

A Bible Adventure

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The Hoax of the Moldy Bread and the Day the Sun Stood Still

A retelling of Joshua 9 and 10

The people of Canaan became frightened as the news of Israel's victories at Jericho and their next conquest of the city of Ai began to spread throughout the land. Because of this, some of the rulers of the larger cities decided to unite and wage war on Israel.

Others thought it would be better to make a peace treaty with the invaders, if that were possible. Among these were the leading men of the city of Gibeon, who plotted a scheme in order to save themselves.

Their city was not far from Ai, and they surmised that if they did not do something

soon, they might be destroyed next. They connived to dress several men as ambassadors from a far country, and placed worn-out sacks on their donkeys, along with old wineskins that had been mended. The men also dressed in worn sandals, ragged clothes, and took with them bread that was moldy. Traveling to Gilgal where Joshua was camped, they presented themselves to him and said, "We have come from a far country to urge you to make a peace treaty with us."

Some of the leaders of Israel were suspicious of the travel-stained strangers and carefully

appraised them, but none detected the fraud. So, Joshua asked them who they were and from whence they had come.

"We have traveled from a far country," they answered, making their voices sound weary from exhaustion and travel. "Because we have heard of your God and the exploits He has done for you in leading you out of Egypt, and how He has helped you conquer the two kings of the Amorites." If the strangers had hailed

from a faraway land, they would not have heard of Joshua's victories over Jericho and Ai, so they avoided mentioning those two cities, which would have exposed them.

Then, seeing that their speech had begun to work its effect on Joshua and the princes of Israel, the strangers pointed to the food they had brought with them.

See "A New Leader and His Undercover Agents," and "Highway Through the River and a Most Unconventional War" for other stories about Joshua.

“Look at our bread,” they said sadly. “We took this hot out of our ovens on the day we left our homes. But now it is dry and moldy. These wineskins, which we filled, were new, and now they are old and cracked. Our garments and our shoes have also become worn by reason of our long journey.”

Joshua believed them, and so did the other leaders who listened to them. How could they deny the evidence of that moldy bread? Joshua made peace with them, and agreed to let them live and to not attack their city.

Within three days, however, the fraud was discovered. You can imagine how foolish and angry Joshua and the others felt over being deceived. But they kept their word, which they had sworn before the Lord, and when they came to the city of Gibeon, they left it unharmed. As a punishment

for their deception, however, the Gibeonites were told that they must be servants of the Israelites.

How did it happen that Joshua and the princes of Israel were deceived by these cunning people? The Bible explains that the men of Israel examined the Gibeonites’ provisions but did not ask counsel from God. They looked at their visitors’ appearance and the moldy bread, and even though they had been suspicious, they did not ask the Lord about it.

God was ready to give them counsel on this matter, just as He had given them counsel on how to take Jericho and Ai. But perhaps Joshua and his officers had become a little proud and overconfident after their two victories and thought it was unnecessary to ask God about something

that seemed so obvious concerning how to proceed. Consequently, they were off guard and were deceived by worn clothes and stale bread. If they had asked God for counsel and wisdom on the issue, He would have given it and would not have allowed them to be deceived. First, they were hoodwinked into making a peace treaty with the Gibeonites, but that was not all. When Adoni-Zedek, one of the kings of the Amorites who lived in Canaan, heard that Joshua had conquered and destroyed Jericho and Ai, and that the Israelites had made a peace treaty with the Gibeonites, he became alarmed.

His people also were afraid because Gibeon was an important city—as great as the royal cities of the Amorites. Gibeon’s men were renowned fighters, and now that they had become allies with Israel, King Adoni-Zedek

rushed urgent messages to the other kings of the Amorites explaining this disastrous turn of events.

“Come and help me attack Gibeon,” his message read. “They have made peace with Joshua and the Israelites.” So, the five Amorite kings joined forces to make a concerted attack on Gibeon.

Soon Joshua received a message from the Gibeonites telling of the coming attack, saying, “Please do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us!”

It seemed ironic that Joshua would help a people who had deceived him, but he knew that Israel could not afford to lose any ground to the wicked kings of Canaan, whom God had commissioned him to drive out of the land.

This time, however, before putting his plans into action, Joshua sought for that most important confirmation from the Lord. He had learned a valuable lesson with the Gibeonites and was determined to seek God's direction.

The Lord answered him, saying, "Do not fear them, because I have given the victory into your hand. Not a man of them will be left standing before you once the battle is done." The answer had come, and the Lord had promised to be with them.

Once he had God's permission to proceed, Joshua showed himself a man of action. Immediately he summoned his best fighting men, who, along with his regular troops, embarked on an all-night march which put them in Gibeon by dawn and

surprising the enemy.

A fierce battle followed, but God had a few tricks up His sleeve. He rained large hailstones upon the enemy army, causing more of them to die from the hailstones than were killed by the Israelite swords.

Joshua and his men had done what they could, and the Lord supernaturally intervened to help them. Yet the five kings along with some of their men were able to flee from the battle. Joshua remembered, however, that God had spoken to him in Gilgal promising him a total victory—that not one man would be left standing.

Joshua realized that this was a decisive battle, which would break the power of the Canaanites and open an all-important roadway to the sea.

He could not let the opposing forces flee.

There was one problem, though. The day was passing and the shadows were lengthening. Soon the sun would disappear behind the mountains, giving the enemies the cover needed to escape and perhaps regroup, or even secure reinforcements.

All at once, Joshua lifted his voice in the sight of his troops and cried out in an explosion of faith, "O sun, stand still over Gibeon! O moon, be still over the valley of Ajalon!"

Miraculously, as Joshua and his men fought on in pursuit

of their enemies, the sun held its position in the heavens over the battlefield until the army of Israel had vanquished its enemies. The sun had stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down for almost a whole day! God had intervened in a most marvelous way to provide the time needed for the armies of Israel to completely subdue their enemies.

After that great victory, Joshua continued defeating the enemies of the Israelites. The Bible says, "All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel" (Joshua 10:42 NIV).

See "Heroes of the Bible: Joshua" for more on this fascinating Bible character.