

Satan, The Gibeonites and Us

Joshua 9:1-27

In 1941, star halfback Johnny Chung from Hawaii was leading his college football team to a storybook season. Plainfield Teachers College of New Jersey won its first four games by scores of 21-12, 20-0, 27-0, and 35-0. Papers in New York and Philadelphia reported that Chung had scored 57 of his team's 98 points in those four games, with one report claiming that Chung averaged a gain of 9.3 yards every time he touched the football. Newspapers across the country picked up the story and very enthusiastically followed the stories of the success of this little college.

Then, suddenly, in mid-November, after winning seven games, Plainfield suddenly stopped playing. A press release issued by their coach announced that the team had disbanded, due to many of the players failing mid-term examinations.

But things are not always what they seem. The actual truth was that the whole story was a hoax. One sportswriter noticed a discrepancy in scores which had been reported, and decided to go to New Jersey to watch the team play. When he arrived in Plainfield, he discovered there was no Plainfield Teachers College, and there was no football team. In fact, none of the school's reported opponents in each of their games existed, either. The whole thing was dreamed up by a stockbroker on Wall Street named Morris Newburger, who at one point in the fictitious season, even named himself as the quarterback!

When the story finally came out, radio stations and newspapers across the country realized that they had been deceived.

Are you being deceived?

I'm not talking about a harmless football prank. Have you gradually been lulled into a mind-set and view of life that has basically surrendered your attitudes and lifestyle over to the forces of darkness?

By the time we get to the ninth chapter of Joshua, the Israelites have defeated both the fortified city of Jericho, and the much smaller town of Ai. They have penetrated like a wedge into the land of Canaan. They've also had a recommitment time as they worshiped on the twin mountainsides of Ebal and Gerizim. But the work was not over. In fact, there would be many, many battles ahead of them.

The main part of Joshua 9 deals with a deception of the Israelites by a group of people called the Gibeonites. It's sort of ironic, because in chapter 8, the Israelites had deceived the inhabitants of Ai into chasing them away from the city! It's a part of military strategy that is still in use to this day.

In Joshua 9:3 we read that they heard what had happened to Jericho and Ai, and realized that they could not win in a battle against Israel. They had heard somehow that God had told the Israelites not to make treaties with any of the Canaanites living in the land, so they devised a scheme to trick Joshua and the Hebrews into thinking they lived far away. Using worn-out sacks, dried and cracked wineskins, dry and moldy bread, and worn-out and patched clothes and sandals, they gave the appearance that they had come a great distance in order to seek peace with the Israelites.

Joshua and the elders of Israel bought their story, but three days later discovered that they had been deceived. When they discovered the deception, they choose to honor the covenant of peace they had made. But Joshua told the Gibeonites in verse 23, *"You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."*

In this story, we can see an obvious parallel between the way the Gibeonites deceived Joshua and the Israelites, and the way Satan works to deceive us in our day. Let's don't overlook it or downplay it. But to see it we first need to identify with the Israelites a little better. Let's understand that we have a great deal in common with them. Yes, they lived a long time ago in another culture. Yes, they spoke a different language. But they were attempting to follow the same God we do. Their faith, even though before Christ came, was essentially the same as ours. They, too, were reaching out for the best that God had to offer them, and they, too, were opposed.

We see this very clearly in vv. 1-2, where the kings of the area banded together to resist the invasion of the Israelites. As you would expect, all this success has created some concern among the kings in the surrounding territory. Some of them were from along the sea coast, some from the mountains, and some from down in the valleys. But what we see in verses one and two of chapter nine are all the kings in the area getting together to unite in war against Joshua and Israel. The victories of the Israelites resulted in opposition from the people who lived in Canaan, as we might expect.

But the same thing happens in our lives today as believers in Christ—not everyone is going to be happy about your commitment and faithfulness to Jesus. Just count on it and don't let it catch you by surprise. They will react in different ways—some will just be indifferent and not want to have anything to do with you anymore; on the other extreme some will be openly antagonistic, like these kings were.

But we need to look at the bigger picture. It was more than just a few kings who were trying to protect their territories. I think it will help us to see this as an attempt by Satan to prevent God's people from entering the land He had promised them. God's entire plan could have been delayed had Satan succeeded in keeping them out.

In the same way, God has plans for you and blessings in store for you that are still to come. You and I have the same force opposing us as did the Israelites. If God wants it for us, Satan will oppose it. Now Satan is not God, and he doesn't know everything. But he does know that God's plans for us are for good. Satan knows that God's plans for us are to give us a hope and a future, and anything he can do to disrupt, destroy or prevent that hope and future, that's what he's going to do. He'll certainly do it your own life, but he will do it in your family, your job, your school and your church.

So understanding that, let us also understand that God is actively involved in your life and mine to bring us to a level of maturity He intends for us in Christ. It is what He wants for us, but not everyone in our circle of influence will be happy about it. In fact, the one who will be most unhappy, even furious, will be Satan himself. And he goes to great trouble to lead us astray.

Though we don't see Satan mentioned at all here, this passage provides us with a lesson on how he works. We need to look carefully and take this to heart. The Bible tells us that the evil one is the prince of this world, the ruler of the kingdom of darkness, and that he blinds the minds of unbelievers. He slanders the saints, inflicts disease, opposes the righteous, and tempts us to disobedience. Jesus Himself told us *“he was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies”* (John 8:44). Peter told us in his first letter that Satan *“prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

Now let me ask you this: when did he begin all that? When did the evil one begin to lie to us and work to deceive us? After Jesus was born? No. We can look at the story of David and Bathsheba, among many other places, and know that Satan was

behind that temptation as well as the scheme to cover it up. In fact, as you know, we can trace Satan's presence and influence all the way back to the Garden of Eden, which is a very good example of what we just said about God's plan. God's plan was for Adam and Eve, and their descendants, to live in that beautiful paradise in unhindered fellowship with each other and with Him.

But because that was what God wanted, Satan worked very hard to destroy it. Look at how he was working here in Joshua 9, and let us draw present-day conclusions:

1 The evil one works to deceive us with great detail, vv. 3-5.

The men of Gibeon developed a clever ruse. They loaded up their donkeys with "*worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended.*" They also wore old and patched sandals on their feet and old clothes on their bodies. Even their food supply was "*dry and moldy.*" Why go to all that trouble and detail?

God had instructed the Israelites that when they came into the Promised Land, they should not make a treaty with any of the nations that lived there. We're not told how the Gibeonites knew that, but they did. Their deception was designed to make the Israelites think that they had come a great distance to make peace with them, rather than from just a few days away.

An amazing example of deceit can be found in a very famous historical figure. He used Christian terms and words in his speeches and writings. He talked about the blessing of the Almighty and the Christian confessions which would become the pillars of a new government he was about to set up. When interviewed by Christian publications, he spoke with a great deal of piety. While holding his tattered Bible he even declared that his strength for his great work came from the Scriptures. People welcomed him as a man sent from God. His name was Adolf Hitler, and he was a master of deceit.

Satan is also a master of deceit, and will go to great trouble, working out the smallest details, if he thinks he can deceive you and me from doing what God wants us to do. He will disguise himself in such a way that we are completely fooled, unless we keep our hearts pure and our ears tuned to the voice of God.

2 The evil one uses flattery, vv. 8-9.

The men of Israel are immediately suspicious, as well they should have been. So they ask, "*Perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a*

treaty with you?” Their reply was *“We are your servants.”* Flattery. Joshua still wanted more information, so he said, *“Who are you and where do you come from?”* Look at their smooth answer: *“Your servants [They repeat the flattery, in case it didn’t take the first time!] have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God.”* More flattery. They told them just what the Israelites wanted to hear. They continued: *“For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt.”* More flattery!

Our English word “flatter” comes from a French word which means “To stroke or caress with the flat of the hand.” The actual word “flattery” doesn’t appear here in our passage, but the Hebrew word for “flatter” means “to make smooth or slippery.” Even today we may describe someone as being “smooth,” or being a “smooth talker.”

Flattery is not always what it seems, is it? Misty Rude once was a student teacher for eighth-grade math for three months. She wrote: “When the term was up, my supervising teacher and all 150 students surprised me with a gift and an emotional going-away party. I was shocked when a boy who had been one of my biggest disciplinary problems sheepishly planted a kiss on my cheek. I must have made a difference after all, I thought proudly.

“My reverie was broken when he turned to a group of snickering boys. “All right,” he demanded, “where’s my dollar?” (*Reader’s Digest*, January 1994).

Don’t let Satan flatter you! He’ll be more than happy to plant a kiss on your cheek, but you’ll have to pay up one day, and it will cost you much more than a dollar.

3 The evil one uses partial truth, vv. 8-10.

Notice that when Joshua asked in verse eight, *“Who are you and where do you come from?”* they never really answered him. Did you notice that? They were real vague in their reply: *“Your servants have come from a very distant country.”* “A distant country” but they never named it. They gave just enough information to perhaps throw Joshua off track in the conversation, and avoid the real answer. In fact, in verse 22, after their ruse has been discovered, Joshua asked them, *“Why did you deceive us?”* The word for “deceive” means “to throw down, or trip up.” He was asking them “Why did you throw us off?”

The phrase “very distant country” in verse nine basically means a country far, far away. The same word is used in Genesis to describe the amount of water that covered the earth during the Flood, which was a lot—a lot of water, a lot of

distance! What they were saying to Joshua was, “Oh, we’re from so far away that you’ve never heard of it. You wouldn’t even be familiar with our country.” They essentially just blew him off.

But pay attention also to what they *didn’t* say. “*We have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtoroth.*”

Do you notice what they *don’t* say? They don’t mention Jericho *or* Ai. Why was that important? Well, if they were truly from a distant country as they claimed, they wouldn’t know about Jericho or Ai, would they? For that matter, how would they even know the Israelites had crossed the Jordan, or even where they were? So they pretended to have limited information.

Isn’t that what Satan does? He gives partial truth to tempt us and lead us astray. He reminds us of how good it would feel, how nice it would taste, how much we deserve it. But he never, never, never tells us the whole story. He never tells us of the pain our sin will cause, of how others could be hurt, of how our witness for Christ will suffer. He never tells us how God’s plan for us will be hindered, delayed or even destroyed by our following the deception. He convinces us of the pleasure but never mentions the pain. He’ll talk about the gratification of desires, but never mentions the emptiness of disobedience. He’ll convince us of the delights of sin, but will somehow never tell us about the darkness of soul which descends on us when we have sinned.

He attempted to do the same things with Christ in His temptation in the wilderness, and he does the same to us today. As he did with Christ, Satan will use Scripture to twist and deceive. Partial truth is many times used to tell the biggest lies.

4 Fourth, the evil one lies to us, vv. 11-13

Look at the story the Gibeonites told Joshua and the elders. First, in verse eleven, they indicated that their offer of peace came from the leaders of their country. In verse twelve, they said that their bread was warm when they set out, but now it was dry and moldy. In verse thirteen they lied about their wineskins, saying they were new when they left home, but now they were cracked and dried up. Even their clothes and sandals were worn and patched after such a long journey!

Lies! It was all lies—a trick, a ruse, a deception, a scheme—to make the Israelites think they had come from a very distant country. The Israelites had not even been in Canaan as long as the Gibeonites claimed to have been traveling!

The evil one will whisper to us that we are right and everyone else is wrong. He will make us think that we have been deprived, and therefore we deserve whatever the sin is he's tempting us to commit. No one will ever know. Just this one time. You deserve it. It won't matter.

From the time Satan deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden, all through the ages up until two minutes ago when he helped you rationalize a sinful thought, he has been out to destroy mankind and our relationship with God.

The lies Satan tells me will be totally different from the lies he tells you. He isn't all knowing, but through a process of trial and error, he has learned what works with me versus what works with you. Take some time to uncover the lies that Satan has been whispering to you, and take a firm stand on the Word of God in opposition.

I have known people who promised one thing and did another so often that hardly anyone around them believed them anymore. One particular person was so consistent in his inconsistency in this regard that I would say to myself, "If it comes out of his mouth, it probably isn't true." As we follow Christ with devotion and wholeheartedness, not everyone will be happy about it. Some may even openly oppose us. But we need to know that our biggest opponent will be Satan. And if it comes out of his mouth, it probably isn't true—or at least not the entire truth.

He will work to deceive us with great detail. He will use flattery. He will use partial truth, and he will outright lie to us. Be self-controlled and stay alert, as Peter reminded us in his first letter. And remember that Satan's ultimate goal is to keep you from the fullness of your life in Christ.

In late September 1864 Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest was leading his troops north from Decatur, Alabama, toward Nashville. But to make it to Nashville, Forrest would have to defeat the Union army at Athens, Alabama. When the Union commander, Colonel Wallace Campbell, refused to surrender, Forrest asked for a personal meeting, and took Campbell on an inspection of his troops. But each time they left a detachment, the Confederate soldiers simply packed up and moved to another position, artillery and all. Forrest and Campbell would then

arrive at the new encampment and continue to tally up the impressive number of Confederate soldiers and weaponry. By the time they returned to the fort, Campbell was convinced he couldn't win and surrendered unconditionally! (*Today in the Word*, June 27, 1993).

When Satan takes you on a tour of his troops, remember that "*Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.*" And refuse to give in to the schemes and wiles of the evil one.

The best way to make sure that happens is to completely, totally and absolutely surrender yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Will you do that today?