

ENTER AT YOUR OWN REST

Studies in the Book of Joshua

“Full blessing in the Christian life is not bestowed except to eager, hungry people who press in to receive it”

Alan Redpath

Text

Joshua 15-19

Topic

Joshua casts the lots to determine the portion of land each tribe will be responsible to settle and control

Title

“Whole Lot of Settlin’ Goin On”

Joshua 19:51 These were the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel divided as an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So they made an end of dividing the country.

Introduction

Every now and then I go to the website of the California State Controller and search my name for any unclaimed property that might belong to me. There’s nothing for me but I was surprised to see that MetLife owes my dad \$53.06.

Unclaimed property characterizes the tribes of Israel as they each in turn receive their inheritance. Tribe after tribe fails to fully settle the land that is given to them.

If we understand their territories as being typical of the various spiritual ‘territories’ we are given to settle as Christians then we will be able to learn from their failures. Your marriage, your family, your job or career - all these and everywhere else you find yourself are the territories you’ve been given to fully occupy for the Lord.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Eliminate The Attitudes That Will Unsettle You, and #2 Encourage The Attitudes That Will Settle You.

#1 Eliminate The Attitudes That Will Unsettle You

The next five chapters - fifteen through nineteen - describe the borders and boundaries, the cities and villages, that were distributed to the Israelites. As you read these chapters you find lengthy legal descriptions that are interrupted occasionally by a comment or two explaining a failure to fully settle the land. It is those comments we want to explore.

The distribution of the land began with the tribe of Judah in chapter fifteen.

- In verses one through twelve the borders and boundaries of their portion are listed.
- In verses twenty through sixty-two the cities and villages within their portion are listed.
- Verses thirteen through nineteen were the subject of our last study. In them we saw the success of one remarkable member of the tribe of Judah, Caleb, as he conquered Hebron and Debir.

The chapter closes on an ominous note in verse sixty-three where we read this:

Joshua 15:63 As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day.

Before we can comment on this one verse we need to understand three facts surrounding the Jebusites and Jerusalem:

1. In the initial campaign to take the land the Israelites put to death the king of Jerusalem (10:26 & 42).
2. They did occupy Jerusalem for a time (Judges 1:8).
3. The full and complete settlement of Jerusalem would not take place until David was king reigning over Israel (Second Samuel 5).

The king of Jerusalem was defeated. The Israelites could occupy Jerusalem but did not do so fully until their king appeared and led them in triumph.

It's a picture for us as Christians of our struggle against the flesh. Satan was defeated on the Cross of Jesus Christ by the death of our Savior. He's like the defeated king of Jerusalem. We can have victory over sin but still struggle against the flesh. The struggle will continue until our King appears. It will continue until the Lord takes us home and we no longer have this physical body to contend with as we seek to walk in a manner pleasing to God.

The struggle against sin, between the flesh and the Spirit, is the normal Christian life. The fact that we struggle against the flesh, and that we occasionally or even often fail, isn't the problem with regards to settling the various territories of our lives.

What can keep us unsettled is complacency in that struggle. It's too easy to attribute our lack of spiritual progress to the flesh and then do nothing about it. When we think or say things like, "That's just the way I am," making excuses, we have become complacent in the daily struggle.

God knows "that's just the way you are" and He is at work to change you. The fact we will not be sinless until we receive our glorified bodies should be no excuse to quit growing in the Lord. When I 'settle' for less in my struggle against the flesh the various territories God has marked-out for me will remain unsettled.

As we turn the page to chapter sixteen and look at the tribes descended from Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, we encounter another attitude that will leave us unsettled. Look at verse ten in chapter sixteen:

Joshua 16:10 And they did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day and have become forced laborers.

Then go to chapter seventeen and look at verses twelve and thirteen:

Joshua 17:12 Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities, but the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land.

Joshua 17:13 And it happened, when the children of Israel grew strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.

God had made no provision for the Canaanites to be made slaves. They were to be slain.

If you can enslave someone then you can utterly drive them out. The failure to do so because the Canaanites were “determined” indicates that the Israelites grew weary of the task.

Growing weary is a major reason why so much spiritual territory remains unsettled in our lives. It’s easy to start out well. It’s the finishing we have trouble with.

You’re not in a sprint or even a marathon. You are in a long-distance race.

Ask yourself, “Am I still growing in the territories of my life, or have I grown weary in them?”

No need to turn the page. Our next unsettling insight is in 17:14-18.

Joshua 17:14 Then the children of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, "Why have you given us only one lot and one share to inherit, since we are a great people, inasmuch as the Lord has blessed us until now?"

Joshua 17:15 So Joshua answered them, "If you are a great people, then go up to the forest country and clear a place for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the giants, since the mountains of Ephraim are too confined for you."

Joshua 17:16 But the children of Joseph said, "The mountain country is not enough for us; and all the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both those who are of Beth Shean and its towns and those who are of the Valley of Jezreel."

Joshua 17:17 And Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph - to Ephraim and Manasseh - saying, "You are a great people and have great power; you shall not have only one lot,

Joshua 17:18 but the mountain country shall be yours. Although it is wooded, you shall cut it down, and its farthest extent shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots and are strong."

The land was being portioned fairly by lot. It wasn’t Joshua’s decision at all. Yet they complained he was acting wrongly in not recognizing them by giving them a greater land.

This kind of unsettling attitude sometimes affects the church. Someone thinks they are blessed by God, gifted in a certain area. If they are not recognized, or recognized soon enough, they complain and want more.

God may indeed have blessed and gifted them. But we are first and foremost servants. As long as we are serving the Lord we need not complain about our lack of recognition. Gifting is not everything. Having a servant's heart is.

Joshua wouldn't budge. He couldn't budge because the choice was God's, not his. So he encouraged them to go after something more difficult. After all, if they were such a "great" people, they ought to be able to conquer a more difficult territory.

We often leave territory unsettled because we want to settle for what is comfortable. We look back rather than forward.

There is one more unsettling attitude and it's in the opening verses of chapter eighteen.

Joshua 18:1 Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them.

Joshua 18:2 But there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes which had not yet received their inheritance.

Joshua 18:3 Then Joshua said to the children of Israel: "How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers has given you?"

Joshua 18:4 Pick out from among you three men for each tribe, and I will send them; they shall rise and go through the land, survey it according to their inheritance, and come back to me.

Joshua 18:5 And they shall divide it into seven parts. Judah shall remain in their territory on the south, and the house of Joseph shall remain in their territory on the north.

Joshua 18:6 You shall therefore survey the land in seven parts and bring the survey here to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord our God.

Joshua 18:7 But the Levites have no part among you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance. And Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave them."

Joshua 18:8 Then the men arose to go away; and Joshua charged those who went to survey the land, saying, "Go, walk through the land, survey it, and come back to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord in Shiloh."

Joshua 18:9 So the men went, passed through the land, and wrote the survey in a book in seven parts by cities; and they came to Joshua at the camp in Shiloh.

Joshua 18:10 Then Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord, and there Joshua divided the land to the children of Israel according to their divisions.

At some point in the distribution of land Israel's camp had moved from Gilgal to Shiloh. The Tabernacle was set up and would remain there for a long time.

Though the portions were still chosen by lot, the land required a survey to determine its portions. Apparently the seven remaining tribes were supposed to have conducted and completed this survey but had blown it off. Joshua had to exhort them to get out into the land and survey it.

What I see here is that the seven tribes were happy to camp around the Tabernacle but hesitant to go out from it into the surrounding territory. An extreme application of this would be a person who attends church regularly but who keeps their so-called 'religion' to themselves while out in the world.

A more appropriate application for us might be a reminder that the places we find ourselves - neighborhood, work, school - are territories that need surveying. We ought to be trying to determine how far we can go in them with sharing the Gospel. We ought to be establishing times of prayer and Bible study. Otherwise we leave them largely unsettled.

It wasn't all failure for the Israelites. We saw the success of Caleb at the very beginning of the distribution of the land. Now at the end we'll see two more examples of successful settling.

#2 Encourage The Attitudes That Will Settle You

Our first positive attitude since Caleb is in 19:40-48.

Joshua 19:40 The seventh lot came out for the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families.

Joshua 19:41 And the territory of their inheritance was Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir Shemesh,

Joshua 19:42 Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Jethlah,

Joshua 19:43 Elon, Timnah, Ekron,

Joshua 19:44 Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath,

Joshua 19:45 Jehud, Bene Berak, Gath Rimmon,

Joshua 19:46 Me Jarkon, and Rakkon, with the region near Joppa.

Joshua 19:47 And the border of the children of Dan went beyond these, because the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem and took it; and they struck it with the edge of the sword, took possession of it, and dwelt in it. They called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father.

Joshua 19:48 This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families, these cities with their villages.

Once Joshua rattled their cage the Danites got with the program.

The Danites were willing to be corrected. That's not easy. But it is spiritual. Let God make course corrections along the way. Don't fight Him on it.

Not only that, note the phrase in verse forty-seven, "And the border of the children of Dan went beyond these, because the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem and took it; and they struck it with the edge of the sword, took possession of it, and dwelt in it."

They did more than they were asked. They saw an area that could be conquered and they went for it.

Among the things we could say about the Danites and Leshem is that they were attentive. They saw what was going on around them.

Cultivate the attitude of attentiveness. Once while walking along being thronged by a crowd Jesus cried out, "Who touched me?" He was attentive to a diseased woman reaching out to touch the hem of His garment. We need to become just as attentive - especially to those with the greater need among us.

There's one more attitude I want to mention. It's only fitting that it belonged to Joshua.

Joshua 19:49 When they had made an end of dividing the land as an inheritance according to their borders, the children of Israel gave an inheritance among them to Joshua the son of Nun.

Joshua 19:50 According to the word of the Lord they gave him the city which he asked for, Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim; and he built the city and dwelt in it.

You'd half expect Joshua to be able to choose anything he wanted as recognition for his meritorious service.

Joshua got no special treatment. The land he received was within the borders of his tribe and was a difficult, infertile region, upon which he would have to build a city.

He was content with the portion God gave him. Contentment might be the key to all our attitudes.

Listen to these verses encouraging us to an attitude of contentment:

1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU."

Being content doesn't mean settling for less. It is perfectly compatible with a zeal to conquer and to grow in the Lord. Being content means that your attitude is settled once-and-for-all knowing that God is working to complete what He's started in you and that all things will work together for your ultimate good and God's consummate glory.

Here is the secret to contentment. You've got Jesus with you always in your territory. His presence transforms your marriage, your family, your work, your ministry.

If you are content to walk with Him in your territories then you will find yourself settling them in His power. Put too much attention on yourself and you will give in to the unsettling attitudes we've discussed. Set your affections on Jesus and your attitudes will be those of a settler discovering and enjoying spiritual territory on your pilgrim journey towards your real home - the place the Lord is busy building and preparing for you in Heaven.