The Gibeonite Trick



Scripture Reference: Joshua 9:1-10:15

Suggested Theme: God knows best. We can ask God for help to make wise decisions.

Memory Verse: “But if any of you needs wisdom, you should ask God for it. God is generous. He enjoys giving to all people, so God will give you wisdom.” James 1:5, ICB

Story Overview:

People in the town of Gibeon were afraid Joshua’s nearby army would overpower them. They pretended to be from a faraway place and tricked Joshua and his army into promising to keep them safe. When the Israelites later heard that the Gibeonites were neighbours, they knew they had been tricked. Joshua made this mistake because he did not ask God to help him. Even so, they knew they had to honour the treaty. When enemies attacked Gibeon, Joshua took his army and protected them in a battle where the Lord caused the sun to stand still.

Background Study:

The Amorites lived in the hill country of the Promised Land and had a king over each major city and the surrounding area. Israel had split the land into two sections and gained control of a large portion of central Canaan by conquering Jericho and Ai. What God had done for the Israelites made everyone in Canaan fearful. They had heard that God told Moses to conquer everyone in the land. So, some joined forces to fight against Israel (Joshua 9:1-2). However, the Gibeonites decided to trick Israel into making a treaty with them.

A Gibeonite delegation tried to make Israel think they had come on a journey from a faraway place. Gibeon was probably not more than twenty miles from the Israelite camp at Gilgal. The ruse was elaborate, even down to carrying dry, mouldy bread. And it worked.

The key factor, and a sad one, is found in Joshua 9:14. The leaders looked at the evidence and trusted their own judgment—without asking the Lord what to do. The treaty the Gibeonites requested offered that they be servants of the Israelites (Joshua 9:11). Perhaps they were aware of the Israelite law concerning peace treaties (Deuteronomy 20:10-11). They knew that Israel, with God’s help, could wipe them out, and they preferred slavery to death.

Israel’s hasty decision resulted in their inability to fulfil God’s command concerning all the inhabitants of the land. We can make bad decisions when we fail to seek God’s guidance, just as Israel did. But when we seek Him and study His word, we can be thankful that He guides us every step of the way.

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Gibeon was now a traitor in the eyes of its neighbours. Now, it would be easier for Israel to attack them. The neighbouring kings were very angry with Gibeon and had to try to stop this treaty from working. So Adoni-Zedik, king of Jerusalem, brought together all the Amorite kings in the southern area and attacked the Gibeonites, who called on Israel for help.

This time, Joshua must have inquired of the Lord because the Lord directed the Israelites in battle (Joshua 10:8). The Amorite alliance was powerless against Israel's powerful God.

Because of an all-night march, Israel took the enemy by surprise (Joshua 10:9). This and the hailstorm that the Lord provided caused mass confusion among the enemy and gave Joshua the advantage.

The Lord answered Joshua's request and caused the sun to stand still. This long day, aided by a hailstorm (Joshua 10:11), would have added to the confusion of Joshua's surprise attack. We don't know exactly what happened when the sun stood still in the sky (Joshua 10:13). One possible way of looking at this is to note that any disruption in the laws of creation concerning the sun's movement would disrupt a huge number of other laws. Some parts of the globe would burn while others would freeze. God performed a miracle to gain victory for Israel. It is good to remember that a miracle always does interrupt a law of the universe. That is why it is called a miracle! Only the Lord can do that. Read Psalm 74:16; Jeremiah 32:17, 27.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Before the group gathers, prepare two pieces of plain white paper. Write the word "Gibeon" on both sheets and then set one aside. Crumple and iron the other sheet a few times until it looks old. As the group gathers, place the "old" paper and a normal piece of paper side by side in front of the children. Let them guess how old each one is. Ask which they think came from far away. Ask how they can tell. After discussing this for a few minutes, reveal the "trick." "One time someone tricked Joshua in this same way. They didn't trick him with paper, but they tricked him with their clothes and food."

The Story:

After winning the cities of Jericho and Ai, Joshua continued to lead the Israelites in winning the cities of the land of Canaan. This was the land God had promised them, and he planned that they win battles to conquer it.

God was on the side of the Israelites, so the kings of all the land were very worried. They decided to form a big army to fight God's people.

Part 1 (The Gibeonites trick the Israelites)
The city of Gibeon was near Joshua and the people of Israel. It did not have a king, but it was big and had many fighting men. The people of Gibeon knew that God was on the side of the Israelites, so they devised a plan to protect themselves.

The Gibeonites were very tricky. They loaded their animals and made it look like they had been travelling for a long time. They wore old and worn-out clothes and shoes. They even put old dry bread and food in their travel packs.

The Israelites were camped nearby, but when the Gibeonites arrived, Joshua and the rest of the people thought their visitors had come from a place far, far away. The men of Israel looked at the old clothes and tasted the old bread. They were fooled!

The Gibeonites said that even though they were far away, they had heard that God was helping the Israelites win all of the land. They asked if the people of Israel would make a special agreement never to hurt the people of Gibeon.

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A special agreement like this is a very big decision. The men of Israel should have taken the time to pray and ask God for wisdom. Instead, they just thought, “This is not that important. God wants us to take over all the cities in Canaan, but Gibeon is a city far away. We will just promise never to hurt them.” So they made the promise to the Gibeonites.

Three days later, the Israelites learned the truth. Gibeon was not an enemy city far away! Gibeon was an enemy city very close to them! They had made a terrible mistake and had to keep their promise. They wished so much that they asked God to give them wisdom instead of rushing into the agreement.

The Israelite people were not very happy with their leaders. They complained that the Gibeonites should not be allowed to get away with this, but the leaders said that they had to keep their promise not to hurt them.

Finally, they came to a decision. They would keep their promise and not hurt the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites, however, would have to do work for the Israelites. From then on, the Gibeonites would have to carry water and cut wood for the Israelites.

Part 2 (Israel Protects the Gibeonites)
Remember how all the kings from the nations banded together to fight the Israelites? Now, when they heard that the Gibeonites had made a special treaty with the Israelites, they got very angry. They decided to fight with the Gibeonites and teach them a lesson.

When the Gibeonites heard that the other nations were going to attack them, they sent a message to Joshua and the people, “Help! Come and save us or we will be destroyed.”

Joshua remembered the promise to the Gibeonites. He led the Israelite soldiers in a battle against the kings and the people of the land, and they defeated them in a great victory.

Everyone knew that God was the God of Israel. As the Israelites chased the enemies away, large hailstones began to fall from the sky. More enemy soldiers died from the hailstones than were killed by swords.

Joshua and the soldiers had been fighting so long that night would come soon, and it would be dark. So, Joshua and the soldiers did something no one expected. Joshua told the sun to stand still, and it did.

That day, God showed that he was God for His people. God made the sun stand still, so it continued to be daytime long enough for the Israelites to win the battle. There had never been a battle like this, and there has never been one since!

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more

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about review and reflection questions.

Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

Review:

- How did the Gibeonites trick Joshua and his men? (They dressed in old clothes and used old supplies to make it look like they had travelled a great distance)
- Did Joshua ask the Lord to help him make a good decision about the Gibeonite treaty? (No)
- When Joshua found out he had been tricked, what happened to the Gibeonites? (They became servants to the Israelites)
- What did Joshua and the Israelites learn from their mistake? (They should ask for God's wisdom instead of making decisions and judgements on their own)
- What unusual things happened when the Israelite army fought Gibeon's enemies? (The enemies were confused; hailstones fell, and the sun stood still in the sky)
- What should we do before making an important decision? (We should pray and ask God to help us make a choice that honours Him)
- What did you learn about God from this story?

Reflection:

- What do you think the Gibeonites looked like when they tricked Joshua and the people into thinking they lived far away? What would you do to look like you'd travelled a long way?
- Joshua and the Israelites often asked God for wisdom when making decisions, like how they should defeat Jericho. Why do you think they didn't ask for God's wisdom when talking with the Gibeonites?
- Have you ever asked God to help you make a decision? Tell us about it.
- Let's think about the battle the Israelites fought in this story. Imagine that you are fighting a battle on a hill against a large army. Then, imagine that your enemy suddenly gets confused. They are so confused that you can chase them all the way down the hill. While you are chasing them, pieces of hail start falling from the sky and kill the enemy soldiers. Then, your leader tells the sun to stop setting and the moon to stop rising, and it happens! Now you have more time to fight before it becomes night. Wow. Which of those things is most amazing to you?
- Did you think that God could do these amazing things before hearing this story? What other miracles do you remember God doing in the Bible?
- How would you feel if you were an Israelite and saw God do all of these things during the battle?
- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What question about this story would you ask God?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

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Song Suggestions:

- I've Got Something in My Pocket Song
- Rejoice in the Lord Always Song
- Goodbye World Song
- He's Still Working on Me Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Kids will love dressing up and acting this one out!
- Collect several products and discuss the various advertisement slogans and promises on the packaging. Guide older children in comparing the promises to the actual products. Advertisements can be "tricky", like the Gibeonites. Wisdom and discernment are required to understand the difference. For example, A food packet can say strawberry "flavoured" without containing actual strawberries. An advertisement might make a toy sound wonderful by saying it is "new and improved", but maybe we haven't even played with the original version.
- Be sure to have the children look the memory verse up in the bible. This can be a good time to ensure they understand the books, chapters, and verses.
- Write the words of the memory verse on a chalkboard/whiteboard. Have the children read the verse as a group a number of times. Erase one word and have them read the verse. Erase another word and have them say it. Keep erasing a word until the children can say the verse without any words on the board.
- Eat ice cubes and discuss the hail in the story.
- See ideas from other teacher(s) in the comments below.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Draw a simple outline of a shirt. Guide children in drawing pictures of patches on the shirt. Then allow the children to add various designs to the patches.
- Show children how to sew a patch over a hole in an old garment or cloth.
- Place a few drops of yellow paint in the centre of the paper. Children can blow the paint through a straw to make a starburst. Do this or any other "sun craft" and discuss that God caused the sun to stand still.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page The Gibeonites trick Joseph worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)

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