

Before Signing on the Dotted Line, Consult with God Joshua 9-10

As physics professor at Adelaide University in Australia, Sir Kerr Grant used to illustrate the time of descent of a free- falling body by allowing a heavy ball suspended from the lecture-theater roof trusses to fall some 30 feet and be caught in a sand bucket.

Each year, the bucket was lined up meticulously to catch the ball -- and each year students secretly moved the bucket to one side, so that the ball crashed thunderously to the floor.

Tiring of this rather stale joke, the professor traced a chalk line around the bucket. The students moved the bucket as usual, traced a chalk mark around the new position, rubbed it out and replaced the bucket in its original spot. "Aha!" the professor explained, seeing the faint outline of the erased chalk mark. He moved the bucket over it and released the ball -- which thundered to the floor as usual.

Reader's Digest, Contributed by D.G. Dewar.

How much are we like that professor? We examine the things that are going on around us. Based upon what we can see, we think that we know exactly what to do next. We think we can handle the matter on our own without help. We act, only to discover that the way things appeared to be is not the way they are at all. We experience frustration, regret, embarrassment and pain as we watch our lives come "crashing to the floor" as the consequence of our decision to handle things on our own instead of looking to God in prayer and trusting Him to lead us.

Looks can be deceiving. What we see is not always what we get. Our ability to make the right decision about our next step in life is much more inadequate than we would like to admit. We don't know the beginning from the end. We aren't able to see all things both physical and spiritual all the time and all at once. We aren't in control of what is going on around us. We are so easily deceived.

God, however, is not limited in any of these ways! He knows the beginning from the end and beyond as He always was, is, and will be. He is able to see all things both physical and spiritual all the time and all at once. He is in control of all that is going on in all of His creation. He is never deceived.

Why then do we make decisions on our own without checking with God first? Why do we continue to do what comes natural, based on our own observations, instead of asking God to lead us?

We need to change the way we do things. We need to seek God's perspective before we make any important decision in life, whether we view that decision as being major or minor. We will be frustrated any time we think we can handle life on our own and that we don't need to check with God first before planning and taking our next steps.

We would think Joshua and the people of Israel would have learned their lesson after the painful defeat they suffered at Ai due in part to their failure to check in with their Commander in Chief before deciding to go into battle. As is so often the case with us, Joshua and the leaders of Israel don't learn their lesson the first time.

Read Joshua 9:1-15

Central Truth:

When we decide what to do next based solely on our own perceptions and without prayer, we miss doing what God wants

The Deceit of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:1-15)

Jericho and Ai have been destroyed. With central cities of Canaan defeated, it's time for the conquest of South. As Israel prepares for their military encounter with the southern Canaanites, the local people exhibit two very different responses.

Pagan kings ally their forces to make war against Israel (9:1-2)

Several of the pagan kings respond to the events at Jericho and Ai by coming together for battle against God's people. What changed? When Israel marched around Jericho, the people tightly shut up the city, allowing no one in or out. They were frightened. Their hearts melted. They did not have the courage to face the Israelites. Now, the pagan kings are gathering together against Israel to make war.

What changed to make Israel's enemies so bold? They heard about the defeat Israel suffered at Ai at the first battle which galvanizes them into action. While they knew of Ai's eventual destruction, news of the defeat Israel suffered emboldens them to come together to take a stand against God's people.

This of course is a terrible decision on their part. It is terrible in that it represents their rejection of the LORD. It is terrible in that it ignores the LORD's role in fighting for Israel—they perceive only a human army and their defeat as a sign of their vulnerability—they ignore that God is behind Israel, that He is responsible for their victories and that He will be with them once again as they obey Him.

The Gibeonites choose to seek peace rather than fight (9:3-13)

The Gibeonites approach the threat of Israel's looming attacks in a completely different manner. They consider what God did to Jericho and Ai and determine that they can't beat Israel. They recognize that the God of Israel is too powerful, so they decide they had better seek peace and join them instead of trying to fight.

While it is admirable that the Gibeonites recognize God's power, that they understand Israel's directives from God enough to know their lives are in danger and respond with a healthy fear of God, it is a mistake for them to resort to a ruse instead of asking for God's mercy and kindness as Rahab did.

They resort to trickery

In order to deceive Israel into thinking they are from a far away place, the delegates the Gibeonites send to Joshua gather clothing and supplies that are old, worn out, patched, dry and moldy to make it appear that they are weary, worn out travelers from afar who have traveled over a long period of time.

Why do the Gibeonites pretend they are from afar instead of admitting they are neighbors?

The Gibeonites know what God commanded of Israel with regards to the inhabitants of the whole land.

Deuteronomy 20:16-18- "However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, **Hivites** and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God."

Perhaps they also knew of the provisions made in Deuteronomy 20:10-15 which offer the opportunity for securing peace with Israel for those nations who lived at a distance and who were not a part of the nearby Canaanite peoples.

Deuteronomy 20:10-15- "When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby."

The Gibeonites then hope that by convincing Israel's leaders that they are from afar, they will be able to trick them into making peace with them which would be impossible if Israel knew they were from close by given God's command to destroy all the Canaanites.

They request a treaty and call themselves Israel's servants

The Gibeonites are careful to appear as non-threatening as possible. They readily make it obvious that they don't want a battle, but a peace agreement.

Though the Gibeonites are really Israel's enemies, they come, referring to themselves as Israel's servants, ready to do whatever Israel asks, so long as God's people will ally themselves with them.

The men of Israel are suspicious when the Gibeonites make their initial appeal for a treaty. They rightly observe that they have no way of knowing if the Gibeonites really are from a far away place as opposed to being neighbors close by. Joshua therefore asks them who they are and where they are from.

They calm suspicions by acknowledging God's greatness

The Gibeonites tell Joshua they have come because of the fame of the LORD, Israel's God. They tell Joshua of the reports they heard of God's powerful acts—of what He did in Egypt and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—to Sihon and Og. The Gibeonite men claim to be delegates sent on their long journey by the elders of their people to seek peace after hearing these reports.

Wisely, so as not to give away the fact that they are really neighbors, they leave out what they also knew to have happened to Jericho and Ai under God's mighty hand. Had they reported this, Joshua would have known they were living close by because news would not have traveled that fast to a far away land.

They focus Israel's attention on what they can see

Consider all of the attention the Gibeonites give to their traveling provisions—"This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now SEE how dry and moldy it is. And these wineskins that we filled were new, but SEE how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey."

The Gibeonites ruse works, for Joshua and the other leaders of Israel follow their lead by focusing on what they can see instead of asking God to give them perspective about what they cannot see.

Israel's leaders choose to look around rather than looking to God (9:14-15)

Just as Joshua thought he didn't need to ask God for help in handling Ai, so too Joshua and Israel's leaders don't think they need to ask God for direction with regards to what to do about the Gibeonites. They fail to consult with God in prayer. They depend on their own observations of the physical evidence around them rather than asking God what they should do.

They sample the Gibeonites' supplies (9:14a)

Evidence is presented to prove the Gibeonites' claims, so naturally all the Israelites need to do is study it to determine what step they need to take next—or so they think. Israel's leaders believe they can handle this one and don't need God's help. Why bother God with the small, routine, unimportant stuff?

Their reasoning goes something like this, "Look at the Gibeonites—they don't appear too threatening. After all, they are looking for peace, not war. They regard themselves as servants, not opponents. Look at their supplies. It is obvious they have come from a far away place just as they say. Listen to what they are saying about God. They acknowledge and respect His power. We can take care of small matters like these on our own."

Before we are too critical of Joshua and Israel's leaders for their failure, we need to take a look at our own lives. How many times have we made decisions based upon our observations of what was happening around us without first going to God in prayer to ask for His perspective and leading?

They fail to ask God what to do (9:14b)

Israel forgets yet again that the battle is the LORD'S and that they are desperately dependent on Him for His power and direction. They aren't supposed to handle anything on their own and whenever they do, they miss out on what God wants for them and face embarrassing consequences.

They naively make and ratify a treaty of peace (9:15)

It is a big mistake for Israel to trust their own judgment and make their own plans instead of asking God. Because Israel fails to inquire of the LORD, Israel fails to do what God commanded.

All the nations within the borders of Canaan are to be destroyed as God's judgment against these peoples for their wickedness, their persistent hatred of Him (Deut. 7:10), and as protection for His people from being influenced by their evil practices.

These people are so committed to evil that unless they are completely destroyed, they will become snares and traps for Israel, leading God's people to participate in their evil ways and come under God's judgment themselves. Instead of destroying the Gibeonites who were Hivites, Israel makes a treaty of peace with them.

Israel makes a frustrating discovery: The Gibeonites are neighbors! (9:16-21)

Read Joshua 9:16-21

Three days after signing a treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites learn that they have been taken. A group of them is sent out to explore the matter only to confirm the Gibeonites' fraud by their discovery of Gibeon and its three dependent cities.

However, Israel can't attack them as God commanded

Even though the whole assembly of Israel is upset and grumbling at the leadership; even though the Israelites were deceived into making this treaty; their oath can't be broken without severe consequences.

An attack would break their sworn oath and incur God's wrath

The Israelites swore an oath in the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. Making an oath in the LORD'S name is never to be treated lightly. Israel is held morally responsible for keeping the agreement they made. To break it would bring down the wrath of God on Israel, a result that did in fact come to pass during king David's reign as the result of Saul's earlier actions in violation of this oath (2 Samuel 21:1-6).

Israel lets the Gibeonites live, but as their slaves

Israel does not go back on their oath. They let the Gibeonites live. Even so, the Gibeonites have to face consequences. They are forced to serve as slaves—as woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community.

Joshua confronts the Gibeonites' deception and announces a curse (9:22-23)

Joshua 9:22-23—Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, “Why did you deceive us by saying, ‘We live a long way from you,’ while actually you live near us? You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.”

The Gibeonites defend their actions and willingly receive their consequences (9:24-27)

Read Joshua 9:24-27

Their defense (9:24-25):

We were told of the command of God to wipe us out! They take God at His Word. We feared for our lives knowing God was with you! They acknowledge God's greatness. We are in your hands—do what is good and right! They throw themselves on God's mercy, submitting to His people. From their perspective, it is much better to live as slaves than to die.

The consequences (9:26-27):

Pagans who deserve death are delivered from death

Joshua delivers the Gibeonites from the angry Israelites who want them dead, not allowing them to be killed. God mercifully allows these pagans to live.

Pagans who deserve death are put to work as servants of God's people

Notice what the Gibeonites are assigned to do. They are to serve as woodcutters and water carriers. This work was carried out in connection with the tabernacle. Again, as we observed in the case of Rahab and her family, we see God's mercy in operation on behalf of the Gibeonites. They receive God's grace in being given a task that exposes them to the worship of the one true God. They are daily put right in the middle of Israel's daily offerings and ceremonial cleansings.

It appears, as we consider later references to the Gibeonites in Scripture, that their service in connection with the activities of the tabernacle influenced them to abandon their idols and worship the God of Israel. For example, in Nehemiah 3:7, we see the Gibeonites involved in helping Israel to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

Praise God for His grace in allowing people who are under judgment and deserve to die to live.

How does this passage apply to us today?

Even if we have made a foolish decision without seeking God, He wants us to honor our commitments

Say a believer rashly marries another person without seeking God's will in prayer. Later, that person realizes he or she was out of God's will when entering into his or her marriage. That person can't say, "Oh, I was out of God's will to marry this person, and now it's not working out. Therefore God wants me to divorce this person so I can marry the right one." No, you have made a covenant before God. He would have you to stay committed to your marriage vows. Just as God had the Israelites honor the rash, foolish treaty they had made in His name with the Gibeonites, He would have you honor the rash commitment you made to your present spouse.

We should entrust every decision of life into the hands of the LORD

Will we do what comes natural or will we consult God and trust Him to lead us:

When making life's big decisions?

Will we do what seems best to us or will we pray to God about decisions like college, marriage, career, where we live, etc.?

When making day to day decisions?

Every one of life's important decisions should be placed into the hands of the Lord who knows the beginning from the end. We should always consult God before making even day to day decisions. We aren't able to figure out by ourselves if a matter that seems insignificant to us at the time will end up being a big deal later. We need God's direction and leading through prayer.

James Hudson Taylor once said, "Small things are small things, but faithfulness with small things is a big thing." In the same way, small prayer matters are small prayer matters, but faithfulness with small prayer matters is a big matter. Think about how much the direction of our lives is determined by all the small decisions we make all added up together.

Consider the blessing and satisfaction we will experience when we give each day to the LORD asking Him for His direction and His perspective.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul instructs us to "pray without ceasing." Do you know what Paul means? We are to pray all the time about everything.

When asked for counsel from someone else?

When offering counsel, will we say the first thing that naturally comes to mind, or will we consult God, asking Him to give us His perspective and wisdom? How many times have we found ourselves saying, "Oh, I wish I wouldn't have said this or I regret having said that." When giving counsel, let us be careful to pray to God asking for His help before we open our mouths to offer our help.

When faced with a trial and unsure what we should do about it?

When times are tough, will we do what comes natural, spending our energies on doing whatever we can to get out from under our trial, or will we consult with God, looking to Him for wisdom for what we should do?

When considering the next step in ministry?

When we consider our next steps with regards to the ministry of our church, will we begin with God; ask His plans, and offer ourselves to Him to carry out those plans? Will we seek Him in prayer every step of the way? May God always help us to look to Him in prayer as opposed to making decisions based on what makes the most sense to us based on what we can see!