

A wine jar handle with the archaic Hebrew letters GB<sup>c</sup>N provided the link between the narratives about Gibeon in the Bible and the ruins at el-Jib. The reading is from right to left: following the word Gibeon is GDR, "vineyard of . . ."



## The Bible Reports on GIBEON

By JAMES B. PRITCHARD

A new dimension was added to the archaeological remains at el-Jib by the discovery in 1956 of a handle from a wine jug on which were scratched the four letters GB<sup>c</sup>N, the Hebrew spelling of the well-known biblical city of Gibeon. In the three subsequent campaigns twenty-nine more handles inscribed with "Gibeon" were found.

This unique discovery makes it possible to link the mute and anonymous data from the five superimposed cities at el-Jib, eight miles north of Jerusalem in Jordan, with the colorful narratives which had been carried along by folk tradition until they were caught up eventually in the religious history of ancient Israel.

Gibeon is the scene of many significant events mentioned in the Old Testament. Through its gates and beside its copious waters there had passed, through the six centuries of its recorded history, a long line of colorful and well-known figures: Joshua, the conqueror; Abner, the commander-in-chief of Saul; Joab, his counterpart

in the army of David; Zadok, David's priest; Amasa, who was murdered by Joab there; Rizpah, Saul's wife; seven sons of Saul; King Solomon; Hananiah, the false prophet who opposed Jeremiah; Ishmael, the Ammonite who slew the Judaeen governor Gedaliah; and Johanan, the leader of the remnant of Judah, who took Jeremiah and other refugees into Egypt. All of these heroes and villains are associated at one time or another with Gibeon in the forty-five references in the Bible to it or to its people.

Although these stories are contained in a book which is primarily concerned with religious faith and practice, they contain clues for the history of the city from the early days of the conquest by Joshua down to the time when the land was laid waste by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar. The episodes cluster about three major periods: the conquest of Canaan; the monarchy of Saul, David, and Solomon; and the Babylonian exile. For each of these periods the excavations at el-Jib have produced evidence for occupation at the site.

## the trickery of the GIBEONITES

The first picture in the Bible of Gibeon and its people is the account of how Joshua, the successful conqueror of the well-fortified cities of Jericho and Ai, was deceived by the disguised Gibeonites into making a covenant of peace with them. The scene is preserved in chapter 9 of the Book of Joshua:

*But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they on their part acted with cunning, and went and made ready provisions, and took worn-out sacks upon their asses, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes; and all their provisions were dry and moldy.*

*And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; so now make a covenant with us."*

*But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?"*

*They said to Joshua, "We are your servants."*

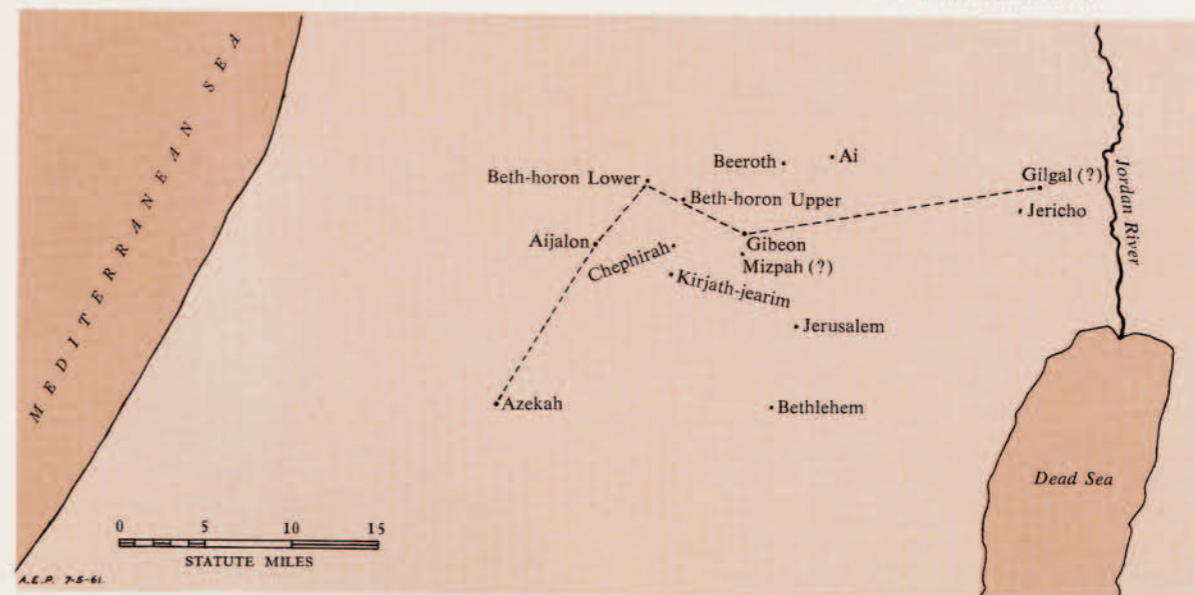
*And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?"*

*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 a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan . . . Here is our bread; it was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey, on the day we set forth to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and moldy; these wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they are burst; and these garments and shoes of ours are worn out from the very long journey."*

*So the men partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.*

After three days the Israelites learned the truth about these emissaries: they were not from a far country, but were Gibeonites from the Hivite enclave of Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim, cities which lay within six miles from Gibeon. Joshua remained true to his oath which he had sworn, but he cursed the deceivers with the perpetual role of menial service; they were sentenced to become "the hewers of wood and the drawers of water." Menial service was indeed better than total extermination.



Map showing route taken by Joshua in his march from Gilgal to Gibeon to defend his allies against the attack of the Amorite kings led by the king of Jerusalem. Joshua pursued the foe as far as Azekah.



The mound of el-Jib, the Biblical Gibeon, as it appears today, from Nebi Samwil to the south.

## “sun, stand thou still at GIBEON”

There is a sequel to this story of Joshua's covenant with the Gibeonites. Adoni-zedek, the king of Jerusalem, was alarmed by the news of the defection of the inhabitants of Gibeon, whose city was said to have been “a great city, like one of the royal cities,” greater than Ai. Quickly he summoned the aid of four kings of Amorite cities to the south and together they laid siege to the fortified city of Gibeon.

The men of Gibeon made a second visit to Joshua at Gilgal. This time they were not disguised, but they were no less frightened than they had been on their first visit. In response to their plea for speedy help, Joshua set out with his army to fulfill his obligation to protect his ally. The account of this battle between Joshua and the five Amorite kings appears in chapter 10 of the

Book of Joshua:

*So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched all night from Gilgal. And the Lord threw them into a panic before Israel, who slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and smote them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the Lord threw down great stones from heaven upon them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died because of the hailstones than the men of Israel killed with the sword.*

*Then spoke Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to*



Joshua's slaughter of the Amorites at Gibeon. Copy by Barruci of a part of the Joshua Roll now in the Vatican. This early illustration of the city of Gibeon shows the sun standing still at Joshua's command.

*the men of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel.*

*“Sun, stand thou still at Gibeon, and thou Moon in the valley of Aijalon.” And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.*

*Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stayed in the midst of the heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel.*

From these dramatic and obviously folk narratives it may be deduced that at the time of the

conquest Gibeon was a large, fortified city, governed by elders, and allied with three other cities in the immediate vicinity. This Hivite league, as it was called, was opposed by a formidable coalition of Amorite kings from the south who attacked the principal Hivite city of Gibeon because of the peace which it had negotiated with the invaders.

After the battle of Gibeon the city drops out of the biblical picture for a period of almost two centuries. It does not figure in the stories about the Judges, nor is it mentioned in the histories of Samuel and Saul in the Book of I Samuel. But during the reign of David, in the first half of the tenth century, Gibeon is the scene of three incidents, each of which is distinctly gruesome.



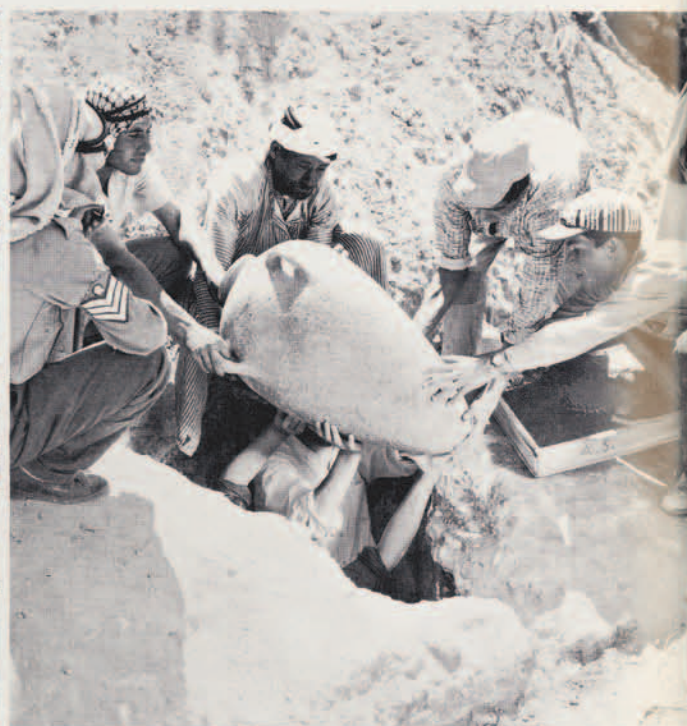
(Left) The pool of Gibeon, cut to a depth of 82 feet in the solid rock of the hill on which the city stood. A circular stairway of 79 steps led from the top to the spring at the bottom.



(Right) The industrial area of Gibeon, where wine was made and stored in the seventh century B.C. Wine cellars were cut into the solid rock of the hill and covered over with stone slabs.



(Left) Interior of one of the Bronze Age tombs. The body was placed on a bed of white stones and the tomb was furnished with offerings in jars and plates.



(Right) The removal of jars from the tomb of one of the "mighty men of Gibeon" in the Bronze Age. Twelve richly furnished tombs were found in the 1960 season.

*And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings upon that altar.*

*At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I shall give you."*

*And Solomon said . . ., "Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil . . ."*

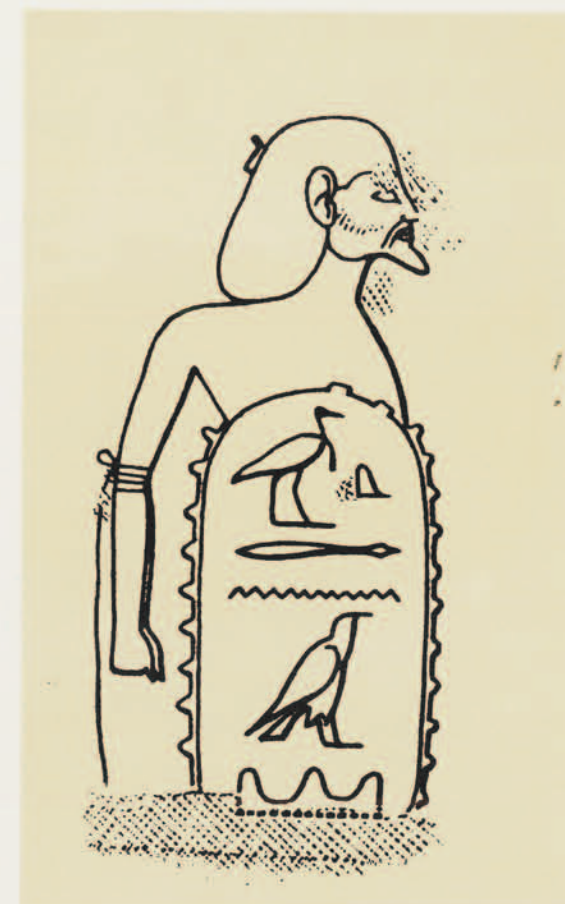
In the fifth year of the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, the Egyptian king Shishak invaded Palestine (I Kings 14:25) and returned home to erect a great display inscription at Karnak, in which he listed the cities which he had taken. The name Gibeon can be read there today neatly carved in hieroglyphs within an oval ring surmounted by the figure of a bound prisoner.

From the end of the tenth century, when it was a cult center for Israel in the early days of Solomon's reign, until the end of the seventh century, Gibeon is not mentioned in any biblical writings. In the golden age of Israelite prophecy it produced no outstanding prophet. The only prophet who is mentioned as having come from Gibeon is Hananiah, who, in the days of Nebuchadnezzar's pillaging of Jerusalem, prophesied that within two full years the Lord would break the yoke of the Babylonian king from off all the nations. To this facile and optimistic prophet Jeremiah spoke the following harsh words:

*Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Therefore thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord" (Jer. 28:15-16).*

This prediction of Jeremiah is followed by the obituary of Hananiah: "In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died." Although Hananiah was a prophet, he brought no distinction to his native town. The name Hananiah has appeared on jar handles from el-Jib, but it belonged to a winemaker not to a prophet.

In the times of anarchy which prevailed after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., Gibeon figures



"Gibeon" from the list of the Egyptian King Shishak at Karnak. This writing of the tenth century B. C. is the earliest surviving example of the name of the city.

in the accounts of troubles which beset the small group of Judaeen refugees. When the Ammonite Ishmael had murdered the pro-Babylonian governor Gedaliah at Mizpah and had seized the Judaeans to take them captive to Ammon, he was met by the forces of Johanan at the "great waters that are in Gibeon" (Jer. 41:12). Ishmael's captives were taken away from him, but Ishmael himself escaped with eight of his men. From Gibeon the rescued "soldiers, women, children, and eunuchs" under the leadership of Johanan moved southward and took refuge near Bethlehem, fearful lest they be held responsible by the Babylonians for the death of Gedaliah. These references tell us nothing about the condition of the city at the beginning of the Exile. There is only the enigmatic reference to the "great waters," a term which could apply equally well to the pool or to the spring of the village.

## the contest at the pool of GIBEON

The first of these episodes takes place soon after the death of Saul. Saul's son Ish-bosheth was seeking to maintain the dynasty of his father against the growing opposition of the talented and resourceful David. After Abner, Saul's commander-in-chief, had made Ish-bosheth king at Mahanaim in Transjordan, he brought servants of Ish-bosheth to Gibeon. There he met the doughty Joab, who had presumably come up from Hebron with a contingent of David's forces, at the "pool of Gibeon." The account of the celebrated contest at the pool is given in chapter 2 of II Samuel:

*And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon; and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool.*

*And Abner said to Joab, "Let the young*

*men arise and play before us."*

*And Joab said, "Let them arise."*

*Then they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. And each caught his opponent by the head, and thrust his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is at Gibeon. And the battle was very fierce that day; and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.*

There ensued a larger battle in which Abner was beaten and was forced to flee. The field beside the "pool of Gibeon" long remained as a landmark associated with the decisive contest which determined the succession to the throne of Israel.

## the assassination of amasa

Another incident of violence at Gibeon during the time of David is that of the murder of Amasa by Joab himself. As soon as David had dealt with the abortive attempt of Absalom to take his throne he was faced with a revolt which was led by Sheba, a Benjaminite. Amasa was sent by David to call together the men of Judah within three days. Three days passed and Amasa did not reappear. When Joab was sent on a mission to deal with the threat of rebellion in the north, the general apprehensions about the loyalty of the missing Amasa were found to be justified. Amasa was with the forces of the rebellious Sheba at Gibeon. The meeting of Joab with Amasa is described in chapter 20 of II Samuel:

*When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier's garment, and over it was a girdle with a sword in its sheath fastened upon his loins, and as he went forward it fell out.*

*And Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with*

*you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not observe the sword which was in Joab's hand: so Joab struck him with it in the body, and shed his bowels to the ground, without striking a second blow; and he died . . . And Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the highway. And anyone who came by, seeing him, stopped; and when the man [one of Joab's men] saw that all the people stopped, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field, and threw a garment over him. When he was taken out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.*

Two specific details of this story are of topographical importance. One is the mention of "the great stone which is in Gibeon," a possible reference to the stone of an altar at the high place of Gibeon, at which Solomon later sacrificed. The other fact of interest is the location of Gibeon on the main highway leading from Jerusalem northward to the center of Benjamin.

## the sacrifice of the seven sons of saul

The third incident involving Gibeon and its inhabitants is the sacrificing of seven descendants of Saul in order to terminate a three-year famine. Saul had slain the Gibeonites in violation of the solemn covenant which had been made between Israel and the men of Gibeon; atonement for this breach of peace could only be made, so the Gibeonites assured David, by hanging two sons and five grandsons of the offending Saul "before the Lord at Gibeon." The shocking account of human sacrifice and the picture of Rizpah, Saul's widow, watching over the corpses are given in chapter 21 of II Samuel:

*They [the Gibeonites] said to the king, "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them up before the Lord at Gibeon on the mountain of the Lord."*

*And the king said, "I will give them." . . .*

*The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merob the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the Lord, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.*

*Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens; and she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night.*



*Rizpah watching over the bodies of the seven sons of Saul. After Leon Gerome, Die Bibel in der Kunst.*

From this story it is apparent that, even as late as the time of David, the people of Gibeon had not been assimilated fully into the body of Israel. Saul had been hostile, while David apparently was on good relations with the city and sought to remove the offense which his predecessor had given.

By the beginning of Solomon's reign, about 960 B.C., Gibeon had become an integral part of Israel. The pagan associations of its ancient high place had been forgotten or removed through purification rites. It was to this high place that Solomon went before the construction of the temple in Jerusalem to offer his impressive holocausts. The account in chapter 3 of I Kings reads: