

Discerning the Truth - Joshua 9:1-27

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I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Have you ever been lied to? That's a no-brainer, isn't it? In fact, a better question might be: Have you ever had a day in your life when you weren't told even a single lie by another person or by yourself? The sad truth is, if all small and big lies were exposed, we would be terribly appalled by all the lies we've been told and believed in our lives, and by all the lies we ourselves have consciously and unconsciously told. And this is because telling both small and big lies to get what we want and protect ourselves is our default life approach flowing out of our sin nature and encouraged by the ruler of this world, the father of lies, the devil. It's the way of our old self and leaving it behind completely is a life-long process. If we live another day on this earth we can count on the fact that we will be lied to in some shape or form. And leaving behind all forms of lying within ourselves is something only the Spirit of God within us can bring about as we allow him to shine the light of Christ into all areas of our lives.

How do you feel when you find out someone has lied to you? What emotions come to the surface almost immediately? Anger. Frustration. A desire to punish. Loss of trust. Humiliation for having fallen for the lie. We could go on and on. And even though we've often been guilty of doing the same thing to others, when we find out it's been done to us we instantly want to lash out and punish and break off the relationship. We're embarrassed that we fell for the lie and angry that the other person willingly deceived us. And trust is seriously damaged.

Knowing that we're going to come face-to-face with lies from other people, from the devil and from ourselves every day, don't you think we need some help in discerning the truth from the lies? Well, today in Scripture, we're going to witness a massive lie that was told to Joshua and the Israelites and believed by them, and the damaging consequences they experienced as they failed to uncover the lie and took binding action on the basis of it. We're also going to discover how they could have uncovered the lie ahead of time and avoided the grave mistake they made.

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Joshua, where we'll be studying all of chapter 9 today. If you'll remember, the Israelites in the conquest of the Promised Land have so far dramatically defeated the cities of Jericho and Ai as they've trusted and obeyed the word of God and experienced his powerful victory. They've had one major hiccup along the way, having rushed forward to the first battle of Ai without consulting the Lord. As a result, the first battle of Ai ended in terrible defeat and the death of 36 men. But since then they've repented of and dealt with that sin and are back on track in full obedience to the Lord, consulting him at every step and following his direction even in the midst of active warfare. And in this fully connected following of the Lord, they've just experienced complete victory over the city of Ai and word is spreading fast throughout the land that God himself is fighting for the Israelites and has promised to give them the Land of Canaan and destroy all its inhabitants.

Additionally, the Israelites have just renewed their covenant with the one true God at mounts Ebal and Gerizim, the mountains of blessing and cursing. They've set up an altar and offered sacrifices to God, they've written out on stones all the terms of God's covenant with them, and Joshua has publicly read God's commandments out loud for all to hear; including the amazing blessings that would come from obeying God's commandments and the terrible cursings that would come from disregarding them and following after the false gods of the world. And this is where we pick up this morning in Joshua.

II. CHOOSING TO FIGHT (vs. 1-2)

Let's begin by reading verses 1 to 2 of Joshua chapter 9, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *Choosing to Fight*.

1 As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard of this, 2 they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.

Word was spreading and spreading fast throughout the whole land God had promised to give the Israelites. The description of the land and people groups in these verses encompasses all the places God had designated to be Israel's

Promised Land. And the kings who ruled these areas were becoming increasingly alarmed at the reports coming in from Jericho and Ai. It was time to either fight or surrender to the one true God who was leading the Israelites in their advance on the Land of Canaan. And what we see here is that the kings of these people groups made a clear choice to fight God rather than surrender. As soon as they heard about the Israelites victory over the city of Ai, they banded together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel and ultimately God himself.

III. CHOOSING TO SURRENDER (vs. 3-13)

But as we move on to verses 3 through 13, we discover that there was a notable exception to this united front against Israel. The inhabitants of one city, the city of Gibeon, decided to take another path...the path of surrender. Let's read verses 3 through 13, which I've labeled in your notes: *Choosing to Surrender*.

3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, 4 they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, 5 with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. 6 And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us." 7 But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?" 8 They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?" 9 They said to him, "From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God. For we have heard a 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 the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth. 11 So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us."' 12 Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and crumbly. 13 These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have

burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey."

Fresh off their powerful victories over Ai and Jericho and the renewal of their covenant with God, things couldn't have been looking better for the Joshua and the Israelites. And yet suddenly, when things seem to be going so well and they're right where they need to be with the Lord, the devil introduces a massive lie that he hopes will trip them up and lock them into disobedience to God's clear command to make no covenant with the people in the Promised Land, but instead to eradicate them completely from the land.

Have you ever had a similar experience in your own life? Things are going so well in your life and you're on the mountaintop with God and suddenly an unexpected and undiscerned lie sends you down a rabbit trail that ends on the cliff of a deep canyon. Be on your guard. Stay alert and awake and connected with God. The devil never rests in his efforts to get us off track from God's purposes.

Well, the city of Gibeon was located around 8 miles southwest of the city Ai, so the people of Gibeon would have been well acquainted with what had just happened to their neighbor city, Ai. For them Ai would have been like Cove to Union. So while the rest of the cities and kings in the land united to fight, the Gibeonites chose a cunning path of surrender to God and his people, hoping to at least escape with their lives. They'd seen unmistakable evidence of the one true God's power and rightly concluded that fighting against him was doomed to failure.

And interestingly, the city of Gibeon was not just a weak city with no means of defense. If we look ahead to Joshua chapter 10, Gibeon is described as "***a great city, like one of the royal cities... greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors***" (see Joshua 10:2). For a great city of warriors to conclude before battle that surrender was the only option shows us how deeply they were affected by the power of God in action at Ai and what they had heard about Jericho's recent defeat as its walls simply crumbled to the ground at the command of God.

Now the reason the Gibeonites decided to surrender deceptively is revealed to us later in verse 24 of chapter 9, and it was because they were privy to the information that God's command to the Israelites through Moses was to destroy

all the people in the land, leaving no survivors. God had decreed that the time for judgment and wrath had come for the great sin in the Land of Canaan. The time for repentance and God's mercy was effectively over for the people in the Promised Land and the Gibeonites had heard of this command from God and feared for their very lives. They concluded their only chance of survival was to trick the Israelites into making a covenant of peace with them as they pretended to be people from a faraway land not subject to God's decree of judgment.

Of course, knowing God's character as we do from Scripture, we know that until that final day of God's wrath and judgment in the last days, he always responds with mercy to true heart repentance and surrendered belief in him, as we saw with Rahab and her family. So we shouldn't conclude that the Gibeonites were correct to use lying and trickery to surrender to God. But nonetheless, in their ignorance of God and his ways they assumed lying was the only way to escape with their lives. Gathering dried and crumbly bread, tying worn-out sacks and wineskins on their donkeys, putting on worn-out clothes and patched sandals, the Gibeonites got fully into character to deceive and traveled to where Israel was now camping again at Gilgal, the place where God had so recently rolled away their reproach through circumcision. Arriving at the camp and approaching Joshua, the Gibeonites proclaimed that they had traveled from a distant country and wanted to make a covenant with the Israelites.

Now the Israelites were right on track as the conversation began. They started well. They remembered God's command that they were to make no covenant with the people of the land and were initially skeptical about the Gibeonites claim that they had traveled from a far country. They said, ***"Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?"*** The Gibeonites first dodged the question, simply replying, ***"We are your servants."*** But Joshua was also wisely skeptical and followed up with, ***"Who are you? And where do you come from?"*** In other words, we need some more info here and some proof that you really are who you say you are. So far so good on the part of Joshua and the Israelites.

But at this point the Gibeonites pulled out all the stops, telling the half-true, half-false story they had concocted, and producing evidence to back up their story. As is usually the case, lies are mixed in with truth to aid in the deception and trick people into believing them. What was true about what the Gibeonites said? Well

first, they truly had come because of the name of the Lord, the Israelites' God. They had seen him in action and fully believed in him and his great power. Secondly, they also really had heard a report about what the Lord had done in Egypt and to the kings Sihon and Og east of the Jordan River. And thirdly, it was true that they had decided as a people to travel with provisions to offer themselves to the Israelites as servants and ask them to make a covenant with them in exchange for their servitude. These were all true statements. However, mixed in with these truths were some very big lies backed up by fabricated evidence.

What were the untrue parts? Well, there was really just one big untruth that was then backed up with lots of false evidence, and that was the claim that they had come from a distant country. Disguised among lots of true statements was one massive lie. And to support that lie the Gibeonites produced dry, crumbly bread which they claimed was fresh out of the oven when they left home; wineskins which had burst, but had supposedly been brand new when they left their country; and worn-out clothes and sandals they claimed had been worn out during their long journey.

So what would Joshua and the Israelites do next? They had started out on the right track by remembering God's commands, being skeptical and asking questions, and asking for proof. But had they done enough and would they be able to discover the lie of the Gibeonites?

IV. NEGLECTING THE LORD'S COUNSEL (vs. 14-15)

Let's read verses 14 and 15 which give us the answer:

14 So the men [the Israelites] took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord. 15 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.

Having started out strong with a desire to follow God's commands and discern the truth, Joshua and the Israelites missed the most important thing they needed to do to uncover truth and stay on the right path, repeating the same mistake they

had made so very recently before that first painful battle of Ai: *They relied on their own wisdom and understanding and did not ask counsel from the Lord.*

How easy and natural it is for us to fall back into this approach to life, even when we know better. Though Joshua and the Israelites knew the Lord was there and available and ready to give them all the insight and direction they needed, they thought they could handle this one on their own and rushed into a hasty covenant that had been forbidden by God. Joshua made peace with the Gibeonites and let them live and the leaders of Israel swore by the name of the Lord their God to keep this covenant forever. By not seeking counsel from the Lord, Joshua and the Israelites were deceived by a massive lie and made a huge mistake that forever bound them in disobedience to a clear command God had previously given.

As we think of our own lives, aren't we also so incredibly prone to relying on our own strength and wisdom and flawed perception of reality? Isn't it so easy and natural for us to not take the time to seek the Lord's input and direction in the decisions we make...to think we've got it under control and can see through the lies without his help. The fact that this serious lapse in seeking the Lord's counsel took place so very soon after the same thing had just happened with terrible consequences at the first battle of Ai, reminds us of how easily we also can drift away from seeking the Lord and maintaining our close and constant connection with him.

But on the positive side, isn't it such a blessing and gift that through Christ you and I can access the Lord's counsel at any time day or night? In seeking his counsel and relying on our truth-guide, the Holy Spirit, we can find what we need to see through the lies of life and avoid making the tragic error Joshua and the Israelites made here. The question is: are we seeking the Lord's counsel and doing it continually?

V. BOUND TO DISOBEDIENCE BY UNADVISED ACTION (vs. 16-21)

Well, the truth soon came out for the Israelites. Let's read verses 16 through 21 which I've labeled, *Bound to Disobedience by Unadvised Action*:

16 At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with [the Gibeonites], they heard that they were their neighbors and that they lived

among them. 17 And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim. 18 But the people of Israel did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. 19 But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. 20 This we will do to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them." 21 And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them.

Well, it seems that soon after the covenant had been made, the Gibeonites excused themselves to begin the "long journey" home to their "distant country." A couple days went by for the Israelites and everything seemed good and normal. But at the end of the third day, some locals came to the Israelites and gave them the troubling truth that the people with whom they had just made an everlasting covenant of peace lived just a 2- or 3-day journey away to the west, right in the middle of the land God had promised to give the Israelites.

You can imagine the sinking feeling Joshua must have felt at this terrible news and the emotions of and anger and humiliation that must have coursed through his veins! In fact, all of Israel must have been up in arms because they wasted no time in breaking camp and traveling immediately to the city of Gibeon for a confrontation. On the third day of traveling they arrived at Gibeon ready for a showdown, but were prevented by their leaders from attacking the city because of the oath the leaders had sworn on the very name of the Lord their God. The angry rush to Gibeon was culminated with the disappointing realization that their hands were completely tied because of the poor decision of their leaders who had failed to consult the Lord. And as you might imagine, this caused some great grumbling against the leaders among the people.

But the leaders could do very little now. They were stuck with the hasty decision they had made without consulting the Lord. To have responded to the grumbling of the people by allowing them to attack and destroy Gibeon after swearing by the Lord to do no such thing, would have simply moved them from "the frying pan into the fire" of God's wrath. To please the people here instead of honoring the

oath they had made on the Lord's name would have subjected them to the certain wrath of God. It would have brought dishonor to the name of the Lord their God who always keeps his promises and abides by the covenants he's made. This oath sworn by the Lord's honor was so binding and serious in fact that it took priority over obeying the previous command God had given to destroy all the people in the land. The leaders' hands were tied and the only thing they could do now to the Gibeonites was make them their servants, which Joshua did by decreeing that they would forever be cutters of wood and drawers of water for the people of Israel.

What's the message here for us? Well, we need to never forget that leaders bear a huge responsibility and their choices and actions can have tremendous effects for good or evil on those they lead. Godly leaders cannot ever afford to neglect seeking the counsel of the Lord in the decisions they make. Additionally, swearing an oath by the Lord is an extremely serious thing and God will hear it and hold us accountable for breaking any promises we've made on the honor of his name. Swearing an oath by the Lord is completely and utterly binding and the Lord's very wrath is aroused when these oaths are broken. Like the Israelites we can end up binding ourselves to disobedience and its consequences when we hastily make promises on the Lord's honor without consulting him and making sure they're in step with his purposes. Better to diligently seek the counsel of the Lord before making any promises or big decisions and then to simply let our yes be yes and our no be no rather than ever swearing by the Lord.

VI. COMPLETE SURRENDER WHATEVER MAY COME (vs. 22-27)

This brings us to our final verses for today, verses 22 to 27, which I've labeled: *Complete Surrender Whatever May Come*:

22 Joshua summoned [the Gibeonites], and he said to them, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you dwell among us? 23 Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." 24 They answered Joshua, "Because it was told to your servants for a certainty 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 from before you—so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this

thing. 25 And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it." 26 So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. 27 But Joshua made them that day 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.

As the Israelites arrived at the city of Gibeon and found themselves powerless to attack the city, Joshua did the only thing that was now in his power to do. Calling the Gibeonites to meet with him, he told them their lie had been discovered and asked them why they had done it. And before they could answer, Joshua pronounced the non-negotiable curse they were now subject to for their deception: as servants of Israel they would be relegated to the job of cutting wood and drawing water for the house of God.

The Gibeonites then had a chance to answer the why question and give their response to the sentence Joshua had imposed on them. In their answer they reveal their certain belief in the one true God and his power and they offer themselves in complete surrender to God and his people. Did you notice what they said? ***"And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it."*** Surrender doesn't get more complete than that, does it? Wouldn't it be amazing if we all had that attitude of complete surrender to God and his purposes? If we said: *Lord, I'm in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to me, do it! I trust that you are good, that you know what's right, that you see through the lies, and I offer myself fully to you and your purposes whatever may come!* Imagine what would happen if we all surrendered ourselves fully to God in this way.

In considering the way the Gibeonites responded to God as opposed to the way the rest of the people in the land were responding to him, we're reminded that everyone in the world chooses to respond to the reality of the one true God in one of two ways: *fight or surrender*. Though the Gibeonites acted deceptively in their attempt to surrender, still they made a much better and wiser choice than those who resolved to take their chances fighting against God. The Gibeonites believed that God is real and would certainly accomplish what he had promised to do. They concluded they had no chance in fighting against him. And they came to him in complete surrender. And guess what? God was merciful and spared their

lives, even bringing a curse on the land in the future when King Saul broke the oath the Israelites had made to the Gibeonites and tried to destroy them. The Gibeonites still had to bear the consequences for the lying and trickery they had used in their surrender plan, but God mercifully spared their lives, allowed them to live among his people, be his servants and enjoy his protection.

VII. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

As we wrap up today, let's first remind ourselves of the central point of this passage of Scripture and that is this: *Failure to seek counsel from the Lord subjects God's people to deception and great errors in judgment that often result in very serious consequences affecting many people.* I don't think I have to convince any of you that lies are all around us in the world. We hear them from others and we even tell them to ourselves. Recognizing that reality should drive us to continual seeking of the Lord's counsel. There's a roaring lion called the devil prowling around trying to destroy us and one of his primary methods is deception and lies. He uses these continually. We should never assume that we have what it takes within ourselves to see through them all. We desperately need the Lord's light to shine and expose the lies we're telling ourselves and that are continually being whispered to us by the devil and other people he's deceived.

In your life, are you seeking the Lord's counsel throughout each day? Can you think of ways that you're doing it? Are you remaining in communication with God and asking him to show you the truth as you go about your day? Are you filling your mind with the one sure source of truth in the world: the Bible? Remember that directive we're given in Romans 12, verse 2:

...be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We renew and transform our minds through God's Word under the direction of our Truth-Guide, the Holy Spirit. And as we fill our minds with God's Word and believe its truths, we get better and better at discerning truth from lies and following God's will, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

And don't ever forget how incredibly easy and natural it is for us to rely on ourselves in everything and lose our connection with God. Slow down. Breathe.

Pray and consider carefully the decisions you're making and the actions you're taking. Make room in your life to hear from God. Ask him continually to show you the truth in situations you face. Do an honest assessment this week of what you're currently doing to seek the counsel of the Lord and what needs to change. And think about what it would look like to be a person fully surrendered to the Lord and continually seeking his counsel.

And if anyone is here today who hasn't yet surrendered to the one true God through Jesus Christ, and experienced his mercy, forgiveness and new life, I plead with you to make that decision today. How will you respond to the reality of the living God, your Creator and Sustainer who's giving you life and breath right now? Will you fight or will you surrender? Will you experience his judgment and wrath or will you experience his great mercy and love? God's path of surrender is so simple and clear. It starts with a simple acknowledgment that you've sinned against God and you want to turn away from it...that you can't save yourself, but need the salvation and righteousness only God can provide through Christ. And in the words of Romans chapter 10, verse 9, this is the simple way you can be saved and forgiven forever and come into healthy relationship with the one true God. Listen carefully:

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

It's that simple. Tell Jesus with your mouth that he is your Lord...that you're surrendering to him and his leadership in your life...and believe in your heart that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead. That's God's simple path to salvation and new life. Don't put it off any longer!

SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Read Joshua 9:1-27, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it.

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

Spend some time looking up references in Scripture to “counsel” (focus on Psalms, Proverbs and the Prophets) and “seek” and “seeking.” Write down any truths you discover. What are some of the ways we see people seeking the counsel of the Lord in Scripture? What instruction does Scripture give us about seeking the counsel of the Lord?

In your own life, what are the various ways you are currently seeking the counsel of the Lord? How often are you doing it? What are some of the barriers in your life to continually seeking the Lord's counsel?

The Gibeonites expressed surrender this way: "And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it." Why do you think we have difficulty in expressing this type of surrender to God? What are some of the lies we're believing that keep us from surrendering this way? How do you think your life and attitude would be different if you lived in this kind of full surrender to God and his purposes?