CHAPTER FOUR

COVENANT, EXECUTION, AND ELIMINATION

4.1 Ruse of Gibeon

The preceding chapter of this study highlighted geography and ethnography as important elements in framing the textual unit of Joshua 9:1–13:7 and in communicating its message. Within this frame, however, other components occur: the narrative on the trickery of the Gibeonites (9:4a–27d); the story about the kings of the Amorite coalition in the cave of Makkedah (10:16a–27f); passages emphasizing the divine aid during the conquest (10:8b, 11a–14c; 11:6a–e, 20abc), and several repetitive sections on the subjugation of the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the promised land (10:28a–39g, 40cde; 11:11abc, 12a–15d, 20b, 21a–22b). Two questions are to be answered concerning these passages. How do they fit within the structural and interpretative framework of the narrative? And what referential elements do they contain which are vital to the diachronic analysis of the text?

Making a Treaty (9:4a–15c)

The first episode to be treated is the inducement to the formation of the southern coalition, that is, the ruse of the Gibeonites. The beginning of Joshua 9 describes the aggressive reaction of the kings west of the river Jordan to the rumour of the devastation of Jericho and Ai by Joshua and Israel: they agree to join forces in order to prevent Israel’s conquest of the land (9:1a–2c). This plan, however, is interrupted. The repetition of the verb שָׁמַע and the use of the intensive pronoun גם־המה shift the attention to Gibeon and its reaction (9:3a–4a).¹ The Gibeonite response to Israel’s victory in the Jordan Valley differs in two ways from the reaction of the other inhabitants of Cisjordan. It is not a reaction of the ruler of a city-state, but of the inhabitants of a city and of their representatives (9:4a, cf. 11a). Besides, it is not

¹ For detailed comments on 9:1a–4a, see section 3.1.
characterized by aggression, but by prudence and deliberation, or—understood in a more negative way—by slyness (דּוֹרִים, 9:4a).² At this point, however, the text does not condemn this kind of behaviour. On the contrary, the next verses depict the reaction of the Gibeonites in great detail. Before they leave their city to meet Israel (9:4b), they disguise themselves as foreign diplomats (9:4c).³ That is, a Gibeonite delegation makes all kind of preparations in order to look as envoys arriving at their goal after a very long journey. They load their donkeys with worn-out sackings of goat’s or camel’s hair and with cracked and mended leather wineskins, look for suitable worn-out sandals and clothes, and take dry and crumbled bread as their provision (9:4d–5c).⁴ Disguised in this way and thus pretending having been underway for months, a delegation travels from the area northwest of Jerusalem to Gilgal, close to Jericho, a trip of 30 kilometres or about 8 to 10 hours (9:6a).⁵

According to the text the delegation is sent to ‘Joshua and Israel’ (9:6a). However, as soon as the Gibeonites seek contact, they speak to the ‘men of Israel’ (9:6b). So the first entity of Israel meeting the Gibeonites is referred to as the ‘men of Israel’. This is important because of the fact that in Joshua 9, several designations for representatives occur. The ‘men of Israel’ is a collective label for a group, most likely the military term for what more often is called עדה, the ‘assembly’.⁶ The military association is also present in this episode: the ‘men of Israel’ meets a foreign delegation and has to answer the question whether it represents a hostile people or not. This becomes evident from the request that is done, for the Gibeonites say that they come from a distant country and ask for a ברית (9:6cd).

² See annotation 9:4g.
³ For this interpretation of ויצטירו, see annotation 9:4h–h.
⁵ Cf. Soggin, Joshua, 127. For the exact location of Gibeon and Gilgal, see section 3.2.