

Joshua – Part 5

The Lord Gave Them Rest – Joshua 18-24

The Tabernacle has found its new location in Shiloh, a more stable place in the center of the Promised Land, where all the tribes will have easy access to come for worship and sacrifice. More importantly, it signifies God's presence abiding in Israel. This is important for unity and worshipping together as a nation.

Two and a half tribes are settled on the east of Jordan and two and a half on the west, but seven smaller tribes remain without a defined inheritance. However, they seem in no hurry to leave their nomadic lifestyle for a permanent home. They have become lazy and are not willing to fight or work. Joshua gently rebukes them, "How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you?" (Josh. 18:3). He urges them to take decisive action and claim the land God promised. They have been given stewardship of this land, to care for it and cultivate it, but their faith must be coupled with actions to receive God's blessing.

Joshua appointed three men from each tribe to go into the territory not yet allocated and survey it. They were to walk through the land, carefully drawing out boundaries, and describing it so there will be no question of what property is being talked about. Cities, rivers, valleys, mountains, and such were primarily used in their survey as boundaries. (Josh. 18:3-19:48). They were to return with their findings to the Tabernacle at Shiloh where lots would be cast before the Lord to determine who would inherit each section.

I. The Remaining Tribes Allotments

The first of these last seven tribes to receive their inheritance was Benjamin, Joseph's brother, described by Jacob as a "ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil" (Gen. 49:27; Josh. 18:11). As the strong picture of this blessing portrays, they were a fierce, cruel, and proficient enemy in battle. Many of their skilled warriors were left-handed and could sling stones with superb accuracy. (Judg. 5:14; 20:16). Unfortunately, their warlike personality also caused internal conflict among themselves! (Judg. 19-21).

Benjamin received a small area between the powerful tribes of Judah and Ephraim. Jerusalem was one of a number of important towns in this central highland area. God may have used these strong warriors to defend this area that would become the seat of the Temple and the nation. The judge Ehud and Israel's first king, Saul, were of the tribe of Benjamin, as well as the apostle Paul in the New Testament.

Joshua 19 begins with Simeon receiving his inheritance. When Jacob had given the blessing, he had spoken of both Simeon and Levi together as violent individuals whose land would be divided. (Gen. 49:5-7). These two had taken it upon themselves to avenge their sister Dinah after she was raped by Prince Shechem, the Hivite. (Gen. 34). They falsely said that Shechem could marry their sister if they were first circumcised to make a covenant between the families. On the third day, when the men weren't feeling so well, Simeon and Levi attacked and killed Shechem and the men of the city. At that time, Jacob had rebuked them for their cruelty and anger.

In addition, Simeon had actively participated in the idol worship and sexual sins of the Midianites. (Numb. 25:1-9). So, although the tribe had come out of Egypt as the third largest tribe (Numb. 1:23), God's judgment of their sin had caused them to rapidly dwindle in number. Now, 35 years later, 63% of the tribe had perished, and they had become the smallest tribe.

As the weakest tribe numerically (Numb. 26:14), their legacy of dividing and scattering turned into a curse for Simeon. Since Judah's land was too large for their tribe, God portioned out their dry, southern land, known as the Negeb, for Simeon. This consisted of a small area of cities within Judah, rather than living on his own land, touching neighboring tribes like the others. Eventually, they would lose their tribal identity and become absorbed into the more powerful tribe of Judah with no land of their own.

Alternatively, this same prophecy given to Levi would become a blessing because of their faithfulness to God during the rebellion with the golden calf (Ex. 32:26-28). Although they would live in various cities scattered throughout the whole nation of Israel and have no large tract of land, they gained one of the richest blessings of any of the tribes because the Lord would be their inheritance. (Josh. 13:33).

The next four tribes occupied territory around Galilee and its neighboring regions in the northern part of Canaan. Zebulun's blessing foretold that he would "dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for a haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon" (Gen. 49:13), but his territory doesn't border on any body of water. It rises from the coastal plain in the fertile hill country to the mountains of southern Galilee. So, how can he be a "haven of ships"?

While Zebulun's borders don't directly reach the Mediterranean, they are close enough to benefit from its maritime trade routes and commercial commerce. The phrase "haven of the sea" could also have been translated "looking towards the sea," since Zebulun did look toward the sea, both to the east and west.

Issachar is given land that borders Zebulun to the north in the Valley of Jezreel to the south of the Sea of Galilee. This area is strategically important and agriculturally rich. This farming region closely matches the prediction of Jacob: "He saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant, so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant at forced labor" (Gen. 49:15 ESV). Because of their willingness to bear burdens and not fight, they would become slaves to foreign nations.

As a strong donkey, he was hardworking and robust, but he didn't have much spirit or courage. He was content to dwell amidst those who could protect him, even willing to pay for their protection. In I Chronicles 12:23-40, many from each tribe came to fight to turn the kingdom of Saul over to David. Most tribes sent between 3,000 and 50,000 men of valor; Issachar sent only 200 men who "understood the times."

They understood the social and spiritual climate of the times, not just knowledge, but what the right course of action should be for Israel. God gave them wisdom and a deep understanding of what He was doing and what they needed to do to align themselves with Him. This was crucial during this time of transition from Saul's to David's reign, so instead of fighting, they used the talents God had given them.

The coastal plains from Mt. Carmel north to the Phoenician cities of Tyree and Sidon were allotted to Asher. They never gained full control of the area, so they had to be

content with what they had. Jacob had said Asher would have good soil so his food would be rich and able to provide royal delicacies. The fertile regions given to Asher provided the perfect soil for abundant agriculture, including olive oil production and farmland. It provided not only necessities, but also luxuries.

Naphtali's land was also north of the Sea of Galilee and included the hills up to Phoenicia and the Jordan Valley. Jacob said, "Naphtali is a doe let loose; he bears beautiful fawns," is a poetic description that suggests freedom, swiftness, and fruitfulness. Not only was his land productive, but because so much of Jesus' teaching and ministry took place here, it also produced significant spiritual fruitfulness.

Finally, Dan received his portion on the Philistine coast. Squeezed between Israel's two most powerful tribes, Judah and Ephraim, and pushed back from the coast by the Philistines and Amorites, the tribe chose to move and settle in the far north, away from God's gift. Jacob's blessing refers to his becoming a judge in Israel rather than referring to his land. His prophecy also includes imagery of a "serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that bites the horses' heels, so that his rider shall fall backward."

His legacy is mixed with the gift of judges and yet a tribe that faced issues with idolatry, a tribe capable of both deliverance and problematic behavior. It was a troublesome tribe. They introduced idolatry to Israel and later became the center of idol worship in Israel (Amos 8:14), prompting God's judgment upon the people. Because of their idolatry, they are disqualified from service during the end times. (Rev. 7:5-8).

After all the tribes received their inheritance, Joshua received a special inheritance, which, by God's command, he was allowed to choose for himself. He chose "Timnath-serah in Mt. Ephraim: and he built the city and dwelt therein." (Josh. 19:49-51). Like the servant leader that he was, Joshua made sure the needs of everyone came before himself. He chose to remain in his own tribe of Ephraim, near the city of Shiloh where the Tabernacle, the symbol of God's presence, was near him.

II. Three Special Situations

Some special situations still needed to be allotted to complete the divisions of Canaan. Six cities scattered throughout Israel would be designated as "Cities of Refuge." (Josh. 20). If anyone had accidentally killed someone, he could take sanctuary in one of these nearby cities. The farthest anyone would have been from a city of refuge was 30 miles. In the city, he was safe from the hand of an avenger seeking vengeance for the death of someone. Here, he would be judged before the congregation. If he were found outside the gates of the city, he could be put to death without the slayer receiving any repercussions. If he were judged to be guilty, he would be put to death immediately, even in the city. The city kept him safe if he stayed within its gates; he must remain there until the death of the current high priest.

In Joshua 21, God again lists the cities of the Levites. Because of their service to God, they would not have time to care for land, so God made special provision for them. "And the LORD gave unto Israel ALL the land which He swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to ALL that He swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered ALL their enemies into their

hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass” (Josh 21:43-45). Isn’t God good?

After things were settled, the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh were permitted to return to their families east of the Jordan. (Josh. 22). Fighting the nations had blessed them with great riches, and as they passed various cities and landmarks, it must have brought back memories of God’s goodness and the battles that He had helped them win. It wasn’t easy, though, to say goodbye to their brothers, nor was it easy to leave the nearness of the Ark of the Covenant. They were leaving the land God had promised to bless, but in some ways, they also must have felt isolated from the rest of the nation. This is probably what prompted the third special situation: they built a massive altar on the east side of the Jordan.

Now, this is a HUGE problem! God had said that if any city was found to be worshipping anywhere other than where God specified, they should all be put to death. (Deut. 13). Only the place God chose was allowed—but no sooner had these 2½ tribes gone back home than they began sinning. This was serious! It was bad enough when 36 men were killed because Achan took things from Jericho, but this was much worse! Action must be taken immediately even if that meant fighting their own brothers.

“And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them” (Josh. 22:12). Their actions demonstrated a deep commitment to God and a genuine desire to maintain the purity of God’s worship, but...they had jumped to the wrong conclusions without finding out the facts. They had only looked at the outward appearance.

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, led the way, with ten princes, one from each of the tribes on the western side of Jordan, to confront the eastern tribes. The fact that Phinehas was included in this delegation shows that this was more than a political matter; the primary issue was spiritual. The situation was highly charged. In their minds, this altar was a violation of God’s instruction for worship. Instead of asking the meaning of the altar and encouraging them to do right, they began their tirade by pointing out their failures. (Josh. 22:16-20).

Four times in their attack, Phinehas uses the word “rebel.” To “rebel” is to “*deliberately* resist God’s will and disobey His law.” They didn’t take the time to find out the motives of the tribes before assuming the worst. James 1:19-20 tells us that we must be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

Even though Joshua wasn’t included in this group, he must have been consulted before they left. While the delegation accuses and condemns without facts, they also include in their words a very generous offer: if the Eastern tribes didn’t think they could worship the Lord on the East side of the river, they could come and live on the western side of the Jordan. This would have shrunk the territory of all the other tribes, but they were showing to them a desire for restoration.

It would not have been surprising to see some of the hotheads in these 2½ tribes draw weapons in their defense, but to their credit, they only replied, “The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, He knoweth...” This altar was not an offering for sacrifice but to be a remembrance, a witness for generations to come of their shared covenant.

It was to be a symbol of unity that, despite their geographical divisions, they all worshipped the same God. Once the western tribes found out the real reason for the altar, they went from being critical to understanding. They were willing to listen and recognized that their fellow Israelites had thought of something they hadn't considered.

III. Last Words and Testaments

Time went by as the people settled into their new homes and became comfortable. Joshua knew he was old. He knew it, he felt it, in every bone of his body, and in every pain of his joints. He didn't have much time left. He could no longer lead Israel into rigorous battle as he had once done. When he looked at his life, though, he realized that he had worked hard. He had accomplished all that Moses had asked him to do. With God, he had rallied the people behind him and won stunning victories. Joshua's life had been a success. What insights does he give us with which to measure our lives to see if we, too, have been a success or a failure?

He had learned to live by faith and not by sight, statistics, bank accounts, college degrees, properties, or prestige. Joshua lived by faith in what God revealed. He would have been a failure if he had measured himself by the world's standards; by God's, he was a complete success.

He called all Israel and the elders of the tribes to give them final instructions and reminders. He reminds them that they needed to remain separate from the nations "that remained among them, neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them; but cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day" (Josh. 23:7-9).

Our lives will never be considered truly successful if we consider that living to a great old age is noteworthy...look at Methusaleh. All the Bible says is that "all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty-nine years; and he died" (Gen. 5:27). Nor can it be measured in a hefty bank account. Howard Hughes died a filthy, lonely recluse, afraid of everything despite all his wealth. We can never have enough achievements to say we are a success because there is always something more we could have done. Joshua, though, understood where his place was in the big picture of God and lived his life accordingly.

There are plenty of ways to stay busy in this life, but busyness alone does not mean we are successful. Only if the things we stay busy with have meaning will we be counted as successful. All that really matters is to be where God wants us to be, doing something to promote His kingdom. Joshua had sought to know God's purpose, to know God's heart, and then he sought to live it. Now, he is seeking to impart that important wisdom to Israel as he lives out his last few days.

Notice in Joshua 24 that Joshua gives all the glory to God for what was accomplished. He relates to Israel the words of God, "I took, I gave, I sent, I plagued, I did, I brought you out, I delivered." None of that was man's accomplishments alone, but God used man to accomplish His plan. "Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth..." That's what we must do to live a successful life. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:14-15). Israel responded that they, too, would serve God. By doing so, they would have success because God would go before them as He had done with Joshua.

Joshua, the servant of the Lord, died at 110 years old, having lived a successful life according to God's standards. (Josh. 24:29). Israel served God all the days of Joshua because he had led and followed God. In Shechem, the people buried the bones of Joseph that they had brought out of Egypt. Eleazar the priest, Aaron's son, also died and was buried. His son Phinehas now became the high priest. Life would change for Israel. No longer would they be a nomadic people but would live in the land given to them by God for eternity.

Conclusion:

As we age, we can sometimes look back on our lives and feel regret and shame over our past mistakes, anxious about lost opportunities, anger over wasted time, and guilt over wasted resources. Plenty of people who arrive in their senior years can relate to what the poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote, "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: it might have been."

If your life were suddenly to take a turn for the worse, how would you look back on it? Would you feel that your life had been a failure? Has it felt empty and devoid of things that you felt would have made it successful? Would you like to do at least parts of it all over again?

As believers, we know that God forgives our shortcomings. He's covered our sins with His blood and is willing to forgive our sins and remember them no more. (Isa. 43:25; I Jn. 1:9; Ps. 103:12 to name a few verses). So, what keeps us feeling like failures? Do we forget that if God forgives our sins, who are we to keep remembering them! Are you looking at yourself as the world sees you or as God does?

Finding God's path for your life, and staying on it, will cause your life to be a success. It's not too early to begin; neither is it too late to become the successful woman God wants you to be. As long as God is in your life, you have the opportunity to snatch success from the jaws of failure. Why not begin with God's forgiveness and start now?

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

And the Lord Gave Them Rest (Judges Part 1)

1) Read Judges 1-3. What pattern do you see beginning to occur in the lives of Israel?

2) How agreement did Simeon and Judah make with each other?

3) According to Judges 1:27-34, what great wrong was done by Israel? What 4 possible dangers could come from this situation?

a.

b.

c.

d.

4) What message did the angel bring for Israel?

5) What happened shortly after Joshua's death?

6) How did the Israelites change of attitude toward God affect how God helped them?

7) What did Israel do then?

8) What did God set in place to lead Israel?

Conclusion:

As we begin to look at the book of Judges, it seems like things are getting started well in the lives of Israel. The tribes appear to be getting along and working together to rid themselves of the Canaanites that hadn't been removed. But then... Yes, there is always that, isn't there? There is always something that turns the tide when things appear to be going well. Satan gets his grubby little paws into the mix, and suddenly, everything begins to fall apart.

The first problem always seems to be us. We take our eyes off of God when things start to go wrong instead of drawing closer to Him. The minute we take things into our own hands, doing what is right in our own eyes, we lose our direction. We may not bow down to idols, but other things begin to take the place of God, and that's only the beginning of our problems!

God sends little hints that things aren't right in our lives. But we ignore them. Then He sends bigger things, and then still bigger until finally, we cry out to the One we should have been looking at all along—God. Thankfully, God is gracious. He promises that when we confess our sin, He will forgive us and cleanse us. Unfortunately, there are still leftover consequences that we may have to deal with for the rest of our lives.

Let's challenge ourselves to not forsake God. Let's continually draw toward Him rather than going our own way and see if we can avoid the problems that will surely come by losing our focus.

I challenge you to memorize this verse as you begin practicing drawing closer to God. "But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works" (Ps. 73:28).