



"Lying can never save us from another lie."  
—Vaclav Havel

26-Mar-21

## Joshua and the Gibeonites (Part Three)

Parts One and Two examined the deception of the Gibeonites in securing their place in Israelite society. They also touched on some of the later effects of the Gibeonites' continued presence in Israel, including Saul's misguided massacre of them and David's ill-advised decision to hang some of Saul's descendants as recompense. As bad as those subsequent events were, the greater evil was that, though in a subservient position, the Gibeonites could still influence the people, and their gods became a snare to the Israelites. Through deception, Joshua's exception to God's command to drive out the Canaanites set a precedent that allowed other pagan peoples to co-exist within Israel, ultimately leading to her downfall.

In all these events, there is a tension between God's sovereignty and man's choice, between God's will and "free will." Within the Christian *zeitgeist* floats an idea that because [God](#) is sovereign, everything that takes place *must* be His will—that if He wanted something different, He would have caused that other course instead.

Indeed, God is sovereign over all, and He does guide events according to His purpose. However, not everything that happens is because God has *willed* it, especially where [sin](#) is involved. We must differentiate between what God

*allows*—a great deal!—and what God truly intends, desires, and enjoys. He has allowed countless sins that He could have prevented, yet Scripture rarely shows Him preventing someone from sinning or acting foolishly. He clearly does not intend or take pleasure in sin, but He allows it. He says to choose life—that is His will—but allows us to choose death ([Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#)).

The events relating to the Gibeonites show that God allows matters that do not please Him at all to play out. Though they are not what He intends, He will still bring about His purpose despite them. We must be careful about ascribing human behavior—and especially human sin—to God, concluding that it must be God's will, or it would be different.

As we know, the ends do not justify the means. When it comes to doing God's will, the *way* we do things can be just as important as what we accomplish. Cain concluded that one offering was as good as another, but God rejected it. Nadab and Abihu thought that any fire would work for God's altar, and they died instant and shocking deaths. How we do things determines whether God accepts the result—whether it is truly what He desires and pleases Him or whether He forebears as He does with countless other acts. How we act affects what we produce.

Deception is so tricky and commonplace these days that we can lose sight of what it even looks like, so here are some things to consider:

- If we must disguise ourselves or our intentions, are we doing God's will? [Jesus Christ](#) never operated this way.
- If we must approach a matter from the side instead of the front gate or front door, are we doing God's will? Jesus calls someone who climbs in some other way a thief and a robber—someone who is out for what he can get, not what God wants ([John 10:1](#)).
- If we use or manipulate others to get something done, it indicates that something is rotten.
- If we do things for appearance's sake instead of reality, we should recognize that what we are doing is not of the holy God. At best, we are doing the will of a carnal person—ourselves. At worst, we are doing the will of someone even more unscrupulous. Jesus has good reason to name [Satan](#) the father of lies and liars ([John 8:44](#)).

Notice what John writes in [Revelation 22:14-15](#):

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and [whoever loves and practices a lie](#) .  
(Emphasis ours.)

These verses serve as a final bookend and mirror of that fateful day in the Garden of Eden. Satan practiced his lies, and Adam and Eve loved them. They had the truth from God, but Adam knowingly chose to listen to someone else, loving what was false. As a result, God drove humanity from His presence, and they lost the right to the Tree of Life.

Thus, God decries both sides of this worthless coin of deception. On one side, He commands us not to bear false witness, which covers all forms of dishonesty. But on the flipside, He urgently warns us not to allow ourselves to be deceived, taken in, hoodwinked, or used by others in their schemes, machinations, or manipulations.

Jesus counsels us to "be wise as serpents but harmless as doves" ([Matthew 10:16](#)). We likely tend to lean toward one or the other. Some have the "wise as serpents" part down but lack a dove's gentleness and harmlessness. Others are dovelike, but they turn a blind eye to the fact that evil is real and end up ensnared.

The right balance is to do what Joshua, Saul, and David all neglected to do about the Gibeonites: earnestly [seek God](#). In this way, we can keep from planting the seeds that will bear bitter fruit for ourselves and others. Deception may work, but in time, it always proves the law of unintended consequences—both for the deceiver and the deceived.

- David C. Grabbe

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**From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

## **The Ninth Commandment**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The breaking of God's Commandments has destroyed trust within the national and local communities of modern Israel. The guilelessness, attributed to Nathaniel, apparently was a rarity in Israel, while deceitfulness was something passed through the genes from father Jacob. Israel's national shame derives from its proclivity for deceit and hypocrisy. In stark contrast to Israel's faithlessness, our God is a God of truth, faithfulness and light. It is the responsibility of the preacher to safeguard the morals of the community. Our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, put truth into a visible concrete form, leaving us an example to follow. Unfortunately, most of modern Israel has rejected this example. Jesus desires that God the Father would sanctify the Israel of God into His truth or reality. In our preparation to become Kings and Priests, we must embody truth as had our Jesus Christ, absolutely refusing to bear false witness in our words, our behavior, and our cumulative reputation. We dare not resist the truth, succumbing to self-deception, or blaming others for our shortcomings, trying to cover up our inadequacies. When we lie, we are vainly attempting to control (or spin) something, producing an escalation of harmful falsehoods, digging a pit into which we will ultimately fall. The heart is deceitful, faithless, insincere, tricky, cunning, double-dealing, treacherous, incurable, and desperately wicked, hopelessly addicted to lying, tuned into the prince and power of the air. We must steadfastly choose to speak the truth, even if it will hurt us in the short run, realizing that truthfulness will enable us to enter into God's presence.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **Let No One Deceive You**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

We live in a day of increasing knowledge—to the point that we are increasingly overloaded with information. Richard Ritenbaugh argues that these and other modern factors lend themselves to deception, yet this is one of the primary end-time trends that Jesus warns us against!

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