

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

All the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, unite their forces against Joshua, Joshua 9:1, Joshua 9:2. The inhabitants of Gibeon, hearing what Joshua had done to Ai, sent ambassadors to him, feigning themselves to come from a very distant tribe, requesting a friendly alliance with him, Joshua 9:3-5. Their address to Joshua, and the means they used to deceive the Israelites, Joshua 9:6-13. The Israelitish elders are deceived, and make a league with them, which they confirm with an oath, Joshua 9:14, Joshua 9:15. After three days they are informed that the Gibeonites belong to the seven Canaanitish nations, yet they spare their cities, Joshua 9:16, Joshua 9:17. The congregation murmuring because of this, the elders excuse themselves because of their oath, Joshua 9:18, Joshua 9:19. They purpose to make the Gibeonites slaves to the congregation, Joshua 9:20, Joshua 9:21. Joshua calls them, and pronounces this sentence against them, Joshua 9:22, Joshua 9:23. They vindicate themselves, and submit to their lot, Joshua 9:24, Joshua 9:25. They are spared, and made hewers of wood and drawers of water to the congregation and to the altar, Joshua 9:26, Joshua 9:27.

Verse 1

And it came to pass, when all the kings - heard thereof - From this account it appears that the capture and destruction of Jericho and Ai had been heard of to the remotest parts of the land, that a general fear of the Israelitish arms prevailed, and that the different dynasties or petty governments into which the land was divided, felt all their interests at stake, and determined to make the defense of their country a common cause. This was the most prudent step they could take in their circumstances, and therefore they entered into a confederation in order to arrest the progress of the Israelites. The Great Sea mentioned here is the Mediterranean Sea, the coasts of which were inhabited by the Phoenicians, Syrians, Sidonians, and Philistines. It is very likely that all these united with the Canaanites for their common safety.

Verse 3

The inhabitants of Gibeon heard - These alone did not join the confederation. Gibeon is supposed to have been the capital of the Hivites. In the division of the land it fell to the lot of Benjamin, Joshua 18:25, and was afterwards given to the priests, Joshua 21:17. See the note on Joshua 10:2.

Verse 4

They did work wily - Finesse of this kind is allowed by the conduct of all nations; and stratagems in war are all considered as legal. Nine tenths of the victories gained are attributable to stratagem; all sides practice them, and therefore none can condemn them. Much time and labor have been lost in the inquiry, "Did not the Gibeonites tell lies?" Certainly they did, and what is that to us? Does the word of God commend them for it? It does not. Are they held up to us as examples! Surely no. They did what any other nation would have done in their circumstances, and we have nothing to do with their example. Had they come to the Israelites, and simply submitted themselves without opposition and without fraud, they had certainly fared much better. Lying and hypocrisy always defeat their own purpose, and at best can succeed only for a short season. Truth and honesty never wear out.

Old sacks - and wine bottles, old, etc. - They pretended to have come from a very distant country, and that their sacks and the goat-skins that served them for carrying their wine and water in, were worn out by the length of the journey.

Verse 5

Old shoes and clouted - Their sandals, they pretended had been worn out by long and difficult travelling, and they had been obliged to have them frequently patched during the way; their garments also were worn thin; and what remained of their bread was mouldy - spotted with age, or, as our old version has it, bored - pierced with many holes by the vermin which had bred in it, through the length of the time it had been in their sacks; and this is the most literal meaning of the original *nikkudim*, which means spotted or pierced with many holes. The old and clouted shoes have been a subject of some controversy: the Hebrew word *baloth* signifies worn out, from *balah*, to wear away; and *metullaoth*, from *tala*, to spot or patch, i.e., spotted with patches. Our word clouted, in the Anglo-Saxon signifies seamed up, patched; from clout, rag, or small piece of cloth, used for piecing or patching. But some suppose the word here comes from clouet, the diminutive of clou, a small nail, with which the Gibeonites had fortified the soles of their shoes, to prevent them from wearing out in so long a journey; but this seems very unlikely; and our old English term clouted - seamed or patched - expresses the spirit of the Hebrew word.

Verse 6

Make ye a league with us - כִּרְתוּ־לָנוּ־בְרִית (kirethu lanu berith), cut, or divide, the covenant sacrifice with us. From this it appears that heathenism at this time had its sacrifices, and covenants were ratified by sacrificing to and invoking the objects of their adoration.

Verse 7

Peradventure ye dwell among us - It is strange they should have had such a suspicion, as the Gibeonites had acted so artfully; and it is as strange that, having such a suspicion, they acted with so little caution.

Verse 8

We are thy servants - This appears to have been the only answer they gave to the question of the Israelitish elders, and this they gave to Joshua, not to them, as they saw that Joshua was commander-in-chief of the host.

Who are ye? and from whence come ye? - To these questions, from such an authority, they felt themselves obliged to give an explicit answer; and they do it very artfully by a mixture of truth, falsehood, and hypocrisy.

Verse 9

Because of the name of the Lord thy God - They pretend that they had undertaken this journey on a religious account; and seem to intimate that they had the highest respect for Jehovah, the object of the Israelites' worship; this was hypocrisy.

We have heard the fame of him - This was true: the wonders which God did in Egypt, and the discomfiture of Sihon and Og, had reached the whole land of Canaan, and it was on this account that the inhabitants of it were panic-struck. The Gibeonites, knowing that they could not stand where such mighty forces had fallen, wished to make the Israelites their friends. This part of their relation was strictly true.

Verse 11

Wherefore our elders, etc. - All this, and what follows to the end of Joshua 9:13, was false, contrived merely for the purpose of deceiving the Israelites, and this they did to save their own lives; as they expected all the inhabitants of Canaan to be put to the sword.

Verse 14

The men took of their victuals - This was done in all probability in the way of friendship; for, from time immemorial to the present day, eating together, in the Asiatic countries, is considered a token of unalterable friendship; and those who eat even salt together, feel themselves bound thereby in a perpetual covenant. But the marginal reading of this clause should not be hastily rejected.

And asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord - They made the covenant with the Gibeonites without consulting God by Urim and Thummim, which was highly reprehensible in them, as it was a state transaction in which the interests and honor of God their king were intimately concerned.

Verse 15

Joshua made peace with them - Joshua agreed to receive them into a friendly connection with the Israelites, and to respect their lives and properties; and the elders of Israel bound themselves to the observance of it, and confirmed it with an oath. As the same words are used here as in Joshua 9:6, we may suppose that the covenant was made in the ordinary way, a sacrifice being offered on the occasion, and its blood poured out before the Lord. See on Genesis 15:10 (note), etc.

Verse 16

At the end of three days - Gibeon is reputed to be only about eight leagues distant from Gilgal, and on this account the fraud might be easily discovered in the time mentioned above.

Verse 17

The children of Israel - came unto their cities - Probably when the fraud was discovered, Joshua sent out a detachment to examine their country, and to see what use could be made of it in the prosecution of their war with the Canaanites. Some of the cities mentioned here were afterwards in great repute among the Israelites: and God chose to make one of them, Kirjath-jearim, the residence of the ark of the covenant for twenty years, in the reigns of Saul and David. There is no evidence that the preservation of the Gibeonites was displeasing to Jehovah.

Verse 18

All the congregation murmured - Merely because they were deprived of the spoils of the Gibeonites. They had now got under the full influence of a predatory spirit; God saw their proneness to this, and therefore, at particular times, totally interdicted the spoils of conquered cities, as in the case of Jericho.

Verse 19

We have sworn unto them - Although the Israelites were deceived in this business, and the covenant was made on a certain supposition which was afterwards proved to have had no foundation in truth, and consequently the whole engagement on the part of the deceived was hereby vitiated and rendered null and void; yet, because the elders had eaten with them, offered a covenant sacrifice, and sworn by Jehovah, they did not consider themselves at liberty to break the terms of the agreement, as far as the lives of the Gibeonites were concerned. That their conduct in this respect was highly pleasing to God is evident from this, that Joshua is nowhere reprehended for making this covenant, and sparing the Gibeonites; and that Saul, who four hundred years after this thought himself and the Israelites loosed from this obligation, and in consequence oppressed and destroyed the Gibeonites, was punished for the breach of this treaty, being considered as the violator of a most solemn oath and covenant engagement. See 2 Samuel 21:2-9, and Ezekiel 17:18, Ezekiel 17:19. All these circumstances laid together, prove that the command to destroy the Canaanites was not so absolute as is generally supposed: and should be understood as rather referring to the destruction of the political existence of the Canaanitish nations, than to the destruction of their lives. See the notes on Deuteronomy 20:10, Deuteronomy 20:17.

Verse 21

Hewers of wood and drawers of water - Perhaps this is a sort of proverbial expression, signifying the lowest state of servitude, though it may also be understood literally. See below.

Verse 23

Now therefore ye are cursed - Does not this refer to what was pronounced by Noah, Genesis 9:26, against Ham and his posterity? Did not the curse of Ham imply slavery, and nothing else? Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be; and does it not sufficiently appear that nothing else than perpetual slavery is implied in the curse of the Gibeonites? They were brought, no doubt, under tribute; performed the meanest offices for the Israelites, being in the same circumstances with the servile class of Hindoos called the Chetrees; had their national importance annihilated, and yet were never permitted to incorporate themselves with the Israelites. And we may reasonably suppose that this was the purpose of God relative to all the Canaanitish nations: those who would not renounce their idolatry, etc., were to be extirpated; those who did were to be preserved alive, on condition of becoming tributary, and serving as slaves. See the note on Deuteronomy 20:17.

Hewers of wood and drawers of water - The disgrace of this state lay not in the laboriousness of it, but in its being the common employment of the females; if the ancient customs among the same people were such as prevail now. The most intelligent travelers in those countries represent collecting wood for fuel, and carrying water, as the peculiar employment of the females. The Arab women of Barbary do so, according to Dr. Shaw. The daughters of the Turcomans in Palestine are employed, according to Dâ€™Arvieux, in fetching wood and water for the accommodation of their respective families. From these circumstances Mr. Harmer reasons thus: "The bitterness of the doom of the Gibeonites does not seem to have consisted in the laboriousness of the service enjoined them, for it was usual for women and children to perform what was required of them; but its degrading them from the characteristic employment of men, that of bearing arms; and condemning them and their posterity for ever to the employment of females. The not receiving them as allies was bitter; the disarming them who had been warriors, and condemning them to the employment of females, was worse; but the extending this degradation to their posterity, was bitterest of all. It is no wonder that in these circumstances they are said to have been cursed." - Obs., vol. iv., p. 297.

Verse 24

We were sore afraid of our lives - Self-preservation, which is the most powerful law of nature, dictated to them those measures which they adopted; and they plead this as the motive of their conduct.

Verse 25

We are in thine hand - Entirely in thy power.

As it seemeth good and right unto thee - do - Whatever justice and mercy dictate to thee to do to us, that perform. They expect justice, because they deceived the Israelites; but they expect mercy also, because they were driven to use this expedient for fear of losing their lives. The appeal to Joshua is full of delicacy and cogent argument.

Verse 26

And so did he unto them - That is, he acted according to justice and mercy: he delivered them out of the hands of the people, so that they slew them not - here was mercy; and he made them hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and to the altar of God - here was justice. Thus Joshua did nothing but what was good and right, not only in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of the Lord. How long the Gibeonites were preserved as a distinct people after this, we know not. That they existed in the time of David, is evident from the circumstance mentioned on Joshua 9:19. They are not mentioned after the captivity; and it is probable that they were nearly annihilated by the persecution raised up against them by Saul. Some suppose that the Gibeonites existed under the appellation of Nethinim; but of this there is no decisive proof; the Nethinim were probably slaves of a different race.

On what we meet with in this chapter, we may make the following observations.

1.The Gibeonites told lies, in order to save their lives. No expediency can justify this, nor are we called to attempt it. The Gibeonites were heathens, and we can expect nothing better from them. See note at the end of Joshua 2:24 (note).

2.They did not profit by their falsity: had they come in fairly, sought peace, and renounced their idolatry, they would have had life on honorable terms. As it was, they barely escaped with their lives, and were utterly deprived of their political liberty. Even the good that is sought by unlawful means has God's curse on it.

3.We need not be solicitous for the character of the Gibeonites here; they are neither our models, nor believers in the true God, and therefore pure religion is not concerned in their prevarication and falsity.

4.We see here of what solemn importance an oath was considered among the people of God; they swore to their own hurt, and changed not. When once they had bound themselves to their Maker, they did not believe that any changing circumstances could justify a departure from so awful an obligation. Thus, reader, shouldst thou fear a lie, and tremble at an oath.