

Studies in the Book of Joshua
Lesson 11 - Joshua 18:1-21:45
The Abundant Life
God's Provisions

Five tribes now had been given their inheritance as Joshua, Eleazer, and the twelve tribal leaders cast lots at Gilgal. Then Joshua moved the camp to Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim, where the tabernacle remained until David moved the ark to Jerusalem. The Lord must have directed Joshua to make this move or he would not have done it. Shiloh was centrally located and was more convenient for all the tribes.

Seven tribes still had to have their inheritance marked out for them, and apparently they were slow to respond to the challenge. Unlike Caleb and the daughters of Zelophehad, these tribes didn't have faith and spiritual zeal. These tribes had helped fight battles and defeat the enemy, but now they hesitated to claim their inheritance and enjoy the land God had given them.

When the nation was still on the other side of the Jordan, God told Moses to have the people set aside special cities for the Levites, as well as six "cities of refuge." Now that the tribes had received their territories, Joshua could assign these cities.

The tribe of Levi didn't have territory assigned to it but was scattered throughout the land. This way, they could teach the people the Law and influence each of the tribes to be faithful to the Lord. But the Levites needed places to live and pastures for their cattle. God assigned forty-eight cities for them to live in, along with a specific amount of land for pasture. The pasture land could not be sold, but their houses could. The Levites even had special privileges for redeeming their property.

As the people of God, we can claim these assurances by faith. God's covenant with us is not going to fail; God's power and wisdom can give us victory over every foe; and God's promises can be trusted, no matter what the circumstances may be. The covenant of God, the power of God, the promises of God. These are the spiritual resources we can depend on as we claim our inheritance in Jesus Christ.

Read Joshua 18:1-21:45. Pray and answer the following questions:

1. How many tribes had received their inheritance? How many remained to inherit? (See 18:2)

2. What criticism did Joshua raise? How was the land to be divided? (See 18:3-10)

3. Which tribe received the first lot? Its land lay between what tribes? (See 18:11-28)

4. Who received the last lot? Where was it? What did they add later? (See 19:40-48)

5. What inheritance was Joshua given? (See 19:49-51)

6. How is Joshua a model for Christian leaders? (See 19:49-50)

7. Explain the purpose of the cities of refuge? (See 20:1-6)

8. What important truths about God, His character and His values do you learn from the forming of these cities?

9. Why do you think the Lord wanted cities in each tribe inhabited by students of His Word and men devoted to worship?

10. Why do you think He put the Levites in charge of the cities of refuge? Why was this job so perfect for them?

11. Why doesn't 13:1 contradict 21:43-45 and 11:23? How are both perspectives true and important to remember in your life?

Risk and Responsibility

An inheritance can be a blessing to a family, but it can also be a terrible curse that divides family members. A lot depends on who manages the disbursements of the assets and how they will do their job.

When Israel divided Canaan, it was Joshua's job to act somewhat like a trustee of an estate, making sure that each tribe received the lands to which it was entitled. It was a delicate job that required him to act with great integrity. Otherwise he might be charged with being unfair in assigning boundaries or with neglecting commitments previously made by Moses.

Joshua handled his responsibility by seeking the welfare of the Twelve Tribes first before asking for land himself. In doing so, he ran the risk of having to settle for a leftover, second best portion of Canaan.

This policy was in marked contrast to that of the Canaanite and Amorite kings of the city-states that the Israelites were inheriting. The pagan kings generally lorded it over their people, choosing for themselves the first and the best. Joshua took the posture of a “servant-leader,” forsaking greed and self-interest in order to seek the highest good for his people.

Joshua’s example is worth following today. As we accept responsibilities and make decisions that affect others, our challenge is to do the right thing by seeking justice, trusting God to work out the details.

Commentary provided by Warren Wiersbe and others