**Gibeon and the Battle for the Promised Land**

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, February 24, 2021

Last week we were with Joshua in the battles of Jericho and Ai. Today we are with Joshua as he fell victim to presuming what God’s plan is without asking God. As we follow the story of this one city we will see that it has been the site of many battles for the Promised Land and continues to this day.

Joshua 9:1-8 has the story of the initial battle. “*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)— 2 they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel. 3 However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, 4 they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. 5 The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. 6 Then they went to 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." 7 The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?" 8 "We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?"* NIV

Israel did a brief background check without verifying anything. Joshua 9:14-15 has the key failure. “*14 The men of Israel sampled their provisions* ***but did not inquire of the Lord****. 15 Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.”*

THEY DID NOT INQUIRE OF THE LORD

The irony is that Gibeon is closer to Jerusalem than Ai and the pictures from Ai show that Jerusalem can be seen today from the ancient city of Ai. So two cities, both within sight of Jerusalem have very different outcomes. Ai was destroyed while Gibeon remained.

WHAT TO DO WITH FRAUDULENTLY OBTAINED AGREEMENTS

The Middle East has long been a place of fake treaties illicitly gained. In this case it took three days to figure it out. Joshua kept his word but did force them to provide assistance as woodcutters and water carriers for the tabernacle. They became essentially indentured servants or servants by contract.

Josh 9:16-23 *Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. 17 So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. 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, 19 but all the leaders answered, "We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. 20 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." 21 They continued, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community." So the leaders' promise to them was kept. 22 Then 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? 23 You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." NIV*

There was a dispute between the leaders and the people as to what should be done about the fraud exposing an important ethical question. Both sides had legitimate concerns. The people wanted to kill the Gibeonites based on God’s plan and the treachery involved. Ethically, a vow secured through fraud is not valid. Under Canon Law if a person enters into marriage through fraud the marriage can be annulled. Similarly, Common Law says that fraud nullifies the contract. Normally, this kind of question would be decided by the Sanhedrin but at this point the system of judges set up by Moses was not yet fully matured so the decision was ultimately left up to Joshua and the leaders. He concluded that an oath before God superseded the fraud although it allowed an adjustment to the agreement. History’s verdict says the people were more correct than the leaders.

This conflict provides an interesting point of discussion for how ethical decisions should be made as it relates to spiritual things. Decisions in Canon Law should be considered in ethical decisions today. For example, Canon 1 from the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD says “Eunuchs may be received into the number of the clergy, but those who castrate themselves shall not be received.” That is, if by sickness or force a male lost his testicles it was not a barrier to the clergy. But if a person did so voluntarily he was thereafter blocked from the ministry. The logic of this bears to questions of transgender persons today. A person who becomes transgender of their own free will would not be allowed in the ministry and would be limited in the church. These are questions of the day where ethical decisions of authorized church leaders in the past can be used to think about marriage annulment decisions. How they handled the Gibeonite fraud gives us some insight even though it is an Old Testament account.

THE LOCALS KINGDOMS RESPOND

The response to the treaty among the locals has a familiar ring to it. Joshua 10:1-4 “*Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and were living near them. 2 He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters. 3 So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem appealed to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon. 4 "Come up and help me attack Gibeon," he said, "because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites."* NIV

As it turned out this anti-Israel alliance only served to gather the more powerful cities into one place for one decisive battle. Joshua 10:7-11 :*So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. 8 The Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you." 9 After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. 10 The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. 11 As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites*.” This anti-Israel alliance can be thought of as a foreshadowing of a similar alliance that will lead up to the battle of Armageddon with a similar outcome. Enemies of God and of Israel will forge alliances led by the anti-Christ to come against Israel but God will defeat them all and rescue Israel.

COMMON LOCATION FOR OTHER BATTLES

Very often this area has been the scene of battles right up into the present day.

Gibeon is located on the edge of the Palestinian village of Al Jib. Notice the similarity of the name “Al Jib” with “Gibeon.” On the nearby hilltop is the “high place” of Gibeon which today has the traditional tomb of Samuel housed in what was once a Byzantine and then crusader church and then rebuilt into a mosque in the 18th century. Nebi Samwill, as it is called, is on the northern edge of Jerusalem.

The site of Gibeon had obvious significance in Joshua’s battle for the Promised Land as there several city/states were defeated. As it turns out, the site has played a part in the Battle for the Promised Land over the centuries. In World War I there were battles fought there between the British and the Ottomans who were eventually defeated and lost control of Israel after 400 years. (The Turkish interest might be explained as trying to avenge the loss of the Ottoman Empire which was centered in Istanbul, Turkey) Again in the war of independence in 1948 and again in the 1967 war the site was used by the Jordanian Arab Legion to bombard Jerusalem. It was also used to attack Jewish traffic going to Jerusalem trying to break the 1948 siege of Jerusalem.

A few months ago Israel entered into the Abrahamic Accords with United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. What was interesting was the response. Turkey, for example, threatened the states which entered the Accord. The Palestinians also complained loudly, withdrawing their diplomatic ties with the UAE.. Why would you threaten a nation for entering into a normalization of relations with another country? Only because you want to harm Israel and anything which strengthens Israel reduces your ability to harm them. The behavior of the Palestinians and Turkey in particular are quite like the city/states that gathered against Israel in Joshua 10.

In Joshua, the kings were going to punish Gibeon so no other cities got the same idea. They wanted a unified front against Israel. This is the same strategy being used by the Palestinians against those who want to normalize relations with Israel.

I believe a fake agreement is what Israel will experience in the tribulation period when the treaty of peace is broken at the mid-point and Israel will begin suffering. Daniel 9:26-27 seems to indicate this. Verse 27 has details that did not happen at the time of the original Roman destruction of Jerusalem and which I think are fulfilled at the time of the Second Coming of Jesus. *26 After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. 27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."*

There are some other great moments at Gibeon in the period of the kings. **At Gibeon, Solomon had his famous dream where he received wisdom from God. Just as Joshua failed to ask God and was deceived, Solomon here asked of God for wisdom and received it with many other blessings as well.**  *2 Chronicles 1:3-13 “ So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness. 4 But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem. 5 Moreover the brasen altar, that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the Lord: and Solomon and the congregation sought unto it. 6 And Solomon went up thither to the brasen altar before the Lord, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it. 7 In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee. 8 And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead. 9 Now, O Lord God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. 10 Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great? 11 And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honor, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: 12 Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like. 13 Then Solomon came from his journey to the high place that was at Gibeon to Jerusalem, from before the tabernacle of the congregation, and reigned over Israel.” KJV*

TWO TABERNACLE WORSHIP SITES

A small detail here is that the tabernacle was at Gibeon while the ark was in a special tent in Jerusalem. In 1 Kings 3:15 we have that detail*. 15 Then Solomon awoke — and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.”*

For a period of time, beginning with King David, there was worship in two places.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jerusalem had the ark of the covenant and Gibeon had the tabernacle. 1 Chronicles 16:37-41 “*37 David left Asaph and his associates before the ark of the covenant of the Lord to minister there regularly, according to each day's requirements. 38 He also left Obed-Edom and his sixty-eight associates to minister with them. Obed-Edom son of Jeduthun, and also Hosah, were gatekeepers. 39 David left Zadok the priest and his fellow priests before the tabernacle of the Lord at the high place in Gibeon 40 to present burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of burnt offering regularly, morning and evening, in accordance with everything written in the Law of the Lord, which he had given Israel*.” NIV

One other detail I wonder about is how the Gibeon fulfilled their obligation as hewers of wood and carriers of water.[[2]](#footnote-2) But the judgement was quite specific to do this work for “the house of my God.” So presumably they had to supply the wood and cleanup water both to Jerusalem and to Gibeon when both places were in use. When Solomon sacrificed as burnt offerings 1000 animals it must have taken an enormous amount of wood for the fires and lots of water for the cleanup.

When Solomon was dedicating his temple the Lord appeared to him in similar fashion as he had the first time at Gibeon. 1 Kings 9:1-5 “*9 When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, 2 the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. 3 The Lord said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. 4 "As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, 5 I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'* NIV

1. 1 Chron 21:27-30 Then the Lord spoke to the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. 28 At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there. 29 The tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses had made in the desert, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time on the high place at Gibeon. 30 But David could not go before it to inquire of God, because he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord. NIV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Josh 9:16-23 Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. 17 So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. 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, 19 but all the leaders answered, "We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. 20 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." 21 They continued, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community." So the leaders' promise to them was kept. 22 Then 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? 23 You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." NIV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)