly a religious individual and is a repeat guest on Robert Schuller’s *Hour of Power* television program. Jampolsky tells of the time he met Swami Muktananda, an Eastern Guru. Let me quote his words concerning this experience. Take note of the decision Mr. Jampolsky makes.

The Swami touched me with feathers and I began to have the impression that our minds were joined. He touched me again on the head with his hand and after this, beautiful colors appeared all around me. It seemed as though I had stepped out of my body and was looking down on it. I saw colors whose depth and brilliance were beyond anything I had ever imagined. A beautiful beam of light came into the room and I decided at that moment, to stop evaluating what was happening and to be one with the experience; to join it completely. . . . For the next three months, my energy level was so heightened that I required very little sleep.

Did Mr. Jampolsky have an experience? You had better believe it. Did he see colors? You had better believe it. I would not deny for a moment that he had this experience. However, was it honoring to God, or did it give credibility to a Swami from an eastern land? I think the answer to that is easily determined.

If you suggest to someone in your contemporary culture at work that yoga or meditation opens an occult doorway, they will laugh in your face. Someone might say, “Now wait a second! I started that stuff and my blood pressure is lower than it has ever been.”

Can you deny that? No, you cannot. So that must mean it is right, right? Wrong! The Word of God tells us that our meditation is never focused inwardly, but onto the law. David said, in Psalm 119:97,

. . . I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Yet, it is difficult to talk to someone who has had this different experience.

The question, ladies and gentlemen, is what has the greatest authority? It is the Bible or the way we feel?

By the way, if there was ever a day to be aware, the church is faced with pragmatic theology like never before. In other words, if something works, it must be right. So, if something causes attendance to skyrocket, it is right. If something makes everyone, or at least the majority of people, feel good, then it is right. This is not just true in secular society, but in the church as well.

I read of an incident in one evangelical church, which embarrassed me for the church. I will not mention its name, but it is a very well known mega-church. Their Sunday night attendance was down, so they got together to try to figure out a way to boost the attendance. They came up with the idea of staging a wrestling match. They called in the Hulk Mania type of wrestlers and had them train the pastoral staff in how to do their kind of wrestling. The church built a stage on their platform and, one Sunday night, staged a wrestling match with pastoral staff men. Guess what happened to attendance? It skyrocketed. They probably had the best offering they had had on a Sunday night in months. Guess what happened to the credibility of the gospel? It plummeted.

Now we have been talking about everyone else, so let us bring it home to where we live. Do you and I allow our experiences, our feelings to determine how we live, or do we allow the Bible to determine how we live? Let me read a few passages and give a few ideas to you.

II Corinthians 6:14 is one of the most frequently broken New Testament commands, if we could call it that. It says,

Do not be bound together with unbelievers . . .

I would be wealthy if I had a nickel for every individual who said, “Oh, but listen, she’s such nice girl. By the way, I get her to come to church with me. If I date her long enough, maybe she’ll trust Jesus Christ.” Or, “I know that guy isn’t a believer, but he treats me better than any believer I’ve dated. It must be right.” Or, “I know that fellow is not a Christian, but if his business was teamed up with mine and we joined together, we would turn a profit like you have never seen.” Maybe you would.

I Timothy 3:7 states that an elder, a leader in the church,

. . . must have a good reputation with those outside the church . . .

Is it possible to have men who, within the church, have great influence, but outside the church walls are known for being schemers in their secular world? Absolutely.

You might say, “But, the church must be forgiving.”

It has nothing to do with forgiveness, ladies and gentlemen, but has everything to do with qualification. That, however, does not feel as good.

David challenges the godly with Psalm 101:3,

I will set no worthless thing before my eyes . . .

This translates in any culture, in any time period; this covers it all. Anything off-color, anything evil, I will not allow to confront my eyes.

My parents, unfortunately, found that verse when I was growing up. They wrote it on a piece of paper and taped it to the television set. That is going too far, thank you very much! I thought it was.

Let me ask a question of you. What do you watch on TV? Is it warm in here, or is it just me? Maybe we had better move on, okay?

The truth, men and women, is that we, in the evangelical church, fudge our way around as much scripture as it takes to live the way we want to live. So, the Bible does not thunder from the pulpits and it does not resonate in the hearts of believers throughout the week. Why? Because it is no longer the authority. Our lives and our experiences are.

My father returned from a missionary conference, where he had been speaking, and told me an interesting story of a missionary candidate. He was a young man who was raising support to go to the field. In a large, evangelical church, he was on the stage and it was almost time for him to deliver his Sunday evening sermon. Just before he got up, the senior pastor, who was sitting on the stage beside him, leaned over and whispered, “Look, don’t try to get up there and teach them anything, just get up there and talk.”

This young candidate was devastated. It happens more than you can imagine.

Two observations about deception

Let me give two observations about deception, before we go any further.

- Number one, it is possible to be sincere, obviously, but sincerely wrong.
- Number two, it is possible to be confident, but confident in the wrong thing.

J. I. Packer writes powerful words in one of his booklets entitled, *The Word of God*. Let me read them to you.

Certainty about the great issues of faith and conduct is lacking all along the line. The outside world views the church, views believers as staggering along from gimmick to gimmick, from stunt to stunt, not knowing at all where we are or which way we should be going. Preaching is hazy, hearts are muddled, hearts fret, doubts drain strength. Unlike those Christians who pioneered the Reformation, and the Puritan awakening, and the great missionary movement of the last century, we, today, lack certainty, and we lack certainty because we are carving this to pieces.

Now let us go back to Joshua chapter 9 and the mistakes that Joshua and the Israelite leaders made that led to the nation’s deception.

3. The third mistake is that Joshua failed to seek the counsel of God.

Look at Joshua 9:14-15.

So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the Lord. 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.

It all fit; it all made sense; there was undeniable physical evidence.

Now why did Joshua not go to God? I asked myself this question, in my study. In trying to figure out the answer, I did not find any commentators who addressed the issue. Let me suggest the reasons I think Joshua did not go to God.

The reason Joshua did not go to God for counsel was not because he was shoddy at the job. He asked the right questions; he interrogated these people; he observed their evidence. Joshua did everything he was supposed to do. He was even wary of deceit. He said, "Oh, maybe you just want a covenant with us. Maybe you live within our country."

Do you know the reason I think Joshua did not go to God? Because Joshua did not think he needed to. This was a small concern; it was small potatoes. This one was easy; simple – moldy bread, worn out sandals – it all fit.

How often in our lives, do we think that something is so insignificant that we do not need God's perspective, or His wisdom, or His counsel? Then, we walk into it and find ourselves trapped by a wrong decision.

One commentator writes,

Never, never, never trust your own judgement in anything. When common sense says that a course is right, lift your heart to God. When voices tell you that action is urgent; that something must be done immediately, refer it directly to the tribunal of heaven. If you are called on to act and you have not time to pray, do not act. Be brave enough to dare to stand and wait on God, because the scriptures say, in Psalm 25:3,

. . . none of those who wait for You will be ashamed . . .

There is a businessman in our church whose walk with God so encourages me. He told me, about a month ago, that his company had pegged him for the

next step up the rung of the corporate ladder. They were going to send him off for training for a particular field. It was an executive position with many people under him. This man had the audacity to tell his company to wait while he went to God. That is rare. He went to God, he and his wife, and spent a couple of weeks in prayer. God led them, through the study of His word and peace in their hearts, to turn the position down.

The company executives said, "You've got to be kidding! It doesn't make common sense."

However, it was God's choice.

The tragedy of this chapter of Joshua, these first few verses of chapter 9 that we have taken time to look at, is that it is implied that Joshua had God's counsel available and he simply did not go to God for it; he just did not ask God. So the Gibeonites, to put it bluntly, "ate his lunch". And even worse, the nation Israel was taken for a free ride by a people who despised Yahweh, initially.

The question then, men and women, is this – in the church of Jesus Christ, are we being taken for a ride? Is the latest gimmick or trend really honoring to God?

Are you involved in things that are supposedly sanctimonious, but are nothing but a drain on your relationship with God? Have you ever stopped and said, "God, do You want me involved in this particular thing?"

If there was ever a day when we need to envelop, in our lives, the sense of the standing request for God's wisdom, it is today. We need to live in such a way that our lives are characterized by not leaning on our own understanding, but in everything acknowledging Him (Proverbs 3:5b-6a).

Do you know what acknowledging Him means? It means, requesting God's advice; honoring Him; giving Him the right to choose.

The solution for gullible Christians is not greater shows of public piety, but personal, private prayer. God says, "My counsel is available to everyone who will stop, who will wait, and who will ask."

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/19/1991 by Stephen Davey.

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