

Our Dirty Little War with Sin

Joshua 9:1-27

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The end of WW II was August 15, 1945. As we look back, we now know the United States and the former Soviet Union entered into what is known as *The Cold War*. This war lasted from Aug. 15, 1945, until Dec. 1991, when the Soviet Union dissolved.

It is called The Cold War because the US and the USSR never actually engaged in open hostilities. The Cold War was fought for 46 years through many dirty little wars. There was a lot of saber-rattling and espionage. The Cold War is known for its lies, spies, intelligence, and counterintelligence.

Both nations and their allies constantly tried to deceive each other, steal military and governmental secrets, and essentially thwart any governmental plan to get the upper hand. Listen to some events of The Cold War. From the end of 1945 to 1947, Klaus Fuchs, a Soviet spy, passed the US's plans for the atomic bomb and hydrogen bomb to the Soviets, and in the '50s, an American Spy Plane was shot down over the USSR just before a joint meeting of the two nations to end hostilities. There was the Soviet blockade of West Berlin, Germany. Then there was the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Both had Cold War fingerprints all over them. Then there was the US blockade of Cuba, the failed Bay of Pigs invasion by the US, the race to be the first to land on the moon, the US's space shuttle, and the Star Wars program of the 1980s. The common thread of all of these Cold War events was espionage, deceptive schemes, and lies masquerading as truth so that each nation might stay one step ahead of the other.

Ironically, the Christian life sometimes feels like The Cold War. Our enemy, the devil, hits us with a frontal assault and then slips around behind us to deceive us by whispering lies and deceit to us, and it seems never to end.

Bottom line: Jesus tells us that we have an enemy whose mission is to steal, kill, and destroy our lives. He is like a lion who is on the prowl seeking someone to devour.

Brothers and sisters, what we find in Joshua 9 is a picture of a dirty little spiritual war played out on the earthly stage. The conflict between Gibeon and Israel is more like the Cold War in our lives than you might think.

I have three points this morning as we work through the text. First, look in vv. 1-2 at *The Enemy's Declared Spiritual War*.

I. The Enemy's Frontal Assault (Joshua 9:1-2)

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.

When you hear these two verses, if you are like me, you immediately think, "*Well, that makes sense. These kings have heard about how Israel is annihilating their enemies, so it would be better if we banded together to fight Israel.*"

But, here is what we need to keep in mind, Israel is not invaders trying to colonize the land of Canaan. This is not empire building. This is not imperialism. This is not manifest destiny. From a human perspective,

you might conclude that the people of Israel are the invaders, and the Canaanites are trying to preserve their inheritance. To read the text this way is to read the text incorrectly. It is to take our contemporary culture of nation-building and use it as a hermeneutic and read it back into the text.

We must be continually reminding ourselves that this is not simply a physical conquest by Israel. It is a cosmic spiritual war. Canaan had long been under Satan's control, and over four hundred years, the sins of the Amorites had piled up. Now Yahweh was going to judge them for their wickedness. Israel's invasion of Canaan was God's divine judgment upon the people to cleanse the land of its iniquity and give His people their inheritance.

So, when we read that the cities of Canaan were banding together against Israel, we must remember that God's people were not going to receive their inheritance without satanic resistance. In other words, the forces of evil were going to fight back, and that meant war. It meant spiritual warfare that manifested itself in a physical war.¹

Brothers and sisters, we must remember that we do not merely live in a physical world. There is a spiritual world, and there are spiritual battles always raging in the spiritual realm. We do not see it, but it is there. Although you may not have declared war on Satan, friends, he has declared war on you as God's people, the church.

Since the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Adam and Eve to sin and disobey God, our enemy, the devil has been at war with God's people. The Apostle Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 5:8:

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

In Revelation 12:9-10, the Apostle John writes:

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him . . . for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

In John 10:10, Jesus was talking about false teachers who deceive God's people and said:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

Friends, false teachers are enemies of the cross. Scripture is clear. Satan is God's enemy. Therefore, Satan is the enemy of God's people.

Look back at vv. 1-2. The confederation of *the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites* in Joshua 9:1-2 sound like the confederation of the spiritual forces of evil in Ephesians 6:10-12:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

¹ David Jackman, *Joshua: People of God's Purpose, Preaching the Word Series*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, 103-104.

If you are a Christian, you need to know that Satan and his forces are mobilized against God and His people. Satan will attack you with the frontal assaults of the world, the flesh, and pure old Satanic evil. He may hit you with trials, suffering, and tribulation as he did Job. This is no gentleman's war. There are no rules of engagement. He took the gloves off when he was kicked out of heaven. *Without the sovereign hand of God upon Satan by keeping him on his leash, he would wreak complete havoc on the world and God's people.*

Yet, even though there is a spiritual war that goes on outside of us, the battle is never really outside of us. The hottest part of the spiritual war is what is going on in your heart. That is why Satan's spiritual cold war is to outflank you. He will hit you with external suffering and then attack your heart with deception and lies. This leads me to my second point: *The enemy's deceptive assault.*

II. The Enemy's Deceptive Assault (Joshua 9:3-15)

First, look in vv. 3-6 and let's see their enemy's plan to deceive Joshua and the leaders of Israel:

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."

Like Rahab, the people of Gibeon had heard of all of Yahweh's mighty acts of deliverance and how He had crushed their enemies. The mighty acts of God had struck fear in the hearts of the people of Canaan.

However, notice what the people of Gibeon did. Instead of an all-out frontal assault on Israel by joining the confederation of the Canaanite cities, they decided to try another tactic. They decided to deceive Israel and get Joshua and Israel to make a covenant with them.

The Gibeonites pretended to be from somewhere outside of the land of Canaan. They hoped by convincing them that they were from outside of the land of Canaan they would exempt them from judgment. All the Gibeonites wanted to do was avoid destruction.

In v. 7, after hearing the Gibeonites story, there is a little check in the spirit of the leaders of Israel. They thought that something is not right. So, the men of Israel questioned these guys to learn whether they actually lived among them.

However, in v. 8, *the Gibeonites play "the harmless servant card."* They tell Israel that they're *harmless and only want to serve*. Then Joshua begins to question them, and even he is fooled.

In v. 9, they repeat their lie, and this time, they use God's covenant name, Yahweh. They told them that they came because of Yahweh's greatness and that they only want to serve.

Then in vv. 11-13, they tell them that their elders sent them on this long journey to make a covenant with Israel. Then they show them their dry, crumbly bread, worn-out shoes and clothes, and their empty and burst wineskins as proof of their long journey.

Finally, in vv. 14-15, we learn that the ruse worked. Why did this ruse work? It worked because they did not pray and seek the Lord's counsel on the matter. Instead, they took the pragmatic approach. Listen to vv. 14-15:

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

There are lots of lessons in this text. *First, the spiritual battle that is raging is occurring in our hearts. It is often the war between what is good and what is God's best. It is a subtle war. It is a dirty little war for who or what reigns in our hearts.*

The spiritual battle is raging when the question comes: Should I take a job? The job comes dressed up in dollar signs and whispers, *"You can make lots of money with me. I only want to serve you."*

What you fail to do is realize that it will cost you time away from your family. So, you begin to reason, and you think, *"The money sure looks, and it seems harmless enough, and I need more money. After all, the Lord has brought this opportunity to me."*

Then you think, *"If I take this job, I will not be able to be the husband my wife needs or the wife my husband needs. I will not be able to be the father or mother that my kids need."* What do you do?

Brothers and sisters, this is just one example of the thousands of temptations with which we are faced. The temptations masqueraded as good decisions, but in reality, they are costly sins that seek to steal, kill, and destroy. You see, Satan tempts us with something that seems good, seems practical, and seems harmless. The temptation to sin rarely approaches us, with red lights and warning bells going off.

So, the question is, what do we do? How are we to avoid sinful choices that are cloaked with good intentions?

In this situation, we can learn from Israel's mistake. They didn't consult God. They didn't pray and didn't get good counsel. As a result, they disobeyed God.

We are like Joshua and the leaders of Israel. We get in a tight spot, and we don't know what to do, but we don't seek the Lord. Instead, we rely on our own understanding instead of seeking counsel from God in prayer.

I think we see a few reasons for our failure to seek the Lord's counsel in this text.

Failure Number One: The misapplication of the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Consider the fact that Joshua and Israel knew God had given them the land, and they had seen God fight for them, and they were mopping up in the land. *They knew that God had ordained the ends, but they had forgotten to apply the means to the end—prayer and obedience to God's word.*

If God has ordained the ends, then He has ordained the means to the end, and that is prayer. We must seek Him in prayer. We must be in His word and seek His wisdom and guidance in life.

If we conclude that God is sovereign and therefore what will be is what will be, and so prayer is pointless, then we do not understand the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. We must repent and make use of the sovereign means of grace like prayer because since He has sovereignly ordained what the ends will be then, He has sovereignly ordained the means to those ends.

Failure Number Two: Forgetting and disobeying God's word. Deuteronomy 7:1-2 instructed Israel on how to approach the inhabitants of the land of Canaan:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you . . . you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.

Oops! Strike two! They didn't remember God's word. They forgot the sermon that Moses and Joshua had preached to them.

For goodness sake, Joshua forgot his own sermon. Imagine forgetting your own sermon. I won't be too hard on Joshua because that happens to me all the time. Joshua simply forgot God's commands, and then he simply assumed he knew what to do. This leads me to failure number three—overconfidence.

Failure Number Three: Overconfidence. You simply assume you know it all and can do it all. You assume you know what is going on in the situation. Do you ever do that? Do you ever fail to pray because you just assume you know what is going on with a situation?

The story is told of Joe Gibbs, the Hall of Fame football coach for the Washington Redskins. One day Coach Gibbs' Labrador retriever showed up at his back door with his neighbor's rabbit in his mouth. Coach Gibbs panicked. He didn't know what to do, so he cleaned up the rabbit and snuck into his neighbor's backyard, and put the rabbit back in its cage. The next day his neighbor came over to his house and said to him, *"You know, we have some sick people in our neighborhood. Three days ago, our rabbit died, and we buried it in the backyard. Well, someone dug up the rabbit and put it back in its cage."*²

Oops! Strike three! We should not assume we know what is actually going on with everything. We should take our assumptions and confusion to God. Israel didn't do this. In their overconfidence, they just assumed.

Let me be clear here. The overconfidence I am talking about is not being overconfident in God; it is overconfidence in yourself. *Overconfidence in yourself means there is a lack of confidence in God. It is a lack of faith.*

These failures can ruin your witness and your leadership. As Joshua soon learned, the people of Israel soon were grumbling at him and his leadership team. Joshua was supposed to set the example in obedience to God's word and pray for the leaders and the nation. Verse 18 says, *"Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders."*

God was merciful to Joshua and the leaders of Israel. He did not allow this to ruin their leadership. Yet, this situation did not set a good example for the people. They failed to pray, and they soon learned from their mistake.

Do you ever what Joshua did? Do you ever fail to pray and seek God's direction about a decision you need to make, and then it costs you dearly? Prayerlessness is a contagious virus.

The virus of prayerlessness may mean that you have become lazy because you conclude God is sovereign and you don't need to do anything. Perhaps you fail to pray because of the tyranny of the urgent is leading you to skip praying and leading to your disobedience. Perhaps you fail to pray because you are overconfident. You are leaning on your own understanding because you have some skill in a certain area. You think you know what is going on with the situation and don't need to pray.

Whatever your reason for your prayerlessness, you need to know that prayerlessness is a deadly virus and a contagious virus.

Consider this, do you ever fail to set the example of prayer like Joshua and the leaders of Israel did? That was precisely what they did.

Let me speak to the men, the husbands, and the fathers and right now. Men, we need to be leading our families in prayer. If you are not then, repent and begin to lead. When I say prayer, I don't mean just praying at meals. I mean a designated time of prayer. Perhaps not every night but at least a night or two a week. Men, your wives, and children need to hear you pray. If you do not know how to pray, then take the initiative and find a man who will teach you how to pray.

² Kenneth O. Gangel, *The Holman Old Testament Commentary: Joshua, Vol. 4*, General Editor: Max Anders, 156.

Ladies, if your husband is not leading in prayer, then have a gentle conversation with him about him beginning to lead in prayer. Be a gentle reminder to pray and offer to help him pray.

Having honest conversations about prayer is one way to fight against the sin of prayerlessness.

Another way to fight against the deceptive virus of prayerlessness is found in Hebrews 3:13:

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

It is the gathering of the saints in worship that helps us to fight not only the sin of prayerlessness but a thousand other sins that may be seeking to deceive and devour us. It is the gathering of the saints to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ rightly preached and taught that shines the light of truth upon the deceit of the enemy.

It is only in the context of the local church where you will faithfully be exhorted to pray, confess, and defeat your sin. James 5:16 says:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Let me make this final application. Does the sinful mistake of Joshua 9 sound familiar? It should because Israel made the same mistake before they attacked Ai.

Yogi Berra was the great manager and longtime catcher for the New York Yankees. Berra is probably best known for his "*Yogi-isms*." "*Yogi-isms*" is his famous little sayings. Berra is the one who coined the phrase, "*It ain't over until it is over.*"

Well, in the 1960s, Berra was playing catcher for the New York Yankees. After a game, a reporter asked him what he thought about the back-to-back home runs hit by Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris. Berra replied, "*It's like déjà vu all over again.*"

Honestly, Joshua should have come up with that phrase because Joshua 9 is *déjà vu all over again*. Joshua and Israel had to correct their mistake of not seeking the Lord when they attacked Ai in Joshua 7. Now in Joshua 9, they did it again, and so, "*it's like déjà vu all over again.*"

This is often our struggle with sin, is it not? I mean, sometimes we take two steps forward and then one step back. Sometimes I think I take one step forward and two steps back.

The truth is we often find ourselves falling prey to the same old sins and learning the same hard lessons over and over. Sometimes our battle with sin feels *like déjà vu all over again*.

Here the good news! Thank the Lord that He does not excuse our sin. He does not overlook it or sweep it under the rug. Instead, God came in Christ to die on the cross and rise from the dead to break the power of sin over our lives. Jesus meets us in our sin with His rich, overcoming mercy.

Praise God that He has not abandoned us to the mere consequences of our sin. *Jesus, in His rich mercy, has planned the consolation of our hearts and lives even when we sin.*

So, let me conclude this point with one more word of encouragement. Leading out in prayer is not always easy. It is often one of those habits of grace where you start and then stop, and then you realize you have stopped again. Brothers and sisters, that is okay. Keep restarting. Restarting your designated prayer time is a form of repentance. Keep going. Do not stop restarting. There is no limit on restarting.

III. The Unintended Consequences and Consolation of Sin (Joshua 9:16-27)

Have you ever had the experience of panic after you have made a terrible mistake? I mean, you wake up in the middle of the night, and it hits you, or you wake up the next morning, and you are sick to your stomach at what you have done. This was Israel's leaders' experience in v. 16.

The horror of their decision hits them because, after three days, they realize that the Gibeonites are actually their neighbors. The Gibeonites were actually four cities: *Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim*.

In v. 18, we see that the leaders kept their word to not attack the Gibeonites. However, the people of Israel were not pleased by the fact that their leaders made a bad decision.

Then in vv. 19-20, the leaders own-up to their sin. They tell the people that God's name is at stake here because of the covenant they made with the Gibeonites. So, instead of attacking them, in v. 23, Joshua cursed them and made them servants of Israel. They made them woodcutters and servants who drew water for all the people of Israel, and, according to v. 27, they also cut wood and drew water for the altar of the LORD that was in the tabernacle.

There are a couple of things we learn from this part of the story. *First, we see that it is important to honor our commitments.* Although the Gibeonites deceived Israel into making a covenant with them, Israel rightly honored their covenant with them because the honor of Yahweh was at stake. *God's holy name implies faithfulness to His people.* For Israel to turn upon the Gibeonites would imply that God and His word were unreliable.

While it is important to keep our commitments, let me qualify what I am saying. I am not talking about staying in an abusive situation. If you are in an abusive situation, you need to get help and counsel about how to proceed.

What I am saying is that if you have made a commitment, then you need to honor that commitment. For example, perhaps you rush into a marriage, and later you realize your spouse falls very short of being the person you thought him or her to be. Let's just say you are not happy and the relationship is very unsatisfactory. That does not mean you should get a divorce. It does mean you might need to get some help from an older couple or marriage counseling.

First and foremost, you should seek the Lord in prayer, get help, talk to your spouse about getting help and begin praying together. You do not know what God will do to bring the power of His Holy Spirit to bear in your relationship. God's honor in the marriage is at stake.

Perhaps a man and woman disobey God by having sex outside of marriage, and she becomes pregnant. Should she get an abortion? No. Their sinful choice involves a commitment to the child whom they should not abandon. There may be sin involved, but there is a commitment that must be kept. God's honor is at stake.

Perhaps you foolishly take a job without praying and seeking God's counsel. Then the job turns out to be a really difficult situation. Should you quit just because you rushed into the job? No. You have made a commitment to the employer at least for a season. It does not mean you can never change jobs, but it does mean that in the future, you seek the Lord's counsel as you change jobs. God's honor is at stake.

Perhaps you have taken out a loan, and because of a downturn in the economy or a bad business deal, now money is tight, and you are considering defaulting on the loan. You have made a commitment to pay the loan. God's honor is at stake.

Second, we must trust the Lord, for He is able to give consolation to our hearts for our foolish, sinful choices. The fact is God is still sovereign over our foolish choices and sins.

Consider what God did in this situation. God used Israel's sinful covenant with Gibeon and used it for their good. Joshua cursed the Gibeonites; they became woodcutters and water drawers for the tabernacle. Not only that, the Gibeonites were scattered throughout Israel in order to serve the people of Israel as

woodcutters and water drawers throughout the whole nation. These were very menial jobs, and now they had to suffer the consequences for their deception of Israel and the curse of their sin.

Romans 8:37 says:

No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

The phrase “*more than conquerors*” is a military term that is the picture of an army winning a victory and then take those who were fighting against them and making them now serve you.

This is what God did with Gibeon's deception and Israel's sin. God can take the sinful designs of the enemy and his painful attacks upon us and make them serve our good. Now, this does not mean the consequences of our sin are taken away, but it does mean the sovereign hand of God not only brings consolation, but God actually makes our sin serve His good purposes for the lives of those who belong to Him.

Finally, what about the Gibeonites. What this the end of the story for them. *Did they simply become Israel's servants, and that was their lot in life, or did God have something else planned for the Gibeonites?*

Here is what we know. The Gibeonites remained in Israel for many generations, and the Lord took care of them. King Saul tried to kill all the Gibeonites. He attacked them, and Yahweh punished Israel for his sin.

In 2 Samuel 21:1, under King David's reign, we learn that Israel was suffering three years of famine because King Saul tried to kill all of the Gibeonites. Saul had violated the covenant Joshua had made with the Gibeonites. Yahweh was protecting the Gibeonites and punishing Israel for their sin.

Later in Nehemiah 3:7, after Israel returned from their Babylonian exile, we learn that the men of Gibeon helped Nehemiah rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

We do not know whether the Gibeonites ever fully assimilated into Israel and became followers of Yahweh, but we do know that when they came to Israel to deceive them, it was out of fear for their lives, just like Rahab.

By the time their little deception ends in Joshua 9, they have put themselves fully in the hands of Israel and the Lord to do with them whatever they please.

We know that the Lord showed them mercy by allowing them to escape with their lives, and they spent their lives serving the altar of God. They were first-hand witnesses of Israel's worship of God. What better place to be than around the altar of the Lord. Gibeon got more than what they bargained for in their deception. God used it for their good.

Brothers and sisters, when we read this story, we are reminded that the enemy comes at us in deceptive ways. He will attack our fallibility and our weaknesses. He will catch us off guard. He will try to out-flank us and defeat us.

We tend to only look for outright aggressive attacks of the enemy and fail to see the subtle masquerade of sin coming alongside us to deceive us.

Hear the good news! Our victory in spiritual warfare is not our ability. Instead, our victory is in what God does for us. Our victory in spiritual warfare happens when we humble ourselves under the mighty hands of God and look to the One who won the spiritual war on the cross.

The cross is our victory! On the cross, Jesus made our sin serve His redemptive plan. The enemy thought that sending the Son of God to the cross would put an end to God's plan to redeem His people from their sin.

Yet, while the enemy's plans were to kill God's Son and thus God's plan to redeem His people was actually God's sovereign plan to redeem His people. Jesus, by His life, death, and resurrection from the dead, redeemed God's people from their sin.

The enemy's deception that lead to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ actually lead to our salvation. Through Christ's death and resurrection, He makes His enemies His children. It is by the blood of the Lord Jesus the victory is won. Rest in the victory of God's Son.