**Joshua**

Chapter 9

*The Gibeonite Deception*

**Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)— 2 they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel. 3 However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, 4 they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. 5 The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. 6 Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, “We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us.” 7 The men of Israel said to the Hivites, “But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?” 8 “We are your servants,” they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, “Who are you and where do you come from?” 9 They answered: “Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, 10 and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. 11 And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, ‘Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, “We are your servants; make a treaty with us.” ’ 12 This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. 13 And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey.” 14 The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. 15 Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath. 16 Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. 17 So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. 18 But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, 19 but all the leaders answered, “We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. 20 This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them.” 21 They continued, “Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community.” So the leaders’ promise to them was kept. 22 Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, “Why did you deceive us by saying, ‘We live a long way from you,’ while actually you live near us? 23 You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.” 24 They answered Joshua, “Your servants were clearly told how the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this. 25 We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you.” 26 So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them. 27 That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the Lord at the place the Lord would choose. And that is what they are to this day.**

**9:1–27** The account of how the Gibeonites deceived the leaders of the tribes and obtained a treaty of submission to Israel. It is the first of three sections telling how Israel came into possession of the bulk of the land. Verses 1–2 introduce the three units. (CSB)

**9:1–2** Other inhabitants of Canaan feared that they would share the fate of Jericho and Ai unless they joined forces against the invaders. (Cf chs 10–11 for Israel’s battles against such coalitions.) (TLSB)

**9:1** *kings west of the Jordan.* Small, independent city-kingdoms were scattered over Canaan, inhabited by a variety of peoples who had come earlier from outside the land (compare vv. 1–2 with Ge 15:19). (CSB)

**9:3** *Gibeon.* A site just north of Jerusalem called el-Jib, showing the remains of a Late Bronze Age city with an excellent water supply. The Gibeonites were in league with a number of neighboring towns (v. 17) but seem to have been dominant in the confederation. (CSB)

Confederation of towns north of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

**9:4** *they*. Likely a collective of leaders from the various towns of Gibeon.

*they resorted to a ruse.* Motivated by their fear of Israel’s God, the Gibeonites used pretense to trick Joshua into a treaty that would allow them to live. (CSB)

**9:6** *make a treaty with us.* In this request they were offering to submit themselves by treaty to be subjects of the Israelites (see v. 11, where they call themselves “your servants”—unmistakable language in the international diplomacy of that day). They chose submission rather than certain death (v. 24). (CSB)

**9:7** *Hivites.* Possibly Horites, an ethnic group living in Canaan related to the Hurrians of northern Mesopotamia (11:19; Ge 10:17; Ex 23:23; Jdg 3:3). (CSB)

Questioning is based on the fact that the Lord strictly forbids making any covenant with any peoples in Canaan (Ex 34:12; Nu 33). (TLSB)

**9:8** *We are your servants*. Common words of politeness, not an indication on their part to become submissive to Israel. (TLSB)

*Who* … *where*. Joshua’s questions indicate that their response is unsatisfactory. (TLSB)

**9:9** *heard reports of him.* The same reports that had been heard in Jericho (see 2:10). (CSB)

*Lord*. Speaking the Lord’s name may have been part of the ruse by which they appeared respectful of Israel’s God to gain Israel’s favor. (TLSB)

*heard a report*. Probably the same report that had come to Jericho. (TLSB)

**9:10** *Ashtaroth*. Another way of referencing the region of Canaan, which was dedicated to the worship of the goddess Ashtaroth. (TLSB)

**9:13** *wineskins*. New wineskins are used for new wine because they can stretch during fermentation. (TLSB)

*they have burst*. Excellent detail to add to the illusion. Wineskins would have likely burst during a long journey with exposure to heat and jostling. (TLSB)

**9:14–15** *did not ask counsel from the Lord*. Instead of inquiring of the Lord through Urim and Thummim (Nu 27:21), the men of Israel trusted in their own judgment, bought the deception, and made a forbidden covenant/treaty with them (cf Ex 23:32; Dt 7:2). (TLSB)

**9:14** *did not inquire of the Lord*. Did not consult their King, whose mission they were on. (CSB)

**9:15** *treaty of peace.* A covenant to let them live was sworn by the heads of the tribes—i.e., an oath was taken in the holy name of God. All such oaths were binding in Israel (see Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12; 1Sa 14:24). (CSB)

At the conclusion of making any covenant or agreement, an oath, binding on all Israel, was sworn in the name of the God of Israel (cf Ex 24:7; 2Ch 15:12–15). (TLSB)

**9:16** *heard*. Perhaps through their own scouts who were searching the region. (TLSB)

**9:17** *their cities*. Located in central Canaan. (TLSB)

**9:18–20** *sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel*. In the leaders’ oath, with the Lord as witness, they had called upon the Lord to bring wrath upon Israel if they broke their word (v 20). This wrath fell upon Israel when Saul ignored the oath and attacked the Gibeonites (2Sm 21:1–14). (TLSB)

**9:18** *The whole assembly grumbled.* Perhaps the people feared the consequences of not following through on the earlier divine order to destroy all the Canaanites, but more likely they grumbled because they could not take over the Gibeonite cities and possessions. (CSB)

Over the violation of the rules in Dt 7 and over their inability to take possession of and plunder the Gibeonite cities. (TLSB)

**9:21** *woodcutters and water carriers.* A conventional phrase for household servants. (CSB)

The Gibeonites had said, “We are your servants” (v 8), and, perhaps with a measure of vengeance, they were made to do menial service for the tabernacle and households of Israel (vv 23, 27). (TLSB)

**9:22–24** Questioning reveals that the leaders had not intentionally disobeyed the Lord or brought shame on Israel. (TLSB)

**9:23** *under a curse.* Noah’s prediction that Canaan would someday “be the slave of Shem” (Ge 9:25–26) has part of its fulfillment in this event. (CSB)

Punishment for their deception was servitude of the lowest class in the house of the Lord and to the people of Israel. This curse is believed to be the fulfillment of the curse of Noah on Canaan (Gn 9:25). (TLSB)

*some*. All would be servants, but in time some would earn, or be granted, their freedom. (TLSB)

 *for the house of my God.* Probably specifies how the Gibeonites were to serve “the entire community” (v. 21). Worship at the tabernacle (and later at the temple) required much wood and water (for sacrifices and washing) and consequently a great deal of menial labor. From now on, that labor was to be supplied by the Gibeonites, perhaps on a rotating basis. In this way they entered the Lord’s service. When Solomon became king, the tabernacle and altar were at Gibeon (2Ch 1:3, 5

At this time, the tabernacle, including the needs of the Levites. (TLSB)

**9:27** *for the congregation*. The Gibeonites would be slaves to the people and to the tabernacle. Serving in the tabernacle was a constant reminder that Canaanite worship was over. (TLSB)

*the place the Lord would choose.* Joshua moved the tabernacle (and its altar) to Shiloh, and there it would reside at least until the days of Samuel (1Sa 4:3). Later, the Lord chose Jerusalem (1Ki 9:3). (CSB)

God would choose where He would have the Gibeonites serve, be it in the tabernacle or in His temple that would eventually be built.

 **Ch 9** Because Joshua and the Israelites neglect to seek the Lord’s counsel, they fall for the deceit of the Gibeonites and make a treaty that they must honor. How often do we judge things based on appearance and act without consulting the Lord and His Word? His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. • Lord, grant us the wisdom and guidance of Your Spirit, so we might seek Your counsel in all we do. Amen. (TLSB)