

it burnt offerings to the LORD, and they sacrificed well-being sacrifices. And he wrote there on the stones the repetition of the teaching of Moses, 32 which he had written in the presence of the Israelites. And all Israel and 33 its elders and its overseers and its judges were standing on both sides of the Ark opposite the levitical priests, bearers of the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD, sojourner and native alike, over against Mount Gerizim, and its other half over against Mount Ebal, as Moses, servant of the LORD, had formerly charged to bless Israel. And afterward he read out all the words of 34 the teaching, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the teaching. There was no word of all that Moses had charged 35 that Joshua did not read out before the whole assembly of Israel and the women and the little ones and the sojourners who went in their midst.

CHAPTER 9 And it happened when all the kings heard who 1 were beyond the Jordan, in the high country and in the lowland and along the whole shore of the Great Sea opposite Lebanon, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivvite and the Jebusite, that they 2 gathered together to do battle with Joshua and with Israel in united resolve. And the inhabitants of Gibeon had heard what Joshua did to Jericho and to 3 Ai. And they on their part acted with cunning and provisioned themselves 4

32. *the repetition of the teaching of Moses.* The Hebrew *mishneh torat mosheh* refers to Deuteronomy (that Greek name itself being a rendering of the Hebrew *mishneh torah*). The Deuteronomist behind this story is clearly promoting the interests of his own privileged text.

CHAPTER 9 1. *beyond the Jordan.* Since all the peoples enumerated here are Canaanites living on the western side of the Jordan, this phrase would have to mean beyond the Jordan from the viewpoint of the Israelites coming from the eastern side, even though elsewhere it almost always refers to trans-Jordanian territory.

2. *in united resolve.* The literal sense of the Hebrew is “with one mouth.” It is historically quite unlikely that the divided city-kingdoms of Canaan could have constituted themselves as a single united force.

4. *they on their part acted with cunning.* In context, the “on their part” (or “too”) must refer to the immediately preceding story of the conquest of Ai. There the Israelites used the cunning of the ambush strategy to destroy the town; here, by contrast, cunning is used by the Gibeonites to save themselves.

provisioned themselves. The Masoretic Text reads *wayitstayru*, which might mean “they painted themselves”—that is (perhaps), “they disguised themselves.” An emendation yields *wayitsdaydu* (the letters *resh* and *dalet* look quite similar), which seems more plausible, especially given the prominence of the cognate noun *tsayid*, “provisions,” in this episode.

and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys and worn-out and cracked and
 5 trussed-up wineskins, and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet and
 worn-out cloaks upon them, and all the bread of their provision was dry
 6 and moldy. And they went to Joshua at the Gilgal camp and said to him
 and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a faraway land, and now seal
 7 a pact with us." And the men of Israel said to the Hivvites, "Perhaps you
 8 dwell in our midst, so how can we seal a pact with you?" And they said to
 Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "From where are
 9 you and from where do you come?" And they said to them, "From a very
 faraway land, your servants have come through the fame of the LORD your
 God, for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt,
 10 and all that He did to the two Amorite kings who were across the Jordan,
 to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan which is in Ashtaroth.
 11 And our elders and all the inhabitants of our land said to us, saying, "Take
 in your hand provisions for the way and go to them and say to them, We
 12 are your servants, and now seal a pact with us.' This bread of ours we took
 still warm as provisions from our homes on the day we went out toward
 13 you, and now, look, it is dry and has turned moldy. And these wineskins
 that we filled were new, and now they are cracked, and these cloaks of ours
 14 and our sandals have worn out from the very long way." And the men took

trussed-up. The wineskins are held together with cords or strips of leather because they are falling apart.

6. *We have come from a faraway land.* With the evidence of the just consummated destruction of Jericho and Ai, the Gibeonites seem aware that the Israelites are embarked on a campaign to annihilate the indigenous population of Canaan, and so they adopt the subterfuge of pretending to be from a land far from Canaan. This entire story is in fact an elaborate etiological tale that betrays the shaky historical basis of this canonical account of the conquest. Deuteronomy, with its call for a radical separation from the pagan peoples of the land, enunciated a program of genocide. Such a program was never actually carried out, and the situation of Israel among the Canaanites was by and large the opposite: the two populations frequently mingled, and the Israelites were often open to cultural and religious influences from the Canaanite peoples. The author of this episode was trying to resolve a contradiction: a particular group of Canaanites—the Gibeonites—not only were living cheek by jowl with the Israelites but were performing subservient duties at an Israelite sanctuary at Gibeon. The story comes to explain how the Gibeonites were not wiped out, as the program of total destruction dictated, and how they came to play a role in an Israelite cultic place.

9. *a very faraway land.* Pushed by Joshua, they add "very" to their previous words.

14. *And the men took from their provisions.* It may seem puzzling that Israelites should want to eat the dry and moldy bread of the Gibeonites, but Kimchi is probably right in surmising that breaking bread—even virtually inedible bread—with the strangers was a way of ritually confirming a treaty of peace with them.

from their provisions, and they did not inquire of the LORD. And Joshua 15
 made peace with them, and sealed a pact with them to preserve their lives,
 and the chieftains of the community made a vow to them. And it happened 16
 at the end of three days after they had sealed the pact with them, that they
 heard that they were neighbors and were dwelling in their midst. And the 17
 Israelites journeyed forth and came to their towns on the third day, and
 their towns were Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-Jearim.
 But the Israelites did not strike them down, for the chieftains of the com- 18
 munity had made a vow to them in the name of the LORD God of Israel, and
 all the community complained against the chieftains. And all the chief- 19
 tains said to the whole community, "We have made a vow to them in the
 name of the LORD God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. This let 20
 us do to them, letting them live, that there be no fury against us for the vow
 we made to them." And the chieftains said of them, "Let them live, and they 21
 will be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole community, as
 the chieftains have said of them." And Joshua called to them and spoke to 22
 them, saying, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We are very far away from
 you,' when you dwell in our midst? And now, you are cursed, and no slave 23
 or hewer of wood or drawer of water for the house of my God will cease to
 be among you." And they answered Joshua and said, "For it was indeed told 24

they did not inquire of the LORD. This is the technical idiom for inquiring of an oracle. Without such guidance, Joshua and the Israelites are taken in by the deception.

17. *on the third day.* Though this is the formulaic number for relatively short journeys, it is also an implication that the Gibeonite towns are well within the borders of Canaan.

19. *We have made a vow to them . . . and now we cannot touch them.* Vows made in the name of the deity—compare the story of Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11—are irrevocable and cannot be renegotiated.

20. *fury.* The Hebrew *qetsef* means divine rage, characteristically manifested in a plague.

21. *hewers of wood and drawers of water.* These are menial workers at the lowest point in the social hierarchy, as is clear in Deuteronomy 29:9–10: "You are stationed here today all of you before the LORD your God, your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your overseers, every man of Israel. Your little ones, your wives, and your sojourner who is in the midst of your camps, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water."

23. *for the house of my God.* In verse 21, it was "for the whole community." In historical fact, the Gibeonites could conceivably have performed these functions in both the sacred and the profane realm.

will cease to be among you. Literally, "will not be cut off from you."

24. *For it was indeed told to your servants.* In this fiction, the Gibeonites somehow have been given a full report of the promise of the land and the program of genocide articulated in Deuteronomy.

to your servants that the LORD your God had charged Moses to give all the land to you and to destroy the inhabitants of the land before you. And we
 25 were very afraid for our lives because of you, and so we did this thing. And
 now, here we are in your hand. What is good and what is right in your eyes
 26 to do to us, do.” And he did thus to them and saved them from the hand
 27 of the Israelites, and they did not kill them. And on that day Joshua made
 them hewers of wood and drawers of water for the community and for the
 LORD’s altar to this day, at the place He was to choose.

1 CHAPTER 10 And it happened when Adoni-Zedek king of
 Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and put it under the ban, as he
 had done to Jericho and its king, so had he done to Ai and its king, and
 that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were in
 2 their midst, that he was very afraid, for Gibeon was a big town, like one
 of the royal towns, and it was bigger than Ai, and all its men were war-
 3 riors. And Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron
 and to Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of
 4 Eglon, saying, “Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon,
 5 for it has made peace with Joshua and with the Israelites.” And the five
 Amorite kings, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of
 Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered together, they
 and all their camps, and they encamped against Gibeon and did battle

26. *saved them from the hand of the Israelites.* This formulation may suggest that, despite the solemn vow, there was some popular sentiment among the Israelites, outraged by this deception, to destroy the Gibeonites. The quick maneuver of the chieftains implemented by Joshua to make them menial servants would be devised to fend off such an assault.

27. *to this day.* This is the formal marker of the etiological tale: if you wonder why the Gibeonites are hewers of wood and drawers of water for the Israelites, this story explains it.

at the place He was to choose. This phrase in Deuteronomistic texts invariably refers to Jerusalem, but it is a misplaced editorial tic here because the sanctuary in question is located at Gibeon.

CHAPTER 10 1. *Adoni-Zedek.* The name means “master of justice” or “master of victory,” and as several medieval Hebrew commentators note, it is probably a hereditary title rather than a proper name. Melchizedek king of Salem (probably a variant of “Jerusalem”), mentioned in Genesis 14:18, has a similar titular name, which means “king of justice” or “king of victory.”

2. *like one of the royal towns.* Even though there is no monarchy in Gibeon, its size and importance make it the equivalent of a royal town.