

Finishing Well

Lesson #16

Nethinim: Given Ones

April 19, 2023

Ezra 2:1-2a, 43 Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, everyone unto his city;

² Which came with Zerubbabel: [Group 1: rebuild temple; 392 nethinim with Zerubbabel]

⁴³The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth,

Ezra 8:1, 20 These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king. Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, 220 Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name. [Group 2: rebuild people & restore worship]

God's Order: Num. 3:9 And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons.

Num. 3:12 The Levites shall be mine

Ezra 8:20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites

Most scholars believe the Gibeonites were later called the Nethinim [given ones] when they were formally given by King David to the Levites to be their servants.

Nethinim = Given; those set apart

- Name given to the hereditary temple servants who were appointed to the menial work of the sanctuary for the Levites
- Mentioned ~18x in Bible: I Chronicles; Ezra & Nehemiah

I Chron. 9:2 Now the first inhabitants that dwelt in their possessions in their cities were the Israelites, the priests, Levites and the Nethinims.

Neh. 11:21 But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel and Ziha and Gispa were over the Nethinims.

- Ophel = high, built-up area; ascend to the southeast side of Temple Mt.
- Nethinim's quarters were close proximity to the Temple, Watergate & Gihon Spring

Background of the Nethinim: Examine their Past

Joshua 9:1-2 Now it came about when all the kings who were beyond the Jordan, in the hill country, the lowland, and on all the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard about it,

² that they met together with one purpose, to fight with Joshua and with Israel.

Consider: These kings had not shown hostility until now.

- The enemies now plan an offensive attack after God had shown Himself strong on behalf of His people.

All the kings of Canaan put aside their differences.

- With a common hatred for the enemy, they unite with a common purpose
 - ❖ to destroy the people of God.
- They did not surrender themselves to Israel nor ask for mercy.

Act 1: Deception Of The Gibeonites To Secure Their Place In Israelite Society

Scene 1: Fear Gives Birth To Deception Joshua 9:3-6

But when the inhabitants of Gibeon [Josh. 10:2 Gibeon was a great city...greater than Ai, and all the men were mighty] heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai,

- The Israelites slaughtered every man, woman and child. They are without mercy.
- Gibeonites realize that opposition to Israel means sure defeat.

they worked craftily and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, [Very thorough in their deceit-even conforming to Israel's peculiar ways by using "donkeys" rather than horses] old wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. And they went to Joshua, to the CAMP AT GILGAL, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us."

Gen. 9:25-27; 10:15-20 The curse of Canaan [one of Noah's grandsons; son of Ham who was cursed] pronounced in Genesis is now coming to fruition in God's judgment on cities of Canaan.

- Gibeon, one of the cities of the Hivites is under threat of God's judgment.

Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23-24; 33:2; 34:11; Deut. 7:1-2; 20:16 confirm Genesis 9's judgment on the peoples of Canaan. At least 7x in Exodus and Deuteronomy Moses lists the Canaanite cities under threat of God's judgment. List in Joshua 9:1-2 repeats those same lists.

Key: The reason the Gibeonites deceive Israel is because of the judgment threatened by Yahweh—a credible threat confirmed by the word of God. Two instances of this threat:

Ex. 23:23-24 "When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and *I blot them out*,²⁴ you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces.

Deut. 7:1-6 God intended ALL of the nations of the Promised Land to be destroyed.

Deut. 7:1-2 "When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you,² and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction.

You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.

Deut. 20:10-18 lists differing rules for cities near and far from Israel.

Deut. 20:10-11, 15 "When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace.¹¹ And if it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and serve you.¹⁵ Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations.

God allows for peace with other nations OUTSIDE the land He is giving Israel as an inheritance.

Deut. 20:16-18 But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, ¹⁷ but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded, ¹⁸ that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God.

- Those far from Israel who seek peace with God's people should be spared from the sword. Become your forced labor and serve you.
- But those near to Israel whose practices of idolatry would lead God's people astray are commanded to be destroyed.

Gibeonites' Knowledge: Somehow, the Gibeonites also knew of this law. As a result, they used it to their advantage to achieve protection from destruction. Their only hope was to convince the Israelites they were from outside of the land of inheritance and were eligible for peace. To make their fictional story appear authentic, they gathered provisions & took worn out sacks on their donkeys and old wineskins, cracked and mended. They wore old, patched sandals on their feet and threadbare clothing on their bodies. Their entire provision of bread was dry and crumbly. Everything about their appearance, their clothes, and even their moldy food gave the appearance that they had been travelling for a long time.

<u>Act 1:</u>	Deception Of The Gibeonites To Secure Their Place In Israelite Society	
<u>Scene 1:</u>	Fear Gives Birth To Deception	Joshua 9:3-6
<u>Scene 2:</u>	Putting Deception Into Action	Joshua 9:7-13

Joshua 9:7a Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, [signifies serpents; deceivers]

Question: Why tell us now the Gibeonites are Hivites?

The Gibeonites are composed of 4 cities from among the Hivites [9:1-2, 7, 17].

Gen. 34: The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father, a "Hivite", "deceitfully."

By using deceit, they succeeded in slaying the Hivites and spoiling their city.

Now, the descendants of those who had so wickedly deceived the Hivites were now being deceived by them!

Joshua 9:7b-13 "Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?"

But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" So they said to him: "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth.

¹¹Therefore, our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying,

'Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We are your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us.'" This bread of ours, we took hot for our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy. And these wineskins which we filled were new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey."

Heard of the great work your God did in delivering you from Egypt and how He gave you victory over the 2 kings of the Amorites. [Rahab put her faith in God.]

Purpose: Ingratiate themselves with Joshua, as though they too desired to come under Jehovah's protection.

Note: They appeared to be deeply impressed by the wonders which God had wrought, and therefore sought friendship with Israel. For this purpose, they had undertaken a very fatiguing journey, which evidenced their willingness to be tributary unto them.

Their story had been carefully thought out. They made reference to their knowledge of what Jehovah had done in Egypt and to the kings of the Amorites,

They were careful to make no mention, of the supernatural crossing of the Jordan, nor of Israel's recent victories at Jericho and Ai. That news would not yet have reached "a very far country"! How far hypocrites will go in order to gain the friendship of God's people.

Act 1: Deception Of The Gibeonites To Secure Their Place In Israelite Society

Scene 1: Fear Gives Birth To Deception Joshua 9:3-6

Scene 2: Putting Deception Into Action Joshua 9:7-13

Scene 3: Why The Enemy Succeeded Joshua 9:14

Joshua 9:14 "Then the Men Of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD." [relied on own judgment > Hivite spirit]

Consider: They were initially skeptical of the Gibeonites. It was carelessness!

They did not follow up on the "red flags" that were going off in their minds.

They walked by sight and not by faith.

Problem: They lowered their defenses and considered the outward appearance as evidence.

Because the Israelites judged by appearances, everything appeared legitimate.

It was doubly inexcusable that Israel was deceived in "the camp at Gilgal." [Joshua 9:6]

- The Ark of the Covenant was here.
- Tabernacle of the priesthood > therefore the place where the mind of the LORD could be obtained if they sought Him in the way He directed.

They knew His will overall, which was to drive the people completely out of the land.

But Israel's leaders failed to check in with God when this decision came before them.

The lingering effects of this failure will be seen in subsequent generations.

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Scene 4: Success Of Deception Joshua 9:15

Joshua 9:15 So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live [showed them mercy]; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

➤ Joshua knows he must first offer peace with those outside of the land.

Joshua 9:16-21 And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them.

¹⁷ And the children of Israel journeyed and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, and Chephirah, and Beeroth, and Kirjathjearim. [Hivite Cities]

¹⁸ And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes. ¹⁹ But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them. ²⁰ This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.

²¹ And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them.

<u>The men of Israel:</u>	Question the Gibeonites	9:7
	Examine the Bread	9:14a
	Fail to consult God	9:14b
<u>The sons of Israel:</u>	Find the hidden cities	9:17
	Refuse to attack them	9:18
<u>Leaders of the Congregation</u>	Swear an oath to the Gibeonites	9:15
	Explain their non-violence to the congregation	9:19-20
	Pronounce a sentence of life on the Gibeonites	9:21
<u>The congregation</u>	Murmurs against the leaders	9:18

Joshua 9:22-23 And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying,

Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us.

²³ Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.

Deut. 29:10-12 = instructions for foreigners brought in as servants to Israel.

¹⁰ "You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, ¹¹ your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water,

¹² so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord your God, which the Lord your God is making with you today . . .

In the context of Moses's covenant renewal with Israel, Moses assigns a place for sojourners to chop wood and haul water.

- When Joshua assigns the Gibeonites to chopping wood and hauling water, he is fulfilling this word from Moses and explaining the covenant relationship between Israel and the Gibeonites.

Joshua 9:24 And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing.

The Gibeonites acted because of what they knew. God had commanded Israel to destroy all the inhabitants of the land. What they knew generated fear in them.

Knowledge and fear are powerful motivators. Their knowledge was power in that it motivated them to action, to do something to prevent or avoid the inevitable destruction they knew was coming. But that knowledge also generated fear.

²⁵ And now, behold, we are in thine hand: as it seems good and right unto thee to do unto us, do.

- Throw themselves on Israel's mercy.
- Acknowledge: Israel is the superior power with the authority to grant justice and mercy.
- This is unconditional surrender, complete dependence on Joshua's grace and truthfulness.

Joshua 9:26-27 And so did he unto them and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. [Joshua, *God is salvation, saves Gibeon from the people.*]

²⁷ And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which He should choose.

- Joshua makes the Gibeonites living sacrifices.

Matthews: God and His voice are not present. Joshua serves as a faithful mediator and the Savior of Gibeon. Josh. 9:26 clearly assigns salvation, deliverance, to Joshua. When standing before the people of Israel who would seek to accuse the Gibeonites, these God-fearers speak to Joshua, even when they were addressed by the congregation. [Joshua 9:8, 24]

The rest of Gibeon's story.

- A. King Saul broke the treaty Joshua had signed. He attacked and killed some Gibeonites.

II Sam. 21:1 Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.

- To appease the Gibeonites and put an end to the famine, 7 descendants of Saul were given to them to be put to death. [II Sam. 21:6]

- B. Gibeon became an important high place in Israel where Solomon offered sacrifices.

- I Chron. 21:28-30; II Chron. 1:2-6

I Kings 3 God met Solomon at Gibeon, where he offered Solomon the chance to ask for anything he desired. Perhaps aware of Israel's failure to consult God with respect to the Gibeonites and clearly cognizant of his newfound position of royal leadership [6-9],

- Solomon asks for wisdom which God gladly grants.

C. There are Gibeonites identified as servants in David's army and at God's house.

I Chron. 12:4 Ishmaiah of Gibeon who is a mighty man for David.

Neh. 3:7 Melatiah the Gibeonite rebuilding the wall.

Note: The Tabernacle stood at High Place of Gibeon during the early days of David and Solomon. Gibeon became a priestly city. [I Chron. 16:39-40; 21:29]

Neh. 7 lists all those who came from Babylon with Zerubbabel

⁶⁰All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were 392.

Ezra 8:20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, 220 Nethinims

Genesis 34:1-31 recounts the last time Israel and the Hivites met.

There are a number of connections between Genesis 34 and Joshua 9. Some of these connections include similarities in covenant-making, deception, and curses turned into blessings.

Note the differences:

In Genesis 34 Shechem, son of Hamor, rapes Dinah, daughter of Jacob.

- When Shechem expresses his longing for Dinah to his father, Hamor attempts to establish a covenant between his people, the Hivites, and Jacob.

Hamor's rationale: Jacob's family would join *their* people and dwell in *their* land [vv. 18-24].

- The emphasis: Israel will join the Hivites.

Two sons of Israel, Levi and Simeon, deceive the Hivites. They tell the men of Shechem: If they circumcise themselves [the visible sign of Israel's covenant] they would enter into covenant with them. However, on the third day, when the men were healing, these two sons came and killed all the men. As a result, no covenant was made.

- We find in Genesis 34 an episode of covenant-making and deception just like Joshua 9. However, the connection most significant for making sense of Joshua 9 is the one related to Levi and Simeon who previously deceived the Hivites.

- After their violence towards Shechem, they would be scattered through the land.

Gen. 49:5-7 Simeon and Levi are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence.

⁶ May my soul not enter into their council; May my glory not be united with their assembly;

For in their anger they killed men, and in their self-will they lamed oxen.

⁷ Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel.

I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them among Israel.

Their curse: They lost their inheritance [their portion] in the land.

- Yet, in time, their curse became a blessing, as God located the tribe of Levi as "priests" at the tabernacle [Deut. 33:8-11].

Something similar occurs with the people of Gibeon. Because of their deceit, they are cursed. However, like the Levites, they become servants in God's house.

God Turns A Curse To A Blessing

Joshua 9:23 "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."

This is a most peculiar curse, as it brings the Gibeonites NEAR to the place of God's dwelling, the location of greatest blessing in Israel.

Instead of seeing how the lies of Gibeon are met with swift punishment, we find that

- God's mercy overshadows their wrongdoing.

Key: The people of Gibeon are not destroyed but given a place of service in God's tabernacle.

- strong indication of God's mercy for people marked out for destruction.

Gibeonites, Nethinim, Serving At The Altar Of Yahweh

Key: To keep the Gibeonites' idolatry from defiling the true faith of Israel, their work would be carried out in the tabernacle, where they would be exposed to the worship of the one true God. Granted their position was at the lowest level of servanthood - woodcutters and water carriers.

- Wood and water are essentials for the daily operations of the sacrifices [Lev. 1:7, 9]
- They participated in the sacrificial worship of the God of Israel by serving at His altar.
- They would naturally acquire the knowledge of the true God.
- They were made to dwell in the courts of the Lord's house with near access to Him in the service of the sanctuary.

Neh. 11:21a But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel...

- Ophel = high, built-up area; ascend to the southeast side of Temple Mt.
- Nethinim's quarters were close proximity to the Temple, Watergate & Gihon Spring

Ps. 84:10-11 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory:

no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.

- Surely, they esteemed their lot a blessing, hard and toilsome and humble as it was.

Ezra 8:20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, 220 Nethinims

- Nethinim = person given, dedicated to the service of the sanctuary & to the Levites

Rod Mattoon: The Gibeonites were liars, deceivers, and under the judgment and wrath of God. Their hope was in a covenant.

Our hope is in God's covenant. We are sinners and go to a greater Joshua, Jesus Christ for deliverance. We are dependent upon His covenant of salvation by grace through faith in Him. Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds. [Treasures From Joshua]

Kenneth Mathews: "Because of their service to the Lord at the tabernacle, they [the Gibeonites] lived at the centerpiece of Israel's unity and worship."

In other words, "by grace those initially outside the covenant are brought near to God."

This was "true redemption for those who otherwise deserved to die." [Mathews, Joshua, 84].