

More Than Meets The Eye – Joshua 9:1-27

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Joel Pickett

Introduction

There are some things in life where it could be said that there was *more than meets the eye*. That so called “easy to assemble piece” of IKEA furniture that took you way longer than it should have. Or that “quick trip” to Costco where you’re only going to grab one thing and then \$200 later. Or the free WIFI at the coffee shop that you didn’t realize would ask for your email, phone number, home address, how you heard about the coffee shop and 20 minutes later you get connected. Or that quick renovation for a room in the house turns into a something much bigger.

Within our passage today, we will find that this phrase would accurately apply to the decision that Joshua makes in which there certainly was *more than meets the eye*.

According to the Bible we live in a world that is under the sway of the wicked one.

And that wicked one has devices and tactics that he launches against the believer to trip us up. It has been well said that “Satan plays with loaded dice.” He knows human nature better than most. *And it is this reality which can cause decision making that much more difficult.*

Many people in this life make decisions based on how they feel or based upon what looks best. Even many believers don’t really know how to make decisions that line up with the will of God. *They just make assumptions, do what makes the most sense, and hope for the best.*

And yet as believers we have been called to walk by faith and not by sight, *but how do we do that? To wait on the Lord but what does that look like? To follow God’s leading, but how does this happen?*

Context

The book of Joshua begins with the handoff of leadership from Moses to Joshua. Joshua is to be the one who leads the people into the promised land. Up to this point, they have successfully crossed over the Jordan, took the city of Jericho, and defeated the nation of Ai.

Diving into chapter 9, they are coming off what you could call a mountain top experience where they renewed their relationship with the Lord and recommitted themselves to walk in all His ways.

And it is in this state that one could be most vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy as the devil hates recommitment to the Lord. This next attack won’t come in the form of an invading army but in a subtle and deceptive way where they quickly find out that there is *More Than Meets The Eye*.

Read Joshua 9:1-27 & Pray

The Deception (verses 1-13)

³ But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, ⁴ they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, ⁵ old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy.

Word began to quickly spread about the children of Israel picking off nation after nation as God moved them through the promised land. As a result, there were a group of nations who got together to fight Israel rather than try and take them on alone.

However, the Gibeonites try a different approach. Gibeon seems to be one of the capital cities of the Hivites. In chapter 10, we are told that Gibeon was a great and royal city.

You'll notice them referred to as the Hivites in addition to the Gibeonites. *(v.7) (like how we are Californians, but we are also Americans)*

They knew they wouldn't have a chance to fight them head on. So they agree with the saying, *"If you can't beat em', join em!"* And they come up with a deceptive plan.

"they worked craftily," *(beginning of verse 4)*

Craftily: premeditated act of deception, cunning, to trick, a ruse, a ploy

Genesis 3:1 describes that the serpent was more cunning than any other animal.

And indeed, that serpent of old is the craftiest being out there.

2 Corinthians 11:3 & 14

³But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

Craftiness: duplicity, seduction

These Gibeonites send a crew of guys pretending to be delegates from a far nation who supposedly heard of the fame of Israel and the glory of Yahweh.

Somehow, they knew what God had told Moses about not making peace with any of the nations in Canaan but to utterly destroy them. *And so, they come posing as someone who they were not.*

And we know that our enemy, Satan too knows the word of God and can use it for his crafty purposes. We saw him do this with Jesus in the wilderness and if he would try to use the Word of God against Jesus, then we are certainly not exempt which is why we must be... **careful & prayerful.**

Now we find an initial hesitation on Joshua's part. He asks some decent questions, and they just lie straight through their teeth and point to all their "old" things as proof of their legitimacy.

The Gibeonites really sell it...

Old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins, old sandals, old garments, & moldy bread. *(v.12-13)*
All to confirm the appearance as if they were travelers from a land far away.

It's also interesting to note that they made no mention of Israel's recent victories over Jericho and Ai because if they had come from a far country they wouldn't have heard of these recent battles. *This certainly was a well thought out plan! (v.9-10)*

Within Satan's craftiness, his favorite trick is a good ol lie.

John 8:44

⁴⁴ You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.

What these Gibeonites used as a way of deception wasn't new, just repackaged.

The Assumption (verses 14-15)

¹⁴ Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the Lord. ¹⁵ So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

Verse 14 is the KEY verse out of this whole chapter. *It reveals to us where Joshua and the rulers of Israel went wrong.*

We are told that they took some of their provisions. This wasn't to eat or to wear but to test what they said against what they saw. This wasn't a bad thing to do, it was prudent and wise. But they went wrong because that was ALL THEY DID.

They used their ability of reasoning, logic, and deduction to come to a conclusion but left out their most important resource, and that is *the counsel of the Lord*.

“but they did not ask counsel of the Lord.”

Counsel: word or commandment, literally refers to someone's mouth, it is to want to know what someone has to say

It wasn't as if God hadn't been speaking or refused to answer! But Joshua failed this time to ask the Lord regarding His counsel. *The Lord's direction was available and yet ignored.*

Ask: to ask and expect an answer

Did Joshua have good reason to think that God would have answered if he asked? **Absolutely!**

“The Lord spoke to Joshua or the Lord said to Joshua...”

10 times! - Joshua 1:1, 3:7, 4:1, 4:15, 5:2, 5:9, 5:15, 6:2, 7:10, 8:1

It wasn't that they didn't think it through, but it was that they never prayed it through.

They relied on their own wisdom and discernment. They trusted their senses instead of trusting the Lord. They leaned on their own understanding. They walked by sight and not by faith.

The mistake wasn't that they were deceived, it was a good lie to be honest! **Their sin was found in their lack of dependance upon Almighty God.**

They had already made a similar mistake in Joshua 7, assuming God was with them, and they hadn't yet learned to wait on the Lord and seek His direction.

The Lord will allow testing situations in our life over and over again as we learn to actively trust Him and not just lean on our own understanding.

And so, verse 15 tells us that they make peace with these pretend delegates by making a covenant with them and swearing to let them live.

God had told them in advance and warned them in His word...

Exodus 34:12

¹² Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst.

Take heed: to make sure, to act purposefully and intentionally | **Snare:** a trap!

Things are not always what they seem, and we need to confess our inability to see everything by going to Him for counsel.

The Obligation (verse 16-20)

¹⁸ *But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers.*

It would only take three days for them to realize their massive mistake. They found out that these people they made peace with were actually their neighbors. They **only lived about 25 miles** away from where they were in Gilgal. Yet because they had already made the covenant with them, they did not attack them.

We are told that all the congregation complained against their rulers and rightfully so. Because of this covenant, they now had unwanted allies.

Despite the complaining, the rulers choose to keep their oath even if it was an oath they should have never made. As unwise as the rulers were in making the original covenant with these people, they were wise in not allowing a second sin to follow the previous sin by taking out the Gibeonites which I am sure they wanted to do even more after knowing they lied to them.

James Montgomery Boice

“Disobedience is no solution to the bad consequences of earlier disobedience.”

Sometimes we can really dig ourselves into a hole of sin because we keep responding the same way.

In a list of what the upright person does, David says this...

Psalms 15:4

⁴ In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the Lord; He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change;

Now if you're like me, you have the thought of well since they lied, why do they still have to honor the covenant? Wasn't it made under false pretenses. Was God still going to hold them to their word even though it was made with liars?

While that reaction is understandable it is probably because we don't value the commitment to our word like we ought to and we probably don't reverence the name of Lord like we should.

Notice the reasoning behind this...

¹⁹ *Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them.*

We have this answer confirmed centuries later when we find that King Saul attacked the Gibeonites and Israel was in a famine because of it...

2 Samuel 21:1-4

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, “*It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites.*” ² So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.

And so, God expected them to keep their word regardless of what it would cost them!

This should be a lesson for us regarding keeping our own word. Jesus said that we are to let your yes be yes and our no be no. We ought to be men and women of integrity no matter the cost. Even when we are the ones to make the decision we regret.

We should be careful with the things we commit to and involve ourselves in.

The Restitution (verses 21-27)

²⁷ *And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.*

We find here in these remaining verses that Joshua and the rulers make the most out of their mistake. Rather than moping around at how they should have done this or that, they use their own failings for the glory of God and the good of the people.

The Gibeonites weren't just going to get free rent, but they would have to work for it. Joshua said they would become wood cutters and water carriers. And specifically for the house of the Lord, at that time this would be the tabernacle where both water and wood were always needed.

In 1999, Pastor Jack taught through the book of Joshua, and I love what he said when he came to this portion, that these Gibeonites were now ***lumberjacks and waterboys!***

Not to excuse what Joshua did, but mistakes are going to happen, but I love the scrappiness of Joshua and the rulers here. They made a mistake; they owned up to it and embraced the consequences but then they made the most of it all for the glory of God! ***What an encouragement for us tonight!***

As He does so well, the Lord will bring restitution for their deception but also redemption to the whole situation.

Later on, Gibeon will become a priestly city where the ark of the covenant will often stay.

1 Chronicles 16:39

³⁹ and Zadok the priest and his brethren the priests, before the tabernacle of the Lord at the high place that was at Gibeon,

One of David's might men was a Gibeonite

1 Chronicles 12:4

⁴ Ishmaiah the Gibeonite, a mighty man among the thirty, and over the thirty; Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, and Jozabad the Gederathite;

God spoke to Solomon at Gibeon

1 Kings 3:4-5

⁴ Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?"

Gibeonites were also involved in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 3:7 & 7:25

⁷ And next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, repaired the residence of the governor of the region beyond the River. ²⁵ the sons of Gibeon, ninety-five;

God is able to redeem our mistakes and use what the enemy intended for evil and even our dumb mistakes and use it for our good and His glory!

His grace is able to turn a curse into a blessing. At times he will allow us to experience the consequences of our sin so that we might learn but will often transform our mistakes for His glory and our good.

Now this account is not just recorded for us to know what happened to Joshua but for us to learn from his mistakes. We must not walk away from tonight's bible study simply with the thought of how nice for them that it all worked out but to walk away knowing WHAT TO DO in light of what we've learned.

1 Corinthians 10:11-12

¹¹ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Admonition: warning

Joshua thought he could stand to make this decision without the Lord, and yet he fell flat on his face. This is something all of us are susceptible to do regardless of how long we've been walking with the Lord. *May we never think we can stand on our own.*

Paul tells in 1 Corinthians 13 that love believes all things, but we also know he prayed for the Philippians that their love would abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment! Living in the world we live in, we must not simply assume the best. ***We can so often sacrifice spiritual discernment given to us by God for the sake of niceness.*** "well, I don't want to be mean or judgy"

While we are not to be deceptive and crafty like the Gibeonites, in Jesus' parable on the unjust steward he made this comment regarding the "sons of light".

Luke 16:8

⁸ So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

Shrewd: wise, prudent, to act with practical intelligence
"street smarts"

Jesus told the disciples that he would send them out as sheep in the midst of wolves and so they were to be wise as serpents and yet harmless as doves. ***This is the balance of a believer being able to be skeptical and yet not sinful.***

The Bible says we are to test all things and hold fast to what is good! And while Joshua tested what they said and what he saw, he only used his physical senses and his own judgment to make the decision.

There are so many decisions that we must make as within our lifetime.

What does it look like to wait on the Lord? What does it look like to walk by faith and not by sight?

How do we ensure the best we can that God is in our decision, and that it lines up with His will? How do we learn from Joshua's mistake and not do what he did?

Two Extremes

1. Someone is so carefree that they assume and don't ask the Lord, doing what seems right to them
2. Someone is so stressed out that they are nervous and paralyzed to do anything so rather than making a wrong decision they make no decision, *Jesus is no fan of indecision*

Proverbs 16:9

⁹ A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.

Directs: to move towards a goal

Joshua didn't look for God's direction. He is directing, but are we looking and listening for His direction?

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Direct: to make straight, to make smooth

Joshua leaned on his own understanding and failed to acknowledge God and so his path got messed up in the process.

God wants to guide and direct His people, *but do we look to His leading?*

This is a primary function of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the Spirit would guide us into all truth. The Bible says that as many that are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. *Do you allow Him to lead, direct, and guide you?*

More than just a quick prayer to pray this is an overall attitude of our lives that we are to embrace.

James 4:13-15

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

So how do we do this? How do we ask the counsel of the Lord?

The repeated promise of Scripture is that if you seek the Lord with all your heart, that He will be found by you, IF you seek Him with your whole heart.

I wish it was as easy as sending a text, but it's not. It's not supposed to be. No relationship in that.

Let's look at 5 steps to help us in our decision making... (these have helped me)

1. Go Slow

The Bible instructs us to wait on the Lord and this phrase is wildly misunderstood and misapplied. *The word wait means active trust, not passive idleness.* This is to continue doing what He's told you to do regardless of the results you see. This is to actively obey Him while trusting Him with the outcome.

Lamentations 3:25

²⁵ The Lord *is* good to those who wait for Him, To the soul *who* seeks Him.

Meaning don't try to take matters into your own hands and "make something happen". When we try to hurry the process, it never ends well for us.

While there are certainly some people who God is waiting on because they are sitting on their hands too scared to decide, we must not get ahead of God *for that is a venture we go on alone.*

When you look at the ministry of Jesus, you don't see him in a rush. In fact, there are times people are frustrated that He isn't going as fast as they would like. We see this in John 11 where Jesus intentionally stays two more days after hearing Lazarus was sick. But that doesn't make any sense! It might not make sense in the moment, but it was a part of the will of God FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

Growing up playing basketball I had a coach that taught be this phrase...

"Be quick but don't hurry"

Going slow and waiting on the Lord isn't that we push decisions off. Indecisiveness leads to accomplishing nothing for the kingdom of God. But when we hurry, we make mistakes. When we rush, we get sloppy.

Isaiah 49:23

Then you will know that I *am* the Lord, For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me."

For me personally, if I'm pressured into making a decision on the spot then my answer is no. That's why I don't do well on car lots and in timeshares. *Guard against the pressure of a rushed decision.*

2. Go to the Word

Ideally, this would be something we are doing daily and not just in the moment of decision. To only come to the Scriptures when you have to make a decision is really selling yourself short. When we are in His word daily, we are being shaped by it and its principles are being ingrained within us. *We are giving God the opportunity to actually direct our steps and not just for so called "big decisions".*

Psalms 119:105

¹⁰⁵ Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

What does it mean to "hear from God"? What is should first and primarily mean is to hear Him based on what He has already said. *God speaks by what He has already spoken.*

I tell our high school students that if they want to hear from God, read their Bible and if they want to hear from God audibly, *then read their Bible out loud!*

The Bible says that God has given us everything that we need that pertains to life and godliness. *And so, while the Bible won't tell you whether you should go in on that business venture,*

it certainly talks about how one should steward finances and what kind of partnerships we should get into.

3. Go to Prayer

This would be both times of intentional on your knees prayer and also living in an attitude of prayer by praying without ceasing.

Hebrews 4:16

¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let's be honest, we constantly live in a "time of need" and as soon as we think we aren't, we're in trouble.

Now I must make the comment that "thinking" about a decision a lot does not mean you have prayed about it. Being up late worrying about it is not the same as getting on your knees and actually calling upon the name of the Lord.

Jeremiah 33:3

³ 'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.'

Like literally ask Him. Speak to him out loud. Even write it down the request. Be intentional.

4. Go to Wise Counsel

Wise counsel is always godly counsel because the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

This ought to come only after we have gone to the Lord first.

Proverbs 15:22

²² Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established.

Awry: fall short in what is expected | **Established:** to stand and remain

Multitude of counselors doesn't mean you post up and take a poll. The idea here is not to rely on just one person's voice.

Unless it's just downright sinful, someone who is truly wise won't just tell you what you should do, but they will help you through asking many questions and sharing with you biblical principles and passages for you to go and consider on your own.

5. Go through Open Doors

An open door is an opportunity. And this isn't just christianese, this is biblical terminology.

Notice this is the 5th step to take when making a decision, you've done all these steps, time to step out and do something!

Jesus is in the business of opening doors...

Revelation 3:8

⁸ "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

An open door doesn't mean always mean an easy door...

1 Corinthians 16:9

⁹ For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.

If your phone can figure out how to renavigate you, God certainly can.

ALL FIVE OF THESE STEPS ARE NEEDED THAT YOU MIGHT BE IN THE WILL OF GOD

Alan Redpath (*in his commentary on Joshua entitled Victorious Christian Living*)

Never, never, NEVER trust your own judgment in anything. When common sense says that a course is right, lift your heart to God, for the path of faith and the path of blessing may be in a direction completely opposite to that which you call common sense. When voices tell you that action is urgent, that something must be done immediately, refer everything to the tribunal of heaven. Then if you are still in doubt, dare to stand still. If you are called on to act and you have not time to pray, don't act. If you are called on to move in a certain direction and cannot wait until you have peace with God about it, don't move. Be strong enough and brave enough to dare to stand and wait on God, for none of them that wait on Him shall ever be ashamed. That is the only way to outmatch the devil.