

Joshua 9

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[0 : 00] 9, and please remain standing as you're able for the reading of God's word. As soon as all of the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the low land, all along the coast of the great sea, toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites heard of this, they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel. But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took out worn out sacks for their donkeys and wineskins worn out and torn and mended with worn out patched sandals on their feet and worn out clothes, and all their provisions were dry and crumbly. And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us. But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, Perhaps you live among us, then how can we make a covenant with you? They said to Joshua,

We are your servants. And Joshua said to them, Who are you? And where do you come from? And they said to him, From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God.

For we have heard a report of him and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sion the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth. So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, We are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us. Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you. But now, behold, it is dry and crumbly. These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey. So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them. At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they lived among them. And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Kephira, Beroth, and Kiriath-Jerim. But the people of Israel did not attack them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. But all the leaders said to the congregation, We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. This we will do to them. Let them live, lest the wrath be upon us because of the oath that we swore to them. And the leaders said to them,

Let them live. So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them. 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? 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.

And they answered Joshua, Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants from the land before you. So we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing. And now behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to us to do, do it. And he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

[4 : 34] Good morning. I have the distinct privilege of having been invited to preach here this morning.

Thank you, Dave. For those of you that don't know, I spend half the year here in Chicago preaching and teaching at different places around the city and further abroad as well. But there's nothing like preaching at your home church. So it's good to be here. We're in Joshua chapter 9.

And today I want to talk to you about difficult decision making. I wonder if you've ever had to make a difficult decision. Of course you have. You're a human being and you've probably been alive for more than five minutes.

Not all of the decisions that we make in life are challenging. Peanut butter and jelly or meat and cheese. Not that complicated. Sometimes the decisions seem downright impossible. Looking back on the decision, it might look like a piece of cake.

You might even wonder, why did I struggle so much in the moment? The reality is, in the moment, it's pretty hard. Take, for example, DECA Records, 1962.

[5 : 59] They had a difficult decision to make. It was whether or not to sign a little band you might have heard of. Called the Beatles. They passed.

And in passing, they lost hundreds of millions of dollars. Now looking back on it, it is well known to be one of the dumbest decisions in the history of the music business.

But how was that a hard decision? This is why it was difficult. Believe it or not. The promo tape that the Beatles sent to the record label was terrible.

It was a difficult decision and they passed on it. Difficult decisions. Difficult decisions that, in the moment, don't press us to make challenging choices that oftentimes go wrong.

I wonder if it sounds familiar. Isn't that the way that our lives go so often? I wonder if you even had to make a difficult decision this week, or you're facing a difficult decision in the moment.

[7 : 10] The question I want to ask and answer today from this text is this. How should you and I make difficult decisions? Especially when we've messed up so many decisions in the past.

Whether you're a Christian or not, don't you wish there was the ability to make good decisions in challenging situations? Today we're going to learn how to do that through the power of a complicated example in a tricky situation presented to us here in Joshua chapter 9.

We're going to look at this story by means of three kinds of decisions. An easy decision, a bad decision, and ultimately a good decision.

So let's start with the easy decision. You'll find it in verses 1 through 6. Now to get what's going on in this story, a little bit of background is going to be important. The Israelites have entered God's promised land to take the land for God, and it's going decent.

Just like your life and my life, there's ups and there's downs, especially just in the last two chapters. In chapter 7, we read that they had broke faith with God. Not a good thing.

[8 : 37] And as a result, they had suffered from their decisions. Chapter 8, though, things are on an upswing. They renew their covenant, their promise with God, and everything goes well, and they gain victory over their enemies where they had previously lost.

I wish I could say, so chapter 9 really doesn't matter. Happily ever after, let's go eat lunch. But that's not what happens.

Just like so often, two steps forward, one step back. We're coming off the tails of a great moment in the life of Israel, and we are shoved in this chapter right into a difficult moment.

But this chapter doesn't begin with Israel's failure. It begins with a few seemingly easy decisions. From the people that live around Israel. Verses 1 and 2, the writer just starts naming all of the tribes that live around Israel, and they make a very easy decision.

The enemy of my enemy is my friend. So I will get together with my enemy, and we will trounce Israel.

[9 : 45] Easy decision. Israel's on the war path. They've been winning. I don't feel like leaving. Let's go to war. Now I say it's a seemingly easy decision, because as you and I know, it's actually God who's fighting for Israel, so good luck.

Because friends, here's the first piece of advice I got for you this morning. Don't fight God, because God doesn't lose. I don't know if you knew that coming in this morning. You'll find out eventually.

You can fight him if you want to. Good luck. Jericho fell down in chapter 6, and Ai got smoked in chapter 8, and preview for the weeks coming up, these people who go to fight against Israel are going to end up losing too.

But it seemed like an easy decision. It wasn't difficult at all. Israel's coming for us. Let's go fight Israel. But Gibeon takes a very different tact. Everybody else goes to fighting.

The Gibeonites go for fraud. If you can't beat them, join them. They do their homework.

[10 : 56] Although, let's be honest, it seems like a junior high school move. Verses 4 through 5. I know what we'll do. Let's get worn out everything and some old crusty bread.

Can you imagine them putting this all together and be like, this is going to work great. When I was far too old for this to be a good idea, and back a thousand years ago, when you used to have those mercury-filled death trap thermometers, I decided it would be a good idea to not go to school.

But of course, my mom was very about the process of education, so I knew I had to deceive my mother. I said, no problem. Hey mom, I'm sick. And my mom goes, do you have a fever? I was like, of course I do.

She goes, fine, put the thermometer in your mouth. I was like, not a problem. Now, it took like 400 years for these things to actually read accurately. So I put the thermometer in my mouth and just chilled in my room. My mom left and I took the thermometer out and I put it up against the light bulb.

It was before we had those LED light bulbs. It was like a thousand watt light bulbs, right? Just held it right up there. It was hot. I melted gummy bears with it when I was a kid and started a fire in my room. I knew it was going to work. No problem.

[12 : 11] No problem. I hear my mom coven, shove that thing back in my mouth, burns my mouth, and I'm like, gold. My mom looks at the thermometer. She goes, your temperature is 110. I go, right? Guess I'm staying home.

My mom goes, no, you would be dead, you idiot. I go, oh, yeah, well, I'm real sick. She goes, get out of here. I went to school and I got an education and here I am now.

You can imagine the Gibeonites going like, this is a great trick and just like keeping their fingers crossed. It was a genius plan, not so genius, but it was incredibly dangerous. Everybody else was gearing up for war and all they got is some worn out clothes, some old moldy bread.

They go, let's just go and see if this will work. You can imagine them with their fingers crossed behind their backs. Just going like, oh, this better work. Might not have been the best plan, but it was an easy decision on their part.

How will the Israelites respond? Well, unfortunately, this is where we shift from an easy decision to a very bad decision.

[13 : 23] You find that bad decision in verses 7 to 15. It starts okay. It starts okay. Some initial suspicion about where the Gibeonites are from and this is very important.

God had forbidden Israel to make covenants with the people who lived in the land in Deuteronomy chapter 7. Before they went in, God goes, by the way, don't make any covenants with people that live in that land.

They are supposed to go. Therefore, finding out where these people are from is of the utmost importance. And initially, they ask the question, okay, so where are you from?

Sounds good. But then the Gibeonites, on their part, give, let's be honest, the most absurdly ridiculous defense on the face of the planet. This is in verses 9 to 13.

Let me summarize it for you. Oh, where are we from? We're from a place, you probably haven't heard of it. It's called Far Away. I mean, we just heard of your God and stuff and so we decided to come all the way over here from where we were and it took a really long time.

[14 : 44] I mean, look at all of our worn out stuff and all we have is this old bread. This doesn't seem like a difficult decision. It's a terrible argument.

Sure, the Israelites are going to see right through this. It's like when the four-year-old gets really quiet and somebody calls the four-year-old into the room and goes, where were you?

The four-year-old goes, nowhere. Clearly still chewing on something. What were you doing? Nothing. And you're sitting there as an observer of this interaction going, oh, this ain't gonna work.

The person asking the question goes, well, all right then. You just stand there going, what are you talking about? It's the way you and I should be reacting to this story. The crazy thing is the stakes are so high.

Israel had gone from breaking faith with God to renewing the covenant with God and now some random people show up from somewhere and start asking, will you make a covenant with us?

[15 : 56] Here's what you have to know. It's not just like a, can you and I make a deal? God is mixed up in all of this. Everything rides on this decision.

And what do the leaders of Israel do? They just go with it and go, all right, what was the principal problem?

It's right there in verse 14. They did not ask counsel from the Lord. Friends, welcome to the birthplace of bad decisions.

You want to know how to create interpersonal conflict this morning? How to wreck your life and the lives of those around you?

It's real easy. Just start making decisions and don't ask God about it. Like, here's the thing. We won't do it this morning, but I could just stop here, take the microphone and we could just have testimony time.

[17 : 12] Couldn't I? We could all do that together. Just be like, just tell us the bad decision you made because you decided to not ask God and the ensuing results of that decision. And the problem is is we'd be here until midnight.

You and I all have examples of making terrible decisions because we just decided, I mean, there might be a God, but who cares about asking Him?

What does it mean to ask counsel from the Lord? Well, it could mean anything from church-wide prayer meeting to calling up a friend and opening the Bible.

In reality, what it means is to live a life dependent upon God in all of your decision-making. That's it.

No matter how big or small, no matter how individual the decision or corporate the decision. I wonder, friends, are you praying?

[18 : 17] Are you reading God's Word before you're acting or not? Here's the funny part. I'll bet you somebody in here is going like, why is he talking to me?

I'm talking to everybody. Here's the thing. You all have had to deal with this for like the last 12 minutes. I've had to deal with this for the last two weeks. Because I'd like to tell you, I'm the example.

I mean, you could give the bad example of how terrible your decisions have been, but let me just give you the litany of all the ways my life has gone perfectly well because I just pray all the time. I wish I could do that, but I can't.

The hymn writer got it right. Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Now, let me admit that like, if you're not a Christian here this morning and you're like, I don't know what the heck is going on, then you might think this whole idea of asking a deity that lives in the sky for help in making your decisions sounds idiotic.

[19 : 33] we all have decisions to make, don't we? Big decisions and little decisions, challenging decisions, seemingly impossible decisions, and we've all screwed up so many decisions in the past.

Don't you wish there was a God? You could ask for help in time of trouble. The good news is there is. The question is, will you be wise enough to do the opposite of the Israelites and to seek counsel from the Lord in your decision making?

Now, if you are a Christian, again, are you about the process of asking counsel from the Lord in your decisions? It's hard to do in our culture. We are all about pragmatic, lightning-quick decisions.

What's the decision? Here's the answer. We're all about not only making decisions, but then publicizing our decisions for the whole world to see.

We're all champions of the hot take. We're not dumber than we used to be. We possess the ability to broadcast our stupidity to a wider audience.

[20 : 47] And you go, yeah, that's what the people out there in the world do. No, no, I'm sorry, I was talking to people in church. And we do the same thing. Like, I know there's a God and everything, but why ask him?

We just got to get things done. Why is it so important to ask counsel from the Lord? It's a good question.

We know it's a bad decision. And the reason why we know it's a bad decision is because of the fallout from this decision. God's question. But the crazy thing is, as we see why it's so important to ask counsel from the Lord, we also see the beginnings of good decisions.

That's how this text is going to end. We're talking about the easy decisions. We're talking about bad decisions.

things. But in the second half of this text, we start to see some good decisions being made. And here's where you and I have a lot to learn. to answer that question, why should we ask for God's help?

[21 : 59] Why should we seek his counsel when it comes to making decisions? It's simply put because when we don't, things often fall apart. Don't they?

I wonder if that's your life this morning. That if you're living in light of a bad decision you made and now everything is falling to pieces and you are doing everything in your power to keep it together.

Don't worry, you're in a room full of people who've done the same thing. Things fall apart here.

People of Israel very quickly figure out the Gibeonites have deceived them. This produces two reactions. First and foremost, understandably, the people of Israel get very upset with the leaders of Israel.

you did the one thing we weren't supposed to do when we came in here. In fact, you did the very opposite. We were supposed to remove these people and you decided to give them a covenant.

[23 : 10] It didn't only create that conflict though, it also created conflict with the Gibeonites. Notice what it says right there in verse 18, but the people of Israel did not attack them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel.

Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. It's not only a problem with the leaders, it also seems like they're ticked with the Gibeonites and want to knock them off too. Friends, here's the truth of the matter.

Prayerless actions lead to interpersonal conflicts. I wonder if that sounds familiar.

So much strife is caused in the church today, here and around the world, because some of us act without praying, causing problems for all of us.

That's the problem with reading the Bible. sometimes the text does seem like really far away, but way too often the text, especially when it goes south, seems way too close.

[24 : 29] There's not just the painful lessons to learn from this text, though. Here's really where we start to learn what to do when we've made bad decisions.

I know this might come as a surprise, but here's the truth of it. When you realize you've made a bad decision, you should start making good decisions. Now you're like, okay, like, listen, I tell my six-year-old that all the time.

I know, right? So you should listen to what you tell your six-year-old. so much of the Christian life is like, just take what you would say to a six-year-old and do that thing.

You've made a bad decision, now make good ones. Doesn't mean everything's going to go right, but you can make the best out of a bad situation, which is exactly what we see happen here.

The first good decision is revealed in the actions of those who caused all of the problem, the Israelite leaders. They have made the terrible decision to act without seeking counsel from the Lord and had gotten themselves into a mess, but there was only one way out of the situation.

[25 : 46] And the way out of that situation was to seek counsel from the Lord, in prayer, in his word. Now you go, well, I don't know, I mean, I heard the text, I'm looking at the text, I don't see anywhere where they start praying, hold a church prayer meeting, and start reading the Bible.

You're right. Here's what they do. We know that they sought the Bible because of what they gave the Gibeonites to do.

It's a strange thing. Cutters of wood, drawers of water. Right there in verse 21. You go, what in the heck is that? Well, that's exactly what foreign peoples who had covenants made with them were given to do in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 20 and the book of Deuteronomy chapter 29.

Now, it would have been far more easy, more pragmatic, more political for the leaders to go, you know what? We made a mistake.

We don't like the Gibeonites either. We don't like looking stupid, so let's go kill them. Everybody would have had a party. That would have been great. But, there's a problem.

[27 : 08] And the problem is that they had made a covenant with the Gibeonites and involved God. You don't go back on something like that.

Because, as God's people, they represented Him. Thus, to break that covenant was to say something bad about God.

Same thing goes for us, friends. How we live, even how we respond to our bad decisions, has much to say about the God we worship. You might be a thousand feet deep in a hole today as a result of your terrible decision-making.

But, the reality is that you need to start making good decisions because God's name is at stake if you call yourself a Christian.

The Gibeonites had defrauded Israel. They had presented themselves as foreigners from far away, and they had had a covenant made with them on that basis.

[28 : 28] And now Israelite leaders are doing the proper, if unpopular, thing. They're making the best out of a bad decision. I began asking a question, how should you and I make difficult decisions?

And I hope we learn from Israel's complicated example. The key component to making good decisions is simply seek God in all your decision-making.

it's not complicated, but it takes commitment. Israel began poorly, but ended better, seeking to make the best out of a bad situation.

But in closing, I want to note that the Gibeonites also made a good decision. When confronted with their deception by Joshua in verses 22 and 23, they decided to tell the truth.

The reason they did what they did was simply because they heard that the God of Israel had given them the land. And thus, they were doing whatever they could to spare their lives.

[29 : 55] And thus, they did what they did and now were throwing themselves at the mercy of the leader of the people of God. Joshua, that leader, does spare their lives.

You see, their motives and the means were wrong. But the move was right. And we have much to learn from this situation, especially considering that you and I have so much more information.

If you're not holding a Bible this morning, the people who were speaking knew this small part up here, but you and I know also the big part back here. Now, maybe you don't know the Bible very well, so let me tell you a story.

In Joshua, it's very clear. God had given Israel his own land, and those who opposed Israel would go down. You and I are told something very similar, but on a much bigger scale.

Someone is coming who has a claim not just on the promised land, but on the whole earth. To oppose him is to lose everything, and to obey him is to gain it all.

[31 : 20] who is that one? Well, none other than Jesus, the one we have prayed about, sung about, God's son and champion king.

You see, as he comes, he brings the kingdom with him, claiming divine authority over the whole world, which is a bold claim. You and I would have reason to doubt that claim, except if you today spend some time reading, take your pick, Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, roll the dice, the four testimonies of Jesus, you will see that really, that claim to divine authority and ownership of the whole world is true at every moment in Jesus' life, almost every moment.

You see, there was that moment where they publicly executed the guy, and he died, and you might think, well, this guy's a chump, except for the fact that he rose from the dead, demonstrating that he doesn't just have authority over all of the world, but all of the universe, including death itself.

Then, having risen from the dead, he ascends victoriously to heaven and promises to come again, come like Joshua, but in a much greater way, removing all of the injustice and wrong in the world, and establishing peace forever.

So, there's a question, how would you and I be in covenant with that guy? It's good news, we should follow the Gibeonites' move, but not their means.

[33 : 10] You and I should draw near to Jesus. You and I don't have to draw near to Jesus as anything other than what we are. And let's be honest, you can look around this morning, we ain't much.

You go like, okay, the Gibeonites' move seems kind of dumb, but what else am I going to do? You're telling me to present myself to one who claims ownership over the whole world.

I mean, I don't know if he's going to accept me. And let's be honest, he shouldn't. Because you're not that great. And neither am I.

So the move of the Gibeonites seems to make sense. Dress yourself down or dress yourself up. Just become something other than what you are. But you don't have to.

The Gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 12, tells us that all who receive Jesus, all who believe in his name, believe that he's the one who he says he is, are all given the right to be made children of God.

[34 : 23] Even somebody like you. The question is, will you and I make a good decision? And trust in Jesus. Friends, you and I can be made right with God, no matter how many bad decisions we've made up until this moment in our life.

No matter how many bad decisions we are in the midst of suffering the consequences of right now. We can receive the help we so desperately feel we need when making decisions, especially difficult ones.

We must simply recognize Jesus for who he is, trust in him, and seek him in all our decisions, no matter how difficult our decisions might be.

Let's pray. God, we thank you for this complicated story of difficult decision-making in Joshua chapter 9.

Amen. I pray for those who are in the midst of dealing with the consequences of bad decisions.

[35 : 40] Help them to make good ones from here on out. Help them to seek you in all of their decisions. Lord, so many of us who claim to be Christians know that it's what we should do.

we just can't seem to find the time, effort, and energy to do so. And yet, suffer repeatedly from our poor decision-making.

Help us to make good decisions no matter how painful making those decisions might be. I pray for those who aren't even Christians, who might be intrigued by this Jesus guy.

Open their hearts and their minds to understand who Jesus is, what he claims for himself, and the hope that there is for all of us, no matter how many bad decisions we've made, that even we can be made right with him.

It's in his name that we pray. Amen.