

Joshua 9:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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's assignment of the Gibeonites to menial service created a lasting memorial to both God's judgment on Canaanite deception and His providential redemption of those who sought refuge with Israel. The tasks—"hewers of wood and drawers of water"—represent the lowest forms of labor, fulfilling Noah's curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:25-27) that Canaanites would be "servants of servants." Yet significantly, their service was directed toward sacred purposes: "for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD."

The dual assignment—serving both the congregation and the altar—placed the Gibeonites in proximity to Israel's worship life. Unlike the exterminated Canaanites, the Gibeonites were preserved and brought near to the sanctuary, albeit in subordinate roles. This arrangement typologically anticipates the New Testament truth that Gentiles, once "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Ephesians 2:12), would be brought near through Christ's blood. The Gibeonites' status as protected servants parallels how believers serve as God's household servants with secure position in His presence.

The phrase "even unto this day" indicates the author wrote after these

arrangements had existed for considerable time, during which the Gibeonites faithfully served. Their loyalty was later proven when they sided with David during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 21) and suffered persecution under Saul. The Gibeonites model how God transforms desperate deception into devoted service, how those seeking refuge under seemingly false pretenses can find genuine incorporation into God's purposes—a picture of sovereign grace.

Historical Context

The social structure of "hewers of wood and drawers of water" appears throughout ancient Near Eastern texts as designation for lowest social class—typically war captives, indentured servants, or those bound to manual labor. In Israel's case, these tasks served the sanctuary's practical needs: wood for sacrificial fires and water for ceremonial washing. Archaeological evidence from tabernacle/temple sites confirms enormous consumption of wood and water for daily sacrifices.

The phrase "in the place which he should choose" (verse 27) refers to the future central sanctuary, fulfilled when David brought the ark to Jerusalem and Solomon built the temple. This forward-looking reference indicates that Joshua anticipated the Mosaic promise of a chosen dwelling place for God's name (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11). The Gibeonites would serve at this central sanctuary, placing them at the very heart of Israel's worship life.

Later biblical references confirm the Gibeonites' ongoing role. During Ezra's return from exile, "Nethinim" (temple servants, likely including Gibeonite descendants) are listed among the returnees (Ezra 2:43-58; 8:20). The designation "Nethinim" (nethunim, נְתֻנִים, "given ones") indicates they were "given" to serve the Levites, possibly tracing back to this Gibeonite arrangement. This demonstrates how an act of deception, met with both judgment (servitude) and mercy (preservation), became integrated into Israel's long-term religious structure.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's transformation of the Gibeonites from deceivers to devoted servants illustrate His sovereign grace in redeeming the unlikely and unworthy?
2. What does the Gibeonites' service at the altar teach about how even humble, behind-the-scenes ministry contributes to God's worship?
3. In what ways does the Gibeonites' story prefigure the inclusion of Gentiles in the New Testament church?

Interlinear Text

וַתַּיְמַן	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	הִי	וְאֵלֶּה	חֹטְבֵי יָ	עֵצֵי יָם
made	And Joshua	even unto this day	H1931	hewers	of wood
H5414	H3091	H3117		H2404	H6086
וְשֵׁי אֲבִי	מֵי מַיִם	לְעֵדָה	וּלְמִזְבֵּחַ	יְהוָה	עַד
and drawers	of water	for the congregation	and for the altar	of the LORD	H5704
H7579	H4325	H5712	H4196	H3068	
הִי	הִנֵּה	אֵל	הַמָּקוֹם	אֲשֶׁר	יִבְחָר:
even unto this day	H2088	H413	in the place	H834	which he should choose
H3117			H4725		H977

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 12:5 (References Lord): But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:
