

GOD WITH US

Part 2: Conquest and Chaos

Joshua – Judges – Ruth

Message 4 – Canaan Divided among the 12 Tribes

Joshua 13-23

Introduction

Having successfully overcome the resistance of the 31 Canaanite city-states, Joshua divided the Promised Land among the 12 tribes of Israel. There were many pockets of remaining resistance, and the various tribes would have to trust God going forward to thoroughly overcome their foes. Yet, on the whole, the promise of a ‘great land’ for Abraham’s descendants (Gen.12:1-3) had been fulfilled. Now, Israel settles into her inheritance and begins to live out her true purpose as a ‘kingdom of priests’ revealing God to the world (see Exodus 19:5,6).



Instructions for dividing the Land: 13:1-14:5

Now Joshua was old and advanced in years, and the Lord said to him, “You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to possess” (13:1).

“Only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you” (13:6).

God told Joshua what portions of land still remained unconquered (13:2-6). God promised that He *would drive those people out* (v.6); but in the meantime, even the unconquered lands should be divided among the 12 tribes. God would work with each individual tribe to complete the work of taking *all* the land, as they trusted Him to give them the victory over their enemies.

9-1/2 tribes would receive their inheritance within the land of Canaan, west of the Jordan River. 2-1/2 tribes had already received their inheritance from Moses, in the lands east of the Jordan River (the ‘trans-Jordan’ lands).

There is often confusion as to the numbering of the “12 tribes” of Israel. Why are there 13 names, but only 12 tribes? This is due to the fact that the tribe of Joseph (Jacob’s 11th son) is rarely counted as one tribe. Rather, the “half tribes” of Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, *are* counted as one. (See Genesis 48:5 where Jacob indicated in his blessing that Joseph’s sons, born in Egypt, Ephraim and Manasseh, would be “as sons” to him.)

The tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, was not given a specific part of the land; rather, they were granted towns, villages and pasturelands throughout the land. Their role as special servants of God *was* their inheritance.

“But to the tribe of Levi, Moses did not give an inheritance; the Lord, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as He had promised to them” (13:33).

Caleb’s request for an inheritance: 14:6-15

Caleb was not one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Joshua and Caleb were 2 of the 12 spies that Moses had sent from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the Promised Land 45 years earlier (Numbers 14). They were the only ones who *believed that God would give Israel victory over the giants in the land*. The other 10 spies brought back a negative, dis-heartening report that led Israel to rebel against God and turn back toward Egypt. This rebellion at Kadesh-barnea was

a fateful turning point, leading to Israel being consigned to 40 years of wilderness wandering until that adult generation had died. Now, 45 years later, Caleb comes to Joshua asking for his own inheritance.

“You know the word which the Lord spoke to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh-barnea. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought word back to him as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt with fear; but I followed the Lord my God fully. So Moses swore on that day, saying, ‘Surely the land on which your foot has trodden will be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God fully.’ Now behold, the Lord has let me live, just as He spoke, these forty-five years, from the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; and now behold, I am eighty-five years old today. I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in. Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I will drive them out as the Lord has spoken.” So Joshua blessed him and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. Therefore, Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite until this day, because he followed the Lord God of Israel fully. Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba; for Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim (14:6-15).

What a testimony of faith. Caleb was 85-years old, yet he was still asking for territory to conquer with God’s help . . . even territory *with giants in it!* ***“Perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I will drive them out as the Lord has spoken” (14:12).*** These giants were the descendants of the same giants that caused the other 10 spies to back out in fear at Kadesh-Barnea. Now, because of his faith, Joshua granted his friend’s request by giving him Hebron.

The territory of Judah: 15:1-63

Judah was given a massive tract of land in the southern part of Canaan. Their land was so vast that they could not inhabit all of it; therefore, the tribe of Simeon will later be allotted a share of land

within the borders of Judah's territory. Caleb's special inheritance was also within the territory of Judah (15:13-19). Again, mention is made of how Caleb (85 yrs. old) drove out the descendants of Anak (a family of giants).

“Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak, Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmi, the descendants of Anak” (15:14).

Three times we hear the phrase: “Caleb followed the Lord God FULLY” (14:8,9,14). This does not mean that Caleb was a perfect man; but it does mean he kept his heart in tune with his God. He walked by faith when others were overcome with fear. He kept his eyes on the character of God and His promises (“I WILL drive them out before you”) rather than the overwhelming circumstances of life. He did not shrink back when he saw that there were giants in the land because his view of God was bigger than his view of the giants. He was willing to stand against the crowd, when necessary. Except for Joshua, ALL of Caleb's contemporaries were dead and buried in the wilderness. Caleb, on the other hand, was still fighting giants and taking land at 85! What a TREMENDOUS EPITAPH to have written over his life at the end: He followed the Lord his God fully. Ask yourself: Do I have that “unique spirit for the Lord” that dwelt in Caleb (see Numbers 14:24). Do I “follow the Lord fully,” as Caleb did? The commitment to following the Lord fully is the foundation of courage, faith, usefulness and, ultimately, God's pleasure/reward.

There is a special note about Caleb as a father (15:15-19). He gave his daughter Acsah to Othniel as a wife, along with some land. As a special wedding gift, his daughter asked Caleb for springs of water (in addition to the land she already had). Caleb gave his daughter this “extra special” wedding gift, just as she requested. A tender warrior! He valued his daughter and her desires.

The territory of Ephraim: 16:1-10

The two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, received their shares of land in the central region of the land of Canaan. While Caleb (above) was able to send giants running, the tribe of Ephraim was unable to dislodge some Canaanites from their territory, so they absorbed them in as forced laborers.

“They did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites have lived in the midst of Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor” (16:10).

The territory of Manasseh: 17:1-13

Manasseh's territory consisted of two parts: one west of the Jordan and one on the east. Special mention is made of the daughters of Zelophehad, a man who had no sons. These 5 women were granted their share of their father's allotment, along with the other male descendants of Manasseh. This was in keeping with the previous promise made to them by Moses (Numbers 27:1-7). Once again, the failure of Manasseh to take full possession of their land, due to Canaanite resistance, is noted.

“Yet the people of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. Now when the people of Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out” (17:12,13).

Ephraim and Manasseh ask for more territory: 17:14-18

Due to the size of their populations, Ephraim and Manasseh asked Joshua for additional land.

The people of Joseph said, “The hill country is not enough for us. Yet all the Canaanites who dwell in the plain have chariots of iron, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel.” Then Joshua said to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, “You are a numerous people and have great power. You shall not have one allotment only, but the hill country shall be yours, for though it is a forest, you shall clear it and possess it to its farthest borders. For you will drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong” (17:16-18).

It seems that Ephraim and Manasseh were *hoping* that Joshua would send his army to subdue to Canaanite warriors for them (v.16). Yet, Joshua put this responsibility squarely on the shoulders of those asking for the privilege of additional land (v.18). *YOU will drive out the Canaanites . . .*

The Land divided among the 7 remaining tribes: 18:1-19:48

Seven tribes still needed their allotment of land. Joshua commissioned them to send out men to survey the remaining land and divide it into seven suitable portions. Again, he delegated the responsibility to the tribes to bring back their suggested divisions of the land. Then, Joshua cast lots in order to give each tribe its inheritance.

You can't expect leaders to do for you what God wants to do directly in and through you. Joshua applied a great leadership principle: Empower others to do the work, rather than trying to do it all yourself. Joshua challenged those with desire to own the responsibility for fulfilling that desire. When these tribes asked for more land, he assured them that they WOULD drive out the enemy; yet, he also invited them to exercise more faith in order to take that land with God's help. God wants each of us to learn to walk with Him, and trust Him for God-sized victories. Perhaps you have (or had in the past) a new vision or idea for ministry. Maybe you even presented the idea to those in leadership over you, hoping that they would 'make it happen.' Another approach is to develop a prayed-over, workable strategy for how you and your team might make your God-given ministry vision a reality. Then, go to your spiritual leaders and present both the vision and the strategy, and volunteer to lead the effort.

A City for Joshua: 19:49-51

“When they had finished distributing the several territories of the land as inheritances, the people of Israel gave an inheritance among them to Joshua the son of Nun. By command of the Lord they gave him the city that he asked, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim. And he rebuilt the city and settled in it.”

It is almost an afterthought to mention; just a few brief lines with no great fanfare. Joshua, in keeping with the manner of a great “servant-leader,” was the last to receive his inheritance. He did not claim the first and the best. He was willing to take the last and the least.

Cities of Refuge designated: 20:1-9

Cities of refuge were places where someone could flee for safety if they had *unintentionally* caused the death of someone. Relatives of the deceased, who wanted to avenge the blood of their relative, could not touch the one who had fled into the city of refuge.

In the New Testament book of Hebrews, the writer draws on “cities of refuge” to make a point about our security in Christ. We have “fled for refuge” to Christ (Hebrews 6:18), who shields us from the judgment of God against our sin. As we remain “in Christ” we are protected from death. What a beautiful thought that Jesus is our place of refuge!

Cities allotted to the Levitical Priests: 21:1-45

The tribe of Levi was not given a specific territory; rather, they were granted cities and pasturelands throughout the Land of Israel. From these cities they could 1) fulfill their cyclical duties in the Tabernacle, and 2) earn their sustenance and provide homes for their families. This section ends with a summary of God's faithfulness in giving Israel the "Promised Land."

"Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass" (21:43-45).

God was FAITHFUL to KEEP HIS WORD and FULFILL His stated promises!

East-of-Jordan Tribes sent to their lands: 22:1-9

Having fulfilled their promise to fight with their brothers, the tribes of Manasseh, Gad and Reuben were dismissed by Joshua to go back across the Jordan to the eastern lands they had previously asked for. Given their geographical separation from the other tribes, Joshua gave them a special charge to remain faithful to the covenant made between Israel as a nation and Yahweh.

"Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul" (22:5).

This charge to faithfulness would have included honoring the location of the Tabernacle at Shiloh. They would need to travel across the Jordan several times each year to attend national festivals.

Before they moved east of the Jordan, these tribes decided to build a massive stone altar. When Joshua and the other tribes heard about the building of this altar, they *immediately assumed* that it was an act of idolatry on the part of Manasseh, Gad and Reuben. In fact, Joshua and company had already decided to go to *war* against these trans-Jordan tribes for their idolatrous act!

“What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the Lord by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord?” (22:16).

Actually, when they spoke directly with the leaders responsible for this altar-building project, they discovered that their motives were not idolatrous, rather, just the opposite: to preserve *true worship* for their future generations.

“No, but we did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, ‘What have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? For the Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you people of Reuben and people of Gad. You have no portion in the Lord.’ So your children might make our children cease to worship the Lord” (22:24,25).

The real purpose of the altar was to say: *We on the east side of the Jordan are WITH YOU who live on the west side.* It was a memorial signifying their UNITY as one nation. Once the true motive was clarified, all of the suspicion and commotion immediately evaporated, and all the tribes were of one mind.

Unchecked assumptions are lethal to relationships. We can so quickly come to conclusions about other people – their motives, intentions, thoughts – when we fail to check our assumptions. Pete Scazzerro (Emotionally Healthy Spirituality) teaches the skill of checking assumptions. When you find yourself making an assumption, go to the person and ask: “May I have permission to check an assumption?” Once you are granted permission, then state honestly and respectfully your assumption. “It seems that you ...” “Is that a correct assumption?” Don’t state your assumption as a fact; rather, as an observation that you are genuinely puzzled about. Then, give the other person the freedom to validate, invalidate, or correct your assumption. The bottom line: In order to remain healthy and free from suspicion, relationships require clear, direct and respectful communication. (See Matthew 18:15 for similar instructions from Jesus, when dealing with “sin issues.” Go directly to the person and clear things up!)