

GIBEON

Gibeon, an important city, was one of the four cities belonging to the Hivites (Josh. 9:7, 17). It was located in the hill country about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. This was a strategic location nearby the major route running north and south through the middle of the land of Canaan.

By their famous ruse, the Gibeonites escaped the destruction experienced by the inhabitants of Jericho and Ai, the first two cities taken in the conquest of Canaan. A delegation from Gibeon went to Joshua and the Israelites at Gilgal, pretending to have taken a long journey from a far country. They said that they had heard of the marvelous deeds that the Lord had performed for Israel in Egypt and the Transjordan. Failing to consult the Lord and to recognize the truth of the matter, Joshua made a peace treaty with them (Josh. 9:3-15). Due to this treaty, the lives of the Gibeonites were spared. However, they became the servants of the Israelites as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of the Lord (Josh. 9:23). When the city of Gibeon was attacked by other Canaanite cities, Joshua and the Israelites came to their defense (Josh. 10:5-11). It was that battle in which Joshua prayed that the sun would “stand still over Gibeon,” and it did (Josh. 10:12-14). The territory where Gibeon was located was later allotted to the tribe of Benjamin after the completion of the conquest (Josh. 18:21, 25).

In later Israelite history, each of the three rulers of the United Kingdom had some dealings with Gibeon.

(1) Although not recorded in the narratives about Saul’s reign, we find out later that he slaughtered some of the Gibeonites, breaking the treaty made by Joshua. Because of this sin, the Lord punished Israel with a famine during David’s reign (2 Sam. 21:1-2).

(2) David asked the Gibeonites how the Israelites could make atonement for Saul’s treachery. The Gibeonites requested to avenge Saul’s actions by impaling seven of Saul’s male descendants, and David granted their request (2 Sam. 21:3–9). In addition, Gibeon was the scene of a contest between twelve soldiers of Abner (Ish-Bosheth’s commander) and twelve soldiers of Joab (David’s commander). The opposing forces sat around the pool at Gibeon, and there the young men engaged in hand-to-hand combat (2 Sam. 2:12-16).

(3) Gibeon is the site where the tabernacle was set up during the reign of Solomon. Prior to the completion of the temple, Solomon visited Gibeon in order to offer sacrifices to the Lord at the tabernacle. While he was staying there, he had a vision in which he asked God for the gift of wisdom (1 Kings 3:4-15; 2 Chron. 1:1-13).

Biblical Gibeon was located at the site of the modern-day Arab village known as el-Jib.

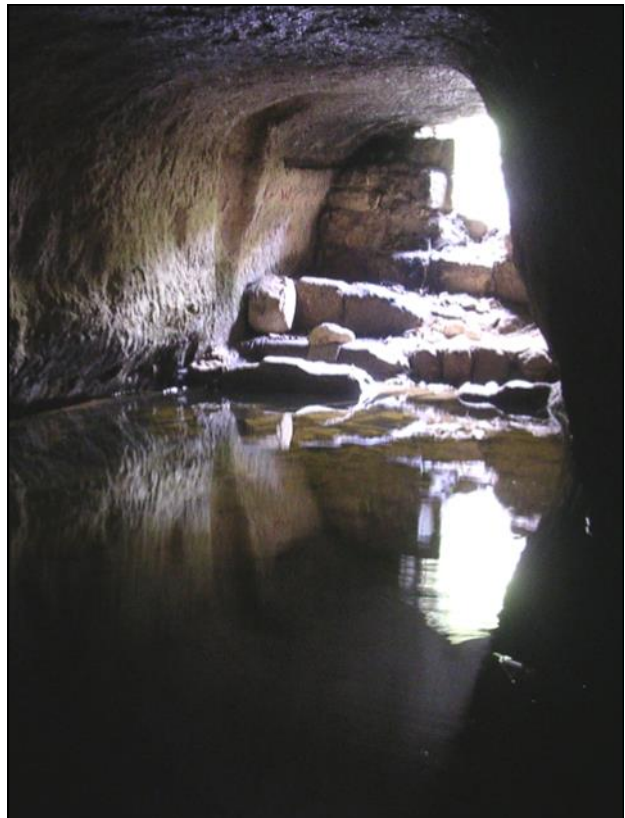
Significant archaeological work has been undertaken in this area. The pool where the soldiers of Ish-Bosheth and David fought in hand-to-hand combat has been excavated. (See the illustration of such combat in Hoerth, 265.) The pool measures 37 feet in diameter and is 82 feet deep. A circular staircase of 79 steps cut out of rock descends into the pool. In addition, Gibeon also had a sloping water tunnel (similar to those at Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer) that would bring fresh water into the city. The abundance of fresh water made Gibeon a strategic city in biblical times, enabling it to endure a siege.



The Pool at Gibeon (2 Sam. 2:12-16)



Entrance to the Water Tunnel



Inside the Water Tunnel

Other finds are also of interest. Numerous jar handles were discovered with the name Gibeon etched into them in ancient Hebrew, confirming the identification of the site. Wine cellars from the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. have also been excavated. More than 60 of these have been found in the area; they had the capacity to store about 25,000 gallons of wine. Some wine vats were found there as well.



Wine Cellars