

PLEASANT SPRINGS CHURCH • SERMON • THE CONQUERING KING,
PART SIX

Deception

There is a way that seems right to a man — an exploration of Joshua 9

Deception

A Sermon on Joshua 9 — Reading Text: Proverbs 14:12

By A Disciple of Jesus Christ • Pleasant Springs Church • August 30, 2026

Key Texts: Proverbs 14:12 • Joshua 9:7–16 • Deuteronomy 7:1–2 • Deuteronomy 20:15 •
Proverbs 3:5–7 • Genesis 3:6

Israel has just beaten Jericho and Ai. The next enemy does not come with an army. He comes with worn-out sandals, mouldy bread, and a story that checks out. Joshua 9 is the one chapter in the conquest where Israel loses without a battle being fought — and it happens because the wrong thing looked right. They looked. They questioned. They examined. They reasoned. They made a decision. But they never asked God.

THE BIG IDEA

Evidence is valuable and reasoning is necessary, but neither is a substitute for seeking God. Faith is not intellectual laziness — faith is trusting God rather than making our own understanding ultimate. We can be deceived when we trust what seems right instead of seeking the LORD.

Proverbs 14:12 (ESV)

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

Verses 1–2. The nations heard how God had given victory over Ai, and conspired to unite against Israel.

Verses 3–15. The Hivites who lived in Gibeon had heard what God had done for Israel in Egypt, and what He had now done at Jericho and Ai. They decided to trick Israel into forming a covenant with them so that their lives might be spared.

Gibeon was close. Close enough that the Gibeonites knew Israel's conquest would reach them next. And Israel even suspected it — it is the first thing out of their mouths:

Joshua 9:7 (ESV)

“But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, ‘Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?’”

And three days after the covenant was cut, they found out.

Joshua 9:16 (ESV)

“At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbors and that they lived among them.”

HOW DID THEY DO THIS?

1. They formulated a plan.

2. They used deception to execute the plan.

3. They convinced Israel — and were successful.

What were some of their tactics?

- They used worn-out sacks to pack their goods for the journey.
- They wore worn-out sandals and worn-out clothes.
- They carried old, cracked, leaky wineskins.
- They brought dry, crumbly, mouldy bread for their food, to look as if they had come a long way.
- And they lied about where they had come from.

POINT 1

Deception can make the wrong thing look right.

The enemy doesn't always attack with force. Sometimes deception is the strategy. The Hivites came in old clothes and a convincing story. All the evidence appeared to point to what they were saying being true. Simply put — they looked the part.

Joshua 9:8 (ESV)

“They said to Joshua, ‘We are your servants.’ And Joshua said to them, ‘Who are you? And where do you come from?’”

Joshua asked the right questions. The Hivites presented their evidence, and the men took some of their provisions. The Scriptures don't say it outright, but what we can conclude from the passage is that after looking at what they had been presented and the story they had been given, all things seemed to check out.

They looked. They questioned. They examined. They reasoned. They made a decision. But they never asked God.

Joshua 9:15 (ESV)

“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.”

And sometimes that is exactly how deception works. It doesn't always look evil. Sometimes it looks reasonable.

We can be deceived when we trust what seems right instead of seeking the LORD.

POINT 2

Discernment without dependence on God is insufficient.

They investigated. They looked. They reasoned. And that brings us straight back to our opening text: there is a way that *seems* right.

Evidence is valuable. Reasoning is necessary. But neither evidence nor reasoning is a substitute for seeking God. Faith is not intellectual laziness. Faith is trusting God rather than making our own understanding ultimate.

THE MISTAKE

They had been told not to make a covenant with these nations — and the Hivites are named on the list.

Deuteronomy 7:1–2 (ESV)

“The Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites... you shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.”

But there was one door left open.

Deuteronomy 20:15 (ESV)

“Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not cities of these nations here.”

Now hear the lie again:

Joshua 9:9 (ESV)

“They said to him, ‘From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God.’”

That is not a general lie. That is the **exact wording of the one exception in the law** — quoted back to Israel. They didn’t just make the wrong thing look true. They made it look *legal*.

The problem wasn’t that Israel didn’t investigate. The problem was that Israel investigated without consulting God.

Joshua 9:14 (ESV)

“So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD.”

Neither did they inquire of God before making the covenant. So ask yourself: what would have happened if they had inquired of God first?

We can be deceived when we trust what seems right instead of seeking the LORD.

POINT 3

Grace doesn't always remove the consequences of our decisions, but it teaches us how to remain faithful.

Not every wrong decision begins with rebellion. Some are made with self-confidence. And there are consequences for our actions. But God can work through the consequences of decisions we wish we had made differently.

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

God is sovereign enough to bring good even out of situations we wish we had handled differently. Even though Israel was deceived, Israel stayed faithful to the covenant they had made. And some of the Gibeonites became servants to Israel and to the house of the LORD.

Joshua 9:27 (ESV)

“But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place that he should choose.”

They lied to survive, and survived, and paid. The Bible tells you the price. A foolish decision does not give us permission to become unfaithful people — and two wrongs do not make a right.

HOW THEN DO WE AVOID DECEPTION?

Proverbs 3:5–7 (ESV)

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.”

Why does this matter so much? Because of three things Scripture says plainly — about God, about our hearts, and about our own judgment.

Isaiah 55:8–9 (ESV)

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Proverbs 21:2 (ESV)

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.”

We can be deceived when we trust what seems right instead of seeking the LORD.

Remember, in the garden, the serpent directed Eve's attention toward what appeared desirable.

Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.”

SO WHAT?

The issue wasn't simply what she saw. The issue was whose voice she trusted. So the question this morning is this: whose voice are we listening to?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER THIS WEEK

1. The decision I am carrying. Is there a choice in front of me right now that I have researched, reasoned through, and talked over with everyone except God?

2. Looks legal. Where am I using a rule, a technicality, or somebody else's permission to justify something I already know the Lord has spoken about?

3. Three days later. What did I decide in confidence that I would decide differently now — and how is God asking me to stay faithful in it anyway?

4. Whose voice. In an ordinary week, whose voice actually gets the last word with me?

AFTER THE SERMON — AUTHOR & AUDIENCE

Joshua 9 rewards a slow reading, because almost every detail is doing work — how close Gibeon actually was, the precise words the Gibeonites chose, and one small Hebrew phrase in verse 14 that tells you exactly what Israel skipped. The following background is offered for deeper study.

HOW CLOSE WAS GIBEON?

About six miles from Ai, and roughly the same from Jerusalem — a morning's walk. These were not distant strangers; they were the next town over. And Gibeon was no village.

Joshua 10:2 (ESV)

“...he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors.”

That is the scale of what the disguise concealed. Israel did not accidentally spare a handful of refugees; they bound themselves by oath to a large fortified city with a standing army, sitting squarely inside the land they had been sent to take. The three-day delay in verse 16 is the point — it took less than a week for the truth to surface. Almost any inquiry would have found it.

“THEY DID NOT ASK THE MOUTH OF THE LORD”

The ESV renders Joshua 9:14 “did not ask counsel from the LORD.” The Hebrew is more concrete than that: *pî YHWH lo’ sha’alu* — literally, **they did not ask the mouth of the LORD**. The King James keeps the idiom: “and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD.”

And Joshua had a way to ask. This is what sharpens the failure. When Joshua was commissioned to succeed Moses, God gave him a specific means of inquiry — assigned to him personally, by name.

Numbers 27:21 (ESV)

“And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation.”

So this is not a case of a man who had no way to hear from God. Joshua had a priest, an ephod, and a standing instruction that at God’s word he was to go out and come in. The machinery for asking was in the camp the whole time. He simply did not use it — because the evidence in front of him looked conclusive.

The sermon says Israel stayed faithful to the covenant they had made. Scripture proves it in a place most people never connect to Joshua 9 — centuries later, in the reign of David.

2 Samuel 21:1–2 (ESV)

“Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years... And the LORD said, ‘There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.’ ... Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.”

An oath sworn under false pretences, by leaders who had not asked God, was still binding four hundred years later — and God Himself enforced it against a king of Israel who broke it. That is how seriously He takes our word, even when we gave it unwisely.

A note on the naming. Joshua 9 calls them Hivites; 2 Samuel 21:2 calls them “the remnant of the Amorites.” That is not a contradiction being smoothed over — “Amorite” is used in places as a broad term for the land’s earlier inhabitants, much as we might say “Canaanite” generally. We say so plainly rather than leaving the reader to trip over it.

AND THE TABERNACLE ENDED UP AT GIBEON

Here is the turn that belongs with the sermon's third point. The city that lied its way into the covenant became, generations later, the place where the tent of meeting stood.

1 Chronicles 16:39 (ESV)

“And he left Zadok the priest and his brothers the priests before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place that was at Gibeon.”

It is where Solomon went to sacrifice, and where God appeared to him and offered him whatever he asked (2 Chronicles 1:3–7). The wood-cutters and water-carriers of Joshua 9:27 were carrying wood and water for that. God did not undo the consequence — the Gibeonites stayed servants. But He worked straight through it, until the place born out of a deception was the place His people came to meet Him.

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“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”

Proverbs 3:5 (ESV)