

## Rahab's Courage and the Gibeonites' Cowardice

According to the analysis presented in Chapter 8, the two sides of Rahab's character – her words and her deeds – evolved together. Instead of representing a particular clan (the “Rahabites”), as some scholars claim, this Canaanite woman serves as an archetype of the outsider who secures a place in the national fold through an act of courage and loyalty.<sup>1</sup>

While we cannot say much, if anything, about Rahab's origins and the prebiblical legends that may have grown up around her name, we can establish what purposes her story serves in the wider narrative: Originally, it had little to do with her identity as an outsider, serving instead to explain why Jericho was “shut up tightly because of the Israelites, with no one going out or coming in” (Josh. 6:1). The story grew to its present proportions as later writers expanded it, both to teach the nation lessons of fearlessness and to address issues posed by contested populations.

The Gibeonites, who are the subject of two chapters in Joshua, were one such contested population. The commonalities between this group and Rahab make their differences all the more telling: Both call attention to Israel's impressive triumphs over two kings in the Transjordan, and both manage to secure a place in the nation's “midst.” Yet while Rahab does so through surreptitious actions that are both courageous and commendable (at least, from the perspective of the intended readership), the Gibeonites secure their protected place through an act of pusillanimous duplicity.

<sup>1</sup> Rahab is notably never called a “Canaanite,” perhaps because in the context of the book this term has an ethnophalustic sense deemed unfitting for such an exemplary character.

The account of the Gibeonites' treachery illustrates the dynamics of war remembrance that we are exploring in our study. Instead of defending this population by commemorating the loyalty and bravery of its members in wartime, the biblical scribes challenged their belonging and privileges by creating a memory of unheroic conduct.<sup>2</sup> Yet what was it about the Gibeonites that rankled the authors of Joshua? To answer this question, we need to consider a number of clues from both the material-cultural record and the biblical corpus.<sup>3</sup>

#### ARCHEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

At the site of Gibeon (Tell el-Jib), archeologists have unearthed more than ninety jar handles bearing the Hebrew impression LMLK (meaning for the king) and dating to the late eighth to mid-seventh centuries; most are identified as "late types." Another twenty-four were found at Beeroth (Khirbet el-Burj). Several of the handles from Gibeon were originally part of massive wine pithoi. Recently, a tax bulla that reads "For the king, from Gibeon," dating perhaps to the reign of Manasseh (697–643 BCE), was uncovered in Jerusalem. In addition to these finds, forty-one jar handles with concentric stamps (mid-seventh century; 14.5 percent of all those excavated) were found at Gibeon, with fifty-six jar handles bearing the name Gibeon.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For this type of negative war memorializing, see my study of the Ziphites and Keilah in *David, King of Israel*, chap. 4.

<sup>3</sup> An older, yet still useful, discussion of the range of historical and exegetical issues posed by the Gibeonites is the work of Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). For a discussion of the role played by the Gibeonite region in the kingdoms of the North (Israel), see Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

For the historical importance of Gibeon in the late monarchic period and thereafter, see Frédéric Gangloff, "La zone rurale centrale de Benjamin après l'invasion babylonienne de 587 av. J.-C.: Un marché régional et international prospère en plein effondrement de Juda," *Res antiquae*, 10 (2013), 257–272; Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005); Diana Edelman, "Gibeon and the Gibeonites Revisited" in Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans Revisited* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 153–168. For the biblical texts, see John Day, "Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Old Testament" in Robert Rezetko, Timothy Henry Lim, and W. Brian Aucker (eds.), *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 113–137.

<sup>4</sup> The figures I present here are from Oded Lipschits, Omer Sergi, and Ido Koch, "Royal Judahite Jar Handles: Reconsidering the Chronology of the lmlk Stamp Impressions," *Tel Aviv*, 37 (2010), 3–32. On the classification and dating of LMLK impressions, see the treatments by Oded Lipschits ("Judah Under Assyrian Rule and the Early Phase of

More than a century before native potters impressed Judean royal seals on these jar handles, an Egyptian scribe had inscribed the name Gibeon in a memorial account of the cities encountered by the Egyptian pharaoh Sheshonq during his campaign in the southern Levantine (ca. 926/5 BCE). The site of Tell el-Jib was occupied from the Early Bronze Age, but attained unprecedented levels of prosperity during Iron Age IIB and IIC (corresponding roughly to the eighth and seventh centuries, respectively). A thick wall enclosed the crest of the High Place, and a large pool with water conduits witnesses to impressive architectural expertise. In addition, the city boasted a thriving wine industry during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, with cellars that could house 95,000 liters of wine.<sup>5</sup>

On the biblical landscape, the Gibeonites inhabited a tetrapolis consisting of the towns of Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-Jearim (see Josh. 9:17). The towns of Chephirah and Beeroth are mentioned very rarely in biblical literature. A list from the Persian-Hellenistic period mentions them together with Kiriath-Jearim as several of the places to which Judean exiles returned (Ezra 2:25; Neh. 7:29). Beeroth gets bad press in a passage from the book of Samuel that describes how two men from this town entered the house of Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, and brutally murdered him in the night; when David hears about it, he condemns their deed and commands his servants to execute them (2 Sam. 4).<sup>6</sup>

Kiriath-Jearim is remembered as the place where the ark of Yhwh was domiciled for some twenty years, and recent excavations conducted by Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer have revealed a massive cultic platform at this site. When David centralizes his kingdom, he transfers the palladium to Jerusalem from "the house of Abinadab on the hill" (2 Sam. 6:1–5, 14–15, 16–19). Whereas the text locates this hill in a town called Baale-Judah, another account (1 Sam. 4–7) goes to great lengths to

Stamping Handles") and Andrew Vaughn ("Should All of the LMLK Jars Still Be Attributed to Hezekiah? Yes!") in Zev I. Farber and Jacob L. Wright (eds.), *Archeology and History of Eighth Century Judah* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), available in open access format at [www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9780884143482\\_0A.pdf](http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9780884143482_0A.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> James B. Pritchard, "Gibeon" in Ephraim Stern (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, 4 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993), 2: 511–14; Hanan Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," *Israel Exploration Journal*, 37 (1987), 1–17. On the Gibeon-Bethel plateau, see Finkelstein, *Forgotten Kingdom*, 37–62.

<sup>6</sup> The passage may have originally consisted of only verses 5–12; see the discussion in Wright, *David, King of Israel*, 130–131.

identify Abinadab's house in Kiriath-Jearim and to explain how the ark ended up there: After the Philistines capture it in battle, it wreaks havoc among them, so they send it back to Judah. When it arrives in the town of Beth-Shemesh, it continues to inflict many deaths. Wondering who could "stand/serve before Yhwh, this holy god," the people of the town petition their neighbors in Kiriath-Jearim to take it off their hands. When the citizens of Kiriath-Jearim do so, they station it in "the house of Abinadab on the hill" and consecrate his son to guard it.<sup>7</sup> It remains in the town happily for twenty years (1 Sam. 7:1–2).<sup>8</sup> The claims made in this account of the ark – perhaps representing an older source – would, of course, have pleased the (Gibeonite) inhabitants of Kiriath-Jearim.<sup>9</sup>

With respect to Gibeon, "a massive city, like one of the royal cities" (Josh. 10:2), the biblical texts reflect a range of attitudes. A document in the Nehemiah Memoir commemorates a Gibeonite contribution to the construction of Jerusalem's wall (Neh. 3:7). The book of Chronicles identifies Gibeon as the place where the tabernacle had been erected (1 Chron. 16:39, 21:29, and *passim*). The book also describes a warrior from Gibeon leaving Saul and becoming one of David's elite warriors (1 Chron. 12:4). Two passages link "the father/founder of Gibeon" to the line of Saul (1 Chron. 8:29–40, 9:35–44); the Gibeonites accordingly belong to Saul's extended clan. This is not a good thing, since, in the version of history told in Chronicles, Saul serves as a contemptible foil to the heroic David.<sup>10</sup>

Older texts present a similarly ambivalent image of Gibeon. A chapter in the book of Samuel depicts a bloody battle fought "at the pool of Gibeon" between the warriors of David and Saul after the death of the latter (2 Sam. 2; see also 2 Sam. 20:8). The book of Jeremiah alludes to this battle by locating another deplorable instance of internecine conflict "at the waters of Gibeon" (Jer. 41:12; cf. v. 9). The same book (chap. 28) depicts a Gibeonite prophet named Hananiah, who, as a prominent figure

<sup>7</sup> Cf. "hill of Kiriath[-Jearim]" in Josh. 18:28; and see Nadav Na'aman, "A Hidden Anti-David Polemic in 2 Samuel 6:2" in David S. Vanderhooft and Abraham Winitzer (eds.), *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 321–328.

<sup>8</sup> Chronicles harmonizes the two texts in Samuel (see 1 Chron. 13:5, as well as Josh. 18:28). The difference of opinion as to whether Kiriath-Jearim is located in the tribal territory of Benjamin or Judah may be related to this account of the ark residing there.

<sup>9</sup> On the ark narrative in Samuel, see now Peter Porzig, *Die Lade Jahwes im Alten Testament und in den Texten vom Toten Meer* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> On these texts, and on Saul as a foil to David in Chronicles more generally, see Wright, *David, King of Israel*, chap. 10.

in Jerusalemite society, enjoys the respect of elite (priestly) circles. However, he denies the veracity of Jeremiah's message; consequently, Yhwh sends Jeremiah to curse him, and he dies soon thereafter. The rabbis interpreted this prophet's Gibeonite origins in line with Joshua's curse (see Josh. 9:23).

#### RELATIONSHIP TO JERUSALEM'S TEMPLE

A number of biblical texts bespeak Gibeon's importance as a cultic place, with a long history of royal patronage. We've already considered the ark narrative, which commemorates the respected role played by Kiriath-Jearim. The book of Kings honors Solomon as the one who built the temple in Jerusalem, but it also claims that long before he undertook the building project, he went regularly to Gibeon to sacrifice: "For that was the principal shrine; Solomon had offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar" (1 Kings 3:4).<sup>11</sup>

Another prominent text reflecting Gibeon's cultic significance is 2 Samuel 21, which we examine in greater detail later in this chapter. The story describes a famine and David's attempts to placate Yhwh. When the drought had not relented for three years, the king learns, in an oracle from Yhwh, that the cause was "Saul and his house, because he had incurred bloodguilt by killing Gibeonites." We are not told when Saul committed the atrocities, but one is reminded of the time when he slaughtered the priests at Nob (1 Sam. 21–22).<sup>12</sup> David asks the Gibeonites what he could do for them so that they would "bless the possession of Yhwh." Although this expression may be just a way of describing reconciliation between the Gibeonites and (the rest of) Israel, it may refer to a special priestly prerogative to pronounce a benediction on the people. (The collective blessing of Israel is to be pronounced by the sons of Aaron, according to Numbers 6.) In response to David's inquiry, the Gibeonites ask that they

<sup>11</sup> This account vexed later readers, who expected Solomon to have worshiped solely in Jerusalem: "He loved Yhwh and followed the practices of his father David, yet he sacrificed and offered at the various shrines [on the high places]" (v. 3). The authors of Chronicles corrected this censure. In their account, Solomon visits the shrine in Gibeon because the sacred tabernacle stands there until Jerusalem becomes the final and sole place of sacrifice; Gibeon is thus the direct precursor to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 16:39–43, 21:29; 2 Chron. 1:3, 13).

<sup>12</sup> If Nob is a misspelling of Gob, as widely assumed, then 1 Samuel 21–22 would be yet another illustration of biblical polemics surrounding the Gibeonites. David's priest Abiathar (if not also Ahitub) would have hailed from a Gibeonite guild, according to this narrative thread.

be given seven of Saul's sons, whom they intended to impale "on the mountain before Yhwh," and, with David's assistance, this is exactly what they do. The cultic-ritual character of the slaughter is underscored by the statement that it occurred for the entire span of the barley harvest.

The Gibeonites' cultic connection is reflected elsewhere in the biblical corpus. Thus, the book of Isaiah (28:21) compares Yhwh's might to the hill of Perazim (see 2 Sam. 6:8) and to the valley of Gibeon. Likewise, material from Joshua, also treated later in this chapter, assigns to the Gibeonites tasks at "the house of my god" and "the altar of Yhwh, in the sacred place that he would choose" (Josh. 9:24, 27). Although menial tasks, the responsibility is nevertheless cultic, and as we shall see, there's a very good reason why the authors would have wanted to diminish the nature of their priestly roles. Moreover, the following account of the battle at Gibeon, which is generally agreed to be older, presents Yhwh engaging directly in combat by both hurling stones from heaven and stopping the sun in the sky; the latter aspect reflects the "solarization" of Yhwh, whose wars are commemorated in "the Scroll of Yashar" (Josh. 10:11–14).<sup>13</sup>

All these texts assert a special relationship between Yhwh and the Gibeonites. They claim that Yhwh's ark resided in Kiriath-Jearim for many years; that Solomon sacrificed frequently to Yhwh at Gibeon and had one of his most important divine encounters there; that the Gibeonites appeased the divine wrath at harvest time by slaughtering Saul's son on the "mountain of Yhwh"; and that Yhwh manifested his power at Gibeon in special ways.

On the basis of the material just discussed, one would assume that the Gibeonites were members of Israel. However, two texts in our survey emphatically deny that such is the case. The first appears in the account of David and the ritual slaughter Saul's descendants; the second is the tale of the Gibeonites' first encounter with Israel during the days of Joshua. In what follows, we treat these two closely related texts in tandem.

<sup>13</sup> On the solarization of Yhwh (attested also in the final line of the Song of Deborah, the subject of Part IV), see Joel M. Lemon, *Yhwh's Winged Forms in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2011). Regarding "the Scroll of Yashar" as a work of war commemoration, I am preparing a short piece on the topic to be published with a work of poetry purporting to be the contents of this venerable work. In the meantime, see Kristin De Troyer, "Is This Not Written in the Book of Jashar?" (Joshua 10:13c): References to Extra-Biblical Books in the Bible" in Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelis de Vos (eds.), *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 45–50; Farber, *Images of Joshua*, 116–118.

## FROM JOSHUA TO SAUL

The account of David permitting the Gibeonites to perform a ritual slaughter of Saul's male progeny (2 Sam. 21) begins with a statement about the origins of this population. As most scholars agree, the statement must have originated as a marginal gloss before being incorporated into the introduction. Notice how it's interjected into the narrative; in most modern translations, it is placed in parentheses:

2 So the king [David] called the Gibeonites and said to them:

(Now the Gibeonites are not Israelites; they are instead part of the Amorites. Although the Israelites had sworn to them [protection], Saul attempted to wipe them out in his zeal for the Israelites and Judah.)

3 *David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you . . . ."*

The supplement declares, in the most straightforward terms, that the Gibeonites are Amorites, not Israelites. They lived among the Israelites because the latter had entered a pact with them. However, Saul had violated the pact and sought to wipe out this indigenous population. What motivated his genocidal campaign, the supplement explains, was his xenophobic zeal for his own people. It's noteworthy that Saul, as a Benjaminite from the town of Gibeah, hails from a region that was home to the important Gibeonite sites mentioned earlier in this chapter.<sup>14</sup>

The account of Saul's reign in the book of Samuel pivots on an episode in which Yhwh's prophet commands him to annihilate the vicious Amalekites, both the people and their animals, because they treated Israel most inhospitably at the time of the exodus.<sup>15</sup> Saul, however, defies these battle orders by granting immunity to the Amalekites' king and destroying only the worthless livestock (1 Sam. 15). Consequently, he forfeits his throne to David, who is busy fighting Amalekites when Saul and Jonathan fall dishonorably in a battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (2 Sam. 1:1).

While Saul fails in his campaigns against these and other enemies of Israel, he easily executes eighty-five priests of Yhwh from the town of

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion of the region in William M. Schniedewind, "The Search for Gibeah: Notes on the Historical Geography of Central Benjamin" in Aren Maeir and Pierre de Miroschedji (eds.), *I Will Speak the Riddles of Ancient Times: Archeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, vol. 2 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 711–721.

<sup>15</sup> In Part I, I treat this text and others that relate to the moral expectation of granting hospitality to refugees on the road, and in Part IV, I discuss this text in relation to the Kenites, whom Saul spares from his genocidal program.

Nob/Gob, together with all the inhabitants and animals that live there (1 Sam. 21–22); the connections between this town and the Gibeonites have long been noted.<sup>16</sup> With respect to that pact mentioned in 2 Samuel 22:2, the book of Joshua tells how Israel swore to the Gibeonites that they would permit them to live in their midst (chap. 9). In the context of the wider narrative of Genesis-Kings, the reader should understand the statement “the Israelites had sworn to them [protection]” as a reference to this episode in the book of Joshua.<sup>17</sup>

The Gibeonites are depicted in chapter 9 as a population that joins the nation later. Since neither they nor their ancestors were present at Sinai, they are not members of the covenant and, as in the case of Rahab, have to be grafted in by a secondary pact of protection made directly, and deceitfully, with the nation (rather than with Yhwh). In the case of the Gibeonites, however, the pact fails to provide protection after the nation’s first king seizes power. When Saul embarks on his nationalistic program of genocide, the people fail to stand in his way and enforce the pact of protection made directly with them. Even if that pact was made under false pretenses, it was sworn in the name of Yhwh, and Yhwh is not reluctant to enforce it. He chooses to do so by punishing the land with a famine.

#### AN EARLY MEMORY OF JOSHUA

It seems quite likely that this episode in Joshua 9 was composed secondarily as a prologue to the battle story in the following chapter.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the battle story may be one of the oldest texts within the book, and the event

<sup>16</sup> The rabbis already connected the two stories (see *b. Yebam.* 78b). Whatever the case may be, the supplement in 2 Samuel 21:2 makes Saul’s crime not the vicious persecution of the Gibeonite priests but the violation of a pact that accorded the Gibeonites a protected (albeit inferior) status in Israelite society.

<sup>17</sup> The Joshua passage may have been composed to tell the prehistory of the pact mentioned in 2 Samuel 21:2. However, the concise formulation leaves the reader wondering what exactly “the Israelites had sworn to them.” (Modern translations resolve this discrepancy by adding “to spare them.”) It is also improbable that a scribe responsible for this gloss would have made such a bold assertion, implying, for example, that non-Israelites served as priests at Yhwh’s altar where Solomon worshiped (1 Kings 3:4).

<sup>18</sup> In chapter 9, Joshua and the Israelites consider wiping them out but cannot do so because of their pact. In chapter 10, they come to their aid against a coalition of enemy forces. Not only is the transition unusually abrupt; Israel could have circumvented their pact and still fulfilled the command to destroy the inhabitants of the land by allowing others to do it for them and not coming to their rescue. See Farber, *Images of Joshua*, 86–122; Zev I. Farber and Jacob L. Wright, “The Savior of Gibeon: Reconstructing the Prehistory of the Joshua



itself appears to have been commemorated in an earlier work featuring the wars of Yhwh (see “the Scroll of Yashar” in 10:11). Most of the material in Joshua appears to have been created ad hoc for the exodus-conquest narrative, yet the battle story, when isolated and read independently from its present context, identifies Joshua neither as Moses’s successor nor as the commanding officer who leads Israel across the Jordan. Like Gideon, Jephthah, Saul, and David, the hero is a local warlord who commands his own private army. He saves a beleaguered population thanks to the miraculous intervention of Yhwh; the name Joshua, after all, means “Yhwh saved/saves.”

The story’s substratum depicts a scenario that is strikingly similar to Saul’s rescue of Jabesh-Gilead as portrayed in 1 Samuel 11. In both cases, an enemy first besieges a town; in response, its residents send a message for help; and finally, the hero answers the call and marches up promptly with an army to “save” them. The difference between the accounts is that Saul musters a militia force from Israel’s farmers, while Joshua fights with what seem to be his private corps of professional warriors. In keeping with a typical scenario of martial “saviors” in the ancient world, Joshua just happens to conquer a region as he lends a hand to those in dire straits.<sup>19</sup> By executing five kings who had formed a military coalition against Gibeon, he then extends his territorial claims from their original borders in the central hill country.

The older battle story in chapter 10 does not present a sharp distinction between Israelites and all others (“Canaanites”); in fact, the name “Israel” is found solely in what appears to be a secondary stratum. In contrast, the account of the pact in chapter 9 clearly identifies the Gibeonites as non-Israelites. Specifically, it calls them “Hivites,” linking them to the “seven nations” that Yhwh commands Israel to exterminate in Deuteronomy. If they survived the conquest, it was only through a contemptible act of deceit.<sup>20</sup>

Account” in Christoph Berner and Harald Samuel (eds.), *Book Seams in the Hexateuch I* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 295–310.

<sup>19</sup> See Wright, *David, King of Israel*, 52–53 and 66–74; Farber, *Images of Joshua*, 109–115.

<sup>20</sup> See also Josh. 11:19. Note however the contradiction to 9:1 (the Hivites attack the Hivites!). The identification of the Gibeonites is likely secondary, for the purpose of identifying them as an accursed nation. In “The Sanctuary of the Gibeonites Revisited,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*, 9 (2009), 101–24, Nadav Na’aman attempts to explain how the Gibeonites were actually Hivites, missing the polemic purpose of the identification. I differ with Na’aman on a number of points, most importantly that this text originated in the direct wake of Josiah’s reforms. The text

The battle story also presents the Gibeonites in a positive (or at least neutral) light. The city of Gibeon is described as “a massive city, like one of the royal cities, . . . and all its men were heroes/warriors” (v. 2).<sup>21</sup> Its extraordinary might is suggested further by the large coalition of Canaanite kings that besieges it. In contradistinction to chapter 10, the new account in chapter 9 portrays the Gibeonites as cowardly and duplicitous. When they hear what Joshua did to Jericho and Ai, they devise a scheme to save themselves: Disguised as travelers from a distant country, they send delegates to make a treaty with Israel. They know that Joshua is intent on taking possession of a clearly circumscribed territory and would not target them as enemies if he thinks they come from abroad. Reflecting this rationale, the laws of Deuteronomy demand the annihilation of all who dwell in Canaan, yet permit peace treaties with those who reside afar off (Deut. 20:10–18).<sup>22</sup>

After Joshua makes a pact with the Gibeonites, their true identity comes to light: Instead of voyaging from a foreign land, they turn out to be a Canaanite population residing in Israel’s “midst.” When summoned to give account for their actions, the Gibeonites explain that they feared for their lives since they knew Yhwh had commanded Israel to destroy all the inhabitants of the land. Rather than violating their treaty and assaulting the Gibeonites, as Saul does, Joshua allows them to live in the nation’s midst. But to ensure that they will not occupy a place of honor, he pronounces a curse on them: “Never shall one of you be ‘cut off’ from being a slave – hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my god!” (v. 23).

#### THE COMPOSITION OF JOSHUA 9

The account of the pact in Joshua 9 denigrates the Gibeonites and denies them a primordial connection to the people of Israel. Whereas the true Israelites came out of Egypt during the exodus under Moses, these are

likely originated at a later time, and the polemics against the Gibeonites are only indirectly related to Josiah, if at all.

<sup>21</sup> The earliest iteration of the account in chapter 10 likely began in verse 5, yet portions of verses 1–4 (such as part of v. 2) may have been added at an early stage. These first four verses appear to have been amplified first with Ai, then with Jericho, and finally with the pact between Gibeon and Israel. On compositional issues in Josh. 9–10, see Dozeman, *Joshua 1–12*; Volkmar Fritz, *Das Buch Josua* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> I am not sure if Joshua 10 presupposes specifically Deuteronomy 20:10–18.

indigenous inhabitants of Canaan who managed to weasel their way into the national fold when Israel was already in the land. The account also explains how the Gibeonites came to serve in a cultic capacity: instead of assigning them to an illustrious position at one of the largest shrines in the region (1 Kings 3:4) or to a special role as guardians of the ark of Yhwh (1 Sam. 7 and 2 Sam. 6), Joshua formally condemned them, during their first encounter with Israel, to the most menial of cultic tasks (see Deut. 29:10).

If the Gibeonites were allowed to perform respected priestly roles at an important shrine, the recognition they would enjoy would incite fierce competition with priests in Jerusalem. The latter have left their unmistakable imprimatur on Joshua 9. As we observed in relation to Joshua 22 in Part II, they take the opportunity here to reaffirm to their readers that there was only one place that Yhwh chose for his altar.

Below I present the results of my diachronic analysis of the text. The indented portions belong to the secondary strata, while the earliest edition is in boldface.<sup>23</sup>

### *Reconstruction of Joshua 9*

1 Now when 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 with one accord to fight Joshua and Israel.

**3 When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai,**

**4 they on their part acted with cunning; they went and prepared 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 moldy.

**6 and went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him**

and to the Israelites, “We have come from a far country; so now make a treaty with us.” 7 But the Israelites said to the Hivites, “Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a treaty 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, “Your servants have come from a very far country, because of the name of Yhwh your god; for we have heard a report of him, of all that he did in Egypt, 10 and of all that he did to the two

<sup>23</sup> For the sake of presentation, I have distinguished solely two layers here. Yet, given the number of duplications, it is possible that, in addition to many supplements, we have two independent recensions that have been spliced together. Notice the way that much of the secondary portion of the text deflects attention away from Joshua and is more priestly in orientation. The problem with this solution is that some things are repeated more than twice. On past proposals and their problems, see Dozeman, *Joshua 1–12*, 407–411.

kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, King Sihon of Heshbon, and King Og 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; go to meet them, and say to them, "We are your servants; come now, make a treaty 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, see, it is dry and moldy; 13 these wineskins were new when we filled them, and see, they are burst; and these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey." 14 So the leaders partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the LORD.

15 **And Joshua made peace with them, guaranteeing their lives by a treaty.**

And the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them.

16 **But when three days had passed after they had made a treaty with them, they heard that they were their neighbors and were living among them.**

17 So the Israelites set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-Jearim. 18 But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by Yhwh, 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 Yhwh, the god of Israel, and now we must not touch them. 20 This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath may not come upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them." 21 The leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, as the leaders had decided concerning them.

22 **Joshua summoned them, and said to them, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' while in fact you are living among us?"**

23 Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall always be slaves, hewers 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 Yhwh your god had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; so we were in great fear for our lives because of you, and did this thing. 25 And now we are in your hand: do as it seems good and right in your sight to do to us."**

26 This is what he did for them: he saved them from the Israelites; and they did not kill them.

27 **On that day Joshua made them hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of Yhwh, to continue to this day, in the place that he should choose.**

As a late text placed at an early point in the biblical narrative, Joshua 9 provides a lens through which to read all the subsequent depictions of the Gibeonites. Moreover, it invites the reader to infer that if the Gibeonites had no cultic role before they were assigned to lowly tasks at the altar of Yhwh, then they must have built their renowned shrine and achieved their prominent priestly status after they abandoned their assignments at

Yhwh's one true altar.<sup>24</sup> When read in sequence, this late text contradicts many others related to the Gibeonites. (For example, it would not make sense for Yhwh to appear to Solomon at Gibeon if its shrine were illicit.) But such is the nature of biblical literature: Instead of *deleting* problematic texts, redactors more frequently *added* new texts in an effort to tip the weight of evidence in their favor. And what better place to attack the Gibeonites than right before Israel's first encounter with them during the conquest?

#### FROM SAUL TO DAVID

Having now explored the compositional history of the Joshua 9–10, we can return to our discussion of 2 Samuel 21. We've seen that Joshua does not break his oath after learning that the Gibeonites deceived him. In contrast, Saul goes out of his way to harass the Gibeonites. By doing so, he flouts the protection Joshua originally promised them. It is up to David, as Saul's successor, to make reparations.<sup>25</sup>

An ancient oath provides little protection unless it is guaranteed by effective divine curses. Fortunately, the Gibeonites have a special relationship to Yhwh, and the oath eventually makes itself felt in the form of an enduring famine. After three years of dismal harvests, David finally turns to an oracle to learn what caused it. When he discovers, conveniently, that not he but his predecessor Saul was at fault, he summons the Gibeonite leaders to determine how he could make atonement so that they would “bless the heritage of Yhwh.” The Gibeonites are initially reluctant to request anything, but, with David's prodding, they eventually ask that seven of Saul's male descendants be impaled on a hill at his hometown in Gibeah. David accedes to their request, and the ritual execution is performed “on the mountain before Yhwh” during the first days of the harvest. The act appeases the deity, and the famine ceases thereafter.

<sup>24</sup> This text is by no means an isolated instance of insults hurled from priestly circles in Jerusalem. Indeed, these circles were responsible for a wide array of biblical texts that defend their own status and assail their competitors. See Wright, *David, King of Israel*, chap. 8.

<sup>25</sup> It's tempting to approach the text with a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” as if it were a pro-Davidic apology that exonerates him from his execution of Saul's descendants. But such a reading is actually naive inasmuch as it must assume that the text was written by spin doctors in David's or Solomon's court.

*Reconstruction of Older Account in 2 Samuel 21*

There was a famine during the reign of David, year after year for three years. David inquired of Yhwh, and Yhwh said, "It is because of Saul and the bloodguilt of his house that he incurred by killing the Gibeonites." 2 The king summoned the Gibeonites and said to them:

(Now the Gibeonites are not Israelites; they are instead part of the Amorites. Although the Israelites had sworn to them [protection], Saul attempted to wipe them out in his zeal for the Israelites and Judah.)— 3 David said to the Gibeonites,

3 *David said to the Gibeonites*, "What shall I do for you? How shall I make atonement, so that you will bless the heritage of Yhwh?" 4 The Gibeonites said to him, "We have no claim for silver or gold against Saul and his household, and we have no claim on the life of any other man in Israel." And he said, "Whatever you say I will do for you." 5 And they said to the king, "The man who massacred us and planned to exterminate us, so that we should not survive in all the territory of Israel, 6 let seven men from his descendants be handed over to us, and we will impale them before Yhwh in Gibeah of Saul, 'Yhwh's chosen one.'" And the king replied, "I will do so."

7 The king had pity on Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul, because of the oath before Yhwh between the two, *between David and Jonathan son of Saul*.<sup>26</sup>

8 The king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons that Rizpah daughter of Aiah bore to Saul, and the five sons that Merab daughter of Saul bore to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholahite, 9 and he delivered them to the Gibeonites, who proceeded to impale them on the mountain before Yhwh. All seven of them perished at the same time; they were put to death in the first days of the harvest, *at the beginning of the barley harvest*.<sup>27</sup>

...  
14b The deity heeded the land after this.

This is a highly disturbing episode, and it is placed next to others that are unfavorable to David's memory. Directly preceding it are the accounts of the bloody war that the king wages against Israel, his calamitous return from exile, and an insurrection against his reign. In the immediately following account, David grows weary while fighting the Philistines and

<sup>26</sup> This line in verse 7 about David sparing Mephibosheth is closely related to the interpolation in verse 2b: in contrast to Saul, David was concerned to keep an oath made "before Yhwh." The line may be intended to cast aspersions on the Gibeonites inasmuch as David has pity on a (disabled) member of Saul's family (see the Talmudic text cited in n. 31 below). The appearance of another descendant named Mephibosheth in the immediately following verse reinforces the impression that verse 7 has been interpolated. On this figure, see Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> The explicit reference to "beginning" here in verse 9 anticipates the new scene in which Rizpah guards the corpses during the entire period of the harvest: "from the beginning of the harvest until water was pouring on them from the sky" (v. 10).

is almost killed; his men thereafter swear that he will no longer accompany them in battle. Another passage tells of a census David undertakes that provokes divine judgment on the nation; it ceases only after David builds an altar and sacrifices to Yhwh, who is said to have “heeded the land” (2 Sam. 24:25) – the same expression with which the episode in chapter 21 concludes.

In the context of these critical accounts, our story is to be interpreted not *ad maiorem David gloriam* but as a conscious attempt to cast the nation's iconic ruler in an unfavorable light. As such, it's part of the larger parable of power and statehood unfurled in the book of Samuel.<sup>28</sup> David originally mounts the throne because he's skilled in fending off the nation's enemies, but at this late stage he has become a menace to his own people.

#### RIZPAH'S HEROISM

The critique of David continues in the expansions to the account, which appear to have been undertaken in two stages. The first is one of the most poignant scenes in the Hebrew Bible, portraying a heroic act of protest. The protagonist is Rizpah, the mother of two of the seven victims. For many weeks, she camps in sackcloth on a nearby boulder, shielding the impaled bodies from birds during the day and from animals at night:

Then Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it on the boulder for herself. She stayed there from the beginning of the harvest until water was pouring on the bodies from the sky. She did not let the birds of the sky settle on them by day or the wild beasts [approach] by night. 2 Sam. 21:10

This description of Rizpah's vigil may have been added to the story first. If so, it would have dramatically shifted the interpretation of the final line: “The deity heeded the land after this.” Originally “after this” referred to the ritual slaughter on the mountain of Yhwh, yet with the new scene we are to understand that what appeased the divine ire was a very different move – namely, an act of *honoring* the victims performed by a bereaved mother who seemingly could not do otherwise.

The second part of the continuation originally had nothing to do with this story, yet it makes for a suggestive and powerful resolution to the

<sup>28</sup> According to a dominant approach, this account is an apologia for the house of David, which actually had these men killed. While the account is suggestive in this regard, the approach obfuscates the fact that this account appears in a context of the book that explicitly casts David in an unfavorable light. For more on the critique of statism in the book of Samuel, see Wright, *David, King of Israel*, chaps. 6–7.

bloody drama. The text consists of a short account of how David honors the memories of Saul and Jonathan by reintering their bones in their ancestral tomb (vv. 12–14). To connect it to the story, a scribe added two lines: one that presents David learning of Rizpah's actions (v. 11) and another (v. 13) that presents David gathering the bones of those who had been "impaled" – the same verb as used in the description of the Gibeonites "impaling" the bodies of Saul's descendants.<sup>29</sup>

11 *And it was told to David what Saul's concubine Rizpah daughter of Aiah had done.*

12 David went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-Shan, where the Philistines had hung them up on the day the Philistines killed Saul at Gilboa. 13 He brought up the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan from there, *and he gathered the bones of those who had been impaled.* 14 They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in Zela, in the territory of Benjamin, in the tomb of his father Kish, and they did all that the king commanded . . . 2 Sam. 21:11–14

The episode works as a continuation of the older account in two ways. First, its description of David reintering Saul's and Jonathan's bones on their patrimony makes for a fitting response to Rizpah's protest over the exposed corpses of these men's descendants. Second, it presents the Philistines "hanging" the bodies of Saul and Jonathan at the public square in Beth-Shan, which parallels the Gibeonites "impaling" their descendants.<sup>30</sup>

The new continuations thus turn the originally pro-Gibeonite account on its head. Together with the interpolation in verse 2b, which we discussed at length earlier in this chapter, these supplements make it clear that the Gibeonites do not belong to the people of Israel. They are outsiders and behave like the Philistines, Israel's most loathsome neighbors.

<sup>29</sup> My understanding of the text has much in common with the sensitive analysis of Simeon Chavel, "Compositry and Creativity in 2 Samuel 21:1–14," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 122 (2003), 23–52. Chavel reads all of verses 1–11, together with verse 13b and the second half of verse 14a, as a separate running account. Although this is possible, the reader would be left wondering what "the king had commanded" (v. 14). It seems more likely that the second half of verse 14a is part of the originally separate account in verses 12–14a, and that verse 13b was added to it by the scribe who secondarily integrated it into the Gibeonite account.

<sup>30</sup> In contrast to 1 Samuel 31:11–13, which commemorates the heroism of the Transjordanian town of Jabesh-Gilead, this account maligns the city's memory by claiming that its citizens purloined the bodies of Saul and Jonathan and perhaps didn't even bury them. I treat these conflicting accounts at length in *David, King of Israel*, chap. 5.



The necessary step David takes to bring an end to the famine is not what he does to placate the Gibeonites but rather the benefaction he performs for the house of Saul. From the perspective of the account's three compositional stages, the deity heeds the land not in response to the Gibeonites' ritual slaughter or even the courageous act of Rizpah to honor the dead; what ultimately induces divine favor is rather the honor David pays to the memory of Saul and his son Jonathan. In keeping with the critique of monarchic power being formulated in the wider context, these new expanded versions of the story leave no room for doubt that had it not been for Rizpah's courageous and unrelenting protest, David wouldn't have thought to perform this praiseworthy deed.<sup>31</sup>

#### THE GIBEONITES, RAHAB, AND BIBLICAL WAR COMMEMORATION

Let us now consider how our findings relate to the Rahab story. Both the Gibeonites and Rahab are depicted in the book of Joshua as indigenous outsiders who secure a place "in the midst of Israel." The accounts of both also revolve around the formal declarations they make as they enter the national fold. The Gibeonite delegates begin their address in a manner that bears striking resemblances to Rahab's speech:

<sup>31</sup> On burying or reintering the bones of the dead as an act of piety, see Saul Olyan, "Some Neglected Aspects of Israelite Interment Ideology," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 124 (2005), 601–616; Olyan, "Jehoiakim's Dehumanizing Interment as a Ritual Act of Reclassification," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 133 (2014), 271–279.

In the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Yebam.* 79a), what seems to be an earlier maxim pertaining to Israel's defining characteristics is placed in the mouth of David: The Gibeonites voice their desire to impale seven of Saul's descendants, and David attempts to conciliate them – to no avail. Their unabashed and merciless brutality proves that they are not fit to belong to Israel: "[David] attempted to placate them, but they refused to be placated. Then he said to them: 'This nation [i.e., Israel] is distinguished by three traits: It is merciful, modest and benevolent. [...] Only one who cultivates these three traits qualifies to become a member of this nation.'" The point is that David recognized that the Gibeonites did not have what it takes to belong to the nation. Even so, the king follows through with his agreement and punishes Saul's descendants in order to do justice for this alien population in Israel's midst. The retribution on behalf of marginal groups causes neighboring peoples to admire Israel and want to enter the fold: "Passers-by asked, 'What kind of men are these?' – 'These are royal princes.' 'What wrong did they do?' – 'They laid their hands upon resident aliens.' Then the passers-by declared: 'There is no nation worth joining more than this one. If royal princes are punished so harshly, how much more so common people? And if they did this for resident aliens, how much more so for Israelites?' 150,000 men immediately joined Israel – as it is said, 'Solomon had 70,000 who bore burdens, and 80,000 who were hewers in the hills.'"

Your servants have come from a very far country due to the name of Yhwh your god. We have heard a report of him, of all that he did in Egypt, and of all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, King Sihon of Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth . . . Josh. 9:9–10

Rahab also tells the spies how she heard about the feats of Yhwh against these two formidable foes that inhabited the Transjordan. Yet she not only speaks; she also acts, and does so fearlessly. By risking her life, she merits the special treatment and protection she and her family receive during the Israelite invasion. Conversely, when all the kings of Canaan assemble to fight Israel (9:1–2), the lily-livered Gibeonites do not rally to Israel's side; their only move is an elaborate act of deception, through which they manage to save themselves.

Such tricksterism is admittedly in keeping with the Israelite ethos of survival depicted in many biblical texts.<sup>32</sup> Yet in the case of outsiders (such as Rahab and the Gibeonites), the objective is not simply to secure a place in the national community, but to do so honorably. Only then can a group expect to be embraced fully, rather than merely tolerated. In this respect, the Gibeonites fall far short of the high standard Rahab set through both her words and actions.

The authors of Joshua radically recontextualized one of the oldest accounts in the book – the story of how an indigenous military leader saved Gibeon and thereby established Israel's hegemony in the region (chap. 10). By prefacing this account with the story of the Gibeonites' subterfuge (chap. 9), they transformed the group to indigenous aliens with no primordial connection to the people of Israel. From other biblical texts and archeological evidence, we know that the Gibeonites boasted an honored position as guardians of a prominent shrine. Vilifying their cultic competitors, the Jerusalem-temple circles that composed Joshua 9 tell how Israel's leader, during the foundational wars of conquest, punished the denizens of Gibeon for their shameless chicanery and consigned them to the lowest orders of service in the congregation of Israel and at Yhwh's altar. Thus, in this case, we see how rivalries between clans and cultic professionals provided the impetus for the war commemoration that produced these central texts in the book of Joshua.

The Rahab story is directly related to this literary activity. The biblical scribes used biography and the stories of particular individuals when

<sup>32</sup> Susan Niditch, *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987). On the trickster elements in the stories of Rahab and the Gibeonites, see Dozeman, *Joshua* 1–12.

engaging in war commemoration on behalf of corporate groups and institutions. Yet whereas a figure like Jael, whom we study in Part IV, represents a particular ethnic group (the Kenites), Rahab serves as a foil to the Gibeonites. The authors castigate a prominent group in their society by producing a powerful tale of an outsider; in the process, the outsider becomes an insider while the Gibeonites, who had long been honored members of Israel, are declared to be aliens.

But the Rahab story is not just about Gibeonites. As the archetypal Other, this woman looms across the horizon of the entire biblical corpus, illustrating the most fundamental strategy by which disputed groups could affirm their affiliation to the people of Israel.

In addition to depicting this strategy, the biblical scribes themselves model a means of negotiating belonging. Instead of actual wartime contributions and solidarity, this method is historiographical in nature. It consists of memory-making through the activity of writing and rewriting texts. For these scribes, the account of the greatest moment in Israel's history – when the nation took possession of its Promised Land – offered itself as an ideal framework in which to commemorate the solidarity and sacrifice of some, and the duplicity and deceptions of others.