

JOSHUA

Lesson 20 - Chapters 17 and 18

We got a short ways into Joshua chapter 17 last week and we'll start close to the beginning of it this week. But first I want to step back and look at things from a broader view.

Last week in chapters 15, 16, and a bit of 17 we studied the all-important distribution of the Promised Land by Joshua to the tribes of Israel. It's difficult to overstate the theological and prophetic significance of that event. It's at least on par with the return of Israel as a nation of Hebrews to its original homeland in 1948; a prophecy that was so long in the making that most Christians AND Jews had long ago given up hope of it ever occurring. In lieu of believing the Scriptures and waiting for the Lord to move to bring Israel home Christians devised what is called Replacement Theology whereby every biblical reference to the land and the people of Israel was allegorized into the Church (essentially transferring the covenant blessings to the Christians but leaving all the covenant curses to the Jews), and the Jews decided that God had permanently exiled them from the Promised Land with no hope for a return.

Theologically this land distribution of Joshua was about God establishing His set-apart people in a designated set-apart place. It was about God's set-apart leader (Joshua) behaving as a godly leader should; he obeyed the Torah, demanded that Israel also be obedient to the Law, and he led the people selflessly as a servant and not a tyrant or a prima Dona. This also reflected God's character and ability to do whatever He promised to do even if it seems humanly and rationally impossible.

I told you last week that there is an element of this land distribution that rarely, if ever, is taught and discussed; it is the element of responsibility and obligation of the inheritors to the divine giver. When Israel was looking ahead to that time that they would finally enter Canaan and each tribe, clan, and family received a piece of land for its own, they were anxious for it all to happen the way a child looks forward to his upcoming birthday party. What they didn't realize was that connected with the inheritance of the land was an obligation to finish conquering it.

Up to now the 12 tribes worked together as a large and formidable army to battle the Canaanites in order take their land from them. The Holy War against Canaan had been largely successful; but much remained to be done. Not all the territory was conquered; it was spotty. Think of modern day Iraq in which there is no doubt that in general the USA has conquered it, yet are we in full control of the nation? No. One city can be completely peaceful and a few miles away another can be in utter turmoil. One city can be loyal to the new Iraqi/US coalition government and another not far away is under the control of a warlord who opposes the government. This was Canaan in Joshua 17.

At the time of Joshua 17 the army of Israel had more or less disbanded and each tribe fielded its own militia. Each tribe was primarily concerned for itself. As we'll find in this and the next chapter of Joshua 7 tribes had yet to receive their land inheritance. But it wasn't because it wasn't offered to them; it was because they refused it. Why on earth would they do such a thing? Because acceptance of their land inheritance meant that each tribe now assumed full responsibility to finish conquering and to govern their allotted territory. Inheritance neither meant peace nor stability for Israel; it was but a step along the way in a very long process that suddenly added a new and very challenging obligation. This was the historical reality of it; but it was (and is) also the theological reality of it.

I have long preached against the modern complacent church that (to its core) believes that once of person walks the aisle and accepts their redemption from Messiah Jesus that our work is done; we can pull up a pew and just be interested observers. That by inheriting salvation we now sit back and enjoy the fruits, waiting only for the day we arrive in heaven. We pray and then go our merry ways. Nothing could be less Scriptural than that proposition.

Instead, we are meant to equate our redemption and inheritance to that of Israel's over Canaan; that's one of the reasons that the Lord chose to preserve this episode for us. Along with our salvation and inheritance come duties and responsibilities. We have indeed come into a kind of spiritual rest due to our trust in God's Son, but physically we still live in a hostile unconquered place. God stated over and over to Joshua that He had already accomplished victory over Israel's Canaanite enemies before the army even went to battle; yet that did not somehow absolve Israel from participating in battle. God was not going to do a 100% supernatural Sodom and Gomorrah type of destruction upon Israel's enemies; Israel would have to fight for a long time to achieve victory and then to hold on to its gains. The path would be very uneven and dangerous. It's exactly the same for Believers of this or any era.

I've said to you recently that Armageddon is actually but the final battle for Canaan that started with Joshua. I don't mean this as illustration or allegory, but rather as simple biblical fact. Fittingly the name of the leader of the Battle of Armageddon, Y'hoshua (abbreviated to Yeshua) is the same as the leader of the battle for Canaan, Y'hoshua (we say Joshua). The battle of course takes place in the heartland of Canaan with Armageddon, just as it did with Joshua. Although I won't go into all the details right now, even observance of the all-important laws of herem (the divine laws of Holy War) that God enjoined upon Joshua and Israel are scrupulously observed at Armageddon as all enemy combatants **MUST** be killed without exception because they are devoted to God as, essentially, spoils of war.

But also consider the matter of the enemy. In Joshua's day the enemy was the Canaanites who were being ordered exterminated because God judged them as being irreconcilably wicked in His eyes. Yet who, spiritually, was the prince over the wicked Canaanites? Satan.

Therefore at Armageddon even though physically Y'hoshua (Jesus) will be leading Holy War against the wicked people of the world from all of its nations, spiritually He is actually fighting the Evil One: Satan. You see, just as Satan was the spiritual prince of Canaan, so now (as then, really) he is also the spiritual prince of the entire world. Listen to me please because what I'm about to say in many ways even addresses the modern day political arguments concerning

Israel and the Middle East. Satan, today, has a LEGAL RIGHT to this earth. God has LEGALLY turned it over to Satan for a time. God has the right to do this because He owns all things. The Lord, for His own good reasons, has turned the world over to Satan and pronounced him prince of the world. Satan is not a squatter. But he is in charge only for a while, has limited power, limited scope, and his evil intents are being used to achieve God's will. Yet in the midst of all this, the Lord has made a path of escape for those who want it: that path is called Salvation. Recognize though that it is a spiritual, not a physical, path with spiritual, not physical, repercussions at this point in history.

Israel was redeemed but they still had to deal with Satan.

In line with that we must never think of the many different Canaanite tribes and peoples that lived in Canaan in Joshua's day as illegal squatters who thus deserved to have their fields, homes, and cities taken from them. They had every legal right to that place.....UNTIL....God decided it was time for them to be destroyed and then the inheritors of that land (Israel) to assume their rightful position.

God had every right to destroy the Canaanites because they were evil in His sight and so He judged them to destruction for their sin. God has every right to destroy Satan because He is evil and so the Lord will eventually cause his destruction for his sin.

Canaan was a type and shadow of Satan, and the Battle for Canaan is a type and shadow of the Battle of Armageddon. In the book of Joshua we are witnessing a type of Battle of Armageddon that was not fully successful because God's people were disobedient and their leader was imperfect.

So here's what we must take from all this:

1. Satan is currently the legal prince of the world, and is ruling at God's will
2. The day has already been appointed that the Lord will revoke Satan's position as prince and replace Him with Yeshua.
3. God has determined that while non-Hebrews at one time had every legal right to be in the land of Canaan, now called Israel, they no longer have that right as He has turned the land over to His set-apart people.
4. As inheritors of God's Kingdom we indeed have heavenly rest, but we do NOT yet have physical, fleshly rest.
5. As inheritors of God's Kingdom we have earthly responsibilities and duties to fulfill. Our lives will be full of conflict against evil. We must stand against it, take action against it, and be willing to be in harm's way in the process.
6. Compromise is not an option. Joshua and the Israelites who would come after him made peace with the enemy. They allowed the enemy to survive and prosper and continue on in their pagan ways provided they didn't bother Israel too much. But that was NOT what the Lord had instructed Joshua and Israel to do. Christianity has for some time sought to compromise and make nice with the world; that approach weakened Israel and ruined their harmony with Yehoveh, and it has done exactly the same to the Church.

Let's re-read Joshua chapter 17.

RE-READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 17

Verse 1 (as we discussed at length last week) remembers that Manasseh and NOT Ephraim was Joseph's firstborn son. What it expects us to know is that Joseph's father, Jacob, pronounced a divine prophetic blessing upon Joseph's two Egyptian-born sons that effectively took Manasseh's firstborn status from him and turned it over to his younger brother, Ephraim; and simultaneously Jacob adopted his two grandchildren and made them sons.

Here it is necessary to have a firm grasp on tribal structure; and first and foremost is that a tribe is composed of several clans, each of which are essentially large extended families. Makhir was the firstborn son of Manasseh and thus he represents the most prominent family. Understand that we are NOT talking about the actual person of Makhir in these passages because he was long ago dead and gone. Rather Makhir is the name of the CLAN that he fathered; and of course since the firstborn son of the tribe's founder fostered the clan this clan is the most powerful of the clans that form the tribe of Manasseh. And here we're reminded that the clan of Makhir, who currently was under the leadership of Gil'ad, had inherited territory on the EAST side of the Jordan (the land of Bashan and a land that would be named after Gil'ad, that in English we call Gilead).

Therefore we are introduced to 5 other clans of Manasseh who were to receive land, but their land would be on the WEST side of the Jordan in the Promised Land. These 5 are Avi'ezer, Helek, Asri'el, Sh'khem, and Sh'mida.

There is a 6th name mentioned, Hefer, and it comes with an explanation. Hefer was indeed a clan of Manasseh. In fact he was a clan that had been spawned by another clan, Makhir. In other words of the sons and families that Makhir had created, Hefer was one of the lines of descent that had grown large and powerful enough to now be considered a separate clan in it's own right. This is not unusual; that's how the number of clans tended to grow within a tribe.

The most current male leader of the Hefer clan was Tz'lof'chad (Hefer's son). But there was a problem: Tz'lof'chad had no sons, only daughters. Therefore he had no son to carry on the clan authority when Tz'lof'chad died. Further, since it was apparently quite rare that a man would have no son to succeed him (one of the purposes of a man having concubines was to be sure he would have a male child), it was not a straightforward process to leave his wealth and possessions to his female children.

Therefore we are reminded here that the daughters of Tz'lof'chad petitioned Moses when they were still in the Wilderness for Moses to declare that they (as women) would get a land inheritance inside the Promised Land (otherwise, theoretically, the land inheritance that their father Tz'lof'chad would have been entitled to would have been forfeited).

Now contrary to some beliefs, there IS a provision in the law for females to inherit; so when

Moses agreed to allow it, it was not an exception to the rule. Turn your Bibles to Numbers 27:1.

READ NUMBERS 27:1-8

So here we see the story of Tz'lof'chad's daughters developed some years earlier, and we see the Lord actually ordain a law whereby if a man does not have son he is obligated to give his inheritance to his daughters. Essentially we find that it was this particular incident that prompted the creation of the law of female inheritance as standard for Hebrew society.

Since there were five daughters that EACH were to get land, and there were 5 uncles (named in the preceding verses) that would also inherit, therefore was the tribe of Manasseh's allotment DIVIDED into 10 portions (as it says to begin verse 5), one each for the 5 females and one each for the 5 males. And again we're told that this was in addition to the land granted to another clan that was located on the EAST side of the Jordan.

Beginning in verse 7 we get the boundaries and borders for the tribe of Manasseh. It was quite a large territory, and it was contiguous to Ephraim's territory because in previous chapters we found that the procedure was that when lots were being drawn by Joshua to match up a region to a tribe (and this according to the population of a tribe), that only ONE lot was drawn for the combined group of Ephraim and Manessah, and this was because together they were considered the tribe of Joseph. We'll see shortly that as confusing as that can be to us, it was equally frustrating to both Ephraim and Manessah who (each being large powerful tribes in their own right) had no interest in being lumped together as one with the common name of "Joseph".

Verse 11 gives us some controversial information because in some ways it sounds like scribal error or doubletalk. It says that Manessah was given cities within the tribal territories of Asher and Issachar. Well, on the surface that's a problem. How could one tribe have cities in the territory of another tribe? That's like saying that Florida has a city in Georgia, and another in South Carolina. Obviously there is meaning to this that is not obvious, and there are two primary trains of thought on it.

The first is that Asher and Issachar were actually the names of small regions and that this was NOT referring to the tribal territories inherited by Asher and Issachar. That, I believe, is a pretty severe stretch. There is no evidence that two such small regions ever existed; its strictly speculation trying to find a solution to the problem.

Much more likely is that it means just what it says; that inside the **original** territories of Asher and Issachar, Manessah held some cities.

We need to understand something at this point; the divvying up of territory to the Israelites was anything but clean and neat; further it was a long and protracted process. Because the Bible moves along at a very rapid pace, where reading from one paragraph to the next can be a decade or more, and turning a page or going to the next chapter can be scores of years, often only the barest of facts are given or the final outcomes are recorded in the shortest form. The

reality is that tribal boundaries were constantly disputed, and some tribes didn't like the land they received and so easily gave some of it up and tried to acquire other land. Some tribes got up and moved entirely, and in other cases boundaries expanded or contracted for various reasons. This went on for hundreds of years and the details are not recorded.

Again, think of Iraq. We can look at a map, see a simple outline map of the country, and say from a wider perspective that we conquered it. Yet from a battlefield perspective, within that simple map outline of the nation of Iraq, there are cities and areas that the USA/central Iraqi government controls and cities and areas where they just don't. So from an overall perspective an Israelite tribe was given a territory with rough boundaries that essentially "outlined" that territory in a general way. But inside that outline there were cities they controlled but didn't occupy, cities they lived in, and cities over which the enemy held firm control and weren't about to easily give up. For whatever reason Manasseh had taken control of some cities that were located in an area that would eventually be allotted to Asher and Issachar (note that it was some time after Manasseh had taken its inheritance before Asher and Issachar took theirs). So even though in time Asher and Issachar would have defined territories for their own, there would be cities within their territories that Manasseh had years earlier conquered and they had no interest in turning over to the other tribes (even though technically these cities were within another tribe's territory) and thus Manasseh continued to control cities within the boundaries of a territory that had not been assigned to them.

Beginning in verse 14 we get a small taste of the countless and never ending kinds of disputes that arose among the tribes of Israel over land allocation. The gist of it is this: Ephraim and Manasseh were unhappy with the amount of land they received and they wanted more. Note again the reference to "the descendants of Yosef (Joseph) doing the complaining (this is of course referring to the two Joseph tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh). Now even though most Bibles will show that last half of verse 15 in quotes, meaning in English grammar that supposedly we're reading the exact words of some individual, in fact this is just Hebrew storytelling. The idea is that the leaders of Ephraim and Manasseh (or, some Rabbis say that this was a complaint coming only from Ephraim) lodged a complaint with Joshua that effectively communicated dissatisfaction with the land allotment process. There's almost not just a little bit of downright arrogance in the tone, that since they were Joseph's sons they certainly deserved special treatment.

Joshua was too experienced and tough to simply accept such nonsense from the Joseph tribes and so suggested that since they think of themselves as so great and mighty then they ought to go up into the forested hill country and use some of their vast labor force to clear the trees for fields, and to take what more land they need from their Canaanite enemies the P'rizi and the Refa'im. Besides, that's what they were supposed to do in the first place. In other words, Joshua says Ephraim and Manasseh should make the equivalent of another allotment for themselves by their own labors; but don't come here asking for Joshua to take some already won territory away from the other tribes and then give it to them as an extra gift.

The two Joseph tribes back down a bit and whine that even if they cleared the hills of trees, that unless they got additional land it was not enough. And not only that but the Canaanites living in the valley areas of the land they currently have allotted to them are just too powerful to

be rooted out. These Canaanites have so-called iron chariots.

To be blunt about it, the Joseph tribes weren't really telling the truth. Taken together they amount to fewer than about 58,000 men of military age. Although the last census taken indicated that Ephraim was 32,500 and Manasseh was 52,700, at least half of Manasseh's number had been given land on the EAST side of the Jordan. So the other half of Manasseh (which is who is being dealt with in these verses) plus the entire tribe of Ephraim made them smaller than Judah, and even smaller than Dan as of this point in their history. The territory given to the sons of Joseph was quite large, at least as large as Judah's and it would be considerably larger than Dan's. Further, the Jezreel Valley is some of the most fertile anywhere in the Middle East. It is a huge area with a nutrient rich black soil several feet deep. Truly the area is so amazing in its fertility that if Ephraim and Manasseh took it they could have fed all 12 tribes from its crops. But as you can also imagine the Canaanites who lived there weren't particularly interested in giving it up, for the same reasons. Generally their request was hollow and self-serving, without any real merit. It's just indicative of ongoing efforts by tribes to constantly increase their influence and prestige while putting themselves out the least possible.

Joshua didn't budge; in the last few verses of chapter 17 he reiterates that since they see themselves as so powerful and mighty that all they need to do is clear the hill country and there will be plenty of open land for farming. And, since they are so numerous and confident in their own greatness it shouldn't be beyond them to defeat these Canaanites with their iron chariots. Set and match to Joshua.

Before we move to chapter 18, let me talk about these iron chariots for a moment. First, these were not chariots made entirely of iron; they were mostly wood that was tipped with iron in strategic spots. But it did make them more durable and not so easy to destroy as their all-wood counterparts. Second, there was a disadvantage to adding the iron: they got significantly heavier. The extra weight meant that the terrain on which they could operate was limited. Mud was near impossible. So we find chariots in general, and iron chariots even more so, limited to operating in valleys and plains. Rocky, hilly geography was a no-go for chariots. So two specific areas that are still well known to this day are mentioned as places where the Canaanites operated their chariots and therefore where Ephraim and Manasseh felt they had no chance at victory: Beit-Shean and the Jezreel Valley.

Some of you have been with me on tour to the Jezreel Valley and we also spent some time at Beit-Shean. These are relatively flat areas that would have easily allowed chariots to operate as they were designed.

Let's move on to Joshua 18.

READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 18 all

Up to this point, the center of operations for Joshua and the Israelite's was Gilgal. Gilgal would eventually fall into Benjamin's territory. There the Wilderness Tabernacle had been erected;

there the priests dwelled and officiated over the sacrificial rituals and serviced the sacred tent. There the Ark of the Covenant (presumably with the Shekinah Glory accompanying) resided.

But now, for reasons not given, Shiloh became the new sacral headquarters and thus the seat of government. It's hard to know how much time passed between the end of chapter 17 (and the allotment of land to the Joseph tribes) and the beginning of chapter 18; probably a few years at the least.

Apparently at least some of Joshua's army remained intact, Ephraim, Manessah, and Judah had some successes against pockets of Canaanites that hung on to cities within their territories, and so the land was under sufficient control to move the Tent of Meeting to another place that was more central and convenient to the 12 tribes of Israel. But notice something: Shiloh was located in Ephraim's territory. No doubt the Joseph tribes lobbied hard to have the religious power center of Israel in their family's territory. For although the site was central, there were many better and easier locations in the Shefelah or even in the low foothills.

Shiloh is hill country; it's beautiful. But it is rocky, craggy, and not so easily accessible. Today it's in what the enemies of Israel term the West Bank. In Biblical terms it's in Samaria. The very area the tent was erected is visible to this day. The evidence of its presence is obvious, even the holes bored in the rock where the posts of the courtyard perimeter curtain were set can be found. Several of you have been with me to that spot and it's quite breathtaking to know that we were standing where the Ark of the Covenant once was.

But all was not going well; as verse 2 explains without editorializing, 7 of the 12 tribes had yet to receive their inheritance of land. Then an exasperated (and aging) Joshua lays out the challenge to these tribes: "how long are you going to resist doing what God has instructed you to do?" In other words, Joshua had been trying to get these 7 tribes to accept their allotted inheritance and then go and subdue it, but they didn't want to. We've discussed in prior lessons and today that the current generation of Israelites were more like Bedouins; they had no interest in trying to make land produce or in fighting over territory. Rather they would just wander around with their flocks and herds from place to place, seeking fresh pasture and good water, living in tents, and would do everything possible to AVOID conflict. Commitment wasn't in their vocabulary. Boundaries were to be crossed, not enforced. Permanently settling was not their goal and it didn't fit the lifestyle they learned during their 40 years out in the Wilderness.

But Joshua was not going to give up; the time was right and so he ordered that each of the 7 remaining landless tribes appoint 3 men who will go out and map the territory allotted to them, and then come back and report. Thereafter adjustments would be made to each tribes' location and size and Joshua would die knowing he had finished the work God had assigned to him: to install the people of Israel into their Promised Land and to divide it among them.

We'll continue with chapter 18 next time.