

Joshua 9:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Israel's fateful decision: 'Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.' The phrase 'made peace' (asah shalom, אָשָׁה שָׁלוֹם) establishes formal treaty. The 'league' (berit, בְּרִית—covenant) invokes sacred oath. The commitment 'to let them live' specifically grants protection from the cherem (devoted destruction) that other Canaanite cities faced. Most significant: 'the princes of the congregation sware'—they took oath before the LORD (verse 18 clarifies). This oath-taking makes the treaty irrevocable despite its deceptive origin. The Reformed principle: oath sanctity supersedes circumstantial considerations. Numbers 30:2: 'If a man vow a vow unto the LORD...he shall not break his word.' The passage teaches that covenant commitments bind us even when obtained through deception or proving inconvenient. God honors faithfulness to oaths because His own character is utterly faithful.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern treaties typically involved elaborate oath-taking ceremonies invoking deities as witnesses. The oath's sanctity meant violation brought divine curse. The 'princes of the congregation' likely refers to tribal leaders who had authority to make binding commitments for Israel. Their corporate oath-taking meant the entire nation was bound. The specification 'to let them live' addressed the central issue—Deuteronomy 20:16-17 commanded destroying nearby

Canaanite cities. By treaty, Gibeonites were exempted from this cherem. Once sworn 'by the LORD' (verse 18), the oath couldn't be revoked even after discovering the deception. This illustrates ancient covenant theology's absolute nature—oaths stood regardless of how obtained. Later, Saul's violation of this oath brought judgment on Israel (2 Samuel 21:1-14), confirming the treaty's perpetual binding nature. Church history wrestles with this tension: faithfulness to commitments obtained through deception. Most Reformed theologians conclude that oath sanctity prevails—our faithfulness reflects God's character regardless of others' truthfulness.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does covenant faithfulness even to those who deceived us reflect God's unchanging character?
2. What does the binding nature of oaths 'by the LORD' teach about taking God's name in commitments?
3. When has God called you to honor commitments despite discovering they were based on incomplete information?

Interlinear Text

בְּכָרְתָּה	לְבָם	יְהוָשָׁעַ	שָׁלֹום	תִּזְכֶּר	תִּזְכֶּר	בְּכָרְתָּה
made	H0	And Joshua	peace	with them and made	H0	a league
H6213		H3091	H7965	H3772		H1285

לְמִזְמַתּוֹ	לְבָם	וַיִּשְׁבַּע	וְנִשְׁיָא	בְּעֵדָה
with them to let them live	sware	H0	and the princes	of the congregation
H2421	H7650		H5387	H5712

Additional Cross-References

2 Samuel 21:2 (Parallel theme): And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.)

Joshua 11:19 (Creation): There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle.

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