

BUT THE ISRAELITES DID NOT ATTACK THEM

Joshua 9:1-27

Key Verse: 9:18

"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. The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders...."

In the last chapter, God gave Israel the strategy of how to win the battle against the people of Ai. In school studies, for one to study hard is the only strategy to get all A+'s. But in society, or in big business, just working hard cannot be a strategy. People of the world try to make wise strategies of how to make money, how to live longer. But human strategy resembles the stock market: we never know about tomorrow. Human life without God makes a man confused and angry without any obvious reason. But God's strategy is very simple. It is to seek his kingdom and his righteousness. Here the word "righteousness" refers to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to meditate on the word of God day and night. It is to love Jesus day and night. Then our Lord Jesus takes care of us. God's strategy is God's wisdom. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." "...and all these things will be given to you..." is God's promise and we must believe it in our hearts. Today's passage is a kind of difficult passage because it is the problem of the deception of the Gibeonites. We are familiar with the deceptive digging of our national father's wrongdoing. Now Kenneth Starr says that the appointment of a special prosecutor was unconstitutional. What he said revealed that he was very deceptive. But he finally deceived himself and confessed that what he had done was wicked. This kind of deceiving and

being deceived is the main job of all humankind when they do not know God. But God's people must depend on God. And God's people must honor his holy name. In the midst of life's battle, we must keep God's promise to us and act according to God's law.

First, "the Gibeonites' survival strategy" (1-13). Today's Bible passage describes the Gibeonites' survival strategy. The Bible compilers entitled it, "The Gibeonite Deception." But when we meditate on this passage, we find it was not really deception; it is fair to call the act, "the Gibeonites' survival strategy." When we know what's going on in the world, everything is to deceive or to be deceived in order to survive in the world. Therefore, we want to entitle the Gibeonites' act as "the Gibeonites' survival strategy." What was their strategy? Look at 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)," they were paralyzed by the news of what the Israelites had done under the leadership of General Joshua. They were, in actuality, mighty armies. Nevertheless, all of them were dispirited. Still, in order to save their lives, they wanted to fight against General Joshua and Israel. It was no more than the act of last resort that they had to do so. Their act was nothing but the act of a suicide squad.

Among them, there were Gibeonites. They knew that they were defeated before fighting, because God was with the army of Israel and God paralyzed them with fear. Maybe one of the Gibeonite Harvard graduates suggested: "It would be good to be their servants rather than to be killed by

them. It would not be fair for all of our children to be destroyed by God's army of Israel."

The people of Gibeon and their council members researched their survival strategy as many scientists struggle in the laboratories. The only choice was to succumb to General Joshua for their survival and their lovely and growing children. It is a question whether they might have thought about the survival of their donkeys and lambs. Maybe they did, maybe not. When the Gibeonites heard what General Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they resorted to a ruse (4). The first survival strategy was to say that they came from a far away distance. They loaded their donkeys with worn out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended (4). The delegates put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy (5). What a comic strategy. I don't know how they made their bread dry and moldy. I don't know how they made their clothes worn and patched. Usually the delegation of a country wears tuxedos and those who have no bushy beards buy a wig and beard and moustache and decorate themselves as if they were noble and men in the hierarchy. But this delegation looked like POW's from Cambodia. In this way, they went to General 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" (6). The Gibeonites belong to the Hivites. So the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live near us? How then can we make a treaty with you?" (7) The council of Israel with political intuition admitted that they decorated themselves like beggars who came from a distant country. Israel was defeated and the Gibeonites won the diplomatic battle. Then the delegation of the Gibeonites begged, saying, "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, 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 Ashtaroath. 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”’ (9-11).

At last, the council of Israel under General Joshua realized they disguised themselves and wanted to be Israel's servants (8). But their deception was so perfect when they said, "Your honor, see! 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 were so wonderful, but now they are worn out by the very long journey" (12-13). Let's see how Israel dealt with them.

Second, the council of Israel gave them God's mercy (14-21). The council of Israel was so moved by their survival strategy and they became sympathetic. The council members of Israel sampled their provisions and did not inquire of the Lord (14). Here Israel inclined sympathy toward the Gibeonites. They became profane. So the author of Joshua says that the leaders of the assembly checked up on their provisions, but they did not inquire of the Lord (14). Their victory was given by God Almighty. But their morale was high and they were arrogant toward the Gibeonites. So they checked the Gibeonites' provisions superficially and it looked that what they said was true. But they made a big mistake. Again we look at verse 14, "The men of Israel sampled

their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord." The Israelite army under General Joshua must thank God and render glory to God. But when the Gibeonites came like a band of beggars to become their servants, the Israelites did not pray to God. This was not a small mistake. They became like Stalin and his soldiers. At the moment, they had no God because they were overwhelmed by a victorious spirit. General Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath (15). General Joshua lacked prayer. We also see he was different from Moses. Whatever Moses did, Moses first prayed to God or he followed the words God had given him. Joshua was full of spirit, but his inner man was not fully mature enough spiritually to lead God's people. It was not the first time; it was the second time he didn't pray. When he did not pray, first he lost a battle to soldiers of a small city Ai. This time he was completely deceived and made an oath in the name of God with the Gibeonite delegation. General Joshua had to conquer the promised land. Finally he conquered it as a whole, but not thoroughly. Many enemies of many nations remained. Most of all, the Philistines became permanent enemies to the Israelites in the history of living in the promised land. As a result, at the time of King David, King David was almost killed by a giant Philistine soldier, Ishbi-Benob in a pit (2Sa 21:16). General Joshua's lack of prayer might be the cause that enemies were not thoroughly destroyed. It is very important for a leader to pray. We must choose as our leaders those who pray, instead of choosing handsome people with three-piece suits made in Babylon.

Three days after they made a treaty with the Gibeonites the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them (16). So the chosen Israelite soldiers set out and on the third day came to their

cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim (17). The chosen Israelite soldiers wanted to destroy them all overnight. In the world, enemies are less hateful, while daughters-in-law are permanently hated by their sisters who belong to the groom's house and especially their mothers-in-law. But those who deceive others completely are the most hated in many books and historical events. It is like we hate spies. So the chosen soldiers really wanted to cut them up. But they restrained themselves because they were the people of God who had given them their oath by the Lord, the God of Israel (18). Because of this oath they could not touch them at the time (19). This was the greatness of the chosen Israelite soldiers. They remembered God at the time of wrath and anger. They did not touch them. But they entrusted their treachery to God by saying, "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" (20). At the time of wrath and anger they remembered Almighty God who can pour his wrath on them. It is because they made the oath in the name of God. So they did not touch them; rather, they suggested to General Joshua to make them woodcutters and water carriers.

Third, General Joshua inspected their cause (22-23). General 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" (22-23). It is amazing that General Joshua was very repentant. And at the same time he was very merciful to the Gibeonites. This treacherous people should be severely punished. But General Joshua asked God to deal with them by saying, "You are now under a curse." General Joshua did not punish them for their

treachery and deception. Rather he asked God's dealing with them. Before making the treaty, General Joshua did not pray out of his high spirited generalship, and he made a mistake. But he was a man of God who knew how to repent. We human beings are nothing but human beings made of the dust of the ground and by the Spirit of God. Some people say, "This man is really good and honest and very handsome." Some people say, "This girl is more beautiful than Cleopatra and she is very honest." But Paul said all men are both good and evil caused by man's Fall, disobeying God's one word. Even though Joshua made a mistake, he humbled himself before the soldiers under him and came back to God.

The Gibeonites answered General 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. We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you" (24-25). We can learn from the Gibeonites' survival strategy. When they heard what God had done through Moses and Joshua, they learned that God Almighty is the true God. They could not do anything. Generally, in a case like this, cursed men and women of anger do not think of anything but fight and fight and again fight, even if they would be completely destroyed and even if their sons and daughters are smashed to death. These kinds of people are the same as the Philistines in the Bible. But the Gibeonites realized God's plan to give the Israelites the promised land. So they disguised themselves and all became comedian delegates and came to Joshua to procure an oath. The Gibeonites recognized the name of God. They believed that they could save their own lives, their children, their grandchildren, and their animals, too.

Fourth, General Joshua made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers despite that they were under a curse (24-27). When General Joshua pronounced, "You are now under a curse," the Gibeonites confessed to General 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. We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you" (24-25). General Joshua was embarrassed by this event. And he was sorry to his people that he made a mistake. The Gibeonites knew that something might happen. They had another strategy. It was to hang on to the promise of God. It is very funny that the Gentile people hung on to the promise of God and made General Joshua totally helpless. They also praised General Joshua by saying, "So we feared for our lives because of you." The second strategy was to praise General Joshua's leadership and his mighty army. Human beings are so flexible in their feelings. Even General Joshua was a little moved by their praise of him. In this world, the best politics or success is to praise his or her boss's virtue every day, endlessly. One who praises his boss will be promoted little by little until he becomes a president.

Fifth, General Joshua made the Gibeonites permanent woodcutters and water carriers for 400,000. Observing their attitude of hanging on the promise of God and praising General Joshua's great leadership, General Joshua could not punish them by a curse from God. But he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community. In the modern time, gas supply is very important. General Patton was disfavored by the White House and his gas supply was stopped. At that time, one of

his lieutenants attacked the mightiest German tank battalion and won the battle. An adverse situation turned into a mighty victory for General Patton. After General Patton won the battle the government gave him a lot of gas. Politicians are very funny sometimes. Likewise, in the past, firewood supply and water supply was crucial to the ancient armies. Here General Joshua knew that they were under a curse. But General Joshua did not curse the Gibeonites to death, but used them as woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community. It is not a small job. They had to work to get water in Palestine where there was no water and not much wood. Grown up people had no problem to be a wood cutter or a water carrier, but teenagers thought wood cutting and water carrying was their bad destiny. Some of them might have enjoyed it because they did not know anything else except wood cutting and water carrying.

In this way, General Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them. 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 (26-27), in other words, wherever they moved forward with the ark of the Lord. And the Gibeonites were woodcutters and water carriers until all the promised land was conquered. They worked hard to survive. Here we see a picture of human life. Human beings without God are all like woodcutters and water carriers until they die. Therefore, we must have God and act according to God's law. When we make an oath to God we must keep it, even to treacherous people. This is the way we must accomplish life as God's holy chosen people.