

Joshua 9:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up;

Analysis

The Gibeonites, hearing of Israel's victories, employ deception: 'they did work wilily.' The Hebrew *עָרְמָה* (*ormah*) means craftiness, shrewdness—the same word describing the serpent in Eden (Genesis 3:1). This linguistic connection hints at deception's sinful nature. Their strategy: 'made as if they had been ambassadors'—elaborate disguise creating false narrative. The phrase suggests they not only dressed the part but acted the role comprehensively. They took old sacks, worn wineskins, old and patched sandals, old garments, and stale bread—all intended to suggest long travel. The comprehensiveness of the deception shows careful planning and intelligence about what would convince Israel. This contrasts with the previous verse's honest military alliance—Gibeon chose subterfuge over confrontation. Their deception succeeded because Israel failed to 'ask counsel at the mouth of the LORD' (verse 14). The passage warns that human discernment, however careful, proves insufficient without divine guidance.

Historical Context

Gibeon was a significant city, described as 'great as one of the royal cities' (10:2) with a warrior population. Their choice of deception over confrontation suggests shrewd assessment that direct warfare against Israel would fail. The elaborate preparation—gathering old items, staging a caravan, preparing a cover story—shows sophistication and desperation. Ancient Near Eastern treaty-making typically involved formal protocols: ambassadors, gifts, negotiations, oaths. Gibeon

mimicked these conventions to appear legitimate. Their knowledge that Israel might make peace with distant peoples (implied by the deception's premise) suggests intelligence about Israelite treaty practices, possibly based on Deuteronomy 20:10-15's distinction between near and far cities. The success of their deception teaches that spiritual warfare includes subterfuge and counterfeits requiring discernment beyond human wisdom. Satan appears as angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); we must test spirits (1 John 4:1).

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What role does deception play in spiritual warfare, and how can believers develop discernment?
2. When has elaborate appearance of legitimacy (like Gibeon's props) deceived you or your community?
3. How does failure to 'ask counsel of the LORD' leave us vulnerable to deception?

Interlinear Text

| | | | | | |
|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| וַעֲשׂוּ | גַם | הַ מֵהָ | בְּעֶרְמָה הַ | וְלֹכֹ | |
| They did work | H1571 | H1992 | wilily | H1980 | |
| H6213 | | | H6195 | | |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| וַיַּעֲשׂוּ | | | וַיִּקְחוּ | שָׁקִים | בָּלִים |
| and made as if they had been ambassadors | | | and took | sacks | old |
| H6737 | | | H3947 | H8242 | H1087 |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| לְחֵם וְרִיָּה | וְנֹאדֹ | וְיַיִן | בָּלִים | וּמִבְּקָעִים | וּמִצְּבָרִים: |
| upon their asses | bottles | and wine | old | and rent | and bound up |
| H2543 | H4997 | H3196 | H1087 | H1234 | H6887 |

Additional Cross-References

Mark 2:22 (Parallel theme): And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

Matthew 10:16 (Parallel theme): Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Luke 16:8 (Parallel theme): And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.