

## Joshua 9

Israel's failure to consult the Lord was a major factor in her defeat at Ai and the prayerlessness of her leaders was about to precipitate another crisis.

**When the surrounding kings heard about the battle history of the Israelites, what did they do (vv. 1-2)?** The military successes of Israel caused all the kings in Canaan to unite their forces and make war against Joshua and Israel.

**However, what did the people of Gibeon do (vv. 3-6)?** The inhabitants of the city of Gibeon and three other cities, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim (vv. 3, 17) decided that it was futile to oppose the invaders. They knew that the Israelites had been ordered to destroy all the heathen inhabitants of the land. But they also knew that no such orders had been issued concerning nations outside Canaan (Deuteronomy 20:10, 15).<sup>1</sup>

So they disguised themselves in tattered old garments and patched sandals. Also, they brought with them dry and moldy bread and torn wineskins. They told Joshua they had come ... from a very far country, and everything about them seemed to support the statement.<sup>2</sup>

**How did the Israelites react to the Hivite offer (v. 7)?** At first Joshua and his staff were hesitant and not altogether convinced. They said, "*But perhaps you live near us.*" It was well for them to be on their guard for things are not always what they seem to be. Evil men often try to take advantage of the righteous.<sup>3</sup>

**NOTE:** Hivites were the larger Canaanite group including the four allied towns (v. 17). The Gibeonites were a specific Hivite community centered in Gibeon. All Gibeonites were Hivites but not all Hivites were Gibeonites.

**How did the Hivites answer Joshua (v. 8)?** "*We are your servants.*"

**What did Joshua ask them (v. 8)?** "*Who are you and where do you come from.*"

**What was their response (vv. 9-13)?** They insisted that they came from a great distance to show respect to the powerful God of the Israelites, to be allowed to live at peace as Israel's servants. Word had reached them of what God had done for the Israelites in Egypt (probably the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea) and of God's victories over Sihon and Og (Numbers 21:21-25; Deuteronomy 2:26-3:11).

Interestingly, however, they made no mention of Israel's recent victories over Jericho and Ai because if they had come from a far country they would not have heard of these recent battles.

The Gibeonites deceived the Israelites with their humble spirit, as well as with their credentials of dry and crumbled food, their split open wineskins, and their worn out clothing. They pretended to fear Yahweh, too, the highest motive for allying with Israel, but their main objective was to save their own lives.<sup>4</sup>

**What major mistake did the men of Israel make (v. 14)?** The leaders did not seek direction from God. Did Joshua think the evidence to be so beyond question that they needed no advice from Yahweh? Did he think the matter too routine or unimportant to "bother" God with it? Whatever the cause it was a mistake to trust their own common sense judgment and make their own plans. This holds true for believers in all ages (James 4:13-15).<sup>5</sup>

**What was the end result of their negotiating (v. 15)?** The leaders made a treaty of peace with the Gibeonites to let them live and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.

The writer clearly identified the reason that the Gibeonites were successful in deceiving Israel: the Israelites "did not ask for the counsel of the LORD" (v. 14; Numbers 27:21; cf. James 4:2). Though they had learned that obedience was necessary for victory, at Jericho and Ai, they had not yet learned that they needed divine guidance for every decision that they made (cf. John 15:5).<sup>6</sup>

The Israelites had failed at Ai because they had confidence in their own strength. They failed here because they had confidence in their own wisdom.<sup>7</sup>

**What did the Israelites discover three days later (v. 16)?** Israel learned that they had been “taken” because the Gibeonites lived only about 25 miles from Gilgal, in Canaan proper and not in some far country. An exploratory force confirmed the fraud by discovering the nearby location of Gibeon and its three dependent cities.<sup>8</sup>

When the scheme was exposed, there was agitation among the Jews to kill the tricksters. But the rulers decided to honor the treaty by sparing the Gibeonites. However, they would henceforth serve the congregation as woodcutters and water carriers in connection with the service of the altar of the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

**How did the Israelites react when they found out that they had been duped (v. 17)?** They went to the Hivite cities.

**What did the Israelites do when they arrived at their cities (v. 17)?** They did not attack them because they had sworn an oath to them.

**How did the whole assembly react (v. 18)?** How provoked the Israelites were when they discovered they had been duped! The people apparently wanted to disregard the treaty and destroy the Gibeonites (v. 26).

**How did the leaders respond (v. 19)?** But Joshua and his staff said that the enemies’ deception did not nullify the treaty. The agreement was sacred because it had been ratified by an oath in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel (cf. v. 15). To break it would bring down the wrath of God on Israel, a tragedy that later came to pass during David’s reign because Saul disregarded this oath (cf. 2 Samuel 21:1–6).<sup>10</sup>

**What was the solution they came up with (vv. 20-21)?** Joshua and the princes were men of integrity, men who stood by their word. Though humiliated by what had transpired they did not want to bring disgrace on God and His people by breaking a sacred treaty. They were to be relegated to a subservient life serving as woodcutters and water carriers.

**How did Joshua confront the deception of the Gibeonites (vv. 22-23)?** Though Israel would not go back on their pledge the deceivers must be punished. Joshua therefore addressed the Gibeonites, rebuking them for their dishonesty, and announced that they were cursed to perpetual slavery. This slavery would take the form of their being woodcutters and water carriers for the Israelites. In order to keep the Gibeonites’ idolatry from defiling the religion of Israel, their work would be carried out in connection with the tabernacle where they would be exposed to the worship of the one true God.<sup>11</sup>

**How did the Gibeonites respond (vv. 24-25)?** With an attitude of submission. Grateful to be alive.

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<sup>1</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 247.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua” in *the Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 348.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Joshua*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua” in *the Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 349.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Joshua*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 87.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>8</sup> Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua” in *the Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 349.

<sup>9</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 247.

<sup>10</sup> Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua” in *the Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 349.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.