

Joshua 9:1-27

The Craftiness of the Gibeonites

Joshua 9:1-2 - "And it came to pass, when all the kings which were on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard thereof; That they gathered themselves together, to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord."

Realizing that they could not defend against the Israelites alone, all the Canaanites agreed to combine forces to fight as one.

Spiritually, this foreshadows Jesus' trial, when Herod and Pilate suddenly became friends with a common purpose:

- **Luke 23:12** - "That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other."

- **Acts 4:27** - "In fact, in this very city Herod and Pontius Pilate conspired with the Gentiles and the people of Israel against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed."

Joshua 9:3-5 - "And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy."

The inhabitants of Gibeon decided against this alliance. They seem to have had better intelligence on Israel and its plans. For one, they understood that the Israelites were only interested in dispossessing the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. Foreign peoples outside the land were not included in God's command to make war on. So they devised a clever plan to trick Joshua into making a covenant with them.

This sort of reminds us of Jesus' advice:

- **Matthew 5:25-26** - "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

Joshua 9:6-8 - "And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us. And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you? And they said unto Joshua, We

are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye?"

Rashi - "And they also acted with wile": Just as Jacob's sons dealt cunningly with Hamor the father of Shechem who was a Hivite; and the inhabitants of Gibeon were also from the Hivites.

This is based on the story in **Genesis 34** of the rape of Dinah, the daughter of Leah. The sons of Jacob deceive the Hivites of Shechem when the son of their leader Hamor offered to marry Dinah after he had kidnapped and raped her. Jacob's sons feigned agreement and arranged for all the city's males to be circumcised. Then while they are incapacitated Simeon and Levi entered the city and killed them all. (Jacob later cursed Simeon and Levi for this slaughter, in **Genesis 49:5-7**).

[But see <https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-protostory-of-shechem-and-jacobs-daughter> for an alternate explanation of this whole story]

Thus this deception by the Gibeonites might be a payback, a balancing of the scales for the deceit of the sons of Jacob.

Joshua 9:9-10 - "And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth."

Abarbinel, a 15th century rabbinical scholar, explains that all the Canaanites had heard of the altar Joshua had made, and of the stones he had set up, and of his reading the law to the people, by which they were to be governed; all which they understood as taking possession of the country, and looking upon it as conquered.

This recalls Joshua's word about the purpose of the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan:

- **Joshua 4:24** - "That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever."

But the Gibeonites, despite their deception, probably did plan to submit to God and to Israel as servants, and to become proselytes, to adopt faith in the God they had heard about. (The deception was meant to keep them alive while they did that). Thus they did not mention here the more recent miracles, like the crossing of the Jordan and the destruction of Jericho, since they were portraying themselves as travelers just arrived from afar.

Joshua 9:14 - "And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD."

Rashi - "took of their victuals" - They accepted their words

i.e. not to eat the food, but rather more like "they received the men by reason of the appearance of their victuals" - old and moldy.

The Jewish leaders "asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD" - probably meaning to consult the Urim and Thummim. God would probably approved of this people becoming proselytes. But that does not excuse Israel's neglect to seek the Lord's will, especially after the incident at Ai, where they also neglected to seek the Lord.

Peace with the Gibeonites

Joshua 9:15 - "And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation swore unto them."

By ratifying their agreement with a vow, it became sacred and inviolable, because if you broke a vow, "the Lord your God will surely require it of you" (**Deuteronomy 23:21-23**).

Joshua 9:16-17 - "And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them. And the children of Israel journeyed, and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, and Chephirah, and Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim."

Joshua and the princes, when they found that they had been deceived, did not apply to Eleazar the high priest to be freed from their vow, much less did they break faith with the Gibeonites. Besides, the Gibeonites had abandoned their idolatry, desiring only that their lives might be spared. This was always an option for the Canaanites - like what happened with Rahab and her family.

This longstanding covenant with Gibeon reappears when God punished the violation of this vow by Saul in **2 Samuel 21:1-9**.

Joshua 9:18-19 - "And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes. But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them."

The people murmured because of how their leaders were easily deceived. But also because they would not get any plunder from the Gibeonite cities. (At Ai, they were allowed to take "the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof" for themselves, unlike at Jericho - **Joshua 8:1**)

The Gibeonites Made Servants

Joshua 9:21 - "And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised

them."

Israel's use of the Gibeonites is analogous to their use of the high places of the land, once dedicated to idolatry. Once recovered and cleansed, these places lose their ability to cause fear or awe. Instead Israel can tread or "ride" on the high places, and they can be used for God's plan.

- **Deuteronomy 32:13** - "He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock"

- **Isaiah 58:14** - "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father"

- **Haggai 1:8** - "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD." i.e. the high places are transformed and used for worship of God.

The Gibeonites show up later in Israel's history.

It's not clear why King Saul tried to kill off the Gibeonites "in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah" (**2 Samuel 21:5**). But after Saul's death, David tried to make things right with the them. David handed over Armoni and Mephibosheth, two of the sons of Saul and the five sons of Merab (Saul's daughter) to the Gibeonites, who hanged them.

Kirjath-jearim

One of the cities of the Gibeonites, Kirjath-jearim (or Kirjath-baal) was the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant for 20 years after it was recovered from the Philistines (**1 Samuel 6:20-21**). David later brought it from there to Obed-edom (**2 Samuel 6:2**).

Kirjath-jearim means "city of woods." This is why in **Psalms 132:6** in the Psalms of Ascent, David is said to have found the ark "in the fields of the wood."

In Rabbinic Judaism, the alleged descendants of the Gibeonites, known as Nethinim (**1 Chronicles 9:2**), are treated differently from ordinary Jews. They could not, for example, marry a Jew by birth.

A Curse

Joshua 9:22-23 - "And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us? Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God."

This actually seems to be a continuation of the curse on Canaan in Genesis:

- **Genesis 9:24-25** - "When Noah awoke from his drunkenness and learned what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan! A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."

Now the Gibeonites, as Canaanites, would serve Canaan's "brother" in the form of Shem, from whom Israel is descended.

But they were not destined to be personal slaves in private persons' households. They would serve the whole congregation "and ... the altar of the LORD" by working in the Tabernacle and later the Temple as helpers to the Levites.

The rabbis explained that while the people of Israel were in camp, before the land was divided, the Gibeonites were hewers of wood and drawers of water to the congregation; but after the land was divided, and they were settled in their cities and inheritances, then they only hewed wood and drew water for the sanctuary at Gilgal, Shiloh, Nob, Gibeon, and later in the Temple.

Apparently they were later joined by other leftover Canaanite survivors of the conquest as servants subject to this curse:

- **1 Kings 9:20-21** - "As for all the people who remained of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (the people who were not Israelites)— their descendants who remained in the land, those whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely— Solomon conscripted these people to be forced laborers, as they are to this day."

For the Gibeonites, though, this curse was turned into a blessing, because they had a place in the sanctuary of the Lord, and opportunity of learning the law of God. Through their service in the Temple, they participated closely in the worship of God.

And the Gibeonites (like Rahab) became emblematic of the reception later of the Gentiles as "ingrafted" into the new Israel, the Church (Romans 11:11-24).

- **Zechariah 2:11** - "And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you."