

Joshua 9:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD.

Analysis

And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.

This verse identifies the critical failure that led to covenant compromise: "asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD." The Hebrew phrase *lo sha'alu befi Yahweh* (לֹא שָׁאֲלוּ בְּפִי יְהוָה) indicates a deliberate decision-making process conducted without divine consultation. Israel possessed multiple means of seeking God's will—the Urim and Thummim through the high priest (Numbers 27:21), prophetic inquiry, or direct divine revelation—yet Joshua proceeded based solely on empirical evidence and human judgment.

The phrase "the men took of their victuals" likely means they examined the provisions or shared a meal, a common ancient Near Eastern practice for ratifying agreements. However, physical inspection, no matter how thorough, cannot discern spiritual reality or divine will. This episode demonstrates the insufficiency of human wisdom apart from divine revelation, a theme prominent in Reformed epistemology: natural reason, though God-given and useful, remains inadequate for discerning God's specific purposes without special revelation.

Joshua's covenant with the Gibeonites—"made peace... made a league... sware unto them"—employed the most binding forms of ancient Near Eastern diplomacy.

The Hebrew *vayikrot lahem berit* (וַיַּכְרֹת לָהֶם בְּרִית, "made a covenant with them") uses terminology identical to God's covenants with humanity, indicating solemn, unbreakable obligation. The swearing by the princes made the entire nation complicit. This illustrates how leadership decisions, made without proper spiritual discernment, can bind entire communities to unintended consequences for generations.

Historical Context

The practice of examining provisions to verify travelers' claims was standard procedure in the ancient world, where inn networks and modern verification systems did not exist. Distance was measured by travel time, with provisions' condition serving as evidence. The Gibeonites' counterfeit evidence—moldy bread, cracked wineskins, worn sandals—would normally provide reasonable proof of long journeys, as such items would not deteriorate significantly over short distances during the dry season.

The Urim and Thummim, kept by the high priest, provided divinely ordained means of determining God's will (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21). The exact mechanism remains uncertain—possibly sacred lots or stones that gave yes/no answers to specific questions. Archaeological evidence suggests similar divination practices throughout the ancient Near East, but Israel's method uniquely involved Yahweh's direct guidance rather than manipulation of impersonal forces or consultation of false deities.

The binding nature of oaths in ancient culture cannot be overstated. To break a sworn covenant, even one obtained through deception, brought divine curse upon the oath-breaker. Later, when Saul violated this treaty by attempting to exterminate the Gibeonites, God brought famine on Israel (2 Samuel 21:1-14). This demonstrates that while the treaty was improperly made, God held Israel accountable to their word, teaching that rash vows have lasting consequences (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life are you most tempted to make decisions based on circumstances rather than seeking God's specific guidance?
2. How does this passage challenge contemporary pragmatism that values efficiency over seeking God's will through prayer and Scripture?
3. What safeguards can Christian leaders establish to ensure major decisions are made with proper spiritual discernment rather than mere human wisdom?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּקַּח ו	הָאֲנָשִׁים	מִצִּידָם	וְאֵת	פִּי
took	And the men	of their victuals	H853	not counsel at the mouth
H3947	H582	H6718		H6310
יְהוָה	לֵא	שָׁאֵל:		
of the LORD	H3808	and asked		
H3068		H7592		

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 27:21 (References Lord): And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.

Judges 1:1 (References Lord): Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

James 1:5 (Parallel theme): If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

2 Samuel 5:19 (References Lord): And David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.

Judges 20:28 (References Lord): And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

Ezra 8:21 (Parallel theme): Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

2 Samuel 2:1 (References Lord): And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron.

Judges 20:18 (References Lord): And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first.