

THE GIBEONITES

Joshua 9

The lesson should be introduced by emphasis on the fact that when the Israelites returned to the Holy Land from Egypt, they found the land full of enemies, but the Lord had promised them victory if they obeyed Him. The teacher should be prepared to tell briefly the story of the fall of Jericho and the capture of Ai. The older pupils may be able to tell these stories themselves.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord knows our weaknesses and takes them into account as He makes provision for us.

The Word teaches us the truth about ourselves.

Our obedience is the measure of our faith.

When we have made a mistake, we must take the consequences and make the best of them.

Notes for Parents

In the book of Revelation, chapter 21, we read how an angel was sent to John to show him the holy city. The angel had a golden reed to measure the city and found its length, breadth, and height to be equal, and its measurement is said to be “according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.” People have always recognized the holy city in Revelation, like the Holy Land in the Old Testament, as a symbol of heaven. Heaven is possible for each one of us not only after we die but within our hearts and minds while we live here. There is a potential angel within each one of us whose measure is the measure of heaven. Our task in this world is to try to “measure up” to our spiritual possibilities.

Yet each one of us is different from every other. Each of us is born with certain inherited abilities and certain inherited limitations. Our Holy Land, like the land of Canaan which Joshua set

out to conquer, is full of enemies trying to check our spiritual progress. The story of the Gibeonites is a picture of how the Lord takes into account our weaknesses and enables us to recognize and make use of them, if we try. Like Joshua with the Gibeonites we are sometimes deceived about our natural tendencies, thinking some of them to be friends which are really enemies. So we accept them as part of our character just as Joshua made a league with the Gibeonites.

Take, for example, the love of “knowing other people’s business” which we all have to some extent. This seems to us often to be a desire which, being born in us—coming, like the Gibeonites from the far country of our ancestry—should be accepted as a proper faculty without question. We do not at first see it as a possible enemy. When we do realize that it is a weakness to be dealt with, the Lord will, if we ask His help, show us how to put it in its place, making it serve our heavenly purpose of being of use to our neighbors. We all know the difference between watching and studying others in a critical spirit or from idle curiosity and doing the same thing from a desire to find out their needs and see how we may help them.

The Lord knows the measure of the angel in each one of us; and if we look to Him with willingness to acknowledge our weaknesses, He will help us to grow day by day closer to our true heavenly stature.

Primary

Your introduction should be given as an explanation of why the Gibeonites were afraid of the Israelites and wanted to make peace with them. The lesson to be drawn from the story is that we are all easily deceived by the way things seem to us at first glance and that we should never make careless promises. Emphasize the need to stop and think whether a thing is right or not before promising to do it.

When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Holy Land, the land was full of enemies and there were many strong walled cities which they had to conquer. The city nearest

the place where they crossed the river was Jericho, and perhaps you remember how the Lord told them to carry the ark around the city once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day, and how the Lord then made the walls fall down so that they could go in and take the city. After that the Lord showed Joshua how to take another city named Ai.

When these two cities fell, the inhabitants of the land were frightened.

What people decided to try to make peace with Israel?

How did they deceive Joshua?

Joshua had been told by the Lord to conquer all the people of the land.

When the Gibeonites came to him, what did he forget to do?

Joshua made a hasty and careless promise.

Do we ever do the same thing?

Before we make a promise, we should always stop to think and to be sure that what we are promising is right.

But Joshua knew that he could not break his promise once it was made.

He had to let the Gibeonites live.

Joshua had made a mistake. So Joshua had to make the best of what he had done. He let the Gibeonites live and did not destroy their cities, but he punished them for lying to him by making them servants of the Israelites forever—hewers of wood and drawers of water.

Junior

Deal in this class with the connecting material and also with the origin of the evil peoples in the land, especially the Hivites. Have the class look up the Bible references. This helps to give them a sense of the continuity of the Bible story and forms a basis for later instruction. The moral lesson in the story for today is one which the Juniors need.

Read in Joshua 8:30-35 how Joshua obeyed the command Moses had given in Deuteronomy 27:1-13 and set up an altar between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim and read the book of the law to the people there. This was the same place where Abraham set up his first altar when he came from Ur to the land of Canaan.

You remember that the children of Israel had been in Egypt for about two hundred and fifty years. During that time the idol-

worshipers who lived in the land of Canaan had increased so that the land was full of enemies whom Joshua would have to conquer. The fall of Jericho and Ai filled all these people with fear because they trusted in their strong cities, and all through the land they were preparing to resist Joshua. But there was one nation in the land which preferred to make peace with the Israelites. These were the people who lived in four cities in the center of the land, one of them not far from Jerusalem, the cities of Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjathjearim. These people were Hivites. The Hivites are mentioned first in Genesis 10:17, where they are said to be descendants of Canaan, one of the sons of Ham the son of Noah. The Canaanites lived in the Holy Land and gave their name to it. There were a number of tribes of them and they were enemies of Israel, but the groups called the Hittites and the Hivites were more inclined than the rest to make peace. There are several stories in the Bible which show this.

Noah and his sons belonged to the second church on earth, the Ancient Church, and this church especially loved knowledge or truth. At first it loved the truth for the sake of living according to it, but the good motive gradually died out. You know some people like to learn a great many facts about everything without ever making use of them. The Hivites in our lesson were such people. The trick they played on Joshua was not honest, but it was better than it would have been for them to fight him.

What did they tell Joshua about themselves?

How did they make him believe it?

The wine “bottles” of the Holy Land were skins, usually of goats, not bottles as we think of them; so even these could be made to look old.

Joshua made a serious mistake. See if you can find what it was by reading verse 14. He formed his judgment in this case according to “appearances”; that is, he judged hastily by the way things looked on the outside. If he had taken counsel of the Lord, the Lord could have shown him the truth which was hidden under the appearances. Do we ever form hasty judgments in this way and

then find out that we have been mistaken?

We all do make such mistakes, and when we do, we should acknowledge them and try to make the best of it. If we face them honestly, the Lord can use our mistakes to teach us our weaknesses and so to make us better. Can you see how Joshua's mistake was used? You know that water represents truth. Wood pictures external good deeds like feeding the hungry and helping people to be more healthy and comfortable in the world. We need knowledge of facts to help us perform good deeds and also to understand the truth about things. This was why the Gibeonites were made to serve the Israelites as hewers of wood and drawers of water.

But wrong things always have bad consequences also. In the very next chapter we find that because the Gibeonites had made peace with Joshua, the other people in the land made war on them, and because Joshua had made a league with them he had to go to their assistance. So when we act hastily, we often bring upon ourselves consequences which we did not expect.



Intermediate

The correspondence of the ruse of the Gibeonites is simple and is helpful in showing how a thing which in the letter is wrong may in its internal meaning be truth.

The Israelites retained their camp at Gilgal for some time, but not long after they celebrated the Passover there and had conquered the two strong cities of Jericho and Ai, they made a pilgrimage to Shechem to fulfill a command given by Moses. (You will find it in the twenty-seventh chapter of Deuteronomy.) You may remember that Shechem was the first place where Abraham stopped when he came into the Holy Land from Ur, and that he built an altar there. Now Joshua also builds an altar there (8:30) and reads the book of the law to the people. The place was a natural amphitheater between two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, and the people divided, six tribes standing on the slopes of Ebal and six on the slopes of Gerizim, as Moses had decreed, and said "Amen" to the laws as

they were read. Then they went back to Gilgal.

The nations which lived in the Holy Land at this time were all—except the giants—remnants of the Ancient Church. We remember that this was a spiritual church, whose principal delight was the study of correspondences, and that it perished because it perverted its knowledge by using it for self-exaltation. Its end is described in the story of the Tower of Babel. Swedenborg tells us that the people of the Ancient Church made images of things in nature and set them up as reminders of the spiritual things to which they correspond, and that when they became selfish and began to lose their spiritual knowledges, they fell into the worship of the images themselves, and so idolatry sprang up and with their dispersion was spread all over the earth. (See AC 1241, SS 23.)

But there are always among all nations people who sin because of ignorance rather than from evil desires and who are not opposed to the truth when it is presented to them. The Gibeonites did not join with the other nations in the Holy Land in resistance to Israel. Instead they sought to make peace with them. Their method was in the letter dishonest, but their intent was sincere—as their later conduct proved.

And in the internal meaning their statements were true. The “far country” they came from was the Ancient Church. The “bread” was the spiritual good which had been warm and fresh when they started, and had grown dry and moldy as they wandered from true worship. The “wine-skins” were their doctrines, which had been strong and true once but were now unfit to hold new truth (read Matthew 9:17). The “old patched garments and shoes” were their understanding of right ways of living, which had declined through the years.

The Gibeonites represent the desire for knowledge for its own sake without any particular thought of its use. This desire is in all of us as part of our heredity. Every child goes through a period when his every other word seems to be *Why?* and most of us never stop asking why, whether we have any conscious need of the answer or not. If this “mental curiosity” is taken as wholly a

friend, and is not put in its proper place in our lives, it may be an enemy to our spiritual life because it can lead us to clutter our minds with a lot of unnecessary and even harmful information. But if it is understood, it can be brought into subjection and made useful to our spiritual progress. The Gibeonites were made “hewers of wood and drawers of water” for the congregation of Israel and for the tabernacle. Knowledges of all kinds are needed if we are to carry our good purposes into concrete action. Wood represents right action, and water, of course, truth. For example, every Christian feels that war should be abolished, but there will have to be much “hewing of wood and drawing of water”—i.e., many carefully worked out plans of action and much gathering of accurate information and formulation of principle—before the desired result is attained.

The wood and water for the tabernacle would be for the use of the great brazen altar in the outer court and for the brazen laver there, and the outer court of the tabernacle represents our outward conduct as we attempt to serve the Lord.

Joshua’s part of the story is interesting, too. He acted hastily according to a judgment formed on the basis of appearances, without taking counsel of the Lord (verse 14) and, although he afterward made the Gibeonites useful, bound himself to them in a pact which presently involved him in battle on their account, as you may learn by reading chapter 10. All our lives we have to fight the temptation to judge by appearances, and every time we yield and act hastily, we bring upon ourselves unexpected and unwanted consequences. We need to take counsel of the Lord every step of the way.

Basic Correspondences

- bread = spiritual good
- wine-skins = doctrines
- garments = truths clothing our affections



Senior

Use this lesson to show how the Lord can make use even of our weaknesses and mistakes and preserves everything in us which may be of service in our spiritual development.

When Israel reentered the Holy Land, the land was full of enemies. It is interesting to note that in the letter of the Word all the nations mentioned as occupying the Holy Land when Israel returned to it can be traced back to the prehistoric churches, the Most Ancient and Ancient, the giants to the Most Ancient and all the others to the Ancient Church, their names occurring first in the genealogies taken from the Ancient Word, notably Genesis 10:15-18. On the other hand, the ancestry of the nations outside of the Holy Land can be traced no further back than Abraham.* The nations outside the land picture evils which come to us through our external environment as we grow up, while those within the land represent the deep internal evils of our heredity. We never wholly destroy these nations; but if we look to the Lord, He can give us power to keep them in subjection and even in some cases to make them useful to our spiritual development.

The Gibeonites of our lesson today were the best remnant of the degenerated Ancient Church. They were, according to the letter, Hivites, descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham. They represent the love of knowledge for its own sake, without thought of its use. We all have this love, especially in our childhood. We like to find out about everything. Under the control of spiritual purposes this faculty can help us decide what we ought to do in our outward life, finding out for us the truth about the conditions we face

*There is at least one exception to this rule (there perhaps being others), namely "Amalek," the first enemy which attacked Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 17). This ancient nation is first mentioned in Genesis 14:7 as one of the nations attacked by Chedorlaomer shortly after Abram arrived in Canaan. This nation seems to have had branches both within and without the Holy Land. Dr. Bayley, in *From Egypt to Canaan*, notes: "Afterwards a portion of the family of Esau likewise took the name of Amalek [Genesis 36:12], perhaps from settling in the very same district that had been occupied by the Amalekites of old." –Ed.

and showing us the best ways of meeting them. This is why the Gibeonites were to be spared as long as they were willing to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the altar and for the congregation.

The appearance of the Gibeonites when they came to Joshua, although it was assumed to deceive him, had genuine truth behind it. Suppose we think of an example. Here, let us say, is a scientist who has let his interest in the natural world wean him away from religious belief. He pursues his profession eagerly and works hard at it, but only for the purpose of finding out ever more and more about the natural world. What is to be done with his discoveries he leaves to other people, both good and bad. The innocent goodness which he had when he was a little child close to the Lord has deteriorated, like the bread which was hot from the oven at the start but had become dry and moldy. His unquestioning belief in God and his tender conscience, like the wine-skins, have become dry and cracked during the years. His ways of thinking and living have, like the garments, come to be full of holes instead of all of one piece, and patched, like the shoes, with worldly expedients. He has indeed come a long journey from that far country of his infancy when he was in his Father's house. Yet if we can see his shortcomings and put them in their place in our lives, the results of his labors can be made serviceable to the spiritual life in providing us with accurate knowledge by means of which we may benefit the world.

This dry scientist may actually be living right in our own mental country. Whenever our interest in worldly knowledge of any kind—whether it be of science, of art, of money-making, of social conventions, of sports, or even of the text of the Bible—comes to be a thing we pursue for its own sake apart from its use to the spiritual life of men, our spiritual bread begins to spoil in us, our religious principles are broken, our knowledge of how to live usefully declines. The fault is not in the knowledges we love to acquire but in the fact that we have come to regard them as ends in themselves and not in their true character as servants to our higher faculties.

The Lord did not require Joshua to break his promise to the Gibeonites. He let them live, but He required that they be put and kept in their proper place. In chapter 10 we find that the other nations, as soon as they found that Gibeon had made a league with Israel, banded together and attacked it. This forced Joshua to go to its aid. When we yield to our weaknesses, even though later we realize our mistake and get them under control, there are always the unlooked-for consequences which have to be faced.



Adult

An interesting study for the Adults is to trace the ancestry of the Canaanites and to identify them with the evil tendencies which we inherit from our earliest ancestry. The Lord's providence in making use of these tendencies to further our spiritual development is brought out by this story.

In the introduction to the story of Abraham, we learned that the origin of idolatry was in the perversion of the knowledge of correspondence possessed by the Ancient Church. The idolatrous remnants of that church were scattered all over the world, and the pagan religions are the descendants of those remnants. But there were also remnants which remained in the Holy Land itself. They were the several tribes grouped under the title of *Canaanites* from whom the country was called the *land of Canaan*. In the letter of the Word Canaan (Genesis 9:18) was the son of Ham, and Genesis 10:19 tells us that "the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha." Of the three sons of Noah, Ham represents "internal worship corrupted." Throughout the Word, therefore, the Canaanites represent those interior evils which by heredity lie deep within us and oppose the entrance of the Lord into our hearts and minds. In addition to the Canaanites there were in the land the giants, an evil remnant of the Most Ancient Church, who represent our common tendency to exalt self.

The Canaanites were in the land when Abraham first came from

Ur. We remember the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the kings who carried off Lot and were overcome by Abraham. These stories picture our first struggles against our inherited evils while we are in the tender and innocent states of little childhood. But the descendants of Abraham, as we have seen, did not remain continuously in the Holy Land to hold down these enemies. They went into Egypt and stayed there for two hundred and fifty years. And while they were away, the Canaanites increased and built themselves many strong, walled cities, and gained complete control of the land. So when the Israelites returned under Joshua, they faced a long struggle for possession of the country which had been promised to them. This is a true picture of our own experience. As little children, cared for and protected by our parents and trusting wholly in them, we have a taste of heavenly living. But then we go out from our homes into the world of school and work and begin to develop as independent individuals, and for a long time we are chiefly concerned with external things and with our outward conduct. Our battles during this period are on the external plane. When we return to the Holy Land to repossess it—that is, when we finally are prepared for the development of our minds and hearts—we find that the few inner enemies we had to fight when we were little children have gathered strength and have entrenched themselves in strongholds of worldly thought and argument.

The Lord gave Joshua victory over all these enemies and enabled the Israelites to possess the land. Yet it was never a final victory. From the rest of the Bible story we know how the enemies in the land persisted, how constantly the Jews were tempted to mingle with them and adopt their ways, how their enemies gathered strength whenever the Jews became self-confident, and how at times they gained the upper hand and put the Jews to tribute. This too we can see in our own experience. There is never a time in this world when we can take our ease and relax our vigilance against the evils within us, never a time when we are not in need of examining ourselves and turning to the Lord for help.

We are now taking as our lesson the incident concerning the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites were Hivites. Among the descendants of Canaan listed in Genesis 10:15-18 were Heth—the Hittites—and the Hivites. These two remnants of the Ancient Church all through the Bible story were more inclined to be friendly to the Jews than any of the other Canaanites. It was from the Hittites that Abraham bought the field and cave of Machpelah; Esau married two wives from the Hittites; and we have an occasional Hittite mentioned in the period of the kings as rendering good service—notably Uriah the Hittite, who was so faithful to his duty in David’s army that David could not cover his sin with Bathsheba by deceit. We first encounter the Hivites in Genesis 34 when Shechem the son of Hamor wishes to marry Jacob’s daughter Dinah, and his father offers Jacob any price for her.

Swedenborg tells us that the Hittites and the Hivites were the more upright of the Canaanites because they still cherished the knowledges which had come down from the Ancient Church: the Hittites, the external knowledges which regard life; and the Hivites, the interior knowledges in the rituals and representatives. In AC 3058 Swedenborg says that the Gibeonites of our lesson for today represent “those who continually desire to know truths, but for no other end than to know them, while caring nothing for the use.”

The ruse by which the Gibeonites deceived Joshua was a falsehood on the surface, but truth interiorly. They had indeed come from a far country, the Ancient Church. The “bread” which they carried—spiritual good—had come hot for their provision out of their houses in the day they came forth, and the “wine-skins”—the doctrines of spiritual truth—had been new when the branch called the Hivites had first developed in the Ancient Church. Their “garments” and their “shoes”—their ideas of external life and their practical applications of these ideas—had been whole and new. Over the centuries they had all become dry and moldy and torn and patched. But the Gibeonites recognized that the Lord was on the side of Israel and they preferred to serve rather than to resist,

knowing that if they resisted they would be destroyed.

And on Joshua's part, what in the letter was a weakness—he asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord but made a league with them—expresses a truth interiorly. As Joseph told his brothers (Genesis 50:20): “Ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.” The Lord “knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” His providence over us in the matter of the inherited evils within us gives us a means of turning into useful channels those evils which we would not destroy.

In our own lives this law means that there are many things in us which in themselves are weaknesses—“strangers” to the angel in us—yet which, if recognized and properly subordinated, may be made to serve our higher goals. We all have that which the Gibeonites symbolize within us: that natural desire to seek all kinds of information regardless of whether it is good or bad, useful or potentially harmful. Our fondness for looking into things and acquiring information can be made to show us the best means of helping others in material ways, and can bring us truths which are useful in our daily life. The Gibeonites were to hew wood and draw water for the house of the Lord, and we recall that it was only in the outer court of the tabernacle that wood and water were regularly used.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 4431: “Because the Hivites had from ancient time signified interior truth, and because they were one of the better disposed nations, with whom iniquity was not so far consummated (that is, the truth of the church was not so far extinguished as with others), the Gibeonite Hivites were of the Lord's providence preserved, by means of a covenant made with them by Joshua and the princes.”

Arcana Coelestia, n. 1097: “Everything written in the Word concerning the Jewish Church was representative of the kingdom of the Lord. The kingdom of the Lord is such that every one in it, whosoever and whatsoever he may be, must perform some use. Nothing but use is regarded by the Lord in his king-

dom. Even the infernals must perform some use.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What did Joshua set up at Gilgal? *twelve stones*
- J. What feast did the Israelites celebrate there? *Passover*
- J. What change in their diet was made there? *manna ceased*
- P. Which one of the enemies in the Holy Land wanted to make peace with Joshua? *Gibeonites*
- P. How did they deceive him? *pretended to be from far away*
- J. In what way was Joshua careless? *failed to consult the Lord*
- J. What promise did he make to the Gibeonites? *not to kill them*
- P. When he found out that they had deceived him, did he break his promise?
no
- J. How did he decide they should be treated? *made to cut wood, haul water*
- J. What does this story teach us about promises? *shouldn't make hasty ones*
- I. What was the ancestry of the Gibeonites? *Hivites (from Ham, son of Noah)*
- S. What do they represent? *intellectual curiosity*
- I. What is pictured by their (1) patched garments, and (2) moldy bread?
(1) ideas of conduct
(2) spirituality
- S. What is pictured by their being made hewers of wood and drawers of water?
using intellectual curiosity to get accurate knowledge of ways to benefit the world