

Lecture 23 Inheriting the Land
Joshua 11:1 – 24:33
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Congratulations on completing a long lesson with a lot of Scripture!

In the lesson last week, Jericho was conquered, Ai was taken and the Southern Campaign that swept around in a counter-clockwise fashion was completed. We left Joshua and his forces back at Gilgal to begin the Northern Campaign.

There was no time for dalliance in the camp at Gilgal. Jabin, king of Hazor, had gathered an immense force to resist the Israelites. Josephus tells us that the united forces consisted of 300,000 warriors, 100,000 horses and 20,000 chariots. He also says that the Israelites were terrified at having to encounter iron chariots. But the book of Joshua is marked with steadfast courage because along with the tidings of a force gathered against them, also came the divine assurance, "Be not afraid because of them: for tomorrow about this time, I will deliver them all slain before Israel." (Joshua 11:6a)

With God's strength the enemy was beaten and for some years the conquest of the land continued. We read that Hazor was burned, probably to intimidate the other cities, since it was

the most prominent in the alliance against Israel. As for the rest, it was deemed sufficient to destroy the inhabitants that could bear arms, to render the horses useless by hamstringing or crippling them, and to burn the chariots. Had they not done that, the temptation to depend on horses and chariots might have lessened their dependence on God.

The Anakim warriors were of extraordinary height. Big is always an intimidation, isn't it? -- whether it's the 250 lb. bully, the mile-high pile of papers that need action on your desk, or even preparing dinner for 30 people. But size is relative when we think of the immense capabilities of our God to help us overcome.

Chapters 12 and 13 gave the specifics of the land on the east side of the Jordan River given to the half-tribe of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites, as well as the names of 31 kings that were conquered on the west side of the Jordan. Question 5 in our lesson asked why you think specific names and places are important in the Bible. I think it's important because it makes milestones and points of reference that can be verified by other sources, and because it shows God has an interest in people and events. He is a God of details. We can believe that He cares for every hair on our head because He's carefully preserved what we might consider minute details. And certainly, when it comes to

land distribution, if I was the one being given a parcel, I'd want to know the exact boundaries. Just think of how much was eliminated in the way of arguments and war because boundaries were God-ordained.

The Bible is not just a mass of bland faces or accounts of “**they** did this or **they** did that” and it's not just an account of a spiritual promised land, but the details of the actual land promised and delivered to God's obedient people. I think we should be grateful for every one of these details.

The book of Joshua naturally divides itself into two parts . . . 1) the conquest of the land and 2) the partition of the land. Joshua was old and there was still work for the Lord to be done. One author says he was probably about 90 and it was time for him to “turn from being administrator to statesman.”

The tribes gathered at Gilgal where Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh, being the more prominent tribes, were given the largest and most valuable lands of Canaan. Apparently the other seven tribes were given the responsibility of initiating the allocation proceedings for their people, but were rebuked by Joshua for their laxity in postponing this business. (Joshua 18:3) So Joshua ordered that three men from each of those tribes make a survey of the remaining land, write a description, then return to

him and he would cast lots to determine the location of each tribe's inheritance. We remember from our Exodus study that the casting of lots was a reference to stones called the Urim and Thummim kept in the breastplate of the priest. In Joshua 18:10, "Joshua then cast lots for them in Shiloh in the presence of the Lord, and there he distributed the land to the Israelites according to their tribal divisions."

The first fell to Benjamin. The second to Simeon. Vs. 9 tells us that "The inheritance of the Simeonites was taken from the share of Judah, because Judah's portion was more than they needed. So the Simeonites received their inheritance within the territory of Judah." The remaining five tribes came up in this order: Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and Dan.

But before that took place, we have the request of Caleb and we didn't spend much time on him in our lesson, so I want to spend a little time on him now.

His life kind of divides naturally into three phases. We first encounter him at age 40 as one of the twelve spies Moses allowed to go investigate the land of Canaan. In the famous Good News / Bad News report, he and Joshua were the only ones who urged Israel to forge ahead and trust God for victory. They were overruled; however, we see two characteristics in Caleb: First, he

was not swayed by the great tide of pessimism. Someone once wrote:

“Twix optimist and pessimist
The difference is droll;
The optimist sees the doughnut,
The pessimist sees the hole.”

Second, we see Caleb’s courage. The weight of ten other opinions didn’t topple him. In Numbers 14 he gave a second speech encouraging them and reminding them that “the Lord is with us” – we should go in.

For the next portion of his life, his reward for that faith was to wander in the desert along with the rest of Israel. Have you ever been there? Dealing with life as the result of another’s sin? Sometimes there is no way out except to go through. By all worldly standards he would have been justified in becoming impatient and resentful, but he maintained his spiritual integrity. He was one of those rare souls who was not offended with how God dealt with him. When Moses died it was Joshua, not Caleb, who was chosen leader. He was not even made second in command of the army. In his heart there was neither jealousy of Joshua nor bitterness against God. He held on to God’s promise of a place in the Promised Land.

For 45 years he had patiently waited for fulfillment of that promise. In his interview with Joshua, five times he made reference to the promise. The years had done nothing to dampen his aggressive faith or dim his memory. Hebron was the choicest spot in the land – fertile, highly elevated with a wonderful view, and a stronghold of the enemy. Caleb's request of Joshua was not one of greed, but of recognizing the authority of the Word of God. "Give me this mountain." 85 years old, strong and still ready to do battle. Aging should not be an excuse. Someone has said: "At 20 we worry about what others think of us. At 50 we don't care what others think. At 70 we discover that people haven't been thinking of us at all."

Caleb got the mountain in Judah's territory and what's more, he completely drove out the enemy, giants and all, because in five words – HE FOLLOWED THE LORD WHOLLY. God moved very slowly to fulfill His promise, but Caleb was content to await God's timing. In New Testament language, he presented his body a living sacrifice to God as an act of worship . . . a striking contrast to the faithless multitudes whose bodies fell in the wilderness because they were unwilling to make that sacrifice.

Did you notice the story of Caleb's daughter as you skimmed these chapters? Seems she was offered as an incentive bride to

the man who captured Kiriath Sepher. So Othniel, (Oth-ni-el) Caleb's nephew, was the lucky man. Plus, Caleb gave his daughter Acsah the upper and lower springs of water – just a softhearted Dad, no doubt. We'll meet Othniel again in our next lesson.

Having settled Caleb's request, the allotment of Canaan was now carried out. It's important to remember the repetitious message that was consistent for each of the tribes . . . "They could not drive them out and the Canaanites dwelled in the land."

15:63 "Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah."

16:10 Speaking of Ephraim, "They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer . . ."

17:12 "yet the Manassites were not able to occupy these towns for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region."

Israel made a profound mistake in allowing them to remain in the land. All the seeds for receiving God's curses spoken from Mt. Ebal were being sown.

Did you think that when they were in the land that all the grumbling had ceased? In 17:14-18 we find the tribe of Manasseh dissatisfied with the portion assigned to them. They wanted more

territory because they were great in number and the land wasn't sufficient because of all the forests on the hills. But Joshua's response was, "If you're so great, cut down the forests yourself and make more room." A reminder to us that many Christians are asking for a larger place of usefulness while they fail to use the opportunities actually within their reach.

Also, remember back in Numbers 27 when the daughters of Zelophehad wanted their inheritance since their father had no sons? In 17:3,4 they received it. Didn't want you to miss that.

Next, we notice that Joshua had moved the Tabernacle from Gilgal to Shiloh very near the center of the Promised Land. Along with the apportioning the land by lot to the other seven tribes was the provision for the manslayer within the protection of the six cities of refuge. You recall, a manslayer was one who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally. He could flee to the nearest city of refuge and be safe from the avenger of blood, usually a close relative seeking a "life for a life."

"He is to stay in that city until he has stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then he may go back to his own home in the town from which he fled." (Joshua 20:6)

Cities of refuge were easy to reach with roads and bridges built for ready access to those who were in trouble. What does it take for us to be a people of refuge? First, it takes an open heart and perhaps an open home. A willingness to come alongside someone and “get involved” – something the world shies away from. Second, it takes loving compassion to bear one another’s burdens; and that often includes practical, tangible help as well as prayer support and comfort. As we’re reminded in 1 Peter 4:10, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”

In chapter 21, we read that the Levites were given 48 cities within the Israelites territories along with pastureland measuring 1,000 cubits from outside the walls. The Levites would dwell there when they were not required for temple service, or when they were incapacitated by age from attending their duties.

Joshua also received his own inheritance. His “estate” so to speak was Timnath-Serah in Ephraim. He must have been glad to retire there for the remaining twenty years of his life. The greatness of his influence can be seen not only in the statement that “the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua,” but also

when we see how quickly they would be overwhelmed with evil when his influence was gone.

So, the work was finished and “not one of all the Lord’s promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.”

It had been a long time of war and conquest. Now it was time for the 40,000 from east of the Jordan to go home. They had been faithful to fulfill their vow to help their brethren take possession of the land. As they reached the Jordan a thought occurred to them. This river is a barrier between us. Will one day people on the west say, “You’re not a part of Israel.” As their solution, they built an “imposing altar.” It was to be a perpetual witness they were loyal-hearted Israelites.

But it was a great mistake. If they had obeyed the divine instruction that three times a year every male should appear before God at Shiloh, there would have been no need for this altar. Was their own conscience condemning them for stopping short and taking the sure thing of good land east of the Jordan without the risk of what might lay beyond? They wanted at least a foothold planted on the Promised Land.

Let’s think a moment about stones of remembrance. It seems Israel was good at doing that. Recall the stones in the middle of the Jordan and the stones when they entered the land?

What are some stones of remembrance for your life? The first date, graduation, marriage, children born, the first grandchild, special occasions, the day you gave your life to Christ might be just a few. Maybe your spiritual land is pitted with stones of another kind that cause you to stumble. Stones like bitterness, unforgiveness, or a quick tongue, that just pockmark the path of your Christian walk. Peter tells us that we are living stones, meant to be a testimony of the living Christ to the world around us. Are we monuments to God's grace, or stumbling stones in our testimony or action?

When Israel heard about the erection of this altar, their first impulse was to go to war. But in this brief episode we see the need for patience in dealing with the erring and fallen. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, and ten chief men from the tribes of Israel went to Gilead as a delegation with a sincere desire to draw them back. Isn't it wonderful how the dialogue solved the problem when the desire for reconciliation was there? The whole episode resulted in a tightening of the bonds of brotherhood and in glad expressions of thankfulness and praise. This is another proof that God can take our mistakes and work it out for His glory when we seek to honor Him.

Well, Joshua's life was drawing to a close, nearly 110 years old. In chapter 23 seven times he refers to the nations of the land . . . what God had done to them; how God was prepared to thrust them out; and especially how great a temptation they would be by their perpetual presence . . . the temptation to intermarry with them and adopt their gods. Joshua urged them to do three things:

- Be courageous and keep the Law of Moses;
- Resist intermarriage and idolatrous practices or they would quickly perish off this good land;
- Love the Lord your God.

What good counsel – Love God and you will both possess God and be possessed by Him.

Perhaps there is nothing more beneficial than to stand on the heights of the years of a long life and review the way by which God has led us. Joshua reviewed Israel's history and God's faithfulness – from God calling Abraham out of Ur where he worshipped other gods, to the call of Moses and Aaron and the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, to victory as they crossed the Jordan and defeated Jericho, to the victories God accomplished in delivering Israel into the Promised Land.

Now Joshua asked them to renew the covenant. "Choose for yourself this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." The unanimous response of the people was to declare their readiness and eagerness to serve the Lord.

The book of Joshua closes with the bones of Joseph being buried in Shechem; the death of Eleazar the priest, and the death of Joshua. We're told in Joshua 24:31, "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel."

Now came the hard part – standing strong and true to the covenant on their own. Would they? We shall see . . .

Let's pray. Father, the life of a leader is not an easy one. Joshua was true to his calling and we pray that You may find us faithful in the work You've called us to do. The land we live in is full of enemy forces trying to pull us away from You. Help us to be strong and courageous knowing You are faithful to your Word. We shall possess all that You have promised us and we deeply thank You for that. In Jesus' name. Amen.