

77—FROM A VERY FAR COUNTRY

(Joshua 9)

As the children of Israel remained encamped at Gilgal, preparing for their campaign through the country, their fame spread throughout the land. The peoples of the land began to be concerned about what Israel might do to them. And to address these concerns, they began to combine their armies into one great united force.

Fearing that Israel's objective was to destroy all of the peoples of the land, the men of the city of Gibeon devised a plan they thought might deceive the children of Israel and preserve their own lives. Dressing themselves in old clothing and worn-out shoes, they took old bottles and dry and moldy bread, then loaded their beasts with old empty sacks and went as a caravan to Israel's camp at Gilgal. They looked—from all appearances—as if they had traveled a considerable distance.

"We have come from a far country," they told Joshua and the princes of Israel, "and are here to make a league with you that we might be your servants."

"Where are you from?" asked Joshua.

In order to carry out their deception, the men avoided specifics. "We have come from a very far country," they said, "because of the name of Jehovah, your God. We have heard of his fame and all he did in Egypt, and have also heard what he did to the Amorites.

"The people of our country have sent us to meet you and to be your servants. This bread, which you now see dry and moldy before you, we took hot from our houses. These bottles of wine, which are now old

and torn, were new when we left home. Our clothes and shoes are now old and worn from this long journey." The story was well dramatized and very convincing.

Joshua was so convinced of the truth of these men's story that he did not seek Jehovah's counsel concerning them. He made peace with the men of Gibeon and gave them food. He also made an agreement with them to let them live, and the princes of Israel swore a covenant.

Three days later the children of Israel learned the truth. These "road-weary" travelers were their neighbors from Gibeon, living just three days' journey from Gilgal. Upon making this discovery, the army of Israel journeyed to their cities—Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim—but they did not attack the cities because of their agreement and the covenant they had made. And all the congregation of Israel murmured against the princes who had sworn a covenant not to destroy these people.

"Because we have sworn to them by Jehovah, the God of Israel," said the princes, "we cannot touch them or the wrath of God will be upon us. However, we will make them our bondsmen. They will chop wood and draw water for the congregation of Israel forever. Not one of them shall be freed."

The people of Gibeon explained to Joshua what they had done and why they did it. "We have done this thing," they said, "because we were told how Jehovah commanded Moses to give this land to the children of Israel and to destroy all the peoples of the land. We were afraid for our lives."

So Joshua made the Gibeonites servants to the children of Israel.¹

¹ Many years later, during the reign of King Saul in Israel, many of the Gibeonites were slain. Story "124—Rizpah's Faithful Vigil" tells the consequences of King Saul's action as Israel experienced them during the reign of King David.