

Spiritual Vigilance

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the chapter we read in the book of Joshua, chapter 9, and if we could read again at verse 3, Joshua chapter 9, reading at verse 3, 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 worn out sacks for their donkeys and so on.

Particularly these words, they on their part acted with cunning. I'm sure we're all familiar with the kind of expression where we say, well, you know, we were taken for a ride.

We had the wool pulled over our eyes. And I'm sure there have been many situations in our lives where we've come to discover that what appears to be is not what is actually there.

We've all been in these situations where afterwards we felt very, very stupid. We felt that we've really been exploited.

We felt we've been made to look really, really, really foolish. And sometimes we can laugh at ourselves. Sometimes we feel frustrated.

[1 : 27] Sometimes we can even feel angry, dependent on what has happened. But I'm sure all of us in here, to one degree or another, that we have learned that everything is not always what it may appear or what it may seem.

And that was certainly a lesson that Israel discovered. And as always, God has carefully recorded for us history.

And I'm sure there have been, there were many aspects of Israel's history that was not recorded.

But God has seen fit to record certain things. And this was one of the things that was recorded.

And as always, these things are recorded in order that we may learn, because there are spiritual lessons to be learned from them. The New Testament tells us that, that these things are set out for our example.

They are set out for our instruction. God has seen fit to record these things so that they are there as pictorial representations of life and of the struggles and the battles and the lessons that are to be learned.

[2 : 35] And probably the great lesson that is to be taken from this is the need for spiritual vigilance. The need for spiritual alertness. The fact that Israel were so tricked, so sort of deceived at this point is all the more amazing.

Because Israel at this particular point in their experience, were, as it were, at a heightened point of spirituality.

We're not talking about a nation here that has kind of wandered away from God. There were periods in Israel's history when that was true.

There were periods they blew hot, and there were periods they blew cold. Well, if there was ever a point where you could measure the spiritual barometer in Israel's history, at this particular point, it would have been very high.

They were a very vibrant, active, spiritual people at this particular juncture. And they were being led by this great man Joshua.

[3 : 48] And Israel were deceived at a point, which is really quite remarkable. Because you'll remember how they had taken Jericho and they had taken Ai.

These two cities had been destroyed. And naturally speaking, you would have expected, because of the success, although there had been failure first at Ai, because of the success, that you would keep the momentum going.

There's the first city destroyed. The next city, let's keep the momentum going. Let's strike while the iron's hot. Let's hit the other cities while they're filled with fear, when they're crippled because of what has happened in the past.

But no, Israel stopped. And they stopped to renew a covenant with God. They stopped in order that the law of God would be read.

Because God had said to Israel, you must study the word, you must read the law, you must meditate upon the law, and if you do that, then your way will be prosperous, and you'll have good success.

[4 : 58] So Joshua and Israel, despite the success at Jericho and Ai, stop. And they do the very thing that God requires them to do.

And so they are here engaged in the reading of the law, and they are renewing their covenant with God. As we say, the spiritual barometer is right up high.

And yet it's at this very point that they are deceived. And you know, there's an incredible warning to us there.

Because Satan, and let's take this on board, Satan is always going to go for the Christian who is committed and is seeking to grow in grace.

Satan is not going to bother too much about the Christian who is sort of drifting along. The Christian who is rarely reading his Bible, or the Christian who is not totally committed at all.

[6 : 03] Because Satan is saying, well, that passion is not much of a threat to my kingdom. That passion isn't really causing me any great grief or damage.

But that passion is there. That passion has a hunger for the Lord. That passion is praying. That passion is dedicated. That is the passion I am going for.

I'm going to get him. I'm going to hit him in whatever way I can. So let us be absolutely persuaded that on the one hand, while there are so many blessings attached to being spiritually vibrant and spiritually vigilant, there is at another level it is never more dangerous for us.

Because it is at these times and these points that Satan is going about like the roaring lion seeking to devour. And be quite persuaded of it, my dear friend.

If you today have an urgency in your heart to know more of the Lord, to become more like Christ, if you are committed to his cause and to his word, you are marked.

[7 : 12] You are a marked person. Satan is gunning for you. He will be waiting in the wings, and he will in one way or another seek to trip you up.

Just as he got Israel at a high point, where they were spiritually alive, spiritually vibrant, spiritually moving forward, and yet they were deceived.

Because that's what Satan is about. The leopard doesn't change his spots, and neither does Satan. And so we've got to be aware of this, that we will always be a target for the enemy.

And that is why it is so important that we pray for those who are involved in the work of the Lord, because they are targets. You know, there are some people who have the idea that missionaries and ministers and elders and these, that they don't need prayers, because they're all right.

No. There is nobody that Satan will attack or bombard more. Martin Luther, all his Christian life, lived the most intense struggles with the evil one.

[8 : 22] He was so conscious of the batterings and the bruising, constant, because Satan knew here was a man who was being mightily used by God, mightily used in opening doors, bringing forth the gospel.

Satan will, as I say, mark anyone and everyone who is a threat to his kingdom, the kingdom of darkness. Now it tells us in verse 3 that when the inhabitants of Gideon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they on their part acted with cunning, or they acted craftily.

Interestingly, the same word that is used of Satan in Genesis chapter 3. It's the same word of that crafty, cunning way that he works. It's a word of deceit.

And that's what Satan is all about. He is the master of deceit. He knows when. He knows how. He knows all these, the hows, the whens, the whys, the wherefers.

He knows when to strike. And he'll wait, and he'll wait, and he'll wait, until there's one moment when you are off guard, and he'll strike.

[9 : 40] He'll strike. He's waiting. Let's not beware, the Bible says, let him that stand beware, lest he fall. Beware.

Now, it's interesting that when the Gibeonites came to Israel, that they didn't talk, sort of, they weren't aggressive in their talk, they weren't atheistic in their talk, they were very pious.

It was pious talk. It was flattering talk. And they were saying to Israel, oh, we've heard all about you. We've heard all about your God, what a great God he is.

We've heard about you, what a great nation you are. And in fact, you're so great, and your God is so great, we would love to strike up a friendship with you. Now, the thing was that, and here again, this is what, the very point that we're highlighting.

The Gibeonites came to Israel, and they built their deception upon God's law. It's very obvious that the Gibeonites knew what God's law was.

[10:50] That becomes quite evident in their conversation. They knew that God's law was such that God had demanded and required that Israel would drive all the inhabitants out of Canaan.

God had set the boundaries of this land they were going into. And all the inhabitants of that land were to be driven out. Israel were not to make a covenant with any of the cities and any of the tribes and any of the peoples within the land.

But those outside the borders, Israel were free to make a covenant with them. So you see the strategy of the Gibeonites. And they even talked, they didn't talk about Jericho.

They didn't talk about Ai because that was too recent. These things weren't mentioned. If they had talked about the destruction of Ai, they would have been given the game away. But they're talking about what Israel did away back to Zion and Og and to the Amorites and these.

They were talking about these great things, these great events. And you see what they're doing is they're building their strategy and deception on what God's word was saying to Israel.

[12:08] And that's another thing that Satan does. He comes, remember, as an angel of light. He doesn't always come as a roaring lion. He's not always as a roaring lion.

He will often come so deceptively, so silently. That's the way he came to Adam. It was through Eve. If Satan had come in a sort of a full frontal and an aggressive manner, Adam would have been on his guard.

But no, he came, as we know us and so often said, he came kind of sideways. And he deceived the woman and the woman as she was deceived was able then to take the man along with her.

And so this is a ploy. Satan is going to attack. Just like the Gibeonites did. Attacking Israel with their knowledge of what God's word said.

Now, the background to it as we read there is that all the kings of all the nations and the cities round about, they decided to form an alliance. And they were going to come as one to fight against Israel.

[13:16] All of them, that is, with the exception of the Gibeonites. And the Gibeonites said to themselves, no. They believed that they were ready for destruction.

They believed that God and Israel were going to destroy all the cities. They believed they had no chance in fighting. Even supposing all the nations came together, they still knew they wouldn't win. And so they employed, or they went down the road of deception. And it was actually very clever, very simple. They were probably the next city.

They were only about 25 miles, about that away. It wasn't far away anyway. Maybe 25, 30 miles away. They weren't far away. It wouldn't have taken long for Joshua and Israel to have found out. And maybe it was a wee bit longer than that. It wasn't far away anyway. But what they did was so simple. They got old patched wineskins, and they got old footwear, and they got old clothes, and they got moldy bread, and off they went.

[14:20] It didn't take them long to reach into the camp of Israel. But in they came, looking old, disheveled, worn out, haggard, and everything about them looked like here are people who come from the other side of the world.

And when they came in, they said to Joshua and to the leaders of Israel, We have come from a long distance, from a faraway land.

And we heard, even in that faraway land, about what mighty things you have done as a nation. And of how great your God is, we want to make a treaty with you.

We want to sign a covenant with you. Joshua rightly said to himself, How do we know that you're not a neighboring city? How do we know that you are not people who live in this land?

And they said, Well, look. Look at it. How could we be people who live in... When we left, see this bread that's got fungus growing out of it and it's just blue and moldy?

[15:26] That bread was fresh out of the oven. See the clothes we were wearing? We had new clothes. They're all torn and disheveled.

We have been traveling for weeks and weeks. And Joshua believed the picture. And you see, that's what we're saying.

We've got to be... Because if there's one folk, they're spiritually vibrant. They've been spiritually alert. But we read there in verse 14, so the men took some of their provisions but did not ask counsel from the Lord.

Didn't ask counsel from the Lord. And that was the mistake that Joshua made. Because he, as we said, built, built this covenant upon what his very eyes were telling him and actually built it upon what God's word said.

Joshua took them at face value and he said, right, what does God's word say? God's word, we've just read the law, God's word says, don't make a covenant with any of the people of the land.

[16:37] Well, they are not people of the land. It's very obvious. They've come from a distance. What does God's word say about those who've come from outside the borders? That the word was this, very simple, that if a city was to seek peace with you and were prepared to become your servants, then you were to enter into peace with them.

You were to make a covenant with them. That was God's word. And so Joshua was keeping exactly to God's word. And he said, right, let's, we'll sign this treaty.

Because everything seemed so clear and straightforward and built and based upon God's word. And so it was except that they were being deceived by the very people they were entering into covenant with.

And that is why you and I must always be asking the Lord. God sets out principles for us in his word in which we are to live. We're to make our decisions and base things upon.

But every day there's something new coming before us. And that is why every day we've got to be going to the Lord. and asking the Lord for that wisdom, that discernment.

[17:53] Lord, give me, give me to know what is right and what is wrong. Lord, give me the spiritual alertness. Because you know it's just like that.

All it takes is that. All it takes is that. Because Satan has arrows. And you know an arrow. An arrow is sharp and is piercing. Even soldiers who used to cover themselves with armor would sometimes get pushed just in the there might be the tiniest gap and sometimes a very fine arrow would make its way through that tiny gap.

Remember what you call him Goliath. He was clothed from head to foot and male. The only place that was clear was his forehead and that's where he was hit. That's all Satan needs to get is a little chink in our armor.

God has provided that armor. But we need every day the spiritual prayer to have the channels open, to be asking the Lord all the time, Lord, give me this vigilance.

Give me this. Because as we say there's this enemy going around all the time. And as we say Satan will come as the angel of light.

[19:09] He will come misquoting scripture. That's what he did with Jesus. He will come using God's word but he will turn it round. That's what he did with Eve.

Satan knows the Bible. Don't you kid yourself. I believe Satan knows the Bible better than any of us in here. Satan knows what the Bible says. And Satan will use that Bible.

And I believe that many of the people in this world who have been deluded, many of the false religions which take some of their teaching from God's word. It is because Satan as the angel of light has come and there are many false doctrines built upon God's word where God's word is taken completely out of context, turned on its head and people build their futures on these things and Satan is a master at doing that.

And that is why it is so important for us, so important for us to know what God's word says. We are looking at the meeting on Thursday night.

It was saying that those who live according to God's word they will not stumble. In other words those that find God's word filling their lives they won't be taken aside by error.

[20:28] You know there is an awful lot of people are blown about by different errors. as Paul calls it they are blown about by every wind of doctrine that there is something new coming and people go this way and they go that way and they try this and they try that and they are just not too sure.

There is an instability and the word of God is saying if we are soaked by the word of God then we will not stumble. There will be that which strengthens us and keeps us in the way.

Now as we see here Joshua and Israel were absolutely shocked to discover that the Gibeonites that they had signed this treaty with were more or less their next door neighbors.

They were more or less the next city that they would be attacking. And you can imagine the consternation and there were many in the camp in Israel they were mad at Joshua and the leaders and they were wanting to destroy the Gibeonites but Joshua and the leaders said no.

And you know this I really admire Joshua. You know sometimes if you were to put it into today's context and here is a treaty signed and it's a treaty that is built on deception and lies.

[21 : 46] You would have the lawyers in and they'd be thumbing through it and they'd say this isn't watertight this doesn't count. This was not built on truth. You can rip up these documents don't count for anything.

Go on and you go. and there would be many people who would be saying to Joshua look this treaty doesn't count because it was built on an untruth and a lie. Joshua says no.

I have given my word. And you can see here the importance of the word of a person's word. And I believe that God although Joshua had made a mistake God actually works and it's wonderful how God works things for good.

The Gibeonites to a certain extent they got what they wanted. They got their lives spared. They didn't get the other thing which they wanted was their freedom because they were taken on in a kind of a servants.

But it's very interesting the work they were given. They were to be cutters of wood and drawers of water. In other words they would be the ones who would be carrying the water all the time.

[22 : 53] Where? To the temple. to the tabernacle. In other words these people who had been the enemies of Israel heathens were given the work which would give them every day they would be opened up to the worship of God in the temple.

Every day their work was involved around the work of the temple. And you see God's wisdom in this. That he was going to expose these people to the true worship of God.

And then of course when the Gibeonites when the other nations or the other tribes and other cities discovered what the Gibeonites did they all got together and said right let's hit the Gibeonites. And again we see what a decent and an upright man Joshua was.

Remember the people of Israel had still wanted Israel to hit Gibeon. The leaders in Joshua said no. here was an option. The other nations were going to destroy the Gibeonites.

Wouldn't it have been easy for Joshua and Israel to say oh we don't need to get our hands dirty. All we need to do is to step back. We will be clear and will let the other nations destroy the Gibeonites and that's us we're clear.

[24 : 22] Is that what Joshua does? No. Because of the treaty he had signed he said we have to defend these people. And that's why the more you read about this man Joshua the greater he becomes.

He is a man absolutely of his word. And even although he had been taken for a ride and the wool had been pulled over his eyes and he had been deceived and he had been made to look a laughing stock he had signed that treaty and he was going to defend the Gibeonites as if they were his own people.

And of course the Lord was using this very thing for the destruction of the Canaanites. And that's what's happened. And you know as you carry on and you read the history of Israel it's interesting that there comes a time in the journeys when the tabernacle is pitched in Gibeon.

And later on when Nehemiah is building rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem there are many Gibeonites who are actually helping Nehemiah. So you see how God's grace God's grace God turns things around so that even the enemy under God's grace is brought in working in the tabernacle and becomes part and partial of even the building project in the history of the nation of Israel.

That's what God's grace does. And so today we need to seek to know this God so that every day that we will live under his protection and care.

[26 : 01] The Gibeonites the moment they signed that treaty with Israel they came under God's protection and care. They came under Israel's protection and care.

Wasn't that wonderful? even even although they had been deceivers even although their lives up until that point had been so wrong from the moment they were into the covenant that was it God was there to protect them and that's exactly what happened and he's able to do that for you today as well to come in under the protection of this covenant keeping God won't you go to him today won't you seek that you will go where the everlasting arms are around you where you will be protected and nourished and fed and directed every single day of your life let us pray oh lord our

god we pray that we might learn as we have studied god's word the need for vigilance the need to be on guard because the devil as a roaring lion goes about seeking whom he may devour lord we need that protection we need that guidance we need that grace help us lord to follow thee with all our hearts lead us in the way of truth and guide us looking ever unto Jesus who is the author and the finisher of our faith wash away from us lord our every sin in Jesus name we ask all amen thank you