

No Wall Too Tall

Pastor Ken

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26 So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them. 27 That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the assembly, to provide for the needs of the altar of the Lord at the place the Lord would choose. And that is what they are to this day. (Joshua 9-NIV)

God have your way in our lives, especially for those of us who have been exposed to God's word for years. And help those who are new to God's word, to see how relevant it is to their journey and faith with God. Your word shows us the way to God, and how to walk with God. Reach us. Teach us. And if you have to, even impeach us for wrongdoing. Today we need a fresh word from you.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

We are following the children of Israel in Joshua 9, this 40-year-old nation has arrived at their destination the Promised Land. Modern day Israel. The nation of Israel is about to encounter the most barbaric armies on the planet.

In spite of the fierce nature of the armies, the armies were no match for God's army. The Hebrew people were unstoppable for 7 years. 31 kings were defeated. Over 10,000 square miles of choice Mediterranean real estate is about to transfer ownership. The Promised Land title deed complete with notary is about to go from the Jebusites to Joshua. From the Canaanites to Caleb.

This Promised Land was the 3rd stop on the Hebrew itinerary. The pilgrimage began in Egypt, the newly freed nation wandered for 40 years with a lengthy stay at Mt Sinai.

There they received the 10 commandments. It would be 40 years before the Jewish nation entered the Promised Land. For several weeks, we have observed God's people experiencing victory after victory.

Egypt represents slavery to sin. Life without Christ is a hell of sin and slavery. In Egypt we wore leg irons of death and destruction. Then a deliverer named Jesus Christ (Moses) brought us out, and is now taking us in. We are in a Promised Land where we are more than conquerors.

No, **despite all these** things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. (Romans 8:37-NLT)

Despite what things? Difficulties. Problems. Problems exist in our Promised Land. It is a place where we win more than lose. We forgive as quickly as offended. We are generous in our service and generous in our giving.

We stumble in the Promised Land, but do not surrender.

We are only temporarily defeated in the Promised Land but not destroyed.

We are bitten by sin but not enslaved to habitual sin.

We are reminded of this truth in:

2 Cor. 4. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4-NIV)

How do I win in my Promised Land, and how do you win in yours? See if this works.

We boast only in Jesus Christ, we trust only in the Holy Spirit, we live daily in his word, and we lean on his power and presence as we enjoy ever growing faith and fruit.

Each geographical land, Egypt, Sinai, and the Promised Land illustrates a different condition of the human heart. Geography is theology.

The Promised Land is also a Problem Land.

The promised land is not a problem free land. When Israel enters the Promised Land there are enemies to defeat. There are course corrections to make because of mistakes. There are mounds of assets to catalogue for the treasury: animals to count, houses to survey, Flat Screen TV to sell and silver to melt down. Robes to hang-up. Shoes to send off to the thrift store. Carts to put aside for local auction.

Joshua will have to fight battles. Shed blood. And feed the troops. It is the Promised Land, but it is not a problem free land. Joshua will have to cooperate and coordinate with God to conquer and settle the land of promise.

So it is with the Christian life, this is not a playground, it is a battle ground. How many are facing some of the Promised Land problems right now? That is why we need each other. We need to be in groups. We grow best, we win most when we live and grow in relationship with each other. The church grows best when it moves from the pew to the porch. From Sunday to Wed night. From a large group setting to small group settings.

You might face a battle when you leave church and then be able to talk about that battle in your life group, support group, small group. And receive help, prayer, and encouragement for the test. For the temptation. For the trial. We need each other. We prosper because of each other. We heal because of each other.

One of the most thorough research projects done on relationships is called the Alameda County study. Headed by a Harvard social scientist, it tracked the lives of **seven thousand** people over nine years. Researchers found that the most isolated people were **three times more likely to die than those connected to relationships.**

People who had bad health habits (smoking, overeating, and even alcoholism) but had solid relational ties lived significantly longer than people who had excellent health habits but were isolated. (**Everybody's Normal Till You get to know them, pg. 33**) The moral of the story? Eating Twinkies with good friends is better than eating broccoli alone.

You are healthier in life, even if you have a habit to change, as long as you have relationships with others.

While armies are amassing on the planes of the Promised Land, a small contingency of Gibeonites are about to approach Joshua's tent in chapter 9. Seemingly they have come from a far distance, and are out of water, out of food and out of strength.

¹² This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. ¹³ And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey. (Joshua 9-NIV)

The Gibeonites know an all-out military assault against Joshua's army was a sheer suicide, so they **resorted to a ruse.**

³ However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, ^{4a} they resorted to a ruse: ... (Joshua 9-NIV)

They set up an elaborate deception to deceive Joshua with a treaty arrangement. Hoping this treaty would save their skin.

Save their hide.

Save their children.

Save their grandparents.

While the kings form destructive armies, the Gibeonites form deceptive approaches.

While the kings form coalitions, the Gibeonites form causes (we are your servants)

While the kings rely on collective strength, the Gibeonites rely upon craftiness and secrecy.

Joshua stood eyeball to eyeball with evil and didn't even recognize it. Joshua looked at the old clothes. He tasted the moldy bread. Joshua listened to the Gibeonites pitch.

Joshua listened to their praise of Jehovah.

Joshua listened to their plea for a treaty.

Each invitation to take a closer look placed the Hebrew nation squarely in the enemy's strategy of deception based on pride and overconfidence.

^{9a} They answered: "Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God." (Joshua 9-NIV)

The Gibeonites claim to be on the side of the Hebrews. We are here to celebrate the victories your God has given.

We are Vagabonds from a far-off land.

We are Hapless pilgrims wanting to join your ranks.

We are Hopeless spiritual Bedouins you can convert to your faith movement.

Soon the ink had dried on the contract.

14 The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. 15 Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath. (Joshua 9-NIV)

And the celebration and toasting began. A toast, one of the Gibeonite Generals declared, "to a long and peaceful relationship between our peoples." Here-Here. And the wine went down.

A toast to our serving your God declared another general, "Here-here!" The glasses were raised!

Joshua heard the Gibeonite story and agreed to the covenant relationship. We will fight for your survival. You will fight for our survival.

14 The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. (Josh 9-NIV)

Because Joshua failed to inquire of the Lord, he allowed the enemy into his camp. The Gibeonites are aware of what is going on. The nation of Israel is the new bully on the block.

Their method of occupation is a scorched earth approach. Kill everyone and take no prisoners.

Consult God in everything.

Learn from Joshua. Learn from others. Consult God in everything. Always. Immediately. Quickly. Live with one ear toward heaven and one eye of suspicion on the opportunity.

Keep your communication with God going all the time. This is called a relationship with God. It is personal. He knows your imperfections. He wants to talk to you.

Ask these questions: Is this opportunity from God? Is this person from God? Is this proposal from God? Should I take this road or that road?

Our relationship with God is just that – a speaking and hearing relationship.

"Come and talk with me, O my people." (Psalm 27:8-TLB)

Be cautious about forming alliances with evil.

Again, look for deception from the world. Every person has an angle, and every program has an angle. At every decision, at every intersection, and at every crossroads...

(1) Acknowledge God is in control of your life.

(2) Declare the acceptance of God's sovereign purposes and plans for your life.

Three days later, as Joshua is leading his troops toward the kings who have amassed a massive army, Joshua runs smack into a community of Bedouins who called themselves Gibeonites.

The tricksters, hucksters, and sham and scam artists were not from a distant land; they were less than 10 miles away. Just over the hill. Past the valley. A couple days journey from Joshua's current encampment.

Somehow the Gibeonites had insider-trading, that their heads were next on the chopping block. So, they scam Josh for survival.

I have often taken a pass, not a path on all kinds of opportunities because I need to consult with God.

²¹ Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (Isaiah 30:21-NIV)

When I was younger it was easier to deceive me, now I put time between the deception and decision. Never make decisions in a hurry and don't rely on your own insights. Consult God about everything!

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. (Prov 3:5)

There are 2 problems in the promised land. One by God's people and one by the Gibeonites. Joshua fails to pray. Gibeonites fail to be truthful. If they had come to Joshua as an honest tribe, perhaps God would have shown grace. He could have offered mercy. Or maybe justice.

You never bother God by asking, seeking, and requesting. You say I have asked 10 times; 20 times then ask him 30 times. Better to ask God 10-20-30 times, then to take the wrong path "1." Jewish proverb.

One problem was disobedience by Joshua and the other was deception by the Gibeonites.

Now, because Joshua swore an oath of allegiance and protection, God needs to keep the Gibeonites from infiltrating Israel with their sinful practices. Once you invoke the name of the Lord in a treaty, you have to keep it.

How do you live for Jehovah when sitting next to you in church is a hedonist, atheist, abortionist, transgender, a Buddhist? How does God do that?

How do you allow Gibeonites religion to live amongst Jewish religion? And not just live amongst the Israelites, but be protected by the Israelites?

Your enemy and mine like the devil is clever, deceptive. Paul tells us we are not ignorant of his devices. Satan has so many devices and he has brought down the best of them. Adam in the Garden. Samson in the vineyard. David in the palace.

Satanic deception is exposed by proximity in prayer, worship, and study of God's Word.

²⁰ This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that God's wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them." ²¹ They continued, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers in the service of the whole assembly." So the leaders' promise to them was kept. (Joshua 9-NIV)

From that day the curse Joshua put on the Gibeonites was to make them slaves and servants in the temple sacrificial system. The Gibeonites would spend the rest of their lives going to church, serving at church, helping in the atoning of sins for God's people.

The Gibeonites became woodcutters and water carriers for the house of the Lord.

The house of God was the temple. The Lord dwelt amongst his people in the temple. And the Gibeonites would have a roll in the operation of the temple. Every day. The same way. Offering life forgiving forgiveness to God's through sacrifices make to God. Grain. Salt. Blood.

The whole reason to exercise all of the cancer from the land, was so the Canaanites evil and sinful practices would not become snare or stumbling block to God's people. So, what do you do with the Gibeonites idolatry and treachery so as not allow it to infect God's people?

You make them work in the temple. To go to church every day. To sit there quietly and not disrupt. Even to participate by carrying wood and filling buckets with water.

They will put bibles in the pews. They will pass out communion at the doors. They will light candles at Christmas, and they will park cars at Easter.

The lost Gibeonites will be exposed to salvation by God every day. They will haul wood for an altar that is always burning. They will provide water so the blood from the sacrifices washes off the altar.

You are going to be so close to God, you will have an introduction to eternal life. What is our other option? We kill you and your family and your tribe.

When you make a mistake, make your mistake work for YOU.

Your mistake is a part of your story!

So, what ever happened to the Gibeonites? They would become a part of Benjamin's tribe. (Josh 18:25).

In Josh 18, the city of Gibeon will become a Levite town. You will have teachers of the Law coming from the town of Gibeon. The teachers of the Word will be close to Gibeonites. Later the tabernacle will rest on a hill in Gibeon.

And my favorite, in Nehemiah. When the walls were rebuilt by Nehemiah, some Gibeonites will do the work.

⁶ The Jeshanah^[a] Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. ⁷ Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah — Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth—places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. (Nehemiah 3-NIV)

I end with two thoughts as we finish the series and finish the book of Joshua.

Caleb wanted to do something great for God.

¹² Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities

were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said. (Joshua 14-NIV)

Caleb has been holding on to this promise for 40 years. God's promises are meant to be kept and held onto. Caleb is asking for Hebron. Hebron would have a special place in Israel's history.

* It was the only land that Abraham ever owned.

*Abraham buried his wife there. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all buried there. It is a symbol of ancient history.

* Hebron was a sacred site.

On that day, 40 years earlier, Caleb imagined a holy hill, populated by unholy people. Abraham did not like that a sacred burial site had become disrespected and disregarded. It was more than he could take.

And before land could be given, promises had to be fulfilled.

Caleb did not ask for Jerusalem. Caleb did not ask for a valley full of grapes. He spoke not of Jericho or Jordan. Caleb wanted a challenge. A place where angels visited. A place where holy families are buried. 40 years ago, Moses took the request before Yaweh, and God announced, Caleb wins the lottery and gets Hebron.

And now at 85, the land he dreamed of at 45 is now his. The old soldier was ready to go to battle one more time.

Give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day. (Joshua 14:12a-NKJV)

No tribe gets everything; but everyone gets something.

If you look closely at the distribution, you will notice one tribe seems to get nothing. The tribe of Levi was not given land because God was their inheritance.

^{7a} The Levites, however, do not get a portion among you, because the priestly service of the LORD is their inheritance. (Joshua 18-NIV)

Their assignment was to direct the affairs of the worship of God in the community and teach the Torah. A word to the faith community. You ought to be seeking out the Levites (pastors and church leaders) for prayer, counseling, family, and life instruction.

We have a unique proportion of Levites in our church-pastors, teachers, missionaries, denominational leaders, evangelists. Let me show you. Stand if you feel called to the ministry or are already training for the ministry or have a ministry credential. Also, as a person called to the ministry, you need to love God's work and love God's people.

Finally, God create special cities to provide a refuge for those who found themselves in danger.

¹ Then the LORD said to Joshua: ² "Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, ³ so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood. (Joshua 20-NIV)

In the ancient middle east during the time of the text I am going to read to you, there was quite a bit of running going on.

Let me explain: Population centers were quite spread out. And the initial government systems were rather basic. People often had to run for their lives if a crime was committed. For example: If you and your neighbor had an altercation out in field that led to a fist fight and if your final punch knocked your neighbor out and he fell to the ground and died in the field.

You had better get your track shoes and start running. Otherwise, this guy's family is going to find out about it, and they are not going to hire an **attorney** to check into things, they are not going to hire a **detective** to investigate the facts...

...they are going to hire what scripture calls a **blood avenger. (go el haddam)**

And this is a guy who is the strongest and fastest guy in their clan from that time forward is to locate you, you're the one who threw the punch, and chase you down until he kills you. And he will spend the rest of his life chasing you until he kills you. Once that is done the matter is considered settled.

So, like I said in that day, there is a lot of running and chasing going on in ancient times. Now, occasionally, in that culture someone killed someone accidently. As you might imagine.

For example: A woman jumps on a horse to get some groceries at the nearby by SAMS CLUB and when she is galloping down those narrow streets a kid dashes out and doesn't look both ways and the kid gets knocked down and killed. He dies. This is a terrible thing. But everyone knows it is just an accident, in that day or in that culture, no one paid attention much to nuance or the finer points of the law and even in the situation.

A blood avenger from the kid's family would be appointed and he would take off running and he would chase that **housewife** down until he caught her, and he would kill her. And you go, that is awful. That's right. It is awful. It was an accident. It is a terrible injustice for her to die for an accident. Right. And you go, someone should do something. Right again.

So, God did. He stepped into this situation; he instructed a key leader named Joshua to designate 6 cities spread out all over the country and he called them **cities of refuge**. 3 on one side of the Jordan and three on the other side. Cities of refuge. Then God told Joshua to establish a new law that would protect people from killing someone accidentally.

So, the new law said, "in the situation of an accidental homicide, the person who did it should take off running immediately but this time run in the direction of a city of refuge. Hopefully, they would take off running before a blood avenger even had an opportunity to be appointed. And so maybe they would run and make it to a city of refuge in time.

The new law said that if they made it there, they could not be killed. They would be protected. There would be a jury that would be selected and put together and a trial would occur and if that homicide was ruled accidental, then all charges were dropped and the individual received papers that they were not guilty and they could return to their village (after the death of the high priest) and not worry about a blood avenger chasing them down any more."

If the blood avenger found the slayer of his kin outside the city of refuge he could avenge with no remorse. This was possible until the death of the high priest. These types of vendettas could go on for 5 generations. And you say, "that is cool." That is amazing. It was. And you could read about it in Joshua 20.

Now, why do I bring this up? For a couple reasons.

God is concerned about all of the activities in the world.

He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber; ⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. (Psalm 121:3-4-NIV)

He always has and always will. We think from time-to-time God is not noticing. And every once in a while, in our individual situations we feel like we want to pull on some chord and go,

“Hey God, surely you see this right, you see what is going on. You see what is going on in my job, you see what is going on in my job, what is going on in our world, right God.” God is not napping when something important is going on. Or when something is going wrong in in the world.

He notices everything.

God’s character (and nature) offers you minute-by-minute refugee status.

Because his very nature is to provide a **refuge** for those who feel frightened, or hurt, or make mistakes, or hunted down by someone or something.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. (Psalm 46:1-GW)