

# Discernment in a Deceptive World

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Sunday Plan

SCRIPTURE

Joshua 9–12

MEMORY VERSE

1 John 4:1

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*In our modern times it is becoming increasingly difficult to determine what is true and real. It is only by spiritual discernment, leaning on God's word and prayer that we may test the spirits (1 John 4:1–6). If we fail to seek wisdom from above, we will fall prey to the deceivers.*

# Welcome & Introduction

## Opening Activity:

Bring a backpack filled with random items (perhaps an old hoodie, crumpled paper, broken pencil, expired snack, etc.). Tell the group you're going to offer someone a "mystery trade."

1. Hold up something *visibly valuable*—a \$5 gift card, or a pack of good candy, or something teens actually want.
2. Then hold up the backpack and say: "You can trade this good thing for whatever is inside this bag... but you have to decide *right now* without asking any questions."
3. Let one brave volunteer choose.
  - If they choose the backpack, reveal the junk inside.
  - If they choose the gift card, reveal the junk anyway so everyone sees what they *could* have gotten.

## Debrief

### ASK

- "Why was it risky to make a decision without asking questions?"
- "What made the mystery bag seem appealing?"
- "How would your decision change if you could inspect it first?"
- "Have you ever made a quick decision you regretted because you didn't slow down and think?"

### TRANSITION

In Joshua 9, Israel makes a 'trade' with the Gibeonites without asking God first. The deal looked harmless... but it came with consequences.

And in chapters 10–12, God still steps in and fights for His people—even after their mistake.

# Catfished

Joshua 9:1–15

## Teaching Points

- Pressure can push us into poor decisions. The Gibeonites create urgency ("We came from a far country!"), and Israel feels the pressure to respond quickly. Teens face this constantly—social pressure, time pressure, emotional pressure.
- Small compromises can create long-term consequences. Israel's treaty seems harmless at first, but it binds them for generations. Choices made in a moment can shape a future.
- The key line in the passage: "But they did not inquire of the Lord." This isn't about being perfect—it's about learning to pause, pray, and ask God before committing.

### DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think the Israelites trusted the Gibeonites so quickly? What emotions or assumptions might have influenced them?
2. What would it look like for you to "inquire of the Lord" before making decisions?
3. What practical steps help you slow down and seek God's wisdom?

**KEY TRUTH**

Deception Works Best When We Don't Slow Down. The Gibeonites succeed because Israel looks at the evidence but never asks God. It's a reminder that not every opportunity, friendship, or offer is what it seems.

## Your Word is Your Bond

Joshua 9:16–27

### Teaching Points

- Three days later, Israel discovers the truth about the Gibeonites. Lies may buy time, but they never build trust. This is a powerful reminder for teens living in a world full of shortcuts and image-management.
- The Gibeonites end up serving at the tabernacle — the very place where God's presence dwells. A deceptive covenant becomes a pathway for them to be near God. God is able to bring good even out of flawed decisions.

**DISCUSSION**

1. Why do you think Israel chose to keep the covenant even though it was made through deception? What does that teach us about integrity?
2. Read 2 Samuel 21:1–2 — Israel had maintained the integrity of their covenant with the Gibeonites for more than 400 years before Saul broke the covenant. Based on this how do you think God views our vows and promises we make to others?

**KEY TRUTH**

Israel keeps the covenant *because they swore it before the Lord*. Integrity isn't about convenience; it's about character. This shows us that following God sometimes means doing the hard, unpopular thing.

## Going into Overtime

Joshua 10:5–14

### Teaching Points

- Israel marches all night, but the victory comes from God — hailstones, confusion, supernatural intervention. This shows us that God's power goes far beyond our own strength or strategy.
- Joshua's prayer for the sun to stand still is audacious. It teaches us that God invites His people to pray big, courageous prayers that align with His mission and character.
- Israel is tired, outnumbered, and stretched thin — but God extends the day so they can finish the mission. When we feel overwhelmed or inadequate, this story reminds us that God supplies what we lack.

**DISCUSSION**

1. Have you ever felt like doing the right thing made life harder, not easier? How does this story encourage you in those moments?
2. Why do you think Joshua had the confidence to pray such a bold prayer? What does that say about his relationship with God?

**KEY TRUTH**

Israel is attacked because they honored their covenant with the Gibeonites. Doing the right thing doesn't always make life easier, but it positions us under God's protection and favor.

## Commencing Priestly Ministry

Joshua 11:16–23

### Teaching Points

- The Anakim were giants, and represented a great terror to God's people if they were left in the land. They were legendary warriors — the same giants who terrified Israel in Numbers 13. Their defeat shows that God dismantles the very things that once paralyzed His people. This isn't about celebrating violence; it's about God removing generational fear so His people can flourish.
- The conquest is difficult for modern readers, but Scripture frames it as God's long-delayed judgment on cultures filled with violence, exploitation, and spiritual corruption. The removal of the Anakim is part of God cleansing the land so Israel can live in justice and peace.
- The text says that some of the Anakim were left in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (v.22). Gath is where Goliath and his brother came from years later when David confronted the Philistine giant.
- The passage ends with a beautiful line: "Then the land had rest from war." God's goal isn't endless conflict — it's restoration. We need to hear that God leads His people toward peace, not perpetual struggle.

**DISCUSSION**

1. Read Numbers 13:32–33 — A generation earlier the Israelite spies returned and concluded they could not take the land because of the Anakim. Their lack of faith led to 40 years wandering in the wilderness. Why was it important for Israel to exterminate the Anakim?
2. What "giant-sized fears" do people your age face today?
3. How does this passage challenge the idea that some problems or struggles are 'too big' for God?
4. What does it mean for God to bring His people into 'rest' after a long season of difficulty?

**KEY TRUTH**

This section is really about God fulfilling His promises, removing generational fear, and bringing rest to His people.

## Kingdoms Come...and Go

Joshua 12:7–8, 24b

## Teaching Points

- Joshua's faithfulness shows that big victories come from daily obedience. Joshua didn't conquer the land in one moment — it was battle after battle, step after step. This helps us see that spiritual growth isn't instant; it's built through consistent, faithful choices.
- The list of kings shows that God's victory is complete, not partial. This isn't a story of "barely making it." It's a story of God finishing what He said He would do.
- Many of the kings listed ruled fortified cities, powerful armies, and intimidating regions. Yet every one of them fell because God had already promised the land. This reminds us that God's promises outweigh whatever feels overwhelming in our lives.

### DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think God wanted Israel to have a written list of every king they defeated? How might remembering past victories help you trust God today?
2. Which part of your life feels like a long, slow battle rather than a quick win? How does Joshua's steady obedience encourage you?

### KEY TRUTH

God keeps track of every victory — Even the ones we forget. This chapter is essentially a victory record. Israel may have moved on, but God wanted them to remember what He had done. We all too often forget how far God has brought us; this passage shows the value of remembering.

## Memory Verses & Closing

### Memory Verses

- 1 John 4:1

Challenge for the Week: This week, choose one area of your life where you need God's wisdom, courage, or strength — and practice these three actions:

#### 1. ONE DECISION: Slow Down Before You Say "Yes"

Just like Israel rushed into a covenant in Joshua 9, choose **one decision** this week where you intentionally pause instead of reacting.

- Before you commit
- Before you respond
- Before you follow the crowd

**Practice slowing down and thinking it through.**

#### 2. ONE PRAYER: Ask God Boldly for Help

Joshua prayed a prayer so bold the sun stood still. This week, pray one bold prayer about something that feels too big, too stressful, or too overwhelming.

Not a safe prayer. Not a tiny prayer. A sun-standing-still prayer.

#### 3. ONE STEP: Do the Right Thing Even If It's Hard

Israel kept their word to the Gibeonites even when it cost them. This week, take **one step of integrity**:

- Keep a promise
- Tell the truth
- Own a mistake
- Do the right thing even if no one notices

Let this be your “Joshua moment.”  
Close in prayer.