

Surprised *by* Grace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Josh. 2:1–21, Num. 14:1–12, Heb. 11:31, Exod. 12:13, Joshua 9, Neh. 7:25.*

Memory Text: “By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace” (*Hebrews 11:31, NKJV*).

Why did I do this again?” Perhaps we all have uttered these words. After all, not only history repeats itself but so does humanity in general and we ourselves in particular. How often we repeat the same mistakes!

Israel has a second chance of entering the Promised Land, and Joshua takes this mission seriously. The first step is to have a clear understanding of what Joshua and the Israelites face. Joshua sends out two spies to bring him valuable information about the land: its defense system, military preparedness, water supplies, and the attitude of the population in the face of an invading force.

One would think that God's promise of giving the land to the Israelites did not require any effort from them. Yet, the assurance of divine support does not override human responsibility. Israel stands at the border of Canaan for a second time. Expectations run high, but the last time Israel was at the border and had the same task, it resulted in an abysmal failure.

This week, we will explore two of the most fascinating stories of the book of Joshua and discover their relevance to our faith today. God's grace has infinite possibilities to surprise us.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 11.*

Second Chance

Read Joshua 2:1, along with Numbers 13:1, 2, 25–28, 33; and Numbers 14:1–12. Why would Joshua start the mission of conquering the Promised Land by sending out spies?

The place from which the two spies are sent out, Acacia Grove (*Josh. 2:1, NKJV*), is called Shittim in the Hebrew text, and it reminds us of two negative episodes of Israel's history.

The first is another spy story (*see Numbers 13*) featuring the same essential elements: the commissioning of the spies, the secret incursion of the spies into enemy territory, the return of the spies, the report of the spies on their findings, and the decision to act based on the report.

The other incident at Shittim represents one of the most defiant, idolatrous violations of the covenant by the Israelites, when, at the instigation of Balaam, they committed a debauchery with the Moabite women and worshiped their gods (*Num. 25:1–3, Num. 31:16*). In this context, the name Shittim creates an extraordinary tension as to the outcome of the whole story. Will it be another failure on the border of the Promised Land? Or will it lead to the long-awaited fulfillment of the ancient promise?

Read John 18:16–18, 25–27, and John 21:15–19. What parallels do you discover between the second chance given to Israel as a nation and to Peter as a person?

God is a God of second chances (and more!). The Bible calls the second chance (and more!) “grace.” Grace is simply receiving what we don’t deserve. The teaching of the Bible is replete with the concept of grace (*compare with Rom. 5:2, Eph. 2:8, Rom. 11:6*). God graciously offers everyone the possibility of a fresh start (*Titus 2:11–14*). Peter himself experienced this grace and urged the church to grow in grace (*2 Pet. 3:18*). And the news gets even better: we get much more than a second chance, don’t we? (Where would we be if we didn’t?)

Think about the experience of the Israelites when they were given a second chance to enter Canaan and about the grace extended to Peter after he denied his Lord. What should these incidents teach us about how we should extend grace to those who need it?

Value in Unexpected Places

Read Joshua 2:2–11, Hebrews 11:31, and James 2:25. What do these texts tell us about Rahab?

Central to Rahab’s story is the lie told to protect the spies. In considering her lie, we have to realize that she was embedded in a society that was extremely sinful, which finally led to God’s decision to judge that society (*Gen. 15:16, Deut. 9:5, Lev. 18:25–28*). While it is true that the New Testament commends her faith, a careful analysis of the New Testament references to Rahab’s act reveals that none endorse everything about her, and none validate her lie.

Hebrews 11:31 confirms her faith in casting her lot with the spies instead of choosing to hold on to a corrupt culture. James 2:25 commends her offer of lodging to the two Israelite spies and for giving them directions on how to return by a safe route. In the middle of a decadent, corrupt culture and Rahab’s own sinful lifestyle, God, in His grace, saw a spark of faith through which He could save her. God used what was good in Rahab—which was manifest faith in Him and in her choice to belong to His people—but never commended everything she did. God valued Rahab for her exceptional courage, for her brave faith, for being an agent of salvation, and for choosing Israel’s God.

After seeing what was happening, she declared, “ ‘For the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath’ ” (*Josh. 2:11, NKJV*). It’s significant to hear a Canaanite woman acknowledging that Yahweh is the only God, especially on a roof where, in her pagan religion, prayers were usually offered to what they believed were celestial deities.

The expression of Rahab is previously found only in the context of God’s exclusive right to receive worship (*Exod. 20:4, Deut. 4:39, Deut. 5:8*). Her words bear witness to a premeditated, conscientious choice to acknowledge that the God of the Israelites is the only true deity. Her confession demonstrates her understanding of the close relationship between God’s sovereignty and the judgment under which Jericho is doomed.

Her moral choice recognizes that, in light of Yahweh’s judgment, there were only two possibilities: to continue in rebellion against Him and be annihilated, or to choose to surrender in faith. By choosing the God of the Israelites, Rahab became an example of what could have been the destiny of all the inhabitants of Jericho had they turned to Israel’s God for mercy.

What does this story teach us about how God must have our ultimate allegiance?

New Allegiance

Read Joshua 2:12–21 and Exodus 12:13, 22, 23. How do the texts in Exodus help you understand the agreement between the spies and Rahab?

Rahab's deal is very clear: life for life and kindness for kindness. The word *chesed* (Josh. 2:12), "loving-kindness," has a richness of meaning that is difficult to express in one word in other languages. It refers primarily to covenantal loyalty, but it also carries the notion of faithfulness, mercy, benevolence, and kindness.

The words of Rahab also are reminiscent of Deuteronomy 7:12, where Yahweh Himself swore to keep His *chesed* toward Israel. "Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy [*chesed*] which He swore to your fathers'" (Deut. 7:12, NKJV).

Interestingly enough, the same chapter (Deuteronomy 7) prescribes the ban (*cherem*) on the Canaanites. Here is Rahab, a Canaanite who is under the ban, and yet she claims, by her emerging faith, the promises that were given to the Israelites. As a result, she is saved.

The first image that inevitably comes to mind related to the conversation of the spies with Rahab is the Passover at the Exodus. There, in order for the Israelites to be protected, they had to stay inside their homes and mark the doorposts and lintels of their houses with the blood of the sacrificial lamb.

"Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt'" (Exod. 12:13, NKJV; see also Exod. 12:22, 23).

"By obedience the people were to give evidence of their faith. So all who hope to be saved by the merits of the blood of Christ should realize that they themselves have something to do in securing their salvation. While it is Christ only that can redeem us from the penalty of transgression, we are to turn from sin to obedience. Man is to be saved by faith, not by works; yet his faith must be shown by his works."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 279.

In that case, the blood was a sign that saved them from the destroying angel of God. As God spared the lives of the Israelites during the last plague in Egypt, the Israelites were to save Rahab and her family when destruction reached Jericho.

**What powerful gospel message can we find in these two stories?
What gospel lessons can we take from them?**

Conflicting Values

Read Joshua 9:1–20. What are the similarities and differences between the story of Rahab and that of the Gibeonites? Why are they meaningful?

This chapter of Joshua starts by informing us that the Canaanite kings who usually ruled over small city-states decided to create a coalition against the Israelites. By contrast, the inhabitants of Gibeon decided to establish a covenant with Israel.

In order to trick the Israelites into making a covenant with them, the Gibeonites resort to the scheme of being ambassadors from a foreign country. According to Deuteronomy 20:10–18, God made a distinction between the Canaanites and people who lived outside the Promised Land.

The word translated as “craftily” or “cunningly” can be used with a positive meaning, denoting prudence and wisdom (*Prov. 1:4; Prov. 8:5, 12*), or negatively, implying criminal intent (*Exod. 21:14, 1 Sam. 23:22, Ps. 83:3*). In the case of the Gibeonites, behind their treacherous action lies a less-destructive intent of self-preservation.

The speech of the Gibeonites is strikingly similar to that of Rahab. Both acknowledge the power of Israel’s God, and both acknowledge that Israel’s success is not simply a human feat. In contrast to other Canaanites, they do not rebel against Yahweh’s plan to grant the land to the Israelites, and they admit that the Lord Himself is driving these nations out before Israel. The news of the deliverance from Egypt, and the victories over Sihon and Og, prompt both Rahab and the Gibeonites to seek an alliance with the Israelites. However, instead of fully acknowledging their willingness to surrender to the God of Israel, as Rahab does, the Gibeonites resort to a subterfuge.

The law of Moses made provisions for learning the will of God in such cases as this (*Num. 27:16–21*). Joshua should have inquired for the will of the Lord and avoided the deception of the Gibeonites.

The fundamental duty of a theocratic leader, and of any Christian leader, is to seek God’s will (*1 Chron. 28:9, 2 Chron. 15:2, 2 Chron. 18:4, 2 Chron. 20:4*). By neglecting it, the Israelites were compelled either to violate the fundamental conditions of conquering the land or to break an oath made in the name of the Lord, which was equally binding.

How often have you found yourself struggling between what appears to be two conflicting biblical values?

Surprising Grace

Read Joshua 9:21–27. How did Joshua’s solution combine justice with grace?

Even if the people of Israel had wanted to attack the Gibeonites, they would not have been allowed to pursue it because of the oath sworn by the rulers of the congregation. The Israelite leaders acted according to the principle that an oath, as long as it does not involve wrongdoing or criminal intent (*Judg. 11:29–40*), is binding, even if it leads to one’s personal hurt.

In the Old Testament, being prudent before making an oath and the keeping of one’s oath are seen as virtues of the pious (*Ps. 15:4; Ps. 24:4; Eccl. 5:2, 6*). Because the oath was made in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, the leaders could not change it.

With the solemn oath taken by the leaders of Israel, the destiny of Israel was indissolubly linked to that of the Gibeonites. In fact, through their designation as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of God (*Josh. 9:23*), the Gibeonites became part and parcel of Israel’s worshipping community. Joshua’s answer, in contrast to the verdict of the rulers of Israel, which decreed servitude for “all the congregation” (*Josh. 9:21, NKJV*), transformed the curse into a potential blessing for the Gibeonites (*compare with 2 Sam. 6:11*).

The subsequent history of Gibeon testifies to the high religious privileges the city enjoyed, as well as to their loyalty to God’s people. The vow taken by Israel remained in place down through generations, so that when the Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity, the Gibeonites were among those who helped rebuild Jerusalem (*Neh. 7:25*). Their actions will have eternally positive consequences but only because of God’s grace.

What might have happened had the Gibeonites disclosed their identity and requested mercy as Rahab did? We don’t know, but we cannot rule out the possibility that even a consultation of God’s will could have resulted in an exemption of the Gibeonites from destruction. God’s ultimate purpose is not to punish sinners but to see them repent and to grant them His mercy (*compare with Ezek. 18:23 and Ezek. 33:11*). The subterfuge of the Gibeonites has to be perceived as an appeal to God’s mercy, to His kind and just character. It was the Canaanites’ refusal to repent and their defiance of God’s purposes that led to the decision for their annihilation (*Gen. 15:16*). God honored the recognition of His supremacy by the Gibeonites, as well as their desire for peace rather than rebellion, and their willingness to give up idolatry and to worship the only true God.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Crossing the Jordan,” pp. 482, 483, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

After this story of Rahab and the spies, the rest of the Old Testament is silent about her until she emerges again in the genealogy of Jesus. It is stated that she became the wife of Salmon (from the tribe of Judah), the mother of Boaz, and the mother-in-law of another remarkable woman mentioned in the same genealogy: Ruth (*Matt. 1:5; compare with Ruth 4:13, 21*). Through her faith in God, the prostitute of Jericho, condemned to total destruction, becomes a significant link in the royal line of David and a progenitor of the Messiah. This is what God is able to accomplish through faith, even if it might be only the size of a mustard seed (*Matt. 17:20, Luke 17:6*).

“And her [Rahab’s] conversion was not an isolated case of God’s mercy toward idolaters who acknowledged His divine authority. In the midst of the land a numerous people—the Gibeonites—renounced their heathenism and united with Israel, sharing in the blessings of the covenant.

“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan’s influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 369, 370.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the whole question of “second chances” (and more) and how we are to extend them to others. At the same time, how can we also be careful not to abuse this concept? Think, for example, about a woman in an abusive relationship, in which she is counseled to keep going back (“grace”), only in some cases for the abuse to continue? How do we find the right balance here?
- ❷ Discuss Rahab as a model of faith. How can we appreciate the openness of people to God, even if their lifestyle is far from the biblical ideal? How is it possible to appreciate their faith while not condoning some of their practices?
- ❸ Joshua managed to combine justice and grace in a practical way in order to solve the predicament caused by the deceit of the Gibeonites and through his own negligence in not consulting the Lord. Think of a situation in your life that requires both justice and grace. What are some practical ways of merging the two?

“Don’t Worry. God Will Help”

A woman spewed hatred when Inácio Manoel knocked on her door to offer Seventh-day Adventist books in Brazil. “I hate Christians!” she yelled.

Inácio was surprised. It was his first house on his first day of work as a literature evangelist offering books and Bible studies.

He and a friend went to the next house. A big dog barked ferociously from the yard. His friend mumbled something about the first house having an angry woman and the second house having an angry dog.

“Don’t worry,” Inácio said. “God is with us.”

A woman came out of the house and led the dog away. Then she invited Inácio and his friend to come in. The three had a heart-to-heart conversation, and the woman told of her struggles since her husband had been sent to prison. The next Sabbath, the woman came to church with her three young children. Inácio was amazed. He told God that he wanted to lead people to Him for the rest of his life.

Inácio’s biggest surprise, however, came from the third house that he and his friend visited on that first day of work. The woman who lived there, Edileuza, agreed to Bible studies on Saturday afternoons. As they read week after week, they came to the Bible truth about the seventh-day Sabbath. Edileuza worked as a manicurist and a housekeeper, and she didn’t see any possibility of resting on Saturdays.

“I make the most money that day of the week,” she said. “What can I do?”

“Don’t worry,” Inácio said. “God will help. He has something better.”

At the next Bible study, Edileuza said she had met a stranger on the street who had asked if she knew a good housekeeper. The job didn’t require any work during the Sabbath hours of sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.

Edileuza beamed as she shared the story with Inácio. “Now my salary is three times more than I earned as a manicurist and a housekeeper,” she said.

Edileuza was baptized. Later, the rest of her family followed suit.

Inácio, now 68, has led four to 11 people to baptism every year for the past 36 years. Everywhere he goes, he carries Bible lessons with him. His

nightly prayer is: “Lord, put someone in my path, so I can share Your love.”

“I can live without anything in the world, but not without Bible studies,” he said.



One of the Thirteenth Sabbath mission projects for this quarter is a church at Pernambucano Adventist Academy in Brazil’s state of Pernambuco, where Inácio Manoel lives. Thank you for planning a generous offering. Watch a short YouTube video of Inácio at: bit.ly/Inacio-Brazil.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 11:31*

Study Focus: *Josh. 2:1–21, Num. 14:1–12, Heb. 11:31, Exod. 12:13, Joshua 9, Neh. 7:25.*

For many readers, the book of Joshua is often associated with war, destruction, and death. While these elements are present in the book, they do not depict the whole story. The destruction of the Canaanites occurred only after a long period of grace (*Gen. 15:16*). The events of the Exodus served as a significant testimony to God's sovereignty and can be seen as a final call for the inhabitants of Canaan. The stories of Rahab and the Gibeonites demonstrate that most Canaanites were aware of what God had done, but only a few responded appropriately. Instead of surrendering, they chose to resist, echoing the failure of Pharaoh 40 years prior.

Indeed, Joshua is a book of grace and mercy. This week we see how God's grace was manifested in the lives of the Israelites and Canaanites. Again, Israel is ready to enter the Promised Land. God is giving them a second chance. The threat posed by the capabilities of the Canaanite military has not changed. What has changed is the faith of this second generation of Israelites. As for the Canaanites, the stories of Rahab and the Gibeonites demonstrate that not everything is lost in the doomed land. At the same time, their faith is far from perfect. The faith of the chosen people of God, however, is far from perfect too. We can learn important lessons for our spiritual journey as we compare the faith of Israel, Rahab, and the Gibeonites. The most crucial lesson, as we shall see, is that we all need God's amazing grace.

Part II: Commentary

The Faith of the Second Generation

In Joshua 2:1, the second desert generation of Israel faces the same dilemma as the first one. The subsequent deployment of the spies reminds Israel that the land that God is giving them must be conquered first. This irony was the reason behind the first desert generation's frustration in Kadesh Barnea (*Numbers 13, 14*); namely, that the land is a gift, but there is a cost to acquiring it. How can these seemingly opposing ideas of bestowal and conquest be reconciled? That is, how can a gift—which, by definition, is free—also cost its recipient something? Put another way, if the land is a gift, then why must Israel acquire it through conquest?

Faith, which is better understood as trust, is really at the heart of the issue here. In the relationship with His creatures, God always leaves room for trust. In a certain sense, trust has been the pivotal issue since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Is it not the same in the human sphere? There can be no genuine relationship without trust. If the Israelites had trusted in God, they would have expelled the Canaanites by supernatural means (*Exod. 23:28*). The lack of trust demonstrated by the previous generation is explicitly indicated by God as the reason for their failure when He asks Moses: “ ‘How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?’ ” (*Num. 14:11, NKJV*).

Forty years have passed, and a new generation emerges. For the youngest among them, the recent military victory against Og and Sihon and the miraculous preservation of their lives during the desert wanderings are merely memories of a relatively distant past. At this point, Israel finds itself at a junction again, facing the same issue: no trust, no land.

In the story, two spies are sent instead of 12. There seems to be no specific reason for this change, but it could be related to the episode of Kadesh Barnea, in which two spies had to confront the unbelieving ten. Although there are some similarities between the two accounts of spies, the differences are even more striking. First, the two spies do not bring any proof that the land is good this time. Second, there is no mention of a widespread search of the land. Third, they spend more time hiding than spying. Finally, there is no report about the land regarding its general characteristics or the challenges in subduing it. The spies simply state: “ ‘Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands’ ” (*Josh. 2:24, NKJV*). What gives them such confidence? The only thing they have is Rahab's assurance. The spies essentially repeat to Joshua what Rahab told them: “ ‘I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are faint-hearted because of you’ ” (*Josh. 2:9, NKJV*). Rahab's words, in turn, echo the words of Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 14:8: “ ‘He will . . . give it to us’ ” (*NKJV*).

The first generation did not trust, despite what they had seen. However, this new generation trusts based on what they heard from a harlot. “The key figure in their escape and their knowledge of the land and its inhabitants is the harlot Rahab. . . . She is both savior and oracle.”—Phyllis A. Bird, “The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46 (1989), p. 127. This dynamic indicates that 40 years in the desert taught the Israelites the most potent ability they could develop: trust in Yahweh. This ability would make them invincible before their most formidable enemies.

The Faith of Rahab and the Gibeonites

Faith Elements	Rahab	Gibeonites
Basis	Hearing	Hearing
Means	Lie	Lie
Goal	To be spared	To be spared
Immediate Results	Deliverance	Deliverance
Long-Term Results	Full citizenship	Servitude

As the chart above indicates, the first parallel between Rahab and the Gibeonites is that their faith is based on what they have heard. Hearing about the past acts of God on behalf of His people is enough to produce in them a positive response of surrender, while most of their fellow countrymen prefer to resist. At this point, their faith is commendable, in line with what Jesus says in John 20:29: “ ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (*NKJV*). Rahab and the Gibeonites’ attitudes are remarkably different from those of the first desert generation, which did not believe, despite what they saw. As a result of their hearing, their “hearts melted” (*Josh. 2:11, NIV*). This expression, which is an idiom for “losing heart” or “being frightened,” refers proleptically to the Canaanites in the song of Moses (*Exod. 15:15*), to the Israelites under the influence of the ten spies (*Deut. 1:28*), to the inhabitants of the land (*Josh. 2:9*) and its kings (*Josh. 5:1*), and to the Israelites in disobedience (*Josh. 7:5*). Furthermore, Rahab’s wording shows that she understands the religious nature of the war (*Josh. 2:10*). The verb *haram* (“to destroy utterly”), which appears in Rahab’s speech, designates an object or person devoted to destruction by God. The concept is known outside Israel, as its use in extrabiblical texts demonstrates.

The second parallel is about how Rahab and the Gibeonites showed their faith through unconventional means. While Rahab lies to protect the spies, the Gibeonites lie to save their lives. Regardless, what motivates their actions is the certainty that God will fulfill His promises to Israel. Although we cannot expect much from these Canaanites in moral terms, the ruse of the Gibeonites is viewed differently. According to the narrator, they acted cunningly (*armah*), similar to the Hebrew term used to describe the serpent in Genesis 3. Unlike Rahab’s reactionary lie, their plan is calculated and well-orchestrated.

The third parallel concerns their motivation. In both cases, they seek to be spared from the coming destruction. In these first steps, their faith is self-centered, looking for transitory solutions for their problem. At this stage, their faith cannot see beyond the horizon. It

is based on fear and not love (*Josh. 2:9, Josh. 9:24*). Here, faith is somehow a bargain. The pragmatic aspect of this faith as the bargain is evident by their use of the word *hesed*. In its secular sense, it often refers to a kind of transaction in which “the one who receives an act of *hesed* responds with a similar act of *hesed*, or at least that the one who demonstrates *hesed* is justified in expecting an equivalent act in return.”—Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “חֶסֶד,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 18.

The fourth and fifth parallels involve the outcome of their decisions. Rahab receives the guarantee that she and her household will be spared. Similar to the Israelites in the last plague, there is a sign to be fixed: a scarlet cord hanging from a window, probably where Rahab lowered the spies via a rope. However, her deliverance is ultimately a divine act. If the walls of Jericho fell flat, God must have preserved the section where her house stood. On the other hand, the Gibeonites are untouchable from now on. They succeed in obtaining the protection they sought, as a coalition of Canaanite kings advances against Gibeon in Joshua 10. The defense of Gibeon triggers a major military campaign in which many cities are destroyed. In the end, the deceitful plan of the Gibeonites is used to advance God’s purpose in the conquest of the land. However, the long-term outcomes are pretty distinct. Rahab became an ancestor to the Messiah and assimilated into Israel. The Gibeonites also assimilated but as servants. They have enduring protection (*compare with 2 Samuel 21*), but the consequence of their scheme remains. “They had adopted the garb of poverty for the purpose of deception, and it was fastened upon them as a badge of perpetual servitude.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 507.

Part III: Life Application

The Amazing Grace in Our Lives

The story of Rahab and the Gibeonites reminds us that the Israelites and Canaanites are more than just ethnic groups; they also represent spiritual conditions. God’s Israel, whatever one’s ethnicity, is primarily a spiritual community. All people are invited to be part of this community. No one is beyond God’s reach. In this sense, the Pauline call to break down all the barriers is not a mere gospel novelty (*Gal. 3:28*).

Thought question: Consider places where you can find people apparently

beyond grace's reach today. What could you and your local church do to reach the unreachable?

Discerning God's Will

Israel's failure to discern the true identity of the Gibeonites reminds us of the danger of being led by appearances. The leaders of Israel tasted the aged bread with their mouths instead of asking "the mouth of the LORD" (literal translation of Joshua 9:14). Israel's error is grave because its failure to consult the Lord undermines its call to mediate God's will to the world.

Invite your students to consider the following questions:

- 1. How can we avoid falling into the same trap today as the Israelites did with the Gibeonites?**

- 2. In what way did Israel repeat Eve's failure before the serpent in the Garden of Eden?**

- 3. How do we discern God's will today? What role should the Scriptures play here?**

- 4. Try to remember the last time you decided to follow a particular direction without consulting God's will. What were the consequences?**
