

TRICK OR TREAT

STUDY NOTES FOR CARE GROUPS – JOSHUA 9-10

July 11, 2009

The central focus for our study is in the midst of current decisions you face, which of these should you take to God in prayer for consultation?

Context:

Beginning with this episode, the effort to conquer the land takes on a new twist. Previously, what the Canaanites heard about Israel caused their hearts to melt (Joshua 2:9-11; 5:1). Now, what they have heard (vv.1-2) has led them to co-operate with each other to fight against the Israelites. Exactly what did the Canaanite kings hear? The expression “heard of this” is vague; but obviously, these Canaanite kings would have heard about the conflict at Ai, including Israel’s initial defeat. Now, the Canaanites no longer believe that Israel was invincible.

STUDY PART A: JOSHUA 9

I. Israelites meet the Gibeonites

- (a) *Gibeonites’ Cunning Scheme:* In contrast to the group of city-states who formed an alliance to fight Israel, the inhabitants of Gibeon chose another tactic – to deceive Israel into making a peace treaty. Gibeon was located about six miles south-west of Ai and about five miles north-west of Jerusalem – no doubt the Gibeonites suspected that they might be Israel’s next target. The narrator raises our curiosity by describing in detail their elaborate preparations (vv. 4-5), designed to trick the Israelites.
- (b) *Israelites’ Suspicion:* The response of the Israelites in verse 7 betrays their suspicion. They are concerned that this contingent seeking a peace treaty might consist of locals and not people from a distant land. But what difference does this make? Here, we encounter one of the amazing features of this story – The Israelite response in verse 7 “how can we make a covenant with you?” makes it clear that they understood Yahweh’s law and were taking it seriously. Their recent review of the law of Moses (8:30-35) would have reminded them that they were to treat differently the towns nearby and the towns in distant areas. According to Deuteronomy 20:10-18, Israel could offer peace to towns very far from them; but they were to destroy the towns close to them – the towns of Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. At the beginning of verse 7, the narrator provides a startling piece of information for the readers: the people of Gibeon to whom the Israelites were replying were Hivites! Joshua, too, asks questions that reflect his suspicion (v. 8).

- (c) *An Unfortunate Treaty*: The narrator concisely summarizes Israel's response. First, they sampled the provisions (v. 14a); then "but they did not seek counsel from the LORD (v. 14b) – finally, Joshua made a peace treaty with the Gibeonites (v. 15). The consequences of this action will become clearer in 9:16-27).

Reflection:

While not as spine-tingling as the Achan story, this episode still has a sobering effect on us. How troubling that believers who know God's word can still make the wrong decisions! Joshua's motives were pure, but his decision was ill-advised. The fact is that we set ourselves up for failure when we don't consult with God. We often pray for God's provision, but this story challenges us to pray for God's direction as well.

II. Israel's Response to the Gibeonites (Hivites)

The story continues with the Israelites setting out for the Hivite cities (v.17). Their mission was to verify or disprove what they had heard – the report that the people with whom they had made a peace treaty actually lived nearby. The four Hivite cities (Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim) were located in an area about 6-12 miles south-west of Ai and 5-10 miles north-west of Jerusalem.

- (a) Conduct reflective of an honour for God. Although Israel found out about the deception, they did not attack the Hivites, because of the oath they had sworn by Yahweh, the God of Israel (v. 18a).
- (b) Congregation murmured against the leaders. Unlike the context of Exodus and Numbers (where murmuring is directed against God), the Israelites now has cause to be upset and the use of such a strong term suggests an attitude of anger bordering on rebellion.

Doing what is Right (biblically):

It is astounding how a failure to ask direction from God (9:14) can cause so much disruption and hostility among God's people. Perhaps the lack of reference to Joshua says something about the legitimacy of the people's murmuring. They were not directing it towards Yahweh; nor were they singling out Joshua, God's appointed leader. The Israelites were legitimately outraged at the failure of their leaders. Yet the leaders handled the situation sensibly. Breaking an oath made in Yahweh's name would amount to profaning or polluting His reputation (Leviticus 19:12). The leaders of Israel recognized that a violation of the oath would incur Yahweh's wrath (v. 20). *(They are right; during the period of the kings, Israel faced a three-year famine as the consequence for King Saul's violation of this very oath (2 Samuel 21:1-2).* So what should the Israelites do? Their decision to assign the work of woodcutters and water carriers to the Gibeonites finds its precedent in Deuteronomy 29:11 – linking these occupations with the 'aliens who are in your camp.'

Discussion:

How do believers respond when we are dealt a poor hand or bad deal?

1. What are some areas where such instances are found and how would you handle such situations or people?
2. Whom or what are you more concerned about when you find yourself in such circumstances?

STUDY PART B: JOSHUA 10

I. God is the One who won the victory for the Israelites!

King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem (vv. 1-2) feared the treaty between Israel and Gibeon, so he called on four other kings of Amorite city-states south-west of Jerusalem to attack Gibeon (vv. 3-5). God won the victory for the Israelites.

- (a) First, He threw the enemy into a panic when Israel suddenly arrived (vv. 7-10).
- (b) Then, when the Amorites fled, God hurled down hailstones on them (v. 11). The narrator even notes that more enemy soldiers died from the hailstones than from Israelite swords.
- (c) Miracle of Sun and Moon standing still. According to verse 13, the sun stood still and the moon stopped until Israel took vengeance on the enemy. The narrator adds two important clauses in verse 13: (i) the 'Book of Jashar' – an extra-biblical book in the Old Testament (it is mentioned again in 2 Samuel 1:17-18). The book must have contained songs or poems commemorating events in Israel. The final clause in verse 13 describes the sun as stopping in the middle of the sky and not going down for about a whole day.

Discussion:

Miracle? What happened that day (Joshua 10:12-13)?

In what way did the sun and moon stand still? The traditional interpretation is that God performed a miracle. The sun and moon stopped where they were in the sky until the battle ended. In other words, the earth stopped or slowed down its rotation to provide additional daylight! Other variations of this interpretation offer non-miraculous explanations: the sun stopped shining either because of a solar eclipse or because of the cloud cover related to the hailstorm. Another possible interpretation takes its cue from Habakkuk 3:10-11 and reads such accounts as a poetic, figurative expression of the battles. In this case, Yahweh's victory would be so overwhelming that the sun and moon would stand still in awe.....

To suggest this view is not to deny Yahweh's miraculous power – and then we have to deal with the crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 3) or the fall of Jericho's walls (Joshua 6). A miracle is something that cannot be replicated or controlled by man or nature, and repeats in the same manner. Only God can perform miracle; and He does it to prove to skeptics Who He Is.

Conclusion:

When leaders honour God's name; God bestows the same.

Verses 20-21 describe the success of the military campaign. The Israelites did inflict a great slaughter and returned safely, although some Amorites survived and escaped into the fortified towns. The crowning detail in the narrative appears at the end of verse 21: 'No one dared to speak against any of the Israelites.' Literally, the expression reads, 'And no one sharpened his tongue against any of the sons of Israel.' The mission was so successful that no Israelites offered any criticism of their leaders (as they did in Joshua 9:18), and no Canaanites or Amorites offered words of threat or opposition.

Discussion:

How important is God's name to you? Are the people of God mindful of the watchful eyes of the world reading our lives in close detail whether we reflect God's name in our daily dealings.

Application:

1. Let us encourage one another to live rightly as people of God through interactions that focused increasingly more and more on God rather than ourselves. These interactions and encounters should not be confined to Christians only but should embrace everybody.
2. In our dealings, when mistakes arose, especially where deception is involved and we are the "victim" – (i) Ask God to lead us out of the difficulty; (ii) Seeking to honour Him; and (iii) Keep believing in Him, for He is the One who will win the victory for us.

Prayer:

Lord God, we call upon You because You are worthy of praise. You are a God who has saved us from our enemies. Help us not to forget You when we face *decisions, challenges and opportunitites*. Amen.