



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Evil Has Really Good Tricks

August 22, 2021

Joshua 9:1-27

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***9** As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland 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, **2** they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.*

***3** But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, **4** they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, **5** with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. **6** 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." **7** But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?" **8** They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?" **9** 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, **10** and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth. **11** 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.'" **12** 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. **13** 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." **14** So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD. **15** 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.*

***16** 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. **17** And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim. **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. **19** But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. **20** This we will do*

*to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them.”<sup>21</sup> 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.*

*<sup>22</sup> 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? <sup>23</sup> 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.” <sup>24</sup> 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 of the land from before you—so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing. <sup>25</sup> And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it.” <sup>26</sup> So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. <sup>27</sup> 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.*

*(Pastor prays)*

We live our lives, every one of us, neck-deep in fallenness. You can see it at every turn. It could be that it's an enemy that is straightforward like the Taliban. They are a clear enemy. You know what they're doing, You know who they are, so you should know how to fight that enemy.

Sometimes you see the fallenness and the evil that you could point out. Other times you can feel the fallenness we live in with things like COVID-19 and its variants. COVID-19 subversively seeps into the air that we breathe and quietly gets inside. You don't even know you have it and it's inside of you. It works from the inside out and it starts to destroy. Sometimes evil is clear, you can see it. You can identify it. It's straightforward. It's observable. You know how to defend yourself. You know what to do.

Those of us who are Christians, we can open the Bible and there are some things that we clearly know. Look at the 10 Commandments. There are things that we know are wrong. We could say that murder is wrong, lying is wrong, homosexuality is wrong. Abortion, hatefulness, blasphemy, there are things we can just look at in the Bible and know that's wrong. There are other evils that seep in and trick even God's people. There are things like a social gospel, an easy “believism.” There are sentimentalities, a nationalistic hypocrisy, CRT, false teachers. For the last 15-20 years we've been battling something called “cultural Christianity.” People think they are Christians just because they had some sort of association with the church.

And for all of those things, whether they are evils you can see and identify or evils that seep in with us unaware, J.C. Ryle says Joshua Chapter 9 should be of great practical value for all believers who are fighting the good fight. He goes on to say when you think about Satan in the Bible and you get a picture of Satan, you either see him as one of two different kinds. In the Bible Satan is pictured as a roaring lion. He uses force and terror and scares God's people. It's a straightforward attack. Or as a serpent, he uses cunning and poison.

And I think there's a lesson to be learned from Joshua in Chapter 9 and what's known as the "Gibeonite deception." I'd like to take this chapter and let's just go through it. You just follow along. You don't have to look up at me or anybody else, you just keep looking at the Bible. I'll point out some things I want you to see.

Join me there in Chapter 9: victories have been won, Jericho's fallen, Ai has fallen. In Chapter 9, as soon as all the kings in that area heard what was going on, they decided to get together from the mountains to down in the flatlands and over to the coast. They all came together, those six tribes, they all come together as one. And now Joshua can't go by and pick out one at a time. They're coming as a giant army. They've got a straightforward approach. They're coming to get him. Sometimes evil comes after you and you can identify it and know how to defend yourself. That's what's happening here.

But there was a tribe that decided to do things a little differently. You know them as the Gibeonites. We find them in verse 3-4. In verse 7, you find out they're actually part of the *Hivites* but they've decided not to go to battle. They will use cunning deception. They used worn out baggage, worn out wineskins and they tore their clothes. Look, if you're wearing jeans with holes and then you think you're in fashion, the Gibeonites did it first.

So they've got worn out clothes and sandals that are breaking apart, and the Bible says that they come up on Israel and they say, "We've come from a far country." Now, I don't know how they knew this but somehow they knew that Israel could make a treaty with people who lived a long way away but they couldn't make a treaty with people who were close. You can read it in Deuteronomy and Exodus. They tell Israel that they have come from a long way and they start pushing the issue of making a covenant. When Joshua doubts their story, they trot out all the evidence. They say "look at our clothes, look at our sandals, look at the wineskins. They were new and the bread in our bag was hot when we pulled it out of the oven but now it's dry." They

keep pressing the issue, and verse 14 says that they didn't ask, they didn't seek counsel. Israel didn't seek to hear what God had to say. So they go ahead and make a treaty with these people. The problem is that, for Israel, a covenant is bound by a holy God. They are bound and they must stick to it. Israel took this God very seriously. So we come down the page to verse 17-18 and we see that 3 or 4 days after they make the covenant, Joshua will find out that they had been lied to. They pulled the people out in front and confronted them. In verses 18-19 the Bible says that the people of Israel started their Monday morning quarterbacking. Joshua should have known better. Here's the vision of the people rising up, but Joshua tells the people who will listen, "we have made a covenant to God with these liars." Israel has promised to God they will not hurt these people and the narrator who wrote Joshua is looking back and saying these people are going to be woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord. To this day, in other words what Joshua decided back then is having long-term effects. He didn't make a good decision.

In verses 1-2 you're fighting an enemy you can identify. In verses 3 and the rest of the story, we're fighting an enemy that's deceptive. How do we stand and fight today? I'd like to make a suggestion based on this story,

### **We Fight Our Battles With a Strong Faith and Gospel Determination**

We're going to see a couple lessons in this passage. I see two "sometimes" and two "always."

#### **Sometimes evil is straightforward**

Sometimes you can identify it right off the bat. You see the kings that come together from the territory. Israel would know what she was up against. They would know where these kings came from and what they were capable of. There is this obvious, blunt opposition coming. I mean this is partly why we feel so frustrated with what's going on. They knew what was gonna happen. Sometimes the thing is evil but you actually know what it's going to do. Israel knew this is how they would act. This is the story of the world that you and I actually live in right now. There are so many enemies that we see this very day fighting against God and against us. You feel that. Some of you feel it at work. You work at a large company and are having to do things that are politically correct. Political correctness continues to move in this devolving way and so you're feeling the pressure there. Or possibly it could be just in the society we live in. You look

around and see all of the devolution of what would otherwise be seen as morality. What our society now views on sexuality, the standards keep moving. Or social media, what are the standards that are appropriate?

You've got to be careful now going to the Public Library because there might be a man there dressed up as a woman to read a story to your children. The thing is, we know there's some of these things that come at us and we see them. You don't have to question; you know that is wrong.

But how do we fight? How do we fight against that without standing and shouting and being angry? How do we do that? I think Paul gives that to us in Ephesians Chapter 6. There you find Paul giving us the instructions on how to stand and fight. He gives us all of the elements of the things we need to fight. He says, first, you've got to put on the belt of truth. There is this objective reality that we hold onto what is true. And it is there at the very center of what we're wearing holding it all together. You must have on the belt of truth. Then there is the breastplate of righteousness which covers all of the internal organs. We understand that to be the righteousness of Christ. The gospel has taught us that Jesus took our sin and gave us his righteousness. So we stand with the breastplate of righteousness. We have our feet shod with the gospel of peace. The Gospel, which is so central to who we are, we fight evil with the Gospel. We stand in the Gospel. We believe that God is holy, that we are sinners and that Jesus Christ died on the cross in the place of sinners. God raised Him from the dead, and the only way to be close to God is through faith in what Jesus has done. The Gospel is what brings peace with God. That's why it is the gospel of peace. In one hand we pick up the shield of faith. Paul says the shield of faith is useful to extinguish the fiery darts that Satan fires at you. Some of you have questioned God's sovereignty and you wonder why God is doing this. And God is giving you this weapon that is a shield of faith and you hold it up when those fiery darts come your way. Also make sure you have the helmet of salvation that covers your mind and heart and emotions. There's the helmet that keeps you intact with the understanding that you being a Christian is dependent on God and not on you. So you have in one hand the shield of faith and in the other hand, we find out, you have the sword of the spirit. He says that's the Bible. Faith in one hand and God's word in the other. And at the end of verse 18, Paul says here's what you put on top of all that, you pray for all the saints. Sometimes, in this evil world that we live in, it

takes every bit of that piece of armor. We stand there to fight and sometimes it is the straightforward kind of evil but not always.

Let me give you a second "sometimes."

### **Sometimes evil is subversive**

Sometimes evil is like what you see in verses 3-4. Look at the Gibeonites. They've come up on Israel and here's what they say. We're not going to fight them like everybody else, straightforwardly. We are going to use cunning. We will be deceptive; we will trick them. For deceit to work, it has to be believable.

Isn't this what Jesus said about false teachers, that they were actually wolves that looked like sheep? Paul warned us in 2 Corinthians, Chapter 2. That we are not outwitted by Satan, we actually are not ignorant of His design. Because Paul says in Ephesians 6, that Satan has his schemes, his tricks. I hope you believe that God has a plan for your life, but you should also believe that Satan has plans, schemes, tricks, traps and dead ends. You run along the path of life and he's built a pit that you fall into that you don't see. God has called us to be alert and to be sober minded. Satan will also use a disguise. Come down the page to verses 4-6, the Gibeonites decide to make a plausible story; so their supplies are worn out, their shoes are worn out, the bags are worn out, their food is drying out. They come up with a plausible story with tangible evidence. In verse 7-8, Joshua could feel that this doesn't sound right but he just didn't press the issue far enough. You need to ask questions. This is where we must be discerning. Paul told us in 2 Corinthians 11 that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. This is where we need to press devotion. Certainly you should be devoted but we also need to press doctrine.

This is when we talk about discipleship. We have the new Foundations class on Wednesdays. We'll talk about discipleship next Sunday. When we talk about discipleship, we must talk in terms of community and information. When we worship together, the songs we sing and prayers we offer up, it should be *feeling* because you are talking to our living God, but it's feeling and truth. Why do we need that? So that we can see what is real, what is a lie and live our lives accordingly. Evil is deceiving and disguising. And look at verses 6-7. Evil rushes you. Look at it with me in verse 6-7. Here is what the Gibeonites are doing. They know they're

playing a trick and somehow they know that if they could get Israel to make this covenant, they'll stick to it. So in verse 6 they say make a covenant with us. In verse 7 they say make a covenant with us. In verse 11, keep looking, they say make a covenant with us, they keep pushing. If the Israelites make an agreement, the Gibeonites know that they will be bound to that agreement because of the name of God. Be careful if you are pressured to do or believe something you our suspect of. God gave you a mind, a conscience, the ability to discern, so you as a child of God, start asking questions. Does this honor God? Does this square with the Bible? Does this adorn the Gospel? Does this help with my sanctification? Does this draw me closer to Jesus? If you need something to compare it to, how is this compared to the 10 Commandments? How does this compare to the Sermon on the Mount? If I pray this to the Lord's prayer will it bring honor to God? You see the enemy starts pushing you to make a decision.

It doesn't seem to be working in the text, and Joshua and the leaders are asking questions. But the enemy changes tactics. Now the enemy will use flattery because sometimes even the best of us fall to flattery. It happened to Adam and Eve in the garden. The serpent said, "if you eat this you will be like God." The people in the text, the Gibeonites say, we just want to be your servants. You are so much greater than us that we just want to serve you. Just make the covenant with us and we will serve you. What does Proverbs 29:5 say? <sup>5</sup> *A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.* It's a trap. And the worst part of it is when God is brought in. It's the worst for God's people. The enemy claims to actually want to be worshippers of God.

Brothers and sisters be careful. Everything that claims to be Christian is not. Everything that claims to be of God is not of God. You need to ask questions and look up underneath and discern, is this discussion, is this movement, is this relationship, based on the centrality of the cross of Jesus? Do you believe in the substitutionary death on the cross of Jesus in the place of sinners? Do you believe in the resurrection? Do you believe this will aid you in holy living?

100 years ago, when Christianity was having the same debate we have now on theological liberalism and theological conservatism, a man named J. Gresham Machen, a Presbyterian theologian, wrote a book entitled **Christianity and Liberalism**. It's about 100 pages. He said that two versions of Christianity are not actually two different kinds of Christianity. The two versions

are actually two different religions. You see, sometimes evil is straightforward but sometimes it is subversive.

Sometimes, sometimes. Let me give you two “always” to finish out the day. Here’s the third point.

### **Always fight evil with God’s word**

Join me there in verse 14. The writer steps back and he gives us the most important verse in the entire story. He tells us in Chapter 9:14, here's where they made the mistake. Here's where they went absolutely wrong. The men looked at what was in front of them but they did not ask counsel from the Lord. They didn't ask God. They didn't say, what does God's word say to this?” This is where God's people go wrong. This is why it's so important for you to have a good grasp on the story of the Bible, of God's creation, and man’s fall, and then the redemption, the consummation, the coming of Jesus. This is why we want to teach the Bible: so that you have a good, clear understanding, so you can go to it and ask the questions. They didn't seek the mouth of God.

Isn’t that what Paul tells Timothy? You need to do your best to present yourself to God. This is to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed. A worker who is rightly handling the word of truth. Always fight evil with God’s word. There is something else, another “always.”

### **Always remain faithful, regardless**

Israel has been brought into a covenant with a bunch of liars. Joshua led his people to do this. They made a decision to make this covenant before the almighty and holy God based on lies. These people, the entire agreement, is built on a false premise. Now anybody here today would think Israel would have been justified to go back and say, “we don't have to hold onto the bargain because we were lied to.” But Joshua and Israel took this covenant so seriously, they took the holiness of God so seriously, that even though the Gibeonites tricked them, they wouldn't go back on what they promised they would do. How do you live faithfully after being treated so poorly? How do you live in the wake of someone else telling you absolute lies? Or flip the coin up. How do you live when you're caught in the framework of your own sins? I mean



the truth is, sometimes we commit these sins and they wreck us for years to come. You might be living in the wake of several bad choices and mistakes and someone else's sin that has affected you so terribly, and you can just look and see that there's a whole mountain of regrets. Why does God have you there? Why? Because God is going to display His strength in your weakness. God is going to show His grace in your sin. God is going to bring His peace into your story. Even a tragic mistake with long-term consequences can be turned to God's glory through your faithfulness.

We hold up Joshua, we look at Joshua, we look at Joshua keeping the covenant, you hold it up to the light and we look through this glass dimly. We looked through Joshua into the true and better Joshua, Jesus. And we can look and see Jesus actually keeping His covenant with us. When you look in the story, don't put yourself in the story and think, "well I'm kind of like Joshua." You and I are not Joshua, we're not Israel. If you look in this story, we are the lying, deceiving, tricking Gibeonites. And yet, our Joshua, Jesus, because of His grace, He's made the covenant. Because of the grace of God given to us at the cross of Jesus, the covenant is kept and we are safe. Not by you not being a liar, but by the faithfulness of our Savior.

This morning, I want you to just come with me for a moment. Listen to the questions. Today, will you commit to fighting the good fight? Here's what I mean. I want you to commit to growing as a disciple of Jesus. Maybe you just want to commit to finding out how to learn and know God's word. I'm asking you to commit to trusting God to sustain you while you live in the wake of somebody's terrible mistake.

This is the Gospel we believe. We believe that our holy God created us in His image but that image is disfigured by our sin. God loves us to the degree that He sent Jesus to live perfectly, and died sacrificially as our substitute. God raised Him from the dead in victory. Our Gospel says turn and believe that.

*(Pastor prays)*