

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 9

The Gibeonite Deception

As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard of this, 2 they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel. 3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, 4 they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, 5 with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. 6 And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us." 7 But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?" 8 They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?" 9 They said to him, "From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God. For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, 10 and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth. 11 So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us."' 12 Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and crumbly. 13 These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey." 14 So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD. 15 And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them. 16 At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbors and that they lived among them. 17 And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim. 18 But the people of Israel did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. 19 But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. 20 This we will do to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them." 21 And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them. 22 Joshua summoned them, and he said to them, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you dwell among us? 23 Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall never be anything but servants, cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." 24 They answered Joshua, "Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you—so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing. 25 And now, behold, we are in your hand. Whatever seems good and right in your sight to do to us, do it." 26 So he did this to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel, and they did not kill them. 27 But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place that he should choose.

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 who were beyond 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 acted with cunning. 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 covenant 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 ask counsel of the LORD*. Did not consult their King, whose mission they were on. (CSB)

9:15 *made 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 *congregation murmured against the leaders*. 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 *cutters of wood and drawers of water*. 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 *are cursed*. 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. (CSB)

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 that he 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)