

Joshua Chapter 9 – John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson "Being a witness for God even when one has been hurt or cheated". It's best if I explain what happens in this lesson and then come back to the title.
 - a) In this lesson, we read of a group of people who lied (convincingly) to the Israelites. This group lived in the "Promised Land". They were among those that God ordered to be killed as part of His judgment against those living there at that time. Their lying worked well enough that it caused the Israelites to take an oath to protect them. The Israelites thought they lived far away and came a long way to see them.
 - b) This leads me back to the lesson title. Despite the fact this group lied to the Israelites, the Israelites kept their vow to protect them. The positive thing about this group is that they were willing to submit themselves to the true God. That willingness (indirectly) spared their lives and led them down a path to draw themselves closer to God.
 - c) Don't lose sight of the fact that this group, called the "Gibeonites" told a series of convincing lies to the Israelites. The Israelites then made an oath to protect them. Because the Gibeonites lied, they were sentenced to menial work, but they had their lives spared. The positive aspect of the story is the jobs the Gibeonites were assigned to give them an opportunity to get closer to God.
 - d) Note that when the Israelites found out the truth, they didn't kill them. They didn't want to go back on their word, even though they gave their word based on the lies told to them.
2. The great lesson of this chapter is that when people hurt us, we are to first see them as "someone who needs Jesus" and not someone who has hurt us.
 - a) God never condemned the Israelites for believing the Gibeonites lies. At the same time, God did not condemn them for taking an oath to save their lives. God did expect Israel to keep their word despite the circumstances.
 - i) You may think, "Well, just because God did not give Israel a sign this action was wrong, does not make it right." Remember that just a few chapters back one Israelite stole a bunch of stuff and "all of Israel" suffered due to that sin. My point here is that despite the fact the Israelites made an oath to spare these people, God never condemned the Israelites for that oath.
 - ii) What I see in this lesson, is that God is teaching a principal about being on the watch for people willing to follow the true God, even if they lied about other things in order to get closer to God. Neither God nor the Israelites excuse the lies. At the same time, the Israelites spare their lives, not because of the lie, but because of the oath to protect them. What is "happening behind the scenes" is God is drawing this "lying group" close to Him because they trust in Him.
 - b) I've read a number of commentaries on this chapter that compare these "liars" to the devil and his ability to lie to us. While this group (again called the Gibeonites) are not excused for lying, the interesting thing is that God never punishes the Israelites for honoring this contract with them. In fact, in the next chapter (and next lesson) the Israelites come to the rescue of this group of people.
 - i) Given that fact, what I have come to see of this chapter is a lesson on being a witness to nonbelievers. Let's face it: all of us, when we first come to God are full of "lies" and things that are displeasing to God. He asks us to come to Him just as we are, and only "then" does God begin to work in our lives.
 - ii) In this chapter, we see the Israelites make an oath with a group of people that lied to their faces. Yet, despite the fact this group was condemned to death as they lived in the Promised Land, they were spared, and even drew closer to God.

- c) How much different is their story (the liars) than yours and mine, who came to God as sinful people and "without God", was sentenced to eternal death. I see this chapter as a story of "rescuing the dead" even when God did not call these people to be rescued from the dead. The point is God always wants us to be a witness to a lost and dying world, just as the Israelites are to these people.
3. Next, let's quickly review where we left off in the book of Joshua and tie it to this lesson:
- a) We last left the Israelites winning their second battle in the Promised Land, which is the battle over the city of "Ai". This battle covered two lessons and the last two chapters. The underlying point (to you and me) in the last chapter is the way to have victory over the sins of our lives requires, first of all, the willingness to face our sins "face on". The point is if we are willing to tackle the sins that separate us from living the way God wants us too, the victory over those issues is guaranteed.
 - b) Here in Chapter 9, the Israelites have to deal with other nations living in this land.
 - i) The first two verses mention other groups of people in the "Land of Israel" who have heard how the Israelites have defeated the cities of Jericho and Ai. These other groups are pretty scared by what is happening. May I also add, rightfully so. These other nations are not scared enough to change their lifestyle, just scared enough of what the Israelites could do to them.
 - ii) The second verse of this chapter mentions that these people who live in the area combine forces with the intent of attacking Joshua and Israel.
 - iii) One has to remember that at this time in history, people are not so much loyal to a country or to an empire as much as they are loyal to their city. Most people living there at that time work the fields and they look to their local cities for protection.
 - iv) All the cities in close proximity of Ai and Jericho are nervous about the Israelites and decide to join forces to attack Israel. That attack is in the next chapter.
 - c) After two verses about the people living in Israel uniting to fight the Israelites, the chapter then changes topics and focuses on one specific group of people called the "Gibeonites".
 - i) Before I discuss the Gibeonites, understand that we are going to come back to the other nations that are angry at Israel and discuss them in the next chapter.
 - ii) So why mention the other nations here "first" as opposed to just bringing up the point of their anger in the next chapter? The reason is to compare how they reacted to the Israelites in contrast to those of Gibeon reacted to the Israelites.
 - d) This leads us to the main "villain" of this chapter, the people of a city called Gibeon.
 - i) Understand that they are among the people that God ordered to be killed.
 - ii) What they (Gibeonites) decide to do instead of fighting the Israelites is to send a delegation to the Israelites and pretend they are from a far away land.
 - iii) The representatives of Gibeon lie to Joshua and the leaders of Israel. This chapter is going to give a bunch of examples used by the Gibeons to fool the Israelites into thinking that they were not from anywhere in "Israel", but from a land far away.
 - iv) Bottom line, the plot worked. They fooled the Israelites, and they agreed to spare the lives of the Gibeonites. Later in this chapter, the Israelites will discover how those of Gibeon lied to the Israelites, and still the Israelites spared their lives.
4. OK, here is where it gets interesting:
- a) If somebody lies to our face and does so very convincingly after we have made a deal with them, one would think the deal would be dead. After the Israelites found out how the Gibeonites went to great length and trouble to fool the Israelites, you would think that Joshua has excellent grounds to "throw the deal out the window".
 - b) A key point of this chapter is the fact that the Israelites still honored the oath to spare the lives of those from Gibeon despite their lying.

- c) In fact, when we get to Chapter 10 (next lesson) we will discover that the other nations are angry at Gibeon for appealing to the Israelites. These other groups attack Gibeon. In that next chapter, the Israelites come to the rescue of the Gibeonites and protect them from the attack by other nations.
 - d) Why did God expect the Israelites to honor the oath they made with the Gibeonites despite all of their deceptive tactics? The answer is that God expects us to keep our word, even if we are fooled into giving our word. Further, the situation allowed the Israelites to be a witness to a group of people who have submitting themselves to God.
 - i) God expects us to keep our word, even when someone else lied to get us to keep our word. When we make an oath, God expects us to keep it. That idea ties back to my lesson theme of "Being a witness for God even when one has been hurt or cheated". Despite the fact this group lied to the Israelites, the important point is that they sought out God and were willing to live for God in the future.
 - e) I can't think of anywhere in the bible where it says we have to make oaths. What the bible clearly says is that if we make an oath, we are bound by that oath and we sin when we violate that oath, even if the other party lied to get us to make that oath.
 - i) So, why is that? Why are we "bound" when we make an oath and why is it considered a sin to go against that oath? Let me put the answer this way: If somebody swears up and down they didn't do something, should we believe them? If they say, "I swear on a big stack of bibles or say, my mothers' grave", should we believe them then? The point is the harder somebody tries to say a thing is true, the less likely we should try to believe them.
 - ii) Our word should simply be our "bond" and we should never have to go over and above that to prove we are telling the truth. (This is the concept Jesus Himself tried to teach in Matthew Chapter 5:33-37).
5. OK, John, you've now written two and one half pages, and you've essentially said it is important to be "men and women of our word" and that being a witness to God is more important than if and when people lie to us. When are we actually going to start the text: Very soon, I promise. ☺
- a) What I mainly want you and I to see is not the fact that "truth telling is important" as much as to look at the situation at hand, and understand that we are to be God's witnesses first and foremost, even when we have been cheated or wronged.
 - b) To explain this, think about what Joshua and the Israelites are going through. They have their eyes set on conquering all of the Promised Land. Here comes this group claiming to be from a distant land. The Israelites believe them and give their word to spare their lives even when the truth is discovered. Even when the Israelites learn they have been lied to, they keep their word and spare this group.
 - c) Aren't the Israelites violating God's orders to kill everyone? Let's face it, if this group lied to the Israelites, isn't that grounds enough to say, "The deal is off" and wipe them out?
 - d) Why is keeping our word so important as it over-rides the orders to kill everyone in the Promised Land as ordered? In other words, if God commands us to do something, and somebody lies to us to prevent that command from happening and (that's the key) we give our word to help them, then God expects us to honor that commitment.
6. Let me summarize the whole lesson this way: The Israelites were lied to and they were guilty of not seeking God in order to find out about this lie: Yet, God never punishes Israel for not killing these people or for making this oath. Maybe God thought it was punishment enough for the Israelites to live with the lie, but the point is, God does not punish the Israelites for this oath.
- a) What is said, notice that the people of Gibeon end up having to serve the true "God" and the Israelites (unwillingly) lead these people to God.
 - b) OK, enough yapping. I'm way overdue to actually cover this chapter verse by verse.

7. Verse 1: Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things--those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)--² they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel.
- a) Let me make it easier to read Verses 1 and 2. There are two "double dashes" in Verses 1-2. One is in the middle of Verse 1 and the other is right before Verse 2. Read these two verses again but this time, ignore what is between the two "double dashes".
 - i) Go ahead and read it that way. I'll wait here. ☺
 - b) OK, welcome back. What these verses say in effect is "when everyone else in the land of Israel heard what the Israelites did to the two cities already conquered (Jericho and Ai), these other city-states decide to get together to take on the Israelites.
 - i) The other nations living here are not going to just "sit there" and let the Israelites conquer them the way they conquered Jericho and Ai. They decide to work together as one big team to take on the Israelites.
 - ii) Remember that God called for the destruction of these nations. Now read the names of these nations "between the two double dashes". Ask yourself, how many Hittites, Amorites, etc. do you know today? These were real nations of people that existed at this time. These nations were destroyed, as they no longer exist today.
 - iii) The other point is "there is no victory against God". They can unite all they want to take on Israel, or they could each attack Israel separately. The point is God called for their destruction and God was judging them for their wickedness.
 - c) As I've made clear by now in previous lessons, God does "group judgment" as well as "individual judgment". God is performing group judgment on these nations.
 - i) In terms of salvation, we are judged individually. In terms of our existence as a group (be it a city, a nation or a church) God has every right to judge as a group and does so at times. Group judgment is not so much about salvation as it is being a witness for God. The essential idea of this judgment is that this particular group has gotten so bad it is more merciful to kill them than to let them continue to live.
 - d) The interesting thing about Verses 1 and 2 is now that the comment is made about these other nations uniting to attack Israel, there is no further mention of them until Chapter 10.
 - i) If that is true, why not mention these war plans in Chapter 10, when their battles actually takes place? Why mention it here prior to the dealing with the Gibeonites?
 - a) The answer is to contrast how the Gibeonites dealt with Israel as opposed to every other group of people living in the Promised Land.
 - b) Speaking of the Gibeonites, let's start to discuss them here in Verse 3.
8. Verse 3: However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai,⁴ they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended.⁵ The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy.
- a) What is happening in these four verses is that we read that those in Gibeon send a delegation over to where the Israelites are camping.
 - b) Notice how clever the Gibeonites are in their attempt to deceive the Israelites:
 - i) The donkeys carried worn out sacks with old wineskins.
 - ii) The delegation was wearing worn out sandals and clothing.
 - iii) Their food supply was "dry and moldy".
 - c) One thing I want you to notice that God never condemns the Israelites for failing to see through this clever attempt to lie to them. Later, the Israelites are scolded for not seeking God at this point in time. Still, God never punishes the Israelites for not being fooled. They have to suffer the consequences of being fooled, but there is no direct punishment by God for believing the lies.

- d) When someone is trying to con us, what the conmen don't want is for us to investigate them. The type of potential victim who is willing to investigate the claims of conmen is the type of person they want to avoid.
 - i) My point here is that God does not condemn the Israelites (or us) for not being smart enough to avoid being conned. Remember that "life in the Promised Land" is symbolic of learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives. The point is "sin" will try every method possible of sneaking up on us and trying to fool us into accepting whatever it is that "sinful desire" is trying to accomplish.
 - ii) I'm not excusing the sin of lying. I'm just saying the fact that it happened is eventually used for God's purposes.
 - iii) The Israelites are guilty of not seeking God and are guilty of trying to solve this themselves. God does not punish them for being fooled. God knows that "sin" will make every effort to fool us and without His help, "sin" is smarter than we are.
 - a) The mistake was not the fact they were deceived. The mistake was not seeking God in terms of what to do about that fact.
 - e) Meanwhile, the Israelites are still dealing with this congregation from Gibeon.
9. Verse 6: Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us."
- a) The Israelites are camping out at a location called "Gilgal". We get clues through the book of Joshua that "Gilgal" is their base of operations in the Promised Land.
 - b) The first thing the representative of Gibeon say to the leaders of the Israelites was "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us".
 - i) The point is the intention of the Gibeonites was not to attack the Israelites, but to actually make a peace treaty with them.
 - c) It's interesting to think compare the Gibeonites to Rahab the Harlot from Chapter 2:
 - i) If you recall, in Chapter 2 of Joshua, a harlot named Rahab was spared from destruction essentially because she trusted in the "true God" for survival.
 - ii) Both here in Chapter 9 and back in Chapter 2, the Gibeonites and Rahab both acknowledge that the God of the Israelites is the "true God" or at least a lot bigger than whatever god(s) they worship. The Gibeonites, like Rahab, are willing to submit their lives into the hands of the Israelites and "their God" in the hopes the Israelites will let them live.
 - iii) The key difference between the Gibeonites and Rahab is that Rahab never lied about her lifestyle, but simply put herself at the mercy of the Israelites.
 - iv) The Gibeonites pulled a "rouse" (i.e., a con job) to approach the Israelites.
10. Verse 7: The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?"
- a) The Israelites knew immediately that these Gibeonites were part of the "Hivite" nation. I don't know what language was used to communicate between these two groups, but somehow the Israelites knew right away that they were Hivites, by their language.
 - b) A little bit of background might help here. The "nation of Hivites" was bigger than just those that lived in Israel. This group of people lived all over the Middle East.
 - i) God did not expect the Israelites to wipe out the entire Hivite nation, just those that were living in Israel at this time. Joshua knew that some Hivites were living in the Promised Land, and therefore Joshua questioned their origin.
 - c) Given the fact that these strangers spoke Hivite, it was therefore logical of Joshua to ask, "How do we know you came from a long distance away and not just a local group avoiding what God called us to do?"
 - d) The response of the Gibeonites (who are part of the Hivite family) is in the next verse.

11. Verse 8: "We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?"
- a) The men of Gibeon say to Joshua, "We are your servants". I doubt he meant that all of Gibeon agrees to be slaves to the Israelites. It was probably a form of greeting to say in effect "We know you represent the true God of heaven and we respect that fact."
 - i) In other words, the Gibeonites approached Joshua with a humble attitude and hoping that all of their "cleverness" will avoid Joshua from discerning the truth.
 - b) Joshua had doubts. When you read the next few verses, notice the Gibeonites avoided the question asked by Joshua about where they are from. As they say in politics, this is an example of "misdirection", where one misdirects the question to what one wants to say.
12. Verse 9: They answered: "Your servants 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,¹⁰ 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 Ashtaroth.
- a) Instead of answering Joshua's question about "where they are from", they quickly change the topic and state how they knew about victories over Egypt and victories over the Amorities. The latter event is described in Numbers 32:39, among other places.
 - i) Notice The Gibeonites did not mention anything about Jericho or Ai. Remember that this is an era before "CNN" or the internet. News travels slowly. Therefore, they did not want to mention any recent victories over Jericho or Ai, but only mention things that were accomplished roughly 40 years ago.
 - b) What I personally find interesting is how the Gibeonites prepared for this event.
 - i) This took some clever and quick planning. They had to find worn out shoes and worn out "luggage" as well as make crusty old bread quickly. I'm guessing one of them said something like, "OK, who has some worn out sandals, size 10?" ☺
 - ii) Personally, I think as these men were walking to the Israelite camp, they spent a lot of time "walking hard" to get their sandals to wear out even more. I visualize them keeping their bread exposed to the hot sun so that green mold would appear quicker. Further, I suspect they spent a lot of time rehearsing their answers to potential questions they could be asked.
13. Verse 11: And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, `Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; make a treaty with us." ' ¹² 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. ¹³ 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."
- a) Again, the emphasis in these verses is about fooling the Israelites. The Gibeonites wanted to avoid the "where are you from" question. The text goes out of its way to emphasize to the reader just how hard was their efforts to fool the Israelites.
 - b) I want to think about the text this way: Most of the chapter so far could be summed up with one line saying, "The Gibeonites went to a lot of time and trouble to fool the Israelites and the Israelites believed them based on the physical evidence they saw".
 - i) Instead of saying that one line, we had a very detailed description from Verse 4 through Verse 13 explaining how the Gibeonites fooled the Israelites.
 - ii) Is the purpose of all of this detail so we could know how they were fooled? Was all of this detail given as maybe Joshua felt guilty about how he was fooled and therefore, wrote out in detail all that they did? We don't know.
 - iii) Here is what we do know: It worked. Therefore, is the lesson here simply to beware of what we see? Is it a matter of trusting God and not our senses? That is a part of the answer. Joshua and the Israelite leaders were fooled based on the physical evidence and that is the point here.

- c) Now it's time for the important question: Why should I care about all of this? How does any of this affect my life other to be on the lookout for a good con artist?
- i) To answer that question, think about the fact that God never condemns the Israelites for being fooled. I've read commentaries that compare the Gibeonites to the devil in His ability to deceive us. While that is a possible comparison, why is it, again that God never condemns the Israelites for believing this deception? Yes, the text will say in a few verses that the Israelites forgot to pray about it and yes, having the Gibeonites "live" do cause some problems for future generations.
 - ii) With all of that out of my system, I think there is a different point God is making.
 - a) What is important is that the Gibeonites do eventually agree to become servants of the Israelites. Grant it, having a choice between being killed or being a low-end servant for life, I'll take servant hood every time. ☺
 - b) The more I read this chapter, the more I see an underlying point about how God would rather see repentance than death! I'm not excusing the lying of the Gibeonites. What I am saying is God accepted their repentance (because they acknowledged God) even though they sinned in order to get that sentence of being servants.
 - iii) Let me try explaining this another way: There will come a day when God will judge the entire world for its sins. (That is what the book of Revelation is mainly about.) God does not want to destroy the world, but He can't let a "sin-filled" world continue forever. God would rather see people repent than have to destroy unrepentant sinners. With that said, God accepts the repentance of the Gibeonites despite their lying. He accepts them not because they lied, but because they were willing to acknowledge Him and start down the path of living for Him as opposed to living for the world.
 - iv) So what's the point for you and me? It is to always be on the watch for anyone willing to turn to God. Even if they lie about their lives in order to take that first step toward God, we are to accept them. Let God work on their sins and not us.
 - v) As we go through life, we will meet others who in their own way also want to acknowledge God. The temptation is to fix them of their sin. God may call us to lead them in the right direction, but it is up to God to fix them, and not us.
14. Verse 14: The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD. ¹⁵ Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.
- a) Verse 14 is the editorial comment of how the Israelites did not inquire of God. In other words, the text is implying that if the Israelites had prayed about this, they probably would not have been fooled by the Gibeonites.
 - i) So why mention the failure to pray at this point in the story? Maybe God would have said, "These men are lying to you. I (God) ordered you (The Israelites) to kill everyone in this land and because you failed to inquire of Me (God) about them, you (The Israelites) will now have to live with them."
 - ii) The other possibility is God could have said, "They are lying to you, but spare them as they are seeking Me with their lives."
 - b) Verse 15 to me is the key point of the chapter.
 - i) The point is the Israelites agreed to make a peace treaty with the Gibeonites as the Israelites believed their lies and let them live.
 - ii) In life, we usually have to live with our mistakes and hopefully learn from them. My point as it relates to the story is God knew the Israelites were going to believe this series of lies and now God is testing how the Israelites are going to react once they have made this vow to preserve the Gibeonites.

- c) We don't read in Joshua of God condemning the Israelites for being fooled. It's almost as if God is saying, "It is punishment enough that you believed their story and now you will have to deal with them. Even though the Gibeonites lied to you, what is important is that they are willing to acknowledge Me (God). Therefore, you can punish them for their lies, but you cannot kill them as they are now seeking Me as their God."
 - i) One has to understand that the nations living in the Promised Land, worshipped all sorts of false gods. The fact that the Gibeonites turned to the Israelites becomes a key point in the next chapter. The other nations that unite against Israel (Remember Verses 1 and 2) attack Gibeon in the next chapter.
 - ii) The spiritual significance is that if the other nations in the Promised Land represent the sinful ways that God wants us to have "victory" over. Those "sinful ways" don't appreciate how Gibeon turned to God and away from "them".
15. Verse 16: Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. ¹⁷ So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. ¹⁸ But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the LORD, the God of Israel.
- a) Here is where the moment of truth comes. The Israelites discover after three days the truth about the Gibeonites. The Israelites discovered that these people only lived a short journey away. The Israelites discovered they still live in the Promised Land.
 - b) Also notice that Gibeon controlled more than one city. I suspect the Hivites that lived in Gibeon expanded to form some surrounding towns, which are listed in Verse 17.
 - c) I don't know if the Gibeonites "spilled the beans" or if the Israelites figured it out on their own. The text does not specify say how the Israelites figured it out, just that they did.
 - i) The point is the Israelites made an oath to have a peace treaty with Gibeon. What I suspect is right after the Israelites made that oath is when the Gibeonites told the Israelites the truth. In other words, the Gibeonites knew that the Israelites have now given their word, so it was safe to say the truth at this point.
 - ii) What I find interesting is that Israelites upheld this oath even after they found out the Gibeonites lied to them. I would think that any court of law would say to the Israelites, "Hey, they lied to you, therefore, you are excused of your oath!"
 - iii) God's silence on their oath leads me to believe that God expected the Israelites to keep that oath. In other words, the Israelites didn't add "sin on top of sin" by going back on their word to the Gibeonites at this point.
 - iv) Also notice how the Gibeonites trusted the Israelites to keep this oath. It is as if they knew that "if they (the Israelites) were trusting in the true God, they would have to keep their word even though we (the Gibeonites) lied to them." Give the Gibeonites a little credit here for having that "starting faith" in God, or at least they knew that trusting in God required one to keep their word.
16. Verse 16 (cont.): The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, ¹⁹ but all the leaders answered, "We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now.
- a) When the rest of Israel heard about everything that happened, they "grumbled", but they had to accept the deal with the Gibeonites because their leaders already agreed to it.
 - b) I could just hear the average Israelite think at this point, "Hey I never agreed to this deal and I didn't get fooled, why do I have to go along with this oath and this deal?"
 - i) We have to respect our leaders and the decisions they made for our life, better or worse. You could argue that the leaders violated God's will by falling for this plan and that everyone else had to go along with that violation.
 - ii) The important point is the leaders made a vow and everyone understand that you can't add "sin on top of sin" by going back on the vow at this point in time.

17. Verse 20: This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them." ²¹ They continued, "Let them live, but let them be wood cutters and water carriers for the entire community." So the leaders' promise to them was kept.
- a) In these verses, we learn that the plan of the Israelite leaders is to make the Gibeonites wood cutters and water carriers. In other words, Joshua gave them the "low end jobs that nobody liked to do". In our vocabulary, it might be like saying, "We are going to make them work the minimum wage paying jobs, whether they like it or not."
 - b) I get the impression here that Joshua and the leaders are talking to the Israelites at this point and not the people of Gibeon. In other words, they are announcing to the Israelites how the Gibeonites are going to have to pay for their lies, but at the same time, the Israelites will spare their lives due to the oath.
18. Verse 22: 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?" ²³ You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."
- a) One thing that comes through as a clue to my lesson theme is that the Gibeonites were to work for the priests as opposed to "working for all the Israelites". That is because Verse 23 says that the Gibeonites will do these jobs "for the house of my God".
 - b) The reason Joshua picked these particular jobs (as opposed to say digging latrines or some other undesirable job) is that Joshua wanted to see the Gibeonites draw closer to God. By having them work for the priests and do the menial jobs "at the house of God", the Gibeonites will learn more about what God requires of believers in Him.
 - c) Going back to my theme, once somebody is willing to accept the true God, we should (if they let us) help them draw closer to God. Joshua picked a punishment where the Gibeonites could learn more about God. When we see someone who has interest in God, we should offer to help them draw closer to God. (For example: invite them to church or a bible study, or just take the time to answer their questions.)
19. Verse 24: They answered Joshua, "Your servants were clearly told how the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this." ²⁵ We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you."
- a) Here is the Gibeonites response to Joshua. Let me paraphrase, "We Gibeonites knew the whole time that God had wanted you to kill everyone in the Promised Land including us. Therefore, we lied to you out of fear for our lives. Now do what seems right."
 - i) In other words, the Gibeonites were willing to be wood cutters and water bearers as that is a much better than to be killed.
 - b) That fact ties back to my argument that the reason God "tolerated" the sin of lying wasn't so much so the Israelites would get caught as much as it was that God saw the Gibeonites start to develop a heart for Him (God) and desire to turn to Him.
 - i) Think of it this way: How much sin did we have in our life prior to God saving us? How much sin did God ask us to clean up prior to giving our lives to Him? The point is whatever changes we make in our lives come after we first commit our lives to serving God and accept Jesus' sin payment for our sins.
 - ii) I believe the reason God allowed the Israelites to be deceived is that so the Israelites would make an exception of the Gibeonites and not kill them.
 - iii) Let me put it this way: Was it God's desire of the Israelites to kill everyone currently living in the Promised Land? Yes it was. Was God willing to make an exception of a group of people willing to turn to Him? Yes He was.
 - iv) In other words, it is not God's desire to kill people, but that people turn to Him with their (our) lives. When a group of people get to a point where they would not even consider turning to God and get "so bad", then God has no choice but to do a mercy killing. That is the service the Israelites are performing in this land.

20. Verse 26: So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them. ²⁷ That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD at the place the LORD would choose. And that is what they are to this day.
- a) Here, the point gets repeated that the Gibeonites were spared. The text says the Gibeonites became woodcutters and water carriers for the community and specifically for the "altar of God" (i.e., for the priests). They are still doing this "to this day". That day would be the day that the book of Joshua was completed, which would probably be sometime later in Joshua's life.
 - b) OK John, I get the idea of the Israelites sparing the Gibeonites because they started to develop a heart for God. What does that mean to you and me? We as Christians are not called to go destroy our enemies and spare those who have an interest in God.
 - i) What we as Christians are called to do, is "spread the word about Jesus". All Christians are to perform the "Great Commission" which is about spreading the Gospel message to all people and baptizing them. (Matthew 28:19.)
 - ii) This does not mean that all Christians are called to say preach or all are called to travel to distant lands to be missionaries. What it does mean is that wherever God calls us to live, we are to be His witnesses to a "lost a dying world".
 - iii) The truth is the world without God is dying. We are not the ones doing the killing, but because of unrepentant sin, people are going down the wrong path.
 - iv) The point is while we are to be busy "helping other Christians grow in their faith" we are still to have enough contact with nonbelievers to keep our eyes out for those willing to accept the Gospel message.
 - v) In other words, if we as Christians don't interact with nonbelievers, how do we ever lead anyone to Christ? Here were the Israelites "going about their lives" doing exactly what God called them to do. God still wants them to keep an eye out for potential nonbelievers to witness to. The idea of leading nonbelievers to Christ still takes precedence over the orders to let the "dying die" of their sins.
 - c) Let me say it this way: Let's not be so busy living our life that we ignore those who have interest in God and want to turn to Him.
 - i) Remember that a big part of the life of Christians is to help others grow closer to God and draw others to Him. If we are so busy looking to "eliminate sin", we can miss trying to save people who desire to turn to God.
 - ii) Does that mean we excuse those who lie to us? No we don't. The point is not the lying but the heart of the nonbeliever. There are times we have to "let stuff go" if it means that someone else is now drawing closer to God. This is what Paul taught when he said it is better to be "deceived" for Christ's sake than to "sue for what is rightfully ours." (See 1st Corinthians 6:7-8).
 - d) In the next lesson, we are going to read how the Israelites come to the defense of the Gibeonites. The point is, once somebody is willing to make that turn in life to God, we are to come to their defense. We are to ignore how they might have hurt us, because the priority is people's salvation, over and above any "thing" of this world.
21. I want to wrap up this lesson by looking at it from the perspective of the "typical" person living in Gibeon at this time:
- a) In the first few verses of this chapter, we read of "much of" the local population uniting in preparation to the attack the Jewish people. In contrast to those people, the Gibeonites decide that the Jewish people are going to win and decide in effect, "Let's see if we can join the winning side". Yes they lied to the Jewish people, but they did it with the intent of saving their lives and honoring the "Jewish God".
 - i) They think they were spared because their lies were convincing. The truth us, they were spared not only in this life, but for all of eternity, because they put their lives in the mercy in the true God not only of the Jewish people, but of all people.

- ii) Because of their lies, they had to work menial jobs, but at least they could live. Further, the jobs they were given are near the Jewish "tabernacle" and therefore near the priests. It gives the Gibeonites an opportunity to draw closer to God.
 - b) Think of it this way: When we first came to God, were we full of sin and lies? The answer is yes and we were no better than the Gibeonites. Despite our faults, God decided to spare us and work on drawing us closer to Him. The point is God accepted the Gibeonites "just the way they were" full of sins and lies and then worked on their life, just the way He works on our lives as well.
 - c) When we first get saved, God rarely calls us to a high position quickly. Instead, God is first interested in getting us to draw closer to Him and learn to trust Him. That is what is happening to the Gibeonites at this point in their life.
 - d) On that happy note, I can end the lesson. ☺
22. Let's pray: Father, may we never fail to give You all the credit for our salvation. You didn't pick us because we were good people, but because You loved us and want us to draw close to You. Help us to draw closer to You by avoiding the sins in our lives and help us to draw others close to You. Help us not to be deceived, but at the same time, help us to see the "deceivers" as people who need You and not people who have hurt us. Guide as we live for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.