



MANIPULATION AND MIRACLES

Joshua 9:1—10:28

A person of integrity is not immune to doing foolish things, but he will seek to do the right things and trust the Lord as he learns from his mistakes. This is the kind of person Joshua was, and God rewarded his integrity by acting on his behalf in amazing and unexpected ways.

Something unusual happens here in Joshua chapter 9. We come across a Canaanite city that refuses to join the other nations in fighting against Israel. Evidently, they've put on their thinking caps and come up with a plan to make peace with Israel. Look at verses 4-6:

They . . . acted with cunning and . . . took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, with . . . patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and



Gibeon (el-Jib)

crumbly. And they went to Joshua . . . and said to him . . . “We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us.”

Why would these Gibeonites go to so much trouble to deceive Israel? Well, it's because they knew of God's command to Israel concerning what to do with people who live a long way off. The Lord said back in Deuteronomy 20:10:

“When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you.”

Now that's very different from God's command concerning the wicked and unrepentant cities in Canaan. Look at what Deuteronomy 20:16-18 says about them:

“But in the cities of these peoples



that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction . . . that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods.”

Let me tell you, these defiant nations knew about these commands. So, the clever Gibeonites aren't really interested in following the Lord; they just want to make peace with Israel by pretending to live a long way away.

Does their plan work? Here's what verses 14-15 tell us concerning Joshua and the Israelite leaders:

[They] did not ask counsel from the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

Joshua takes a look at their dried-up bread and their worn-out sandals, and the evidence matches their story. The problem is that they rely on their own observation.

Why didn't Joshua go to God? It wasn't that he didn't care about obeying God. He certainly asked questions and examined the evidence.

I think Joshua failed to go to God because he didn't think he needed to. This was easy. He saw the moldy bread, worn-out sandals, and torn clothing—case closed. That's the same reason we often don't go to God: we don't think we need to. We think this decision is a simple one; we can figure it out on our own. This is a reminder for us to seek the Lord's wisdom every day for everything.

Now it only took about three days before Israel found out the Gibeonites did not live in a far-off country but in Canaan, about twenty miles away.

So, what did the people of Israel do? Well, the Bible says here in verse 18, “All the congregation murmured against the leaders.”

It sounds like a church business meeting, doesn't it? All the congregation is murmuring against the leaders. Some pastors think this must be the theme verse for their church. Well, Joshua can feel your pain.

Even though Joshua made a mistake, he is a man of character, and he won't allow the Israelite nation to retaliate against the Gibeonites. It was wrong to make the promise to begin with, but now it would be wrong to break that promise. Two wrongs never make something right.

So now the Israelites are angry at Joshua, and the Gibeonites have made him look foolish. This is when a leader often decides to quit or retire and go fishing or golfing. Not Joshua; he defends the Gibeonites and allows them to stay alive, and God ends up using these events to bring about something rather unexpected.

Notice in chapter 10, we learn that a coalition of Canaanite kings decides to destroy Gibeon because of their alliance with Israel. Now Joshua could have stayed out of it and let these Canaanites kill each other off; and frankly, it would have solved his problem.

But Joshua is a man of character, and he gathers his army to go and protect the Gibeonites in fulfillment of their covenant. God honors the Israelites' actions, and in verse 11 He aids them in battle, striking the enemy armies with large hailstones.

As the day wears on, the battle isn't finished, and Joshua is running out of daylight. So, God provides another supernatural intervention here in verse 13: “The sun stood still, and the moon stopped.” God stops the sun and the moon in their tracks, prolonging the day!

The critics love to dismiss this account by pointing out that God can't pause the solar system without creating massive, if not total, destruction of the earth. Others say this is poetic language, and you don't need to take it literally. Well, something literal did happen to give Joshua a longer day. Verse 14 says, “There has been no day like it before or since.”

I think I've read every possible explanation of this event—everything from passing comets or volcanic eruptions slowing the earth's rotation to God tilting



the earth to give longer daylight. The truth is, we're not told *how* God did it; we're just told He did it.

Listen, if God is able to create the laws of the universe, He is capable of superseding those laws. That's why a miracle is a miracle. Something outside the normal laws of nature occurs, whether it's the Jordan River parting, Jesus walking on the water, or a dead man returning to life and walking out of a tomb.

God reverses the normal laws He created; He supersedes them, momentarily altering the way things normally work. That's what you call a miracle, by the way, and that's why you can't explain it.

Listen, I can't explain how Jesus paid the penalty for my crimes on His cross. And I can't explain how He will one day give me a new body that will last forever. I don't understand how; I just know who promised it, and He keeps His promises.

By the way, two of the chief Canaanite gods just happened to be the sun and the moon. Through this miracle, God is sending a message that He's more powerful than they are.

Now let's go back to chapter 9 and verse 27:

Joshua made [the Gibeonites] cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place that he should choose."

Joshua assigned the Gibeonites to serve at the altar. You know what that means? It means they are going to be in constant contact with the worship of Yahweh.

And something amazing will happen. The Gibeonites will eventually follow the Lord.

Later on, the tabernacle will be set up in Gibeon (2 Chronicles 1:3). When Nehemiah returns centuries later to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, guess who volunteers to help him—the Gibeonites (Nehemiah 3, 7).

Beloved, you may be surrounded by unbelieving Gibeonites today. They know about the Lord, but they're not interested in following Him. You probably work with them. You might be married to one of them. Let me encourage you to live in such a way that you draw their attention to your worship of the true and living God—and you just leave the rest to Him.

How has not including God in important decisions in your life brought on hardships? What heart attitudes cause believers to think they can make decisions without asking God? What tactics of Satan against believers contribute to this failure of consistently asking God for wisdom?

In what ways does fully embracing the creation account in Genesis 1 make such events as prolonging a day not only plausible but expected? How is your faith affected knowing God can respond miraculously to any believer's crisis?

God blended His grace with Joshua's integrity to draw unbelievers to Himself. What spiritual lesson emerges from this observation that impacts your ministry to your yet to be saved friends and family? Who is your life might the LORD be wanting to draw through your integrity?

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