

## **The Fight That Wasn't Finished**

### **Joshua 13-21**

Hours behind the runner in front of him, the last marathoner finally entered the Olympic stadium. By that time, the drama of the day's events was almost over and most of the spectators had gone home. This athlete's story, however, was still being played out. Limping into the arena, the Tanzanian runner grimaced with every step, his knee bleeding and bandaged from an earlier fall. His ragged appearances immediately caught the attention of the remaining crowd, who cheered him on to the finish line. Why did he stay in the race? What made him endure his injuries to the end? When asked these questions later, he replied, "My country did not send me 7,000 miles away to start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles to finish it."

Likewise, God didn't send Israel into the Promised Land to start the conquest and settlement of Canaan, He sent them there to finish the job. As William Clubertson writes, "It is important to start right, but it is imperative to end well." We have learned thus far that with a few exceptions Israel got off to a great start, but how well did they finish?

### **The distribution of the Promised Land (13-21)**

#### **God's instructions to divide the land (13:1-7)**

Just as God took control over Israel's battles, God also takes control of the distribution of the Promised Land and communicates specific details for how Canaan should be divided. While Joshua 13-21 with all of its geographical descriptions reads like a real estate deed and does not represent the most interesting reading for us, what is going on in these chapters represents a very exciting and happy time for Israel. This is the first time in the nation's history that the Israelites are able to have their own land. After centuries of Egyptian bondage, decades of barren wilderness, years of hard fighting in Canaan, Israel can at last settle down to cultivate the soil, build homes, raise families, and live in peace in their own land.

#### **Read Joshua 13:1-7**

**Joshua is old and no longer able to lead Israel in battle, but more land remains to be taken over**

**Joshua is to divide the land by tribe, allocating to each one their inheritance**

Just because Joshua is too old to continue leading all of Israel in battle doesn't mean God is finished using him. It's imperative that he continue his leadership over the nation by guiding them in the allotment of each tribe's territory. The LORD instructed him that he wasn't only to achieve military victory in the land, but also was to assume leadership in dividing up Israel's inheritance (1:6)

**Each tribe is responsible to eliminate the Canaanites in their area**

**God provides Israel with the assurance of victory- “I myself will drive them out.”**

### **Division of the land East of the Jordan (13:8-33)**

In Joshua 13:8-33, recognition and confirmation is given of the arrangement that the two and a half tribes (Reuben, Gad, and the ½ tribe of Manasseh) made with Moses for them to inherit and settle the land East of the Jordan. The land they inherited is described in Joshua 13:8-13. While these two and a half tribes were faithful to the agreement that they made to cross the Jordan and to help Israel conquer the land in Canaan, they failed to drive out the people of Geshure and Maacah. This is the first of a series of references indicating that:

### **Israel failed to finish the fight God had given to them (13:13)**

Why didn't these two and a half tribes of Israel complete the job? Laziness? Complacency? Whatever the reason, they did not receive all that God had for them. The pagans they allow to cohabit the land with them eventually lead them into their idolatrous ways. As a consequence of their unfaithfulness, these are the first tribes later to be carried into captivity by the Assyrian armies (1 Chronicles 5:26).

In the remainder of chapter 13, there is a descriptive summary of the specific land given to each of the two and a half tribes East of the Jordan. There is also a description of the Levites inheritance which was also determined while Israel was under Moses' leadership. We will discuss the Levites more when we get to chapter 21.

### **Division of the land West of the Jordan (14-19)**

#### **Introduction of how the land would be divided (14:1-5)**

#### **Read Joshua 14:1-5**

The administration of the allotment of the land was not handled by Joshua alone. Also involved were Eleazar the priest and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel. The casting of lots before the LORD was the divinely appointed method by which each tribe would receive its share of land.

The casting of lots was not just a matter of chance. It wasn't like flipping a coin. Rather, the lots were cast at God's direction and their decision was an expression of God's will. Proverbs 16:33-“The lot is cast in the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” The land was divided then just as the LORD commanded Moses.

### **Inheritance of Caleb (14:6-15)**

Throughout the description of the land division, we read account after account of how the various tribes fail to obey God's instructions concerning the Canaanites. They fail to drive them out completely. In stark contrast to the general disobedience of Israel stands Caleb. As the distribution of the land West of the Jordan starts with the tribe of Judah, special attention is given to Caleb's inheritance. This man consistently provides an example of what Israel should have been with regards to faith in God and obedience to Him.

#### **Caleb was a good example in the past of faith and obedience (14:6-9)**

##### **Read Joshua 14:6-9**

The 12 spies of Israel were sent out to explore the land and bring back a report of what it was like. Caleb came back from this mission and gave a report based on his convictions. Caleb reported that the land was exceedingly good and that Israel could certainly take it given that the LORD was with them and had promised to give it to them. Caleb demonstrated his commitment to follow the LORD wholeheartedly.

The ten spies, however, spread a bad report which caused the hearts of the people to melt in fear. They gave Israel the impression that they would be devoured if they attacked the Canaanites because they had both fortified cities and giants on their side.

As Donald Campbell writes about Caleb, "He did not minimize the problems—the giants and the fortified cities—but he magnified God. To him, God was greater than the biggest problem. Caleb had faith in the power of God. Not so the other spies. They magnified the problems and thereby minimized God."

As the result of Caleb's faithfulness and example, he was promised by Moses, "The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly."

#### **Caleb continues to be an example of faith and obedience (14:10-14)**

##### **Read Joshua 14:10-14**

#### **He acknowledges the LORD's faithfulness in bringing him to this point**

"Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty five years since the time he said this in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old." God promised Caleb a prolonged life and came through on that promise. When the promise is realized, Caleb is careful to give credit to where credit is due.

So many, when they experience the blessing of God, slip into self-congratulations. Not Caleb! He is faithful to acknowledge that his prolonged life through weary years of wilderness wanderings and several years of conquest is all because of God.

### **He is confident in and dependent on God to keep using him**

We have to admire Caleb's outlook. At an age when many tend to act in a pessimistic and grumpy manner, Caleb says, "I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then." Caleb is still up to being used of God.

We also have to admire Caleb's future plan. At an age where the tendency of people is to ask for a quiet place to plant a garden or for "easy chair" living, Caleb asks for the land of the Anakites. He volunteers to take on the giants. Caleb remains confident that God is able to keep using him. In spite of his age, Caleb still trusts God to enable him to remove the enemy from his inheritance. The LORD promised Caleb land that is occupied by the Anakites with their large, fortified cities, but Caleb remains confident that with the LORD helping him, he will drive them out just as God said.

### **He receives the inheritance God promised (13-14a)**

### **He consistently demonstrates a wholehearted commitment to follow God (14:8, 9, 14)**

### **Allotment for Judah (15)**

With Caleb's request having been granted, Joshua returns to the business of dividing the land West of the Jordan to the nine and one half tribes. The inheritance of the rest of Judah is described in Joshua 15:1-12 and 15:21-63. In the midst of the description of Judah's allotment, Caleb comes up again.

### **Caleb is faithful to finish the fight (15:14)**

"From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites—Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi—descendants of Anak."

### **Judah fails to finish the fight (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."

### **Allotment of Joseph (16-17)**

#### **Summary (16:1-4)**

#### **Ephraim (16:5-10)**

### **Ephraim fails to finish the fight (16:10)**

“They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim, but are required to do forced labor.”

Though the Canaanites became servants like the Gibeonites, they didn't acknowledge God or submit to Him and had a negative influence on Israel.

### **Manasseh (17:1-13)**

#### **Manasseh fails to finish the fight (17:12-13)**

“Yet the Manassites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in the region. However, when the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out completely.”

### **The complaint issued by the tribes of Joseph is met with Joshua's challenge (17:14-18)**

#### **Read Joshua 17:14-18**

Joseph's descendants, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, belligerently complain to Joshua about the limited amount of territory allotted to them. They feel they need more space because of how God has blessed them in making them a numerous people. While these tribes, like Caleb make a specific request for territory, their request is very different in that it comes out of fear, not faith as Caleb's did.

Joshua challenges the two tribes, assuring them that there is plenty of room in the territory allotted to them if they will trust God and claim their entire territory. They just need to stretch out in to the forest areas and drive out the Canaanites living in these areas. Joseph's descendants object that the forest area won't provide enough space. They voice their concern about the iron chariots possessed by the Canaanites in their territory. Joshua assures Joseph's descendants that even though the Canaanites have iron chariots and are strong, they can drive them out and after clearing out the forest area, they will have all the territory they need. Only by courageous faith in God would these tribes possess the Promised Land fully as God intended. However, we get the sense from the tone here that these two tribes aren't going to finish the fight.

### **Allotment for the remaining tribes (18-19:48)**

The whole country was under the control of Israel, but seven tribes of Israel had not yet received their inheritance. Why not? No good reason. They have failed to move in and finish the fight.

Joshua 18:3- “So Joshua said to the Israelites: ‘How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?’”

Joshua essentially says, “What are you waiting for, get moving?” Joshua sends out 21 men, three from each of the remaining seven tribes, on a surveying expedition. After a complete survey is done of the land, lots are cast to determine the portions of territory to be allotted to the remaining seven tribes.

### **Inheritance of Joshua (19:49-50)**

At the conclusion of the division of the land, Joshua is given a city as his inheritance. He builds up this city and settles there. What is most noteworthy about this particular city is its location in the hill country of Ephraim. This is the very place where he told Joseph’s descendants to move in and take over. Like Caleb, Joshua doesn’t choose a life of ease, but a life of faithfulness.

### **Conclusion of land division (19:51)**

At this point, the division of the land is complete.

### **The establishment of cities of refuge (Joshua 20)**

God instructed Moses to have the people set aside cities of refuge. What was the purpose of these cities? They are established as places of refuge for those to flee from their avengers who have accidentally killed someone. The basic rule of law in the Old Testament was that those who shed blood accidentally could flee to a city of refuge; however, those who shed innocent blood intentionally should pay for their crime with their own blood. Genesis 9:5-6- “And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. ‘Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.’”

In the society of Joshua’s day, there was no police force to investigate crimes. It was the responsibility of each family to see that murderers were avenged. In the heat of emotions after a loved one was killed, a relative of the dead person might kill someone who was really innocent of a capital crime. To keep this from happening and to protect those who accidentally killed someone, cities of refuge were set up. Anyone who killed another person could flee to the city of refuge to be protected from the avenger of blood until the elders of the city could convene to investigate the circumstances. If the person who fled to the city of refuge was found guilty of murder, he or she was put to death. If he or she killed someone accidentally, this fugitive was allowed to live in the city of refuge to be protected from the avenger. Upon the death of the high priest, the fugitive was able to go home again.

Joshua 20 makes it apparent that God wished to impress upon Israel the sanctity of human life. To put an end to an innocent person’s life is a serious thing. It is serious if it is unintentional, but for these cases, God makes provisions for the protection of the person who made such a mistake.

It is criminal when it is intentional. God help us to be careful to uphold the sanctity of human life by making sure that the innocent are protected.

### **The Levites receive a different inheritance compared to the other tribes (Joshua 21)**

In Joshua 13:14, 33; 14:4 and 21, we have a description of the inheritance of the Levites. They are not given an inheritance of land like everyone else in Israel. Instead, they receive their food from the burnt offerings made to the LORD by the Israelites as their inheritance. They have the LORD as their inheritance. They are also given towns to live in with pasturelands for their flocks and herds as God instructed Moses (Numbers 35:1-5). Joshua 21 describes the towns and pasturelands that were given to the Levites out of the inheritance of the other tribes.

Why are the Levites treated differently? There are a couple of reasons.

The inheritance of the Levites fulfills prophecy. Jacob, at the end of his life, predicted that the following would happen in the future to his sons, Simeon and Levi, “Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel” (Genesis 49:5-7). Remember, these two brothers slaughtered the Shechemites in vengeance upon them for what a Shechemite had done to their sister Dinah. As the result of this act of vengeance, both Simeon and Levi would be dispersed. This is fulfilled in Simeon’s case as his tribe largely disintegrated with its land inside of Judah (See Joshua 19:1, 9) and it is fulfilled in Levi’s case by the dispersion of the tribe to serve as priests among all of Israel.

The inheritance of a number of cities and of the offerings made by fire to the LORD instead of an inheritance of land will allow the Levites to focus fully on giving themselves to serving the LORD. The LORD set apart the Levites in place of the firstborn of Israel, giving them the responsibility of serving Him at the tent of meeting, of standing before Him to minister and to pronounce blessings, and of carrying the ark of the covenant (Numbers 8:15-22; Deut 10:8-9). Their unique inheritance allows them to focus on these responsibilities. As the Levites are scattered amongst all of the tribes of Israel in the cities allotted to them, their presence and work serves as a reminder for all Israel of their responsibility to the Law and assists them in their worship of the One and Only True God.

The inheritance of the Levites is an incredible privilege. What a blessing to be set aside for the LORD’s service, to enjoy ongoing contact with Him, and to receive His personal provision of their financial needs.

Having completed the description of how the land was allotted to each tribe, Joshua closes this section by drawing our attention to the faithfulness of God to His covenant promise.

Joshua 21:44-45- “The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all of the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled.”

God fulfilled all of His promises and yet Israel failed to finish the fight and get rid of the Pagans in their land.

### **Application for us today:**

#### **Trust God to keep His promises**

Everything God promised will happen. This was the case for Israel. It is the case throughout all of Biblical history. It will be the case today and forever in the future. We can trust God to do as He said. It may be required of us to wait a long time for God’s promise to be fulfilled. Caleb waited 45 long years for the fulfillment of God’s promise to Him. Just the same, Caleb trusted God to keep His promise and was thereby sustained through the difficult of the years in the wilderness and the years of conquest. A promise delayed is not a promise denied. God will keep all of His promises. We can trust Him.

#### **Recognize that some of God’s promises are ours only when we appropriate them by faith**

God promised the Israelites that He would drive out the Canaanites, which He did, but in order for this promise to be realized, they needed to appropriate it by faith, they needed to trust in Him to help them finish the fight He had committed to them. Likewise, some of the promises of God that are given to us require that we appropriate them by faith. We are promised wisdom when we don’t know what to do when we are in a tough spot, but we need to ask for it in faith (James 1:5-8). God provides and promises peace that surpasses understanding for us when we are going through circumstances that bring anxious moments, but only as we present our requests to God (Philippians 4:6-7). God promises to direct our path, but only as we trust in Him with all of our being (Proverbs 3:5-6).

#### **Wholeheartedly follow God, depending on Him to help us**

Let’s wholeheartedly follow God with a commitment to do whatever He asks of us. What he asks us to do might be intimidating. There might be “giants” and “iron chariots” to contend with. There might be risks involved. Let’s follow God just the same, depending on and fully confident in Him to take care of us and help us complete the tasks He has committed to us.

## **Like Caleb and Joshua, let us trust God to help us finish well**

The fact that we have been faithful and have enjoyed victory in the past doesn't excuse us to stop now. We need to be faithful to trust and serve the LORD all the way to the end of our course in this life. Israel's incredible victories in the past did not excuse their failure to obey Him by finishing the fight God committed to them. Neither will our past victories excuse our failure to finish what God has committed to us. Notice with me that the end of our course isn't when we are old. Joshua and Caleb are the oldest men in all of Israel and here they are taking on giants in the power of the LORD. There is no such thing as retirement from trusting and serving the LORD. As Warren Wiersbe writes, "We are never too old to make new conquests of faith in the power of the Lord." I would challenge us to reject the notion in our country that being old is all about pursuing the easy life. Instead, may we be like Joshua and Caleb who in their old age pursued the faithful life and used the vigor and strength God gave them to serve Him.