

The Peril of Deception

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Joshua 9.1 – 27

Israel entering Canaan is a picture of a Christian embarking on the journey of living victoriously as a follower of Jesus Christ. It portrays setting aside the old man, or old self, and putting on the new self as described in Ephesians 4.22-24. Thus, we find within Israel's journey, principles to guide us in appropriating the riches available to us and for leading God-honoring lives. Victorious Christian living generally is comprised of highs and lows, occasions when we make sound decisions and it is clear we *no longer walk as the Gentiles do* (Eph 4.17), but unfortunately, there are also those times when we stumble. It is of course the agenda of satan and those who serve him to derail us from pleasing the Lord. One event which provides us with a good deal of insight into the strategy our enemy employs in his destructive pursuit is found in Joshua 9.

The events described in Joshua 9 took place after the people of God crossed the River Jordan where God miraculously stopped the water and the people crossed over into the Promised Land on dry ground. Their campaign to claim the land God had promised to Abraham hundreds of years earlier began with the impregnable city of Jericho where God miraculously intervened in its destruction. That was followed by their initial defeat at Ai, but after Israel addressed the sin of Achan, they easily conquered Ai. The arrival of Israel and their victories did not escape the notice of the surrounding cities and their kings. Their response is described in **Joshua 9:1–2** (ESV) ¹As 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, ²they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.

Rather than embrace the God of Israel as Rahab had, they chose instead to fight. The action of the kings, which is detailed more fully in chapter 10, portrays one of satan's strategies, a very visible and aggressive assault on the children of God. We are reminded in **1 Peter 5:8** (ESV) ⁸Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." There are times when satan and his emissaries launch an attack resembling that of an attacking lion. However, on other occasions satan is much more subtle and veiled, as pictured in the action of the Gibeonites who also heard about Joshua and his success. For the Gibeonites it was the skillful use of deception and cunning that proved effective. It is deception that lies at the core of many of the temptations we face in our pursuit to lead God-honoring lives, hence it is important to give attention to it.

The Strategy of Deception

Very simply, deception is getting someone to believe something that isn't true. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines deception as, "*the act of causing someone to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid.*" Generally, there is a goal in deception; the deceiver wants the deceived person to do something they would not do if they weren't deceived. That certainly was the case with the Gibeonites.

Remember, people who are deceived don't realize they are deceived; they think they are right. They are like people who insist they know the directions to a destination even though they are headed in the wrong direction. The Gibeonites, also known as Hivites, lived only about 25 miles from Joshua's camp at Gilgal, but they wanted Joshua to believe they were from a distant land. They were astute enough to realize, unlike the kings who formed a coalition to fight against Israel, that fighting against Israel was a battle they could not win because the God of Israel was more powerful than their gods. Not only would they not succeed in war against Israel, but even if they did nothing, they knew their fate would be no different from the inhabitants of Jericho or Ai who were annihilated (Jos 9.3). However, somehow they were aware that while Israel was instructed by God to not make treaties with people living in Canaan, Israel was permitted to make treaties with people who lived outside the land promised to Abraham (Exodus 34.11-16, Deuteronomy 20.10-18). Therefore, to avert destruction the Gibeonites came up with a plan to deceive Joshua and his leaders into believing they were from a distant land and then make a treaty with them.

Joshua 9:4–5 (ESV) ⁴they 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, ⁵with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly.

Having completed their preparations and rehearsed their story, the Gibeonites set out to meet Joshua.

Joshua 9:6–13 (ESV) ⁶And 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." ⁷But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?" ⁸They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?" ⁹They 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, ¹⁰and 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. ¹¹So 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." ' ¹²Here 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. ¹³These 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."

The Gibeonites' deception worked.

Joshua 9:15 (ESV) 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.

The Gibeonites successfully misled Joshua and succeeded in getting him to make a forbidden treaty with them which averted their complete destruction. The action of the Gibeonites gives us insight into the use of deception by satan and those who serve him.

The first example of deception in the Bible is the serpent, or satan, confronting Eve in the Garden of Eden. He began by phrasing his question in a manner that implied God was selfishly holding something back from Eve and distorted what God told Adam and Eve. “He [satan] said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden”?’” (Genesis 3:1 ESV). His goal was to undermine God’s integrity and erode Eve’s trust in God. He wanted Eve to believe that he, satan, was the one who could be trusted, and he would not place the unwarranted restrictions on her that God had. He successfully deceived Eve into believing his lie, but rather than Adam and Eve benefiting by believing satan, just the reverse happened.

The strategy of deception continues to be used with great effectiveness by satan and his ambassadors of evil against Christians. Central, is persuading people who have been saved by grace through Jesus Christ, to doubt God and His trustworthiness. To get people to question whether God really has their best interests at heart. Despite the demonstration of God’s love when Jesus Christ left the glories of heaven to come to earth to provide salvation for His children, satan wants people to doubt God’s love and care for them. He especially targets people who love the Lord and who are experiencing adversity and disappointment. It should be noted though, that it is satan who is the ultimate cause of all the hardship and adversity inflicted on people. However, his goal is to deceive people and have them blame God and doubt God’s love and concern for them.

The first ambition of satan and the realm of darkness is to keep people from believing the Gospel and trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. Failing that, he wants people to lead impoverished and defeated lives as Christians, lives filled with compromise and where obedience to the Lord is optional. He doesn’t want people to experience the power of God at work in them as they intentionally seek to please the Lord in the enabling strength of the Holy Spirit.

Remember who satan is. Paul in warning people about false apostles pointed out satan’s deceptive nature. “¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15, ESV).

It is obvious that satan employs others in his agenda of deception, sometimes he recruits those within religious circles to deceive and mislead the people of God. The goal of satan is to receive the glory God alone deserves. Hence, he tries to mimic God and to deceive people into believing him and following him.

Defending Against Deception

The first step to averting deception is the one Joshua and his men failed to do – they didn’t ask God. It is the same failure they made only a short time earlier which resulted in their defeat at Ai – they didn’t ask God. “So the men [Joshua and his leaders] took some of their [the Gibeonites] provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord.” (Joshua 9:14, ESV). Fundamental to a victorious walk with the Lord is the centrality of Jesus Christ in our lives. It is essential to keep our eyes focused on Him so we don’t fall prey to deception. Consider the direction we receive from the author of the Book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 12:1–2 (ESV) ¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Our relationship with the Lord needs to be woven into every aspect of our lives so that it shapes how we think and guides our priorities, passions, and pursuits. We are surrounded by the unmistakable evidence of God’s existence; we live in a universe created and sustained by God. Despite the incomprehensible vastness and complexity of it, He knows each of us and is interested in us. He created us in His image and “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10 ESV). He has mapped out a plan for us, so it only makes sense our approach to all we do should be done in the context of our relationship with Him. The admonition, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV) makes it clear that we should seek to align all we think, say, and do with God and His will for us.

Sometimes, just like Joshua, in our haste and independence we hurry ahead, oblivious of becoming a victim of deception. To avoid that, we must bath our lives in prayer as we navigate along in a world that is increasingly in conflict with a Christian worldview and Christian values. Sometimes it is very easy to discern how to not walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds and who are darkened in their understanding (Eph 4.17-18), but other times it is a bit hazy. Therefore, we need to genuinely place our thoughts and actions before the Lord asking Him to alert us to error or deception.

Proverbs 3:5–7 (ESV) ⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

We desperately need wisdom and God offers it to us. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5 ESV). Pray as David did, “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.” (Psalm 86:11 ESV). The primary means God uses to renew our minds with what He believes is through His word – the Bible. Make it a practice to pass your plans, including those that seem routine, through the grid of His Word. Reading the Bible and praying go hand in hand. Sometimes when we pray, God prompts us through His indwelling Spirit to a particular verse we have stored in our hearts or an event detailed in the Bible that illustrates a truth pertinent to us. It is amazing when reading the Scriptures, including portions of Scripture that may appear at the outset to be less applicable, how often a verse resonates with our heart and provides direction or insight. Remember, God will never lead or direct us in a manner that conflicts with what He has said in His Word.

Health experts tell us what we should eat, or not eat to avert health risks. They also empathize the importance of a healthy lifestyle, things like exercising and proper

amounts of sleep. A wise person does not wait until they face health issues that could have been prevented before implementing healthy habits. The wise and discerning person is proactive and makes healthy choices to minimize the likelihood of experiencing those health issues altogether. So it is for believers who seek to minimize the likelihood of being deceived. We too must be proactive and saturate ourselves with God's word as described by the Psalmist, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11 ESV). Mounting a successful campaign against deception begins with storing God's word in our hearts and minds, thereby equipping us to more easily recognize views and opinions that conflict with what God says. We do that in the context of prayer where we ask God to illuminate His truth for us and guide us so we might align our lives with His Word.

Another very important defense against deception is to surround ourselves with Godly people who demonstrate an abiding relationship with the Lord and who are students of God's Word. Generally, it is important to include discerning people who are familiar with us and our circumstances. Jesus Christ in His infinite wisdom created the very environment for that to take place – His Church. Even a cursory reading of the New Testament makes it clear that God's template for His followers is to live their lives among the Community of Saints (the Church) and before the watching world. The interdependent relationship of believers was critically important in the first century as they lived and worked in a world which was generally hostile to their relationship with Jesus Christ. The New Testament model is one of community and accountability to one another.

The relationship to fellow believers is especially important in withstanding deception. Satan and those who serve him know that Christians become much more susceptible to deception and defeat when isolated from other believers. Isolated believers are removed from the encouragement, positive influence, support, and protection of fellow believers. Further, they are removed from those who may observe areas of deception and error and who would provide helpful input and correction. Our relationship with the family of God provides an environment for others to observe our well-being and to provide a measure of accountability. It is in the context of the Church where we develop the maturity and experience the essential support to stand steadfast in the face of deception.

It is for all those reasons that suspending our in-person services for the third time is of concern. It is an aberration; it is out of synch with our needs. We know it is vitally important to meet with others to turn our collective focus on God and worship Him, to study His Word, and to see and interact with one another for our collective support and care. In the meantime, may we avail ourselves of opportunities to individually worship God, study His Word, and pursue opportunities to interact with one another and encourage them.

Let me add one other step to minimize falling to deception – it is thanksgiving. Three times in the following passage from Colossians we are told to be thankful.

Colossians 3:15–17 (ESV) ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. **And be thankful.** ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **with thankfulness in your**

hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father** through him.

Reflect on God's provision to us; many things we may take for granted and give little or no notice to. Something as obvious as giving us the air we breathe and the capacity to breathe it. Giving thanks to God, first turns our attention to Him, and second, reminds us of the multitudinous places we are recipients of His gracious and unmerited provisions to us. As we think on those things, we are less prone to being deceived because we will view our lives much more from a God-perspective than an earth-bound one.

Consequences of Deception

The Gibeonites succeeded in getting Joshua to make a covenant with them. Because Joshua and the people of Israel had made an oath to them, integrity did not give them the option of ignoring their covenant even though making it was against God's instructions to them. This is an example where disobedience often produces lasting consequences. Even though God forgives people for their disobedience that does not necessarily erase or nullify the results of their disobedience. Israel quickly learned they had been deceived and the Gibeonites were neighbors of theirs (Jos 3.16). Even though the people complained about their leaders' impulsive decision, the results were unchangeable. Joshua could only impose a sentence of servitude upon the Gibeonites. They were consigned to be cutters of wood and drawers of water, a role they fulfilled throughout the Biblical record.

Conclusion

Living victoriously is a journey comprised of exemplary commitment to the Lord interspersed with times of recovery from missteps along the way. It begins with a relationship with the Lord through His Son Jesus Christ and continues with an ongoing intentional focus on Him and His Word for direction and enablement.

May the following song minister to you:

I Will Wait for You (Psalm 130) - Keith & Kristyn Getty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJUqY_6tqo&ab_channel=KeithandKristynGetty