

was entered into under totally deceitful circumstances. If they had not lied to Joshua, he would never have made the covenant with them. Right? Surely, God would not expect them to have to honor a covenant made under such deceitful circumstances. After all, they *lied* to him. Joshua *surely* could go ahead and attack the cities of the Gibeonites and take their land. They *deserved* that — because of all the lies they had told! Not so! A covenant is a covenant is a covenant — no matter what!

“The sons of Israel did not strike them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord the God of Israel. And the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders. But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, ‘We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. This we will do to them, even let them live, so that wrath will not be upon us for the oath which we swore to them.’” (Joshua 9:18 - 20 NASB)

Not only could the Israelites not attack them because of the covenant they had made but if we continue to read in Joshua chapter 10, we learn that the Gibeonites were attacked by the armies of five different kings and because of the covenant Joshua had made with them, he marched *“with his entire army, including all the best fighting men”* and helped the Gibeonites gain victory. What? Not only was Joshua required to keep the covenant with them but he even helped them to defend themselves from other armies, with his own *“...best fighting men.”* Why? — because a covenant is a covenant is a covenant — *even if it was entered into surrounded by deceit and lies.*

Perhaps the most important part of this whole story is in Joshua 9:14.

“...but they did not ask counsel of the Lord. So Joshua made...a covenant with them”

Had Joshua consulted God before entering into the covenant with the Gibeonites, it could have spared him from making such a mistake. This story most definitely demonstrates the gravity and permanence of making a covenant. Joshua had to honor the agreement even though it was made under deceitful circumstances. It was a covenant — and a covenant is a binding agreement made with God Himself as a witness to it. If any of us today were given the same situation Joshua faced, the attitude would very likely be — Whoops, I don’t have to keep *that* covenant — no way — I was lied to! God surely views it differently. Remember, a covenant is a covenant is a covenant — forever — no matter what! Joshua understood that. Do we?

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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Whoops! No Way! They Lied To Me!

In the previous issue of *Diligence*, we discussed “cutting” or “making” a covenant. We recall that anytime the phrase “make a covenant” is used in the Old Testament that the writer used the words *“karath beriyth,”* or more literally, “to cut a covenant.” We saw that cutting a covenant involved a sacrifice, or the shedding of blood and that a covenant was a binding agreement, forever or until the death of one of the parties involved in making the covenant. We therefore noted that the death of Christ on the cross ended the Old Covenant and began the New Covenant.

Before we move on from that previous discussion we’re going to digress just a bit here and briefly discuss the symbols used when God made that covenant with Abram. We won’t include all of the verses here but if you missed the last issue you may want to read the entire context in Genesis 15:7-18.

“So He said to him, ‘Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three year old female goat, a three year old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.’ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other;... And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram....” (Genesis 15:9-10 and 17-18 NKJV)

There is some speculation as to exactly what the smoking oven and the burning torch represented here. Depending on which Commentary one may read, opinions vary. Probably the most common interpretation is that those emblems represented the severe trials and afflictions of the children of Israel in Egypt. This interpretation has credence since Deuteronomy 4:20 refers to Egypt as “the iron furnace.” But we want to at least consider another possibility. There are several times throughout the Scriptures where God’s presence is indicated by smoke or a cloud (Exodus 19:18; I Kings 8:10; Ezekiel 10:4; Rev. 15:8; Exodus 13:21). We also read of numerous instances where the presence of either God or the Holy Spirit is demonstrated by fire. (Exodus 13:21; Exodus 3:2; Exodus 19:18; Acts 2:3). Do you think then that it is therefore *possible* that the “smoking oven” represented God the Father — the “burning torch” represented the Holy Spirit and the cut pieces of flesh (or the shed blood) represented the sacrifice that Christ would

make on the cross as He shed His blood that would eventually “cut” a New Covenant? Perhaps this first “cut” (*karath*) covenant that God made with Abram was a demonstration of the involvement of The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit in the “cutting” of *any* covenant to signify that a covenant is calling on God to be a witness to a *binding* agreement.

A good Biblical example that clearly demonstrates that God is a witness when a covenant is made is found in Genesis 31. It’s an exchange between Jacob and Laban concerning the daughters of Laban.

“Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.... If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me.” (Genesis 31:44 and 50 NASB)

Equipped now, with the understanding of the gravity and permanent nature of making a covenant and knowing that God Himself is a witness to any covenant that is made, let’s look at what we believe is one of the most interesting accounts in the Bible involving the making of a covenant.

A bit of background information — at the end of Deuteronomy 6, God cautions the Israelites, through Moses against being disobedient to Him. Then in Deuteronomy 7 verses 1 and 2 we read these words.

“When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Gergashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.” (NKJV)

Just as God had said, they did indeed conquer nations that were much stronger than they were. Perhaps the most notable stories of those nations that God delivered over to them are the stories of Joshua’s conquest of Jerico (Joshua 6) and Ai (Joshua 8). Since most of us are very familiar with both of those accounts, we won’t take the space here to retell them but there’s no doubt that both conquests were quite amazing. They were *so* amazing that Joshua 6:27 says —

“So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country.” (NKJV)

Notice however, that the Israelites had been told not to make a covenant with inhabitants of the lands that would be given over to them. Then in Joshua chapter 9 we read about this story of deception.

“And it came to pass when all the kings who were on this side of the Jordan,...heard about it, that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord. But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, ‘We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us....And Joshua said to them, ‘Who are you, and where do you come from?’” (Joshua 9:1-6 and 8 NKJV)

The Gibeonites continued to lie convincingly to Joshua.

“So they said to him: ‘From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan...Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, ‘Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, We are your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us.’” (Joshua 9:9-11 NKJV)

And still, they continue to lie —

“This bread of ours we took hot for our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy. And these wineskins which we filled were new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey.” (Joshua 9:12-13 NKJV)

Joshua was convinced their story was true.

*“Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; **but they did not ask counsel of the Lord. So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them** to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them. (Joshua 9:14-15 NKJV)*

Joshua failed to consult with the Lord and he made a covenant with them. But —

“It came about at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were neighbors and that they were living within their land.” (Joshua 9:16 NASB)

After the covenant had been made, Joshua discovered that he had been deceived. Since the Gibeonites had lied to Joshua to get him to make the covenant with them, the Israelites surely would not be required to *keep* it. Right? After all, it