

# Sermon Outline

“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”:  
A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

---

## CUTTERS OF WOOD AND DRAWERS OF WATER

*Joshua 9:22-27*

### I. Introduction

### II. Joshua Confronts and Curses the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:22, 23)

- A. Having discovered that they had been deceived, Joshua summons the Gibeonite leaders to demand an answer.  
—Verse “Joshua summoned them, and he said to them, ‘Why did you deceive us, saying, ‘We are very far from you,’ when you dwell among us?’”
- B. Joshua also pronounces a curse on the Gibeonites: “Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.”
  1. What are we to make of Joshua’s actions here?
    - Was Joshua simply being vindictive?
    - Was Joshua actually acting as God’s representative at this particular point?
  2. One of the difficulties of interpreting narratives like this one is that we do not hear directly the Lord’s voice on the matter.  
—We do not hear God sayings whether he was pleased or displeased with this action.
  3. But given...
    - the absence of any negative appraisal of Joshua’s action
    - the presence of a negative appraisal in Joshua’s action elsewhere (9:14), we can assume that Joshua was truly acting as the Lord’s prophet in this instance.
  4. Joshua was not acting out of his own wisdom—he was acting as the Lord’s representative.
  5. Therefore, the curse is from God.
    - a. The Gibeonites had not lied to men, but to God and his prophet.
    - b. They now face the consequences of their deception.
  6. The curse is a life of servitude.  
—Some of the Gibeonites would “never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.”
- C. God’s love separates Israel from the world at this point in history.
  1. At this stage in history, God is zealous for the purity of his people.

2. He wants his people to be separated from the pagan nations of the world.
  3. When the Gospel is revealed, this wall of separation between Israel and the nations will be broken down in the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 3).
  4. But at this point in time, God wants to wall off his people from too much contact with the nations because he desires to preserve the promised seed.
- D. Since God's Name was already used to spare the Gibeonites from destruction, God will take the next step and keep them at an arms' length from his people.  
—God requires Israel to pursue a policy of containment, deterrence, and cultural separation

**\*Question for reflection:** (1) What does Joshua do to the Gibeonites? (2) Was Joshua' curse approved by God? Why do we think that it is? (3) What does the curse on the Gibeonites involve? (4) How is the Lord's curse on the Gibeonites related to God's love for Israel?

### III. The Gibeonites Explain Themselves (Joshua 9:24)

- A. The Gibeonites explain themselves in v 24.
1. The Gibeonites recognized what the Lord was capable of—and that the Lord was determined to give Israel all the land.
  2. Out of dread for their own lives, they did what they did.
- B. And a part of us cannot help but feel bad for these guys.
1. They did believe, to some extent, in the Lord God of Israel.
  2. While we can debate how repentant they truly were, their confession of faith is quite similar to Rahab's (2:9, 10).
  3. We can speculate:
    - a. Perhaps the Gibeonites would be welcome if they had surrendered to Israel before the war began like Rahab did.
    - b. Perhaps the Gibeonites would be welcome if they had admitted to who they were.  
—But these are only speculations.
  4. The fact was, they lied to the Israelites to obtain the blessing.
  5. That does not help the Gibeonites' case!
  6. From now on, some of the Gibeonites would be condemned to do slavish labor for Israel.
- C. The Gibeonites were resigned to their fate: “And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it” (v 25).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How do the Gibeonites explain themselves? (2) How does their statement compare to Rahab's in 2:9, 10? (3) Do you think the Gibeonites would have found mercy if they had repented before the judgment began? (4) What were two factors that stacked against the Gibeonites? (5) What do the Gibeonites ask Joshua to do?

#### IV. Joshua Spares the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:26)

- A. What does Joshua consider “good and right” action?  
—He delivers the Gibeonites out of the hands of the Israelites (v 26).
  
- B. Joshua shows us what a good leader of God's flock is like.
  - 1. *A good shepherd protects the weak.*
    - a. A good shepherd doesn't simply listen to popular opinion.
    - b. A good shepherd cares for those who cannot protect themselves.  
—If need be, he even protects them from the rest of the Church!
  - 2. While the Gibeonites were a deceptive, scheming bunch, they are now a protected minority group.
  - 3. It would be sinful and unjust for any Israelite to strike them.
  
- C. We see a glimmer of the fatherly heart of our God here.
  - 1. God cares for the weak, even if they are sinful.
  - 2. God will protect those who do not have any political, social, or cultural strength.
  - 3. Are we like that as well? Do we look out for those who are weak?
  
- D. *Joshua protects the Gibeonites—wicked as they might be—from unjust treatment at the hands of his own people.* Even sinners and criminals deserve fair treatment. That is the desire of our heavenly Father.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Joshua consider “good and right” action toward the Gibeonites? What does he do for the Gibeonites? (2) How is Joshua an example for Christian leaders? (3) How is the fatherly heart of God revealed here?

#### V. Joshua Makes Them Cutters of Wood and Drawers of Water (Joshua 9:27)

- A. But that said, the present account still concludes on a minor key, a tone of judgment.  
—“But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place that he should choose” (v 27)
  
- B. While the Gibeonites were spared from destruction, they were not spared from divine discipline.

1. It doesn't pay to lie!
  2. When we seek to get God's blessings by fraud, we open ourselves to the discipline of God.
  3. For the Gibeonites, discipline took the form of hard labor and servitude to the people of Israel.
  4. For others, discipline may come in the form of embarrassment or at worse, death.
    - a. Just ask Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11!
    - b. They lied to the apostle Peter and God struck them down.
- C. God calls us to repent from our lies.
1. Repentance involves confessing our sin to God, asking him for forgiveness, and turning from our evil deeds.
  2. Having received forgiveness, we seek to heal those whom we have hurt through our fraud (or other sins).
  3. We make whatever restitution is necessary and possible, restoring what we have stolen through deceit.
  4. Of course, we are not saved by our attempts at making restitution.
    - a. Christ Jesus the Son of God has already made complete restitution for all our sins to God.
    - b. In his life, Jesus offered to God the obedience we lack.
    - c. In his death, Jesus took the full punishment for our disobedience.
  5. Yet, having been reconciled to God, God now calls us to be reconciled with others, seeking to repair the wounds we have caused to the extent possible.
  6. When we make restitution, we call attention to God's work of reconciliation in Christ.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How does the present account conclude in Joshua 9? Were the Gibeonites spared entirely from punishment? (2) What lesson on lying can we derive from here? (3) What must we do about our habits of lying? What must we do when we have acquired things through fraud like the Gibeonites? (4) How does our restitution relate to Christ's completed work on the cross?

## **VI. The Gibeonites: A Story of Loyalty and Partnership**

- A. While the Gibeonites stumbled their way into God's earthly kingdom in a sleazy way, their story is one of faithfulness and loyal partnership.
1. Gibeon eventually becomes one of the cities of the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 18:21-25).
  2. About four hundred years later, King David would place the tabernacle of the Lord in Gibeon.
  3. At least one of David's own elite soldiers was a Gibeonite (1 Chron 12:4).
  4. God addressed Solomon at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:5).

5. The Gibeonites helped rebuild the city of Jerusalem after exile (Neh 3:7).
6. Sons of Gibeon were included in the list of Israelites who returned from exile (Neh 7:25)!

- B. Ever since the treaty was made, the Gibeonites remained loyal to their Israeli rulers.  
—They may have experienced fuller integration into Israel by the time the exile is over.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How did the relationship between the Israelites and the Gibeonites unfold? (2) How did the Gibeonites relate to their Israelite rulers?

## VII. From Cutters of Wood to Sons of God

- A. The curse over the Gibeonites and all sinners is removed in Christ.  
—Galatians 3:13-14: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”
- B. In Galatians 3:28, Paul, a former conservative Jewish Pharisee, declares: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
- C. Joshua’s curse on Gibeon is not the end of the matter after all.  
—The end of the matter is God coming down in the person of his Son, Jesus, taking his own curse upon himself, and freeing us from it so that whether we may know God as our Abba Father.
- D. God’s secret plan for all the nations is disclosed in Ephesians 3:6: “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”
- E. Reformed apologist Francis Schaeffer wrote in *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History* (p. 160):

“Every Christian, no matter who he or she is, was once like Rahab (a prostitute) and the Gibeonites (liars), under the wrath and judgment of God. We were all rebels. Not one of us was born good. Not one of us who was raised a Christian automatically became a Christian.”

“Those who are not Christians remain where Rahab and the Gibeonites stood prior to their identification with the people of God. But Rahab and

the Gibeonites believed, and they were accepted. If it is true that God accepted them, how much more true can it be for us who have an open invitation from God. Jesus said, 'Whosoever will may come' (see, for instance, John 3:15-16). 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden,' Jesus invited, 'and I will give you rest' (Matt 11:28)."

"Let us remember that God insisted that the Israelites keep their oath, even though it was made because of the Gibeonites' deception. If God will not tolerate the breaking of an oath made in his name, how much more will he never break his own oath and covenant made to us on the basis of the shed blood and infinite value of Jesus Christ. How secure are we who have cast ourselves upon Christ as our Savior!"

**There is no need to lie our way into the eternal Kingdom. In fact, God requires us to declare ourselves for what we are. We are Gibeonites. We are liars and thieves. We are hypocrites and idolaters. We misapply God's Word to suit our ambitions. We are expert at tracking down the sins of others while remaining wilfully blind to our own. We say we worship God when we also bow to our own man-made ideals for happiness. We condemn the child-sacrifices of Canaan while we sacrifice our own children to Mammon. We are guilty sinners through and through. That is what we are. And God requires us to stop living in denial—and to face the truth. But even as we face up to the ugly truth of what we are, God reveals the happy truth of who he is. He is the God who saves sinners through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 4:5). Jesus told the truth for us. Jesus lived the all-truthful life which we have not. And Jesus took the curse for all our lies and other sins upon himself. God calls us to cast ourselves entirely on this Jesus. And God promises that those who do so will be saved (Acts 16:31).**

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does God call us to do in order to be saved from our sins? (2) Where are you living in denial of your own sinfulness? Where are you covering up your own sins? (3) What did the Lord Jesus do for us in his life and death? (4) How do we come to be saved from our sins?