

JOSHUA

Lesson 17 - Chapters 12 and 13

Today we enter a decidedly different section of the book of Joshua than what we have studied to this point. The land has (to a sufficient degree) been conquered and now it is time to settle it. Its time to turn the implements of war into ploughshares.

For me this is a difficult section because I strained to find the theological value in what (on the surface) seems to be little more than several consecutive chapters that center primarily on geography and tribal boundaries. Yet because of the fundamental God-patterns that the Lord has established for us in the Torah, when we can get beyond (or is it beneath?) these long tedious lists of ancient cities, and rivers, and mountains, and kings suddenly the reasons for their presence in the Holy Scriptures starts to surface.

What we're going to see develop in the next few chapters is that despite the general statement that the Bible pronounces that Joshua conquered all the land, in fact he did not. And this is but one example of why, after our first coming to belief in the God of Israel and His Messiah Yeshua, we must move as quickly as possible beyond our childlike belief in highly simplified doctrines and into a greater maturity and understanding by diligently studying God's Word from the beginning. That is, the Bible is full of generalizations that were but cultural (Hebrew cultural) in their nature and form. But then as we read closer we find that these generalizations have caveats and nuances. The Hebrew way in the Holy Scripture seems to be that a broad generalization is pronounced first and then afterwards the details that shape its edges are added. If we stop studying and become satisfied with the generalizations then we only get part of the truth and thus we have a much harder time grasping what follows.

In a certain sense, everything that happens from this point forward in the remainder of the Bible (Old and New Testaments) is about the consequences of Joshua and the Israelites and their descendants, failing to fully conquer the Promised Land. I have stated on numerous occasions that the intractable Middle East we see today is the direct result of Israel's inability to follow through with the conquering of Canaan. Yet in our era we can now also see in ways more visible than at any time since the advent of Yeshua, that the failures of Joshua and those Israeli leaders who followed him have also led to the permanent state of confusion and conflict that seems to have gripped the entire globe.

So the key to our study of the remaining chapters of Joshua is to approach it from the right angle; and that angle is all wrapped up in recognizing the consequences of incomplete victory that all of God's people will suffer until Messiah comes again.

To set the tone for today's lesson, open your Bibles to the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 10: 1 – 13

Paul says that he and his generation are living out what was started in the previous generations; or as he puts it, "what happened to our fathers". And he says in verse 6 that what went on especially with Moses, the Exodus, and then the entering into the Promised land was prefigurative of what the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ can expect. And that is because it is all connected. Now that we've heard from Paul on the subject I can do no better than to paraphrase Richard Hess who says this about the section of Joshua we are about to enter:

For the Believer, Israel's inability to fully and completely conquer all the Promised Land looks ahead to our present-day inability to enjoy the fullest favor of God's available blessings in this life. Christians are not perfect even though we are called to display perfect holiness. We live in this impossible tension between the rewards of a life lived as directed by the Holy Spirit of God (and these rewards are available here and now), and our own failures that effectively block our access to these same rewards that we so desperately seek. This maddening paradox of the Believer's life sadly has no resolution in our current state of being, or in this world as it currently exists. But we DO have the promise of God's continual presence in the life of a Believer that both allows us to receive forgiveness for our failures and power to live a life of obedience to the Lord.

So with that as a background, let's read Joshua chapter 12.

READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 12 all

Chapter 12 is divided into two distinct divisions: verses 1 – 6, and then 7 –24. The division is essentially marked by the Jordan River. That is the first 6 verses speak of Moses leading Israel to take the land on the **eastern** side of the Jordan River, and then from verse 7 onward it speaks of Joshua's victories on the **western** side of the Jordan River. So this is more or less a State of the Union address that defines where Israel stood as a nation at this point in history. And it does it by explaining it in geographic terms: what part of the Land of Canaan they took, and by default what part they did NOT take.

We must always remember that what the first 6 verses describe is NOT part of the Promised Land. It is land that the Lord allowed the tribes of Reuben and Gad and about ½ of the tribe of Manasseh to have INSTEAD of their natural inheritance inside the Land of Canaan. It is not clear why the Lord permitted this; but it is clear why these 2 ½ Israelite tribes preferred land in the Trans-Jordan to land inside Canaan: it was beautiful, fertile, and already conquered; plus each tribe would receive quite a large tract of territory for its own. Let's face it: from a purely mathematical and practical viewpoint the Land of Canaan wasn't all that big. To divide it up into 1/12 's would make each tract pretty small. By the 2 ½ tribes accepting their land in another place altogether, that both gave them bigger territories AND it meant the Land of Canaan would be divided into 10 parts instead of 12, thus affording more land for each of the

other 9 ½ tribes. Setting the theological implications aside, it seemed to be a win-win for all concerned.

As for the land on the east side of the Jordan River, this section basically explains that it runs from the River Arnon in the south to Mt. Hermon in the north. The River Arnon is more or less the natural boundary that separated the kingdom of Sihon from Moab. Mt. Hermon is the primary source of water for the Jordan River as a result of its almost 10,000 feet elevation and resultant annual snow pack and then melt-off

Now that the north-south boundary is established, verse 3 gives us the east-west boundary of the land in the Trans-Jordan; or more accurately, the western boundary (the east is not given). And the western boundary is the Jordan River Valley that runs from the Kinnareth (later called the Sea of Galilee) down to the Dead Sea.

In verse 4 the matter of the kingdom of Og is brought up. Og was the king that ruled over a kingdom called Bashan, and it was north of Sihon. This is some of the most fertile prime field and pastureland in the Middle East and so it was always a territory that was hotly contested and desired by surrounding nations. Israel struggled mightily to maintain control over it and really only had thorough sovereignty over it during the time of King's David and Solomon.

Here we are reminded that King Og was of a race of people called the Rephaim (something you should by now be familiar with). The Rephaim were unusually big and tall people, at times called giants particularly in the Greek translations of the Bible. The Rephaim were scattered and did not live together as a nation. Rather they tended to rise to power in various nations and/or become legendary warriors. Goliath was one of these.

The idea behind these passages is that Moses set the example for Joshua to follow: he conquered land. So it's an easy transition into verse 7 whereby we Joshua do the same by conquering the actual Promised Land. And as the first verse makes clear, this is considered to be land WEST of the Jordan River.

Yet there are a couple of interesting differences between how Moses went about things and what Joshua did. First is what we already covered: Moses conquered land that was NOT the Promised Land. Second is that Moses personally assigned land to Reuben, Gad, and ½ of the tribe of Manasseh, and this generally according to what they requested. Joshua on the other hand distributed the land by lots, and the drawing of the lots had already been accomplished (even though up to this point the land had not yet been assigned to each tribe).

The area of the Promised Land is given in a generality: from Ba'al Gad up north in the Lebanon (yes, the same Lebanon we know of today), down to Seir (also known as Edom) to the south. Then to define the east-west boundary it speaks of the hills that rise up above the Jordan Valley (on the west bank of the Jordan) to the Shefelah (the Mediterranean coastal plain).

From this a long list of cities that Joshua conquered in Canaan is presented. This list is in the order of their taking, beginning with Jericho, then Ai, and then the last to be taken Tirtzah. It is

key to notice that if we plotted these cities on a map (and truthfully not all these places are identifiable today) that they would be mostly in the area that the world today calls the West Bank. It is ironic, is it not, that the area that the Arab nations insist is theirs', and that Israel is largely willing to concede, is in fact the heart of the Promised Land and was the foundation of the Kingdom of God that Joshua had taken in battle.

So the state of Israel at the point of Joshua 12 can be summed up this way: much remains to be done. Israel has carved out a large section of the land for themselves, but other areas have not been conquered. The major kings have been defeated, but many minor ones must be dealt with. Israel has (generally speaking) won the territory but still must drive out the remaining inhabitants and settle it.

Warfare and battle is not Israel's nature; her natural state is to live at peace in the land the Lord has given to her. But on this planet, during this phase in the world's existence, only battle can attain the peace Israel wants and the Lord wants for her. Now that Israel has conquered, the land must be divided up among the people and so that is what is about to happen. Once that is done Israel finally has a full and complete identity; a people set-apart for God living in a land set-apart for them by God.

Let me point out something that might not yet be apparent: everything that led up to this moment in Israel's history pointed towards the distribution of the land among God's people. Conquering the land is one thing, what is done with the land is quite another. Joshua was to divide the land and give it to the people; Joshua was not to own it or personally control it as Israel's leader. Such a procedure was generally unknown in history up to that time. For a king or potentate to have an enormous army capable of overthrowing entire regions meant that he already had a large and established center of civilization and headquarters for control and operation. He had fields to grow food for his army; a tax base to collect money to buy supplies for his soldiers; foundries and thousands of craftsmen to fashion weapons; an established, trained, and well-organized military leadership. Israel had none of this. And for those who accept Israel's Exodus from Egypt and even their conquering of Canaan, but look for natural reasons for their success and thus do not accept the reality of miracles then this one goes unexplainable. How can a wandering horde of people with no country, a people with no fields for food and no foundries for making weapons, not even a center of civilization have the wherewithal to be an unstoppable conquering force over a substantial region of multiple kingdoms that were entrenched, well defended, well funded, and many had sizable standing armies? Answer: it can't happen except by the hand of the Almighty.

Further when a king conquered territory it was meant for anything but the people. Rather it was his; it was to satisfy his personal ambitions and lust for power. The people merely lived by-his-leave in his land. It's not that people didn't own farmlands and businesses, and so on; it's that the nation belonged entirely to the king. Yet God's plan for Israel was revolutionary: no ruler would own the land or control the nation. Rather the land would be divided up according to tribe and then the tribal leader would divvy it up according to the clans that together formed his tribe. The Israelite tribal prince was called a *nasi*, a chieftain, not a king. He was not royalty; he was the head, the patriarch, of a very large extended family called a tribe. His first duty was to be responsible for his people's wellbeing; he was their father and was to behave

that way.

Just as Moses set the example for Joshua, Joshua was to have been the example for all of Israel's future leaders to follow. They were NOT to be kings, they were to be a council of equals, a confederation of tribes who had come from the loins of a single earthly father, Jacob called Israel. They're loyalty was not to be to a king, it was to be to their God, Yehoveh. Just as with the pagan world it was a king who ultimately owned the nation and thus all the land of that nation, so it was that Yehoveh the God of Israel was the true king of Israel and thus owned the nation of Israel and all the land He had given to them to possess, not own.

With this history and understanding we can see why it was that the Lord did NOT want Israel to have an earthly king. Introducing such a thing into Israelite society changed the entire dynamic of God's relationship with His people, and the people's relationship with their leader. A king MUST have the loyalty of his people; but in God's plan for Israel all they're loyalty was to be towards Him. With the advent of a human king, the people's loyalty would necessarily be a divided loyalty between the God of Israel and the King of Israel. If a human king was to be effective in this present world, he must have the loyalty and obedience of his people. Saul, the first king of Israel, was a poor king and really didn't know how to govern as a king. David was a good king and provided strong leadership, but he was hardly ideal. Solomon was not as good as his father, David, but he cared deeply for the people and loved God. Solomon consolidated his power, instituted heavy taxes, and worked hard to create alliances with his neighbors. Some day when we get to the narratives about the kings of Israel, and we study King Solomon, I'm going to show you something that most Jews, but few Christians, understand: the narratives about him were designed to demonstrate that Solomon was a poor king who did not follow the Torah and the ways of the Lord. But every step of the way, each king of Israel in succession demanded more **from** the people and gave less **to** the people than the one before him. In time some of these kings even felt jealous of any loyalty the people of Israel had to God, and so introduced false gods to try and destroy their connection with the God of Israel.

Who owns the land is everything, especially when it comes to Israel. Who the people give their loyalty to is everything, especially when it comes to Israel and those grafted in to Israel, Believers. I told you last time that the coming Battle of Armageddon is literally the final battle for the Land of Canaan that Joshua, and then all future leaders of Israel, never accomplished. And with the taking of the land, will be the taking of the whole world by Messiah. God will once again be king as was always intended, and no purely human king will ever again rule on this planet. And all this stems from the time of Joshua.

Let's move on to chapter 13

READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 13 all

The 1st verse essentially gives us the reason that the Lord was telling Joshua to distribute the land they had conquered; Joshua was old. Joshua was one of the 2 spies (the other being Kaleb) who had ventured along with 10 others into Canaan to scout it out, but came back with a good report while the other 10 recommended caution and even trying to find somewhere else

to call home. Therefore Joshua was indeed pretty old, somewhere between his early 80's and perhaps 90 ish. Not only that, unlike where we read in Deuteronomy that Moses was as strong when he died as he was many years earlier, here we read that age had taken its toll of Joshua. Moses was not a warrior, Joshua was. Joshua fought in many battles and he lived a dangerous and hard life. You don't fight as much as Joshua had without stress affecting you and without a litany of battle wounds; Joshua had been used and used up.

There is an unspoken, but fairly obvious, reality in play here: since the order from Yehoveh was to conquer ALL of Canaan and by no means had that been accomplished, Joshua probably wasn't mentally prepared to divide up the land just yet. This was not rebellion it was rather reasonable logic. But the Lord wanted Joshua to be the one to supervise the division so with Joshua feeling the affects of old age the Father wanted this done sooner than later lest Joshua die before the land allotment was accomplished. Further Yehoveh wanted whatever portion of the land that Israel did hold to be divided as is and the Lord would, in His time, take care of the remainder.

The last half of this 1st verse brings us to the purpose of my comment at the beginning of this lesson regarding generalizations; it says, "but there is yet a great deal of land to be possessed". This modifies the words spoken at the end of Joshua chapter 11 verse 23 that said, "Joshua took the whole land..." That is, we have Joshua taking the whole land and then a few paragraphs later being told that much land remained to be taken. This doesn't jibe until we better understand the Biblical Hebrew style. Joshua taking the whole land is one of those broad generalizations that I referred to. After that comment the writer of Joshua (often called the Compiler since he is both anonymous and very obviously he used several sources to piece together the whole account of the conquest of southern and northern Canaan) goes on to begin adding nuances and better defining the overall situation concerning the land.

One of the questions that can reasonably be asked is why all this somewhat redundant information about the borders and boundaries of the various land taken, and then what land will be given to each tribe? The answer is simpler than it might seem. Anyone who has purchased a home and recorded the deed knows that you receive a document that is called a property description. This property description uses several legal terms to give a precise definition of the property in question from the state, to the city, to the zip code, street address, length, width (down to the inch sometimes), and latitude and longitude. The purpose is to remove any doubt as to precisely who owns the land, and precisely what constitutes the land in question.

Well none of these modern devices was available in the Biblical era. Rivers, wells, dried up streams, well known landmarks like a large tree or a cave or rock outcropping, the name of the king who ruled over the pertinent area, were the only ways available to describe the property in question and it worked quite well. Land disputes were common then as they are now and these long narrative descriptions of the property were what was needed to solve most of them. The problem is that over hundreds and thousands of years rivers move or cease to exist; landmarks disappear, local cities are destroyed and renamed, kings change with regularity and the record of the names of previous kings are often lost or intentionally modified in order to discredit a king who came into disfavor. So defining exactly where a piece of property dating

back into the Bible times was located can be daunting and at times impossible.

So verse 2 speaks of one rather infamous region that Joshua did NOT conquer: the land of the P'lishtim, the Philistines. Let me remind you of the rather interesting fact the word Palestine is but Greek for Philistine or Philistia. And this verse makes it clear that the Israelites had no luck whatsoever in taking any part of Philistia.

The region that was defined as associated with the Philistines is from the Wadi of Egypt (here called the Shichor) in the south, to the border of Ekron in the north. And then it goes on to name the 5 major city-states that make up Philistia, Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gat and Ekron. This area lies along the coast of Canaan, next to the Mediterranean Sea. It is a long narrow strip that suited this group of people that were called the Sea Peoples before they were known as the Philistines. While nothing has been 100% proved, the body of evidence points towards the Sea Peoples coming from the area of Crete and terrorizing and then colonizing areas as far south as Egypt and as far north and east as modern day Istanbul.

It is notable that today a lot of people mistakenly think that the Gaza strip is the location of ancient Philistia, but that is not so. In fact Gaza city was the southernmost of the 5 city Philistine complex in ancient times, and today Gaza city is northernmost major city of the so-called Gaza strip. Ashdod and Ashkelon are well north of Gaza city and those places are firmly in Israel's hands. The exact locations of Gath and Ekron are hotly debated.

Philistia had an ally at their southern border that is called the Geshurites. The Geshurites were a minor power and thus operated in concert with the powerful Philistines such that even the territory that the Geshurites occupied was simply generalized as being part of Philistia. Technically Philistia proper ended at about Gaza city, and then the land of the Geshurites began and continued south the Wadi of Egypt. This mention of a people called the Avim is thought to be referring to a remnant of the former inhabitants of the area Philistia now occupied.

So here we have a pretty well defined area that lies along the seacoast, beginning in the upper Sinai Peninsula at the Wadi of Egypt and then extending to a little south of modern day Ashdod dominated by a people called the Philistines, and this is one of 3 named regions that the Israelites did NOT conquer under Joshua. By the way: modern Ashdod is NOT the same place as ancient Ashdod. Ancient Ashdod is about 3 miles or so southeast of the modern city of Ashdod.

The next major unconquered region is the northern seacoast of Canaan that is better known as Phoenicia. Again notice that for some reason the Israelites had at the time of Joshua either not undertaken the task or failed at it in taking the seacoast areas. Even though the word "Phoenicia" is not mentioned, the word "Sidonians" is. Sidon was the capital city of Phoenicia. Being the seat of government it was common to speak of the residents of Sidon in a more general way and at times to ascribe their name to all of Phoenicia even though technically that is incorrect.

I'm originally from southern California. And even though I lived in various tiny beach areas

from Manhattan Beach all the way south to Huntington Beach, if a person who I knew was not terribly familiar with the area asked me where I was from I'd say, "L.A." Most people wouldn't really know where the small beach cities were if I gave them the actual beach city that I lived in. Los Angeles City isn't really all that big of a land area, but it is such a known name and the power center of southern California that it best answers the question to "where you're from" if you are living anywhere in that area to say "L.A.". It's the same with calling the people of Phoenicia "Sidonians" because the grand city of Sidon was such a known place.

The 3rd unconquered region is described in verse 5. It begins just above Sidon, probably at a place called Byblos and then stretches eastward. Lebanon refers to the mountain range in the western part of Canaan that is next to Phoenicia, and is definitely part of the land promised to Israel through Moses.

So now we have a lay of the land. In general the mountain and desert regions of Israel beginning at the Jordan River and moving westward were captured by Joshua, but not as far as the Mediterranean Sea. The coast and the coastal plain from the upper Sinai Peninsula in the south, running all the way north to Lebanon remained in the hands of the enemy.

In verse 6 the Lord makes it clear that despite Israel holding only some of the territory, they were to immediately divide it up among the 9 ½ tribes for their inheritance. God says that He will, in time, expel these people. Let's be clear what is happening: Joshua is old and tired. His fighting days are nearing an end. The Lord is saying to Joshua, to Israel, and to future generations not to worry. Joshua the anointed warrior may soon be gone, but God will remain with the people and continue with the plan. Joshua's final task is not that of war, but of the distribution of the land that has already been won by war.

Verse 7 emphasizes that the land conquered by Joshua is ONLY for the 9 ½ tribes because the other 2 ½ have already received their land allotment, at their own request, OUTSIDE of the Promised Land, on the east side of the Jordan River.

Starting with verse 8, after the overall territory that was now in the hands of Israel (including the land on both the east and west sides of the Jordan River), the Israelite tribes start being mentioned as associated with certain territories within these lands. Reuben, Gad, and ½ of Manasseh are officially certified as having their land assigned to them by means of more or less repeating the boundaries. However it is also mentioned that they didn't conquer all the land of Og and Sihon. It says that the Geshurites and the Maakites were not driven out. This is a different group of Geshurites than the ones that lived to the south of Philistia and were their close ally. These Geshurites lived far away in the north country, to the east of the Jordan River. What interests me is the portion of the verse that says these people live among Israel to this day. Understand: this does NOT mean they were assimilated. Rather it means they kept their independence but generally speaking they lived side-by-side in peace with Israel.

By all rights the Geshurites living near Israel would have been OK with the Lord, if they did so in peace. Israel was to try and make peace with nations outside of the Land of Canaan, as opposed to the requirement to drive out or kill all the inhabitants INSIDE the Land of Canaan; and the northern Gerushites were outside the Land of Canaan. However both the negative

tone of the statement and the use of the Hebrew word **qereb** make it clear that these Geshurites lived not NEAR Israel but within the midst of Israel. They influenced Israel, they lived intertwined with the ½ tribe of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan; and this was never intended for this exact thing is what would quickly lead to idol worship and intermarriage and then eventually Israel's exile for their idolatry and rebellion.

We'll continue with Joshua 13 next week.