

Joshua 9:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us.

Analysis

The Gibeonites approach Israel's camp at Gilgal and petition Joshua: 'We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us.' Their opening claim—distance of origin—is the crucial lie on which the entire deception depends. The Hebrew מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה (me'ereetz rechoqah—from a far land) repeats the distance emphasis. The request for a league (בְּרִית, berit—covenant, treaty) invokes formal treaty-making conventions. Ancient Near Eastern treaties involved solemn oaths binding both parties. By requesting a covenant, Gibeonites sought permanent protection under oath Israel couldn't break without violating covenant sanctity. Their approach shows sophisticated understanding of Israelite theology—they knew Israel took oaths seriously (as later verses prove when Israel honors the oath despite discovering the deception). The petition's simplicity masks calculated manipulation. They don't plead for mercy or cite specific threats; they simply state distant origin and request treaty—implying that distance makes them non-threatening, eligible for peaceful relations.

Historical Context

Gilgal served as Israel's base camp after crossing Jordan (Joshua 4:19), making it the appropriate location for diplomatic contact. Ancient treaty-making between nations typically occurred at one party's capital or camp, with ambassadors traveling to petition for agreements. The request for a 'league' (covenant) invoked the most solemn form of international relationship. Such covenants involved oaths

before deities, making violation highly serious. The Gibeonites' strategy exploited Israel's own legal framework: Deuteronomy 20:10-15 permitted peace treaties with distant cities while commanding near Canaanite cities' destruction. By claiming distance, Gibeonites sought to qualify for the lenient category. Their confidence in approaching Israel's camp shows either courage or desperation—or both. Canaanite cities knew Israel's track record (Jericho, Ai); approaching voluntarily risked immediate hostility. Yet Gibeon gambled that their disguise and proposal would work. The success of their gambit teaches that bold deception sometimes succeeds where honest confrontation would fail.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do deceivers often exploit legitimate structures or rules (like Israel's treaty categories) for illegitimate purposes?
2. What does Gibeon's boldness in approaching Israel teach about desperation producing creative solutions?
3. How should believers balance hospitality/openness with wise discernment in evaluating requests?

Interlinear Text

וְלָכָה	אֶל	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶל	הַמַּחֲנֶה	לְ	הַגִּלְגָּל	וַיֹּאמֶר	וְ
H1980	H413	to Joshua	H413	unto the camp		at Gilgal	and said	H413
		H3091		H4264		H1537	H559	
וְאֵל		אֶל יֹשֵׁ		יִשְׂרָאֵל	מֵאֶרֶץ	רְחוֹקָה	בָּ	אֵנוּ
H413		unto him and to the men		of Israel	country	from a far	We be	come
		H376		H3478	H776	H7350	H935	
וְעַתָּה		כְּתוּ	לָ	נוּ	בְרִית:			
H6258		now therefore make		H0	ye a league			
		H3772			H1285			

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 5:10 (References Israel): And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho.

2 Kings 20:14 (Parallel theme): Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon.