

7. The same mistake for the second time

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As some of you know that I've been working out lately at my old age. I bought a weight bench more than a year ago. I finally decided that I was gonna use it instead of just having it in the garage.

Since I am very much mechanically challenged, I had to study the assembly manual extensively before I put that thing together. After I did that, I couldn't wait to try the weight set. I put 95 pounds on it for a starter. I know that for some of you, that is the same weight you use for your bicep curling.

I pumped it for fifteen times and thought I could use more weights. So I put it down on the bench for some dumb reason instead of the rack. Then I got up and lifted up the weight and wanted to put it on the rack from the front by using my two wrists which I forgot that I started to have arthritis on the left one. As I flipped the 95 pounds, I had a very sharp pain on my left wrist. I was thinking, "I should not do that again. It hurts."

I put 30 more pounds on the bar. Now it was 125 pounds. I pumped it for seven or eight times. I couldn't put it on the rack, because I ran out of steam. So I let the bar with the weight down rolled down on my stomach and eventually on the bench. I stood up and faced the rack again. I picked up the weight and flipped it up again with my already injured wrists. This time it was hurting really, really bad. I was thinking, "You are a major idiot with a capital 'M'."

That was over three weeks ago. I've been off the weight training all this time and still have sharp pains on my wrist. The same mistake for the second time.

It is one thing to make a mistake or sin against the Lord by our ignorance. But it is a completely different thing when we do the exact same thing again, then we have to wonder where our hearts and brains are.

We find the leaders of the Israelites, especially Joshua, neglecting prayers to the Lord when they faced enemy just like they did with the people of Ai in chapter 7.

May we constantly seek the will of God and follow it to honor Him!

A. ENEMIES IN MANY SHAPES AND FORMS

Joshua 9:1-6 And it came to pass when all the kings who were on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon--the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite--heard about it, 2 that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord. 3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, 4 they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, 5 old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. 6 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."

Even though the city-states in Canaan were not always friendly with one another, but local rivals can often come together when they have a common enemy, the Israelites.

After an experience of great blessing, God's people must be especially prepared to confront the enemy, because the Christian life is a constant battle without any vacation or down time. The Israel's greatest danger wasn't the confederation of the armies of Canaan. It was a group of men from Gibeon who were about to enter the camp and deceive Joshua and the rulers of Israel.

Satan sometimes comes as a devouring lion and sometimes as a deceiving serpent. He presents himself not only as a bully, but also an angel of light. We must be alert and protected by the spiritual armor God has provided for us.

Gibeon was located only twenty-five miles from the camp of Israel at Gilgal and was the next target on Joshua's list to be destroyed. In Deuteronomy 20, God's law stated that Israel must destroy all the cities in Canaan. For the cities that were outside the land of Canaan, they could make treaties with them.

Somehow the Gibeonites knew about this law and decided to use it for their own protection. Since the enemy knows how to use the Word of God for their own purposes as Satan did against the Lord Jesus during His 40 days of temptation in the wilderness, God's people must keep alert.

B. WHEN A DOUBT ARISES

Joshua 9:7-13 Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?" 8 But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" 9 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, 10 and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan--to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth. 11 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."' 12 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. 13 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."

Obviously the Israel rulers had their doubts about these people's explanation. They should have stopped right there. If they did, it wouldn't have been a sin against God.

Whenever we have any doubt about the situation, we need to consult with our Lord before we make decisions. There is a tremendous difference between doubt and worry. Spiritual doubt is based on not knowing which way to follow the will of God, but worry is based on not trusting the Lord's attributes and promises. When we have spiritual doubts, God will answer us and guide us. But when we have worry, we are putting ourselves in danger.

These Gibeonites even used the name of God to convince Joshua and the rulers of Israel with their deception. Satan's ambassadors can lie more convincingly than some Christians can tell the truth. Satan knows how to use "religious lies" to give the impression that people are seeking the Lord.

Oh, how many times in last four years in our church ministries I encountered the people who tried to get me to do something for them! All of them used the name of God in one fashion or another.

That is the reason why we no longer help out anyone outside of the church congregation. Because there are so many con-artists who target churches' benevolence funds.

C. THE SAME MISTAKE FOR THE SECOND TIME

Joshua 9:14-15 Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the Lord. 15 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.

Haven't we been here not very long ago? When they were about to attack Ai, they didn't seek God in prayer. Again, they were not praying. They walked by sight and not by faith. After listening to the strangers' speech and examining the evidence, Joshua and his leaders concluded that the men were telling the truth. The leaders of Israel took the "scientific approach" instead of the "spiritual approach." It was all very logical and convincing, but it was all wrong.

The will of God comes from the heart of God, and He delights to make it known to His children when He knows they are humble and willing to obey.

Psalms 33:11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations.

Jeremiah 29:12-14a you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the Lord,

We don't seek God's will like customers who look at options but like servants who listen for orders. This should be a basic principle for victorious Christian living. Certainly we ought to use the mind God has given us, but we must heed the warning of Proverbs 3:5-6 and not lean on our own understanding.

In spite of God's warning, Joshua and the Jewish leaders broke God's Law and made a covenant with the enemy. Since their oath was sworn in the name of the Lord, it could not be broken. Joshua and the rulers of Israel had sworn to their own hurt, and there was no way to revoke their oath or be released from their promise.

Many of us know a hymn by Joseph Scriven in the 1800s "Oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

Apostle Paul talks about associating or even marrying a non-believer.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

Let's say there is a born-again believer Charlie who was head over heels in love with Denise who is a non-believer. He decided that she is his soul mate. So he got down on his knee and proposed to her to marry him. She said, "Yes," and they got engaged. One day he went to the church and heard the pastor taught about being unequally yoked with a non-believer is a sin against the Lord. Even though he struggled with this, he knew what he needed to do. He broke the engagement and walked away from Denise completely because she insisted that she has nothing to do with God.

What Charlie did was absolutely a right thing to do. Did he break the agreement? Yes, he did. But he chose not to stay with a non-believer for the rest of his life which would have been another sin to God.

What if they were married? If Denise wanted to stay in the marriage, Charlie would not have a ground for divorce according to 1 Cor 7:12-13 unless there is a marital unfaithfulness.

D. ENLISTING THE ENEMY

Joshua 9:16-27 And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them. 17 Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim. 18 But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers. 19 Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them. 20 This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them." 21 And the rulers said to them, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them." 22 Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you dwell near us? 23 Now therefore, you are cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves--woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." 24 So they answered Joshua and said, "Because your servants were clearly told that the Lord your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; therefore we were very much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. 25 And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us." 26 So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. 27 And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.

When Joshua discovered that he and the princes had been had, no doubt they were humbled and embarrassed because of it.

We must give the leaders credit for being men of their word. To violate their oath would have been to take the holy name of God in vain, and this would have brought about divine judgment. Two wrongs do not make one right. It is a mark of godliness and maturity to keep a promise, even when it is difficult.

Joshua and his people teach us an important lesson: If we make a mistake, admit it. Then make our mistake work for God and us. The leaders put the Gibeonites to work hauling water and wood for the service of the tabernacle, where both water and wood were used in abundance. In later years the Gibeonites were called the Nephilim which means "given ones" and labored as servants in the temple. In Joshua 10, we shall see that God overruled Joshua's mistake and used it to give him a wonderful victory over five kings at one time.

There's no evidence in Scripture that the descendants of the Gibeonites created any problems for the Jews. It's likely that their service in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, influenced them to abandon their idols and worship the God of Israel. The fact that over 500 hundred Gibeonite temple servants returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity suggests that they were devoted to the Lord and His house.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) After an experience of great blessing, God's people must be especially prepared to confront the enemy, because the Christian life is a constant battle without any vacation or down time.

2) Whenever we have any doubt about the situation, we need to consult with our Lord before we make decisions.

3) We don't seek God's will like customers who look at options but like servants who listen for orders. This should be a basic principle for victorious Christian living.

4) It is a mark of godliness and maturity to keep a promise, even when it is difficult.

5) If we make a mistake, admit it. Then make our mistake work for God and us.