

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHAPTER I

## GIBEON AND ITS CITIES

Since a study of the role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the history of Israel from the Settlement to Solomon has to rely almost exclusively on what has been preserved in the Old Testament we could do no better than begin with a survey of this material. The list of four Gibeonite cities with which Israel entered into treaty-relationship (Joshua ix. 17) warns us that such a study cannot be confined to the city of Gibeon. The gentile occurs in the plural only in the account of the ritual execution of the Saulites (2 Sam. xxi. 1–14) where it refers, in all probability, to the inhabitants of some if not all of the four cities. Elsewhere individuals from the city of Gibeon are mentioned: Ishmaiah (1 Chron. xii. 4), Hananiah ben-Azzur a prophet (Jer. xxviii. 1), Melatiah (Neh. iii. 7). These represent a type of name which appears to have been common at Gibeon during the divided monarchy since several of the same formation have turned up in the excavation of el-Jib, including two Hananiahs.<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 37 (= 1 Chron. xi. 39) refers to a Beerothite named Naharai who was the armour-bearer of Joab and one of the Thirty, David's *corps d'élite*. The two assassins of Ishbaal, Baanah and Rechab sons of Rimmon (2 Sam. iv. 2), also came from the same city. We may recall, finally, that the martyr-prophet Uriah ben-Shemaiah, a contemporary of Jeremiah (Jer. xxvi. 20), was a native of Kiriath-jearim, the fourth of the Gibeonite cities.

The place-name *gib'on* occurs some forty times in M.T., covering the period from the treaty to the exile and beyond. It is the first mentioned of the four with whose inhabitants the treaty was made and is described as 'a great city, like one of the royal cities', greater than Ai and renowned for its warriors (Joshua x. 2). It features in the Benjaminite city-list (Joshua xviii. 25) and was one of the Levitical cities allocated to the descendants of Aaron (Joshua xxi. 17). The execution of the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ISRAEL

descendants of Saul handed over to the Gibeonites by David is described as taking place 'at Gibeon on the mountain of the Lord' (2 Sam. xxi.6).<sup>2</sup> Other fateful events which took place at Gibeon during the same reign were the meeting between Abner and Joab and the ensuing hostilities (2 Sam. ii. 12–24),<sup>3</sup> the assassination of Amasa (iii.30; xx.8) and David's final victory over the Philistines (v.25; cf. 1 Chron. xiv.16).<sup>4</sup> Solomon visited the Gibeon sanctuary at the beginning of his reign and it was here, at 'the great high place', that he was favoured with an oracle of good augury (1 Kings iii.4–5; ix.2; cf. 2 Chron. i.3, 13). It was by 'the great pool which is in Gibeon' that Johanan came upon the assassins of Gedaliah (Jer. xli. 12, 16), and we learn from Neh. vii. 25 that Gibeonites were among those who returned from exile in Babylon. Finally, we should mention the important role of Gibeon in the Chronicler's cultic history (1 Chron. xvi.39; xxi.29) and the topographical genealogies towards the beginning of his work (viii.29; ix.35).

A glance at this rapid survey reveals a rather strange fact which might seem to call for explanation. Gibeon is first mentioned in the account of the treaty shortly after the Settlement and thereafter during the early part of David's reign and that of his successor down to the building of the temple. During the long period of the Judges and the reign of Saul, however, there is not a single occurrence of the name in M.T., despite the fact that it is precisely at this time that we would expect this 'great city' and 'great high place' to have played a significant role in the political and religious history of Israel. This gap in the historical tradition has focussed attention on the frequent textual confusion between *gib'on* and similar forms, notably the place-names *gib'ah* and *geba'* and the substantive *gib'ah* (hill), with or without the article. Both of the place-names occur in Benjamin within whose boundaries Gibeon also was located. Benjaminites Gibeah is variously described as 'Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin' (Judges xix.14; xx.4), 'Gibeah of Benjamin' (1 Sam. xiii.2, 15; xiv.16), 'Gibeah of Saul' (1 Sam. xi.4; xv.34; 2 Sam. xxi.6)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ITS CITIES

or simply Gibeah. From the context, the ‘Gibeah of Elohim’ of 1 Sam. x. 5 must be identical with the Gibeah of x. 10 since it was there that Saul was to meet, and did meet, the band of prophets. It is by no means certain, however, that the place referred to is Saul’s city since we could, with equal probability, translate ‘the hill of God’ or ‘the most high hill’, thus leaving its precise location open. While there are very few cases, perhaps only two,<sup>5</sup> where we are obliged to emend M.T. to *gib’ôn* on purely textual grounds, the silence of the tradition about Gibeon during this crucial period (Judges and Saul) has tempted many scholars to suppose that, in some instances at least, *haggib’ah* has either replaced *gib’ôn* or refers indirectly to it.<sup>6</sup> We shall have to evaluate these hypotheses in the course of this study.

Neither the place-name nor the gentilic occurs in any non-biblical text from the period under consideration. Gibeon is mentioned in a city-list from the time of Sheshonk I (945–924 B.C.) on the wall of the Amun temple at Karnak commemorating his invasion of Palestine, an event referred to in 1 Kings xiv. 25.<sup>7</sup> Some thirty jar handles bearing the inscription *g b ‘ n* in the Phoenician lettering have been recovered from the site of el-Jîb, but these come from a period somewhere between the beginning of the seventh century and the Exile.<sup>8</sup>

We must now turn to the location of the Gibeonite cities listed in Joshua ix. 17. We can conclude from the texts referred to earlier that Gibeon was in Benjamin (Joshua xviii. 25), not more than a night’s march from Gilgal near the Jordan (Joshua x. 9; cf. ix. 6–7, 16) and not too distant from the Philistine area (2 Sam. v. 25, LXX). Noth deduces from 2 Sam. xx. 8 that it must have lain on the main road north from Jerusalem, assuming that Abishai and Joab were heading due north to deal with the rebellion of Sheba and that the encounter with Amasa at Gibeon was fortuitous.<sup>9</sup> But in view of the fact that the city seems to have been favoured as a meeting place (cf. 2 Sam. ii. 12ff.; Jer. xli. 12, 16), it is equally possible that the encounter was pre-arranged for reasons not stated in the text. The Sheshonk list just referred to, in which we have the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ISRAEL

earliest non-biblical reference to the city, cannot be used with any confidence to determine the precise location of Gibeon. The cities are not listed necessarily in the topographical order of the Pharaoh's victorious progress northward and, in any case, the identification of at least two key place-names is uncertain.<sup>10</sup>

Later Jewish tradition is interested in Gibeon as one of the three loci of the Tent, and therefore of the *Shekinah*, before the building of the Temple. It does not, however, provide any help towards identifying the site. Josephus informs us that during the Civil War Cestius pitched his camp at Gibeon which was fifty (or perhaps forty) stadia from Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> This would certainly be consistent with a location at el-Jîb and is confirmed by the evident strategic importance of Nebi Samwil about a mile away.<sup>12</sup> The *Onomasticon* of Eusebius places Gibeon on the road leading north out of Jerusalem, which led Alt to identify it first with Tell en-Naşbeh and later, when this was ruled out by Badè's excavations at that site, with el-Bireh.<sup>13</sup> But not only is the interpretation of the *Onomasticon* uncertain at this point – Abel has argued against Alt that it is reconcilable with Josephus<sup>14</sup> – it also conflicts with other texts from the early Christian period which favour el-Jîb or Nebi Samwil. Jerome has preserved a statement of Paula to the effect that she saw Gibeon on her right as she was going up to Jerusalem, which would be consistent with a location at el-Jîb. Epiphanius refers to a summit which he calls ἡ Γαββαων, about eight miles from Jerusalem, the only one which could vie with the Mount of Olives in height.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that Nebi Samwil was known locally as Gibeon in the fourth century.

The accounts of pilgrims from about the fourth century to early modern times do not provide reliable guidance since it is uncertain to what extent, if at all, they rely on traditions independent of particular interpretations of the biblical material. Some of these accounts, such as the *Liber de Locis Sacris* of Peter the Deacon, betray in addition a rather confused knowledge of the relevant Old Testament texts.<sup>16</sup> We may add

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ITS CITIES

that attempts to locate one or other of the Gibeonite cities on the basis of the Madaba mosaic map bring us no closer to a solution.<sup>17</sup>

That controversy has raged for practically a century over the identification of Gibeon, there being at least three claimants among modern sites (el-Jîb, el-Bireh, Tell en-Naşbeh), suggests that no clear and unanimous tradition has survived from the early Christian period. Visitors to Palestine in the early modern period tended to opt for either el-Jîb or Nebi Samwil (as Franz Ferdinand von Troilo in 1666 and Richard Pococke in 1738) but it was not until the historic visit of Edward Robinson in 1838 that this identification was supported with arguments.<sup>18</sup> Robinson spent only forty minutes at the site of el-Jîb on 8 May of that year and had probably reached this conclusion before setting out, mainly on the basis of the similarity between the ancient and modern place-names. We should note however that this argument is not without its difficulties, principally because of the absence of *‘ayin* in the Arabic name and the long *i* in *j i b*.<sup>19</sup> At any rate, the claim of el-Jîb was widely accepted by scholars with an excellent knowledge of Palestinian topography even before the excavation of the site by J. B. Pritchard. As the results of the excavations began to come in, others who had been doubtful (Noth and Albright in particular) also accepted this identification.<sup>20</sup>

During the five seasons between 1956 and 1962 Professor Pritchard and his colleagues uncovered epigraphical evidence of names connected with Gibeon and some thirty jar handles bearing the inscription *g b ‘ n* in circumstances which strongly suggested that they were original to the site. *ḥ n n y h w* on one of the handles corresponds to the name of the Gibeonite prophet in Jer. xxviii. 1. *n r*’ which occurs several times and which is, as Pritchard suggests, probably hypocoristic, is identical with the Neriah of Jer. xxxvi. 32 and may be compared with Ner in the Gibeonite ‘genealogy’ of the Chronicler (1 Chron. viii. 33; ix. 36). Pritchard suggests that the puzzling *g d r* in the frequently recurring *g b ‘ n g d r* refers to the place-name Gederah (1 Chron. xii. 5) probably to be identified with

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ISRAEL

Jedireh about half a mile north-east of el-Jîb.<sup>21</sup> That the jars originated at el-Jîb is established beyond reasonable doubt by the presence of stoppers and funnels which fit them, suggesting that the bottling was done at this 'Bordeaux of Palestine'.<sup>22</sup> In short, it may be maintained that the identification has been established beyond reasonable doubt.

Apart from positively identifying the site, the excavations at el-Jîb have given us disappointingly little information for the period corresponding to the end of Late Bronze and Iron I. The main problem is the absence of any significant evidence for the 'great city' which the biblical evidence would lead us to suppose existed towards the end of Late Bronze. Perhaps the site of the Late Bronze city lies elsewhere on the tell, only a relatively small area of which was excavated. What little evidence there is suggests that the city may have been enlarged and possibly resettled about this time. Pritchard dates the first city wall not later than ca. 1200 B.C. and the first stage of the vast hydraulic works may have been carried through about the same time.<sup>23</sup> Albright claims that this absence of evidence favours the view that Gibeon was an insignificant settlement attached to Jerusalem,<sup>24</sup> a possibility which we will examine at a later stage. Until we know definitely whether a Late Bronze city existed on the site, it will be unwise to make too much of *argumenta e silentio*.

The strategic importance of Gibeon, amply attested in the biblical record, is due not just to its high elevation and its situation on a major route from the Central Highlands to the Coastal Plain but to the abundance of its water supply. Jer. xli. 12 speaks of 'the great waters which are in Gibeon' and 2 Sam. ii. 13 more specifically of 'the pool (*b'rēkâh*) of Gibeon'. This can no longer be identified with the reservoir north-east of the tell which dates from the Roman period. Pritchard tentatively identifies it with the great cylindrical cistern eighty-two feet deep discovered and cleared in 1956–7.<sup>25</sup> It might, however, be objected that this could hardly be called a *b'rēkâh* and in any case it is inside the wall, whereas the single combat in 2 Sam. ii. 13–16 must have taken place outside the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ITS CITIES

city limits, a conclusion suggested strongly by the name of the site, *ḥelqaṭ ḥaššūrīm*.<sup>26</sup>

‘The great stone which is in Gibeon’ (2 Sam. xx.8) has sometimes been identified with the altar upon which Solomon offered sacrifices as recorded in 1 Kings iii.4.<sup>27</sup> While this is hypothetical, it may find support in the reference to ‘the great stone’ set up by Saul after his victory over the Philistines. This constituted the first altar erected by him to Yahweh and was certainly in the Gibeonite region (1 Sam. xiv.33–5; cf. v.31). That the excavations have revealed no trace of a sanctuary or altar does not, of course, prove that the Gibeonites worshipped on Nebi Samwil but it would be in accord with this hypothesis. If, as will be proposed later, some Gibeonites served as cultic personnel at the Gibeonite high place, the appropriateness of the description ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ would, on the basis of this hypothesis, be beyond question. Nebi Samwil lies about a mile south of el-Jīb with an elevation above sea level of some 2,835 feet, more than 492 feet higher than el-Jīb. This would already suggest that this, the most imposing elevation north-west of Jerusalem, must have seemed an ideal site for religious worship. If any site in that part of Palestine may be described as ‘the mountain’ (2 Sam. xxi.9), ‘the hill’ (1 Sam. vii.1; 2 Sam. vi.3), or ‘the great high place’ (1 Kings iii.4) it would surely be Nebi Samwil.<sup>28</sup>

The second in the list of Gibeonite cities is Chephirah, also mentioned in connection with the list of repatriated Judahites after the Exile (Ezra ii.25 = Neh. vii.29). It too is attributed to Benjamin (Joshua xviii.26) and is generally identified with Tell Kefîreh less than five miles west of el-Jīb and north-north-west of Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> Two of the Amarna letters were written by a certain Ba‘alat-neše (*belit neše*) from somewhere north of Jerusalem in the vicinity of *a-ia-lu-na* (Aijalon) and *ša-ar-ḥa* (probably Sar‘a near Beth-shemesh);<sup>30</sup> and it has been suggested that this ‘lady of the lions’ wrote from the biblical city of Chephirah since *neše* (ideographically UR-MAḤ-MEŠ) corresponds to *k\*ḫīrīm*.<sup>31</sup> If this is correct, we have here the only occurrence of any of the Gibeonite cities in the Amarna letters.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ISRAEL

Beeroth ('Wells'), third in the list, is also Benjaminite (Joshua xviii. 25) and according to Ezra ii. 25 = Neh. vii. 29 was repopulated after the Exile. It is probably identical with the Berea of the Maccabean period (1 Macc. ix. 4). Neither the biblical texts nor the reference to this city in the *Onomasticon* help us in locating it and its identification cannot be solved apart from the long-standing controversy about Gibeon and Mizpah. Earlier identification with either el-Jīb or Tell en-Naşbeh has had to be abandoned after the excavations carried out by Pritchard and Badè respectively.<sup>32</sup> Kallai-Kleinmann places it at Nebi Samwil but this does not take account of the peculiar relations between this site and neighbouring el-Jīb.<sup>33</sup> From the time of Robinson, el-Bireh (more precisely, nearby Raš eṭ-Ṭahūne) has been the favourite claimant.<sup>34</sup> This site, about ten miles north of Jerusalem, is consistent with the biblical references, finds support in onomastic similarity (though this in itself is not enough) and has achieved a greater degree of probability with the elimination of its principal rivals.

We saw earlier that the Benjaminite Rimmon, father of Baanah and Rechab who assassinated Ishbaal, came from Beeroth (2 Sam. iv. 2ff.). Following on this information the writer, or perhaps a later glossator, deemed it useful to add that Beeroth was a Benjaminite city and that its inhabitants fled to Gittaim where they were *gērîm* up to the time of writing. The situation of the city to which they fled continues to cause difficulty. The name occurs only here and in Neh. xi. 33 where it is listed as Benjaminite. But Gittaim is the dual form of Gath, and in 1 Chron. vii. 21 and viii. 13 a Gath is mentioned which can only with great difficulty be identified with the well known Philistine city.<sup>35</sup> It would be reasonable therefore to advance the hypothesis that this Gath is identical with the Gittaim of 2 Sam. iv. 3.<sup>36</sup> The question would then arise whether this Gath-Gittaim occurs elsewhere and whether, in particular, it may be identified with the Gath where Obed-edom lived in whose house the ark was left before its definitive transfer to Jerusalem (2 Sam. vi. 10). This in its turn would



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ITS CITIES

lead to the interesting possibility that Obed-edom may have been of the Beerothite Gibeonites who fled to Gittaim and was still there in the early years of David's reign.<sup>37</sup> This, of course, can only be suggested, not proved. But it is at least more likely that he was a Gibeonite rather than a Philistine since, having just taken the ark from Philistine control (2 Sam. vi. 1ff. following directly on v. 25), it is highly unlikely that David would have given it back into the charge of a Philistine, even a holy Philistine. We must recall that the ark had just been removed from a Gibeonite city.

The note in 2 Sam. iv. 2*b* gives no reason for the flight of the Beerothites, but in view of the fact that Beeroth was a Gibeonite city we may suggest that it was occasioned by the hostile action of Saul against this alien ethnic group. Evidence of such action against Gibeonites is found in 2 Sam. xxi. 2, also in the form of an explanatory note, and may be suggested also for the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, as we shall see.

The last in the Gibeonite list and first in the post-exilic list is Kiriath-jearim.<sup>38</sup> The first problem which calls for discussion in connection with this city arises from the fact that it is the only one which is attributed to both Benjamin (Joshua xviii. 28) and Judah (xv. 16) and is located on the boundary of both tribes (xviii. 14; xv. 9). The position of Kiriath-jearim in the tribal boundary descriptions is particularly significant. A comparison between the two boundary lists (Joshua xv. 5–9 and xviii. 15–20), which are practically identical though in inverse order, will reveal the crucially important situation of this city. Not only does the Judahite–Benjaminite boundary *end* at Kiriath-jearim (Joshua xviii. 14); it also forms the nodal point between the tribal territories of Judah, Benjamin and Dan, all of which are concerned in the movements of the ark prior to its 'translation' to Jerusalem. More specifically, the three stages of the ark's movement after its capture by the Philistines occur in inverse order in the Judah boundary list (Kiriath-jearim, Beth-shemesh, Ekron, Joshua xv. 9*b*–11*a*), hence, by implication, in the direct order of the Benjaminite boundary list. This fact, which has so far gone unnoticed, may

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11541-4 - Gibeon and Israel: The Role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Political and Religious History of Early Israel

Joseph Blenkinsopp

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GIBEON AND ISRAEL

well provide an important clue to the interpretation of the early ark-narratives in 1–2 Sam.

It will be noticed that in the lists Kiriath-jearim is identified with Baalah (Joshua xv.9) or Kiriath-baal (xv.60; xviii.14) with which we may compare *ba'alē y'hūdāh* in 2 Sam. vi.2, interpreted by many as the point from which David set out in taking the ark to Jerusalem. In the parallel narrative of the Chronicler (1 Chron. xiii.6) this point is described as 'Baalah, that is, Kiriath-jearim which belongs to Judah', which appears to be a conflation of Joshua xv.9b and xviii.14. This would seem to lead to the conclusion that Kiriath-jearim was earlier known as Baalah, or some similar form, and that it first acquired its new name when it passed into Judahite hands.<sup>39</sup> Against this view, however, we should note that *qiryat-* is a genuinely ancient form found in Syria and Palestine from at least Middle Bronze, *q r t* occurring more than once in Ugaritic and Punic texts.<sup>40</sup> We may add that the former names of Hebron and Debir were, respectively, Kiriath-arba (Joshua iv.15) and Kiriath-sepher (Joshua xv.15).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the occurrence of both Mount Jearim and Mount Baalah in this section of the Judahite boundary description (Joshua xv.10–11) would rather suggest that Kiriath-jearim and Baalah were topographically distinct and that therefore the hybrid form Kiriath-baal was formed at a later redactional stage. We shall also see in a later chapter that it is not necessary and perhaps not even legitimate to interpret *ba'alē y'hūdāh* of 2 Sam. vi.2 as a place-name.

The only consensus which has so far emerged from the discussion of the date to be assigned to the city-lists is that they derive, in all probability, from an administrative measure carried out some time during the divided monarchy; but whether the monarch in question was Josiah (Alt), Hezekiah (Kallai-Kleinmann), Uzziah (Aharoni), Jehoshaphat (Cross and Wright) or some other appears to be still an open question.<sup>42</sup> In the Judahite list Kiriath-baal (Kiriath-jearim) and Rabbah form a unit by themselves. Rabbah is probably to be identified with *rubute* of the cuneiform inscriptions and *r bt* of