

Title: Making mistakes - Joshua 9

Purpose: To know practically from this story how we get into making mistakes and equally how we can back out and move on once we made them.

INTRODUCTION

Blunders

Mistakes, blunders, heroic failures - really do make for very interesting reading and it might be that you have yourself come across that great bestseller by **Stephen Pile** called : **"The Book of Heroic Failures"** - a book which essentially **celebrates human inadequacy in all its forms.**

1978 - Chesterfield-Stockwith Canal clean up

One of my favourite entries was for cleaning up a canal. In 1978 a group of workmen were tasked with dredging a rather murky canal of shopping trolleys, bikes, prams and old bedsteads.

Well they began the work and then went off for the usual British workmen's tea break WHEN after a while they were interrupted by a local bobby who was investigation a giant whirlpool that had been reported. When they returned to the scene there was no whirlpool whatsoever - but equally, there was no canal either. For an entire mile and a half there was only a seamless stretch of mud punctuated, here and there with bikes and trolley and a whole string of stranded holiday makers on their stranded narrow boats!! **Unknown to them**, this section of the canal had featured a **200 year old plug** which they had dredged up!! **One big red face for the Chesterfield Town Council!!**

The Bible no stranger to big blunders

Now it might surprise you to know that the Bible is no stranger to people making themselves look like **"right Charlies"**:

- making **remarkably short-sighted decisions**
- AND falling prey to **large-scale lapses of good judgment**

Now if this is something that troubles you - after all this is the Holy Bible that we are talking about - well I think that actually this should encourage you.

Q. Why is that? Well simply because it tells you that the Bible is **fully true-to-life** and has not been simply concocted by human beings to say whatever they want it to say by HIGHLIGHTING the good and RUBBING OUT the bad.

Holy Scripture always shows human beings in a true light:

- sometimes they walk well, they do the right things, they follow God closely and know His blessings
- equally, at other times, they stray away from God and His ways and get themselves into all kinds of scrapes and difficulties

Well today we are coming back to this book of Joshua, a book that has the overall theme of CONQUEST and VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIVING and yet it does seem that from one chapter to the next we are YO-YOING up and down between GREAT SUCCESS and HUMONGOUS FAILURE.

So now we are at Chapter 9 of this book of Joshua and the general theme of this chapter, as is not overly hard to detect, is that of MISTAKES. Yes HOWLING BLUNDERS, SENSELESS SLIP-UPS!

So maybe no surprise for a not very original initial heading - #1:

1] Making mistakes

A little background

Now although the main action of this chapter starts in Verse 3 and tempting as it is to simply start where the action starts - it is helpful to just sketch in the background that Verse 1&2 give us.

(Joshua 9 Verses 1-2) "Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)— they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel."

As they say: "**Good News Travels Fast - Bad News Travels Faster!!**"

Well it would not have taken very long at all for the news of Jericho being flattened and Ai quickly meeting the same fate - to have travelled the whole length and breadth of the Land of Canaan.

And brings in its wake a remarkable new structure. You see the land of Canaan was populated by a wide variety of peoples loosely called Canaanites or Amorites and yet the reality was that the land of Canaan was very diverse and fragmented in a sense.

You had large cities and these were controlled by a King - they were, if you like CITY-STATES and perhaps they might have had various treaties between cities and between the various kings, but in essence things were very individual and autonomous.

BUT NOW - there is this big coming together and the creation, almost in a moment, of one great allied army - a huge confederation of city states all acting as one people and one great COALITION ARMY with the purpose of taking on Israel and her armies.

So that is the situation that is now prevailing and it is by way of CONTRAST that we see the people from the city state of GIBEON *not* joining into this Canaan-wide Coalition. They are in fact going to distance themselves from the mainstream and go it alone.

Resorted to a ruse

Verse 3 gives us their policy:

"However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they **RESORTED TO A RUSE...**"

OR as the ESV puts it: "they acted with CUNNING...".

High risk strategy

Q. So what was their RUSE - what was their HIGH RISK STRATEGY, their CUNNING PLAN?

Well, Verses 4-6 tell us:

"They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, **'We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us.'** "

You have to say that it is an excellent example of what might be termed: "**CREATIVE PERSUASION**".

I am presently half way through a book by **Os Guinness** called "**Fool's Talk - Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion**". The aim of the book is simply to help Christians to better scale the walls that unbelievers build around themselves and their beliefs, given that many people today are:

- UNTROUBLED rather than UNREACHED
- they are UNCONCERNED rather than UNCONVINCED

Guinness starts the book with a classic example of where someone deployed CREATIVITY with powerful effect. It concerned the **University of Berkeley in California** where a notorious and controversial novelist had been invited to address the students. He was well known for his scathing dismissals of the women's movement and publicly bragged that he was a "champion male chauvinist pig". Guinness recounts what happened:

As several accounts of the incident go, the air was crackling as Mailer entered the lecture room. He had been warned in advance that the feminists would be hostile and were lying in wait for him. Mailer strode confidently through the crowd, stepped up to the podium and announced that he had important things to say, so those who wished to hiss and boo should get it out at once. He then threw down the gauntlet: "Everybody in this hall who regards me as a male chauvinist pig, hiss."

As if perfectly on cue, the feminists broke out at once in loud, derisive hissing and booing, which rose to a crescendo of long, sustained jeering and barracking, punctuated with derisive cat calls and wolf whistles from men in other parts of the lecture room. For a while there was pandemonium, but inevitably it had to die down. The feminists could not keep up the booing forever, and the hubbub subsided. Mailer stepped back to the microphone, looked over to them, paused just a second or two, and said, "Obedient little women, aren't you?" (To sanitize his words somewhat.)

For a second or so the outcome hung in the balance. The ploy could have bombed and set off chaos, but it worked. The hostile tension collapsed. Mailer had shown a canny mastery of his audience, and many laughed and applauded. By all accounts, even some of the hardcore feminists were so stunned at falling for his ploy that from then on they listened in a rueful silence.

Gibeonites - a crafty people

As **Guinness** conveys in his book - we need to get a bit less CLEVER and become a little more CREATIVE.

So let's have a look at how their RUSE, their CUNNING PLOY worked out:

- **FIRST OF ALL** - it's a delegation of Gibeonites vs some, or all of the Israelite elders and Joshua.

If anyone is going to spot foul play it ought to be the Spiritual Leaders of God's people - and if anyone is going to be in a position to make a binding treaty of peace - it is going to be these leaders.

- **SECOND** - their claims are not taken merely at face value.

There is initial suspicion and a round of questions that get asked, for example:

- "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?"
- "Who are you and where do you come from?"

- **THIRDLY** - they are speak HUMBLY and use GLOWING TERMS :

Twice they stress that they are their **SERVANTS** - a **truly humble tone** that they prefix everything they say with.

Added to this they also speak in **GLOWING TERMS** of the LORD.

Verse 9 reads: "because of the fame of the LORD your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan - Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth."

Certainly a little sugar-coating never does much harm when it comes to making something look attractive.

- **FOURTHLY** - the VISUAL ELEMENT and maybe this was the most powerful and persuasive aspect of all.

They take them into the story. **They engage their imagination** and take them back to the day when, back in their own land - **somewhere far far away**, they are told to undertake this long journey. And they get them to think about the nice warm bread taken straight from the oven maybe 4, 5 perhaps 6 weeks back.

They get them to imagine new wineskins and fresh clothes and now before them they look dishevelled, dusty, worn & weary.

Q. So what was the result? Well - **Verses 14 & 15** give us the bottom line in a very telling way:

"The men of Israel sampled their provisions **but did not inquire of the LORD**.
Then **Joshua made a treaty of peace** with them to let them live, and **the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath**."

So Joshua makes the PROPOSES the resolution and all the leaders of Israel second the MOTION and it becomes, to all intents and purpose WRITTEN IN STONE.

And the telling comment that precedes that reality is that they sampled the provision (yes very tasty I'm sure - nice piece of mouldy bread!) YET, AND THIS DOES SEEM SOMEWHAT AMAZING - "they did not inquire of the LORD".

2 Threats - Q. Which is the greatest?

Doing a quick survey of Joshua 9 there is 2 obvious threats:

- the FIRST is what you might call "**The Canaanite Coalition**" - all these numerous city-states banding together and joining forces to make one mighty confederation.
- the SECOND is a considerably smaller group of people who we might call "The Crafty Canaanites".

Q. So then who should we fear the most?

And the answer would appear to latter for it is the cunning city that wins the day and not the coalition.

Applying this to ourselves

Applying this to ourselves for a moment - think about our great enemy Satan, the devil.

The NT describes him BOTH as a roaring lion and also as a deceiving serpent BUT THE TRUTH that this passage underlines for us is that:

*** "the fearful roar of the lion is far less dangerous than the deceiving hiss of the snake" ***

Q. So what was their mistake?

Well it's not hard to see - and it is two-fold:

- **FIRST** - they walked by sight and not by faith in God and His word
As 2 Corinthians 5 verse 7 says "We walk by faith, not by sight."

How easy it is to just look at what is seen, at the evidence that is presented and not go any further or deeper than that.

Although they did ask some questions, they seemed to be more guided by their hearts than their heads.

- **SECOND** - they repeated a mistake they seem to have made only a short time ago when they forgot to pray after the victory of Jericho.

You know we all make mistakes and not only that we tend to make the same mistakes multiple times and because of this God will often setup another test further down the line of a similar nature to try to get us to face up to our weaknesses.

If God didn't halt our progress, then we would just blindly go through life never really facing up to our failure points.

Well that's #1 - Making Mistakes but Q. What are we supposed to do when we have made a mistake? Which takes us to what I want to call #2:

2] Owing mistakes

For the Israelites now:

"It took 3 days to discover their error **AND THEN** a lifetime to live with it!!"

It is perhaps not surprising that the whole assembly of Israel all grumble against their leaders for having made such a blatant blunder.

However, as we say: "Hindsight is a wonderful thing!" and YES it is very easy to criticise after the event.

I can imagine, when the leaders now had the benefit of hindsight, a whole host of questions that they didn't ask - might have presented themselves:

- Q. Why did we not see their vagueness, their evasiveness about where exactly they came from?
- Q. Why did they studiously avoid any comment on the fate of Jericho?
Q. Surely they would have journeyed past it OR heard the latest gossip flying around on the grapevine as they came toward our camp in Gilgal?
- AND Q. Why did they come so ill-equipped?
It was almost as if they only bought a SINGLE ticket!!
Q. How exactly were they going to make it home?

But at the end of the day - all these sorts of questions - were a case of "too little, too late".

2 Wrongs don't make a right

The real question now becomes: Q. Where they go from here?

It is pretty easy when you've clearly made a mistake to OVERCOMPENSATE and end up making another - and as they say "2 wrongs don't make a right!"

It is interesting to observe that there are a couple of TEMPTATIONS that present themselves at this point:

- **FIRSTLY** - the Israelites, when they make this rather uncomfortable discovery march off to confront these crafty Gibeonites.

How very tempting it must have been to rationalize their destruction by saying: "Well they deceived us, so they should not expect us to act faithfully towards them."

It sound quite a reasonable argument - you know "All's fair in love and war."

The problem with this kind of thinking is that you yourself sink to the same level as the other people.

Someone writes a nasty txt - so you write a nasty one back. It might seem fair enough at the time, but do you really want to imitate them and become like them - if you do, how can you really point any fingers at them if you are exactly like them. Anyway God says to the Christian "vindication is mine."

- **SECONDLY** - (and you'll see this in the next chapter)- Very soon after this deception, the "Canaanite Coalition" comes

en masse to attack the Gibeonites for defecting to the other side and so maybe Joshua could just have stood back and watched the ensuing annihilation.

He could have simply crossed his arms, smiled to himself and said; "Well that's one battle we don't even need to fight!!", "Kind of - serves them right for deceiving us in the first place!!" . In effect, as we say: "Justice done!!"

BOTH OF THESE could have acted as strong temptations, as seemingly convenient ways out.

BUT THE PROBLEM would be that they would not really have faced up to their own FAILURES, to their own BLUNDERS and that would have simply queued them up for making another (perhaps even more serious mistake) further down the line.

Have to own our mistakes

You see it's really important that we learn to **own our mistakes**:

- PERHAPS you are **good at making mistakes**
- AND just to make it all the worse, you are **good at making excuses, good at making allowances**

If you have made a mistake AND if you are going to learn from it (and thus not just repeat it)

THEN you DO have to learn to **OWN IT**

YOU DO have to **TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT**

Joshua sees clearly that he should have been watching in prayer and sticking close to God's word - but he didn't.

So now he is very clear about things:

Verse 19 "the leaders answered, 'We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them.'"

Canny not cunning

Now it would be wrong to say that Joshua cannot do anything with regard to these Gibeonites.

If they were **CUNNING**, then there is nothing to say that Joshua and the leadership cannot be **CANNY**.

And this is exactly what you see:

Verse 21 "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community."

And **Verse 23** (addressing the Gibeonites) "You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."

So **#1 Making mistakes**, **#2 Owning mistakes** and by way of conclusion **#3**:

3] Overruling mistakes

It is quite important that we don't fall into the same trap in reading this chapter that the Israelite leaders did in listening to what the Gibeonites were saying (and in fact what was not said).

And I think when we do look at what they said, we might notice a couple of helpful echoes that serve to provide some

added light in what might seem, at least on the surface, as a rather **dim & discouraging episode**.

Rahab & the Gibeonites

- **NOW** there's no getting around **the fact that Rahab** (who we met in Jericho when the two spies were doing a little reconnaissance in chapter 2) - **that RAHAB WAS A PROSTITUTE**
- **SIMILARLY** there's no getting around **the fact that the GIBEONITES WERE LIARS**

And when we were back in Chapter 2 we quickly realised that **the main focus** was not really on the spies but rather on **this shameless and immoral Canaanite woman**.

Q. What did we see?

Well a few things:

- **FIRSTLY** that she was **party to certain information around the Israelites and their God:**

This is what we read in Chapter 2 Verse 9&10 "I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed."

I don't know if you notice that that is exactly what these deceptive Gibeonites say in Verses 9&10 in this chapter. They have taken note of the same events and they too seem to reckon this in terms of the LORD God's great fame.

- **SECONDLY** we observed **that Rahab made a CONFESSION, she exhibited an evident FAITH:**

The **confession** is short but clear enough - she says: "for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

Notice that these disreputable Gibeonites also have their own words of confession - see what we read at the end of the chapter at Verse 24 "Your servants were clearly told how the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. **So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this.**"

- **THIRDLY** we observed that **for Rahab there was a COST, a RISK attached:**

She risks her life by hiding the spies and lying to the King of Jericho so that she might gain a new identification from there on in - becoming allied and aligned with the interests of the Israelites.

The Gibeonites also chose to take some deceptive steps of their own and this element of risk was not exactly something they did not acknowledge: Verse 25 "We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you."

- **A LAST THING** we observed **with Rahab was how God chose to bless her:**

Maybe you remember that she and her whole family was saved and then she married an Israelite and amazingly became a part of the family tree of Jesus the Messiah Himself!! (You have to say that is AMAZING GRACE).

Q. So what of these Gibeonites?

Well they, like Rahab, were saved from certain destruction. They were also incorporated into Israel.

More than a little similarity

So I think you can see that there is more than a little similarity between these two episode whereby a GENTILE INDIVIDUAL (yes and her family) gain access to the people of God and, more importantly the God of the people.

God's overruling Joshua's mistake

Q. So what of Joshua's and the leader's mistake - how does God work to overrule their blunder?

Notice what the final verse of the chapter says:

Verse 27 "That day he made the Gibeonites **woodcutters** and **water carriers** for the community **AND FOR THE ALTAR OF THE LORD AT THE PLACE THE LORD WOULD CHOOSE**. And that is what they are to this day."

It seems pretty smart to make them subject to the people and make them carry out jobs that would be beneficial to the Israelites. And you see from **Verse 25** that Joshua describes this outcome in terms of a curse due to the deception they enacted.

When you follow the history of the Gibeonites from this point on it appears that they remain faithful and are essentially a real blessing to the Israelites because of their service to the LORD as temple attendants.

And so despite all our mess-ups and mistakes that we make - I think we can draw confidence from the fact that actually everything ended "happily ever after":

- we get another example of AMAZING GRACE, this time to the Gibeonites that they were permitted to serve alongside the Levites and the Priests right up close to the temple where the LORD's presence came down
- we see too in the long term that the Gibeonites would only bring blessing to the people of God

CONCLUSION

So we all make mistakes and we might like those rather hapless workmen at the start feel that everything has rather gone down the drain and that we are basically left high and dry.

The truth is that the only COMPLETE MISTAKE is the mistake we don't learn from.

Joshua 9 is a great antidote from MISTAKES and especially MISTAKEN THINKING - we find:

- FIRSTLY the courage to know that MISTAKES *don't have to be* THE END. We can OWN THEM & then move on
- ALSO that even when our MISTAKES seem to "pull the plug out" the wonderful thing is that God's GRACE DOES *NOT* DRAIN OUT

AND LASTLY, how fear relieving that God can REDEEM and CERTAINLY DOES OVERRIDE even our worst MISTAKES remarkably to our great benefit and blessing.

What a merciful God we have - who plants even the seeds of our MISTAKES & raises a REMARKABLE HARVEST! **AMEN**