

Giving the Land: Joshua 13-19

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What would you rather read? Would you rather read an exciting adventure novel, or read about the redistricting of Pennsylvania and the boundaries of each district? My son Noah has been reading some Hardy Boys books, which really takes me back because I remember reading Hardy Boys books when I was his age. I remember the suspense and excitement of those books, and books like them. I haven't found any of my kids reading about Pennsylvania's district boundaries.

In the book of Joshua, the new section we come to today is kind of like transitioning from a Hardy Boys book to the redistricting of Canaan, in terms of literary genre.

Just listen to a few verses . . . Read Joshua 15:1-4

In the first several chapters of Joshua we read about the Israelites crossing the Jordan River, defeating Jericho. We've read of battles, hailstones, the sun standing still. And now we have chapter after chapter of boundary markers.

On Wednesday morning I was jogging and listening to a lecture by Dr. Douglas Stuart, an Old Testament professor. He was lecturing on the book of Joshua. And he commented on this portion of Joshua that we're going to study this morning, the allotment of the land. He said, Nobody's going to read a verse like the ones I just read to you and say, Yes, my new life verse! That's not what we're going to find in these specific instructions about how the land was going to be divided up among the tribes.

But, Dr. Stuart went on to say, just because it strikes us as boring reading doesn't diminish how meaningful and valuable this would have been to the Israelites. Just put yourself in their place. They would have been hanging on every word. Dr. Stuart compared it to the deed of a house or your medical records. Neither of those is very exciting literature. But the content is extremely important to the recipient.

If your doctor sends you a detailed document about some recent tests, you're probably going to read over that very carefully. Or if a piece of land is given to you, you're going to be very attentive to the description of the boundaries of that plot of land. Well, that gives you a sense of what's going on here in Joshua chapters 13 and following.

We're basically at the halfway point through this book. However, we're pretty close to the end of this sermon series. I went slower through the first half of the book because most of the significant events happen in the first several chapters. This morning I'm going to cover 7 chapters—13-19—because so much of this deals with the boundaries of each tribe's allotment.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then I could just show you this map and then be done with the sermon. But instead I'll give you the picture AND a thousand words . . . a few thousand words actually.

I want to start, though, with a little background. Maybe you haven't been with us since the beginning of this study of Joshua, and you may not be familiar with the story. So I want to go back, very briefly, and mention some things I mentioned at the beginning of this study. If you'd like, you can go on our website and listen to the sermon I preached at the beginning of February, in which I summarized the Pentateuch—the first 5 books of the Bible that come right before Joshua. Here are the 7 words I used to summarize Genesis through Deuteronomy.

Eden: God gave His people (Adam and Eve) a beautiful land (the Garden of Eden).

Exile: Due to their rebellion, Adam and Eve were kicked out of that good land.

Abraham: God made a great promise to this undeserving man (Genesis 12:1-3). God would give Abraham and his descendants a very good land to inhabit.

Egypt: Abraham's great-great-grandson, Joseph, ended up in Egypt. This was due to the wickedness of Joseph's jealous brothers, but also part of God's sovereign plan to save His people (Genesis 50:20). After Joseph died, another king came to power in Egypt who did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8). The Israelites ended up as slaves.

Exodus: This was God's miraculous deliverance of His people from Egypt.

Wilderness: Due to their rebellion, the Israelites were made to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the Promised Land.

Eternity: God's promise to give His people a restful home, a land of abundance, should direct our gaze toward heaven.

Now, what we've seen in the first 12 chapters of Joshua is the conquest of the land, taking the land. They have fought many battles, the Lord has fought for them, and now they have control of the land. My sermon title last Sunday was "Taking the Land." My sermon title today is "Giving the Land." Because the land which now belongs to Israel is going to be given, portion by portion, to the many tribes of Israel.

As you see on this map, the tribes were given their particular areas. Larger tribes received larger areas, and smaller tribes received smaller areas. But it was also done by lot, which means the decisions came from the Lord. It wasn't Joshua or other leaders who decided who would go where. "*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*" (Proverbs 16:33, ESV) And that's how they did this.

Now, let's start in chapter 13 with the point . . .

Take What God Gives

Verse 1 of chapter 13 marks the beginning of this new section in the book. The beginning of the second half of the book. And you'll notice a couple of similarities between Joshua 1 and Joshua 13. In both the Lord is speaking to Joshua. In chapter 1 the Lord says to Joshua, "Moses is dead." Here in chapter 13 the Lord tells Joshua, "You are old and advanced in years." Each of these statements mark a time of transition. At the beginning of the book Joshua is stepping up as the new leader. In chapter 13 he has now accomplished much of what he was called to do, and he's now an old man.

But, as the Lord goes on to say in that same verse, there is still much left undone. "There remains yet very much land to possess."

Here's another helpful map showing the areas Israel already had control of, but then the broader area which actually constituted the Promised Land. They had taken this land east of the Jordan prior to crossing the Jordan. Then there was the central campaign, the southern campaign, and the northern campaign. They now have control of the land as a whole, but that doesn't mean the work is done. There are still many areas that need to be conquered.

So the allotment of the land is not only a present to be received with thanksgiving. It is also a military mission that needs to be taken very seriously. This is the area God is giving to you, so go and take it. It's the same mentality Israel as a whole was to

have toward the Promised Land as a whole. Now that mentality is applied particularly to the tribes. Here's your piece of the land, go and take it.

Francis Schaeffer, who died in 1985 and was an influential Christian thinker (and his writings are still very influential), has an insightful book about Joshua. Commenting on chapter 13 he speaks of "possessing our possessions."¹ God gives something to us, and we must take it.

Sadly, the Israelites did not follow through on this as they should have. Schaeffer cites 2 causes for this failure. First, the people wanted peace rather than more fighting. It was easier to let the remaining Canaanite peoples just coexist with them than to fight to eliminate them. And a second reason was ease and comfort. They could make these remaining Canaanites do forced labor for them, so why not keep them around?

But this was such a dangerous move, and it had devastating consequences in the long run. Maybe you remember the instructions that God gave to Moses in Deuteronomy 20. I've talked about these in earlier sermons.

The instruction concerning people groups within the Promised Land was that Israel was to devote everything to destruction. And there's a very important reason for this.

"But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God." (Deuteronomy 20:16–18, ESV)

For the purpose of Israel's purity, that they would be focused on Yahweh and not be tempted to turn to other gods, it was important for them to eliminate these idolatrous peoples. That was part of God's specific intent in this unique moment in Israel's history.

But Israel failed to do this completely, and later they suffered the consequences, as you can see if you read the stories in the book of Judges. They did turn to worship the gods of those other peoples, and that made the Lord very angry so that the Lord gave them over into the hands of their enemies. Very sad stories.

¹ Francis Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, page 156ff.

And those tragedies were the predictable result of Israel not following through to really possess their possessions. God was giving them the land, the entire land, but they refused to take it entirely. They were content to have just a portion of it.

In Joshua 18:3, which was read earlier in the service, Joshua says to the people . . .

There's a dangerous complacency that we can easily fall into. Being OK with the status quo. Being content to know a little bit about the Bible. Being fine with a mediocre prayer life. Having the mentality that "I'm saved, and God can save others if He wants to, but evangelism isn't really on my radar." Or the mentality that "I'm saved by grace, so I don't need to be too concerned about sanctification. I'll continue to sin and grace will abound." Those are sad and dangerous ways of thinking about the Christian life.

Let us not be complacent. Let's fight to take what God is giving us. He has given us very much, indeed. He has given us the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And, in His providence, He has placed us here in the middle of this mission field.

And I would ask each of you brothers and sisters here today to thoughtfully consider two things.

- 1) One, consider the spiritual gifts God has uniquely given to you. Are you gifted in the areas of service or mercy? Are you gifted in giving to others and to the work of the church? Are you gifted in evangelism, or teaching, or leadership? Are you gifted in administration? God has wired you and equipped you in marvelous way, to play a very important role in the life of this family. So think about what those gifts are.
- 2) And then, secondly, thoughtfully consider what opportunities are before you. You probably don't have to look very far. What ministry opportunity is staring you right in the face, but maybe you're too complacent to pursue it. What physical needs, spiritual needs, emotional needs, do you observe right around you? God is giving you gifts, and He's giving you opportunities for ministry—to have a Gospel impact on others. spiritual fruit. Don't settle for what has already been done. Move forward and pursue this spiritual battle to the next level.

Be Content with What God Gives

My next point may sound like a contradiction to what I've just been saying. But as we read another paragraph of our text, I hope you'll see how these 2 fit hand in hand.

Read Joshua 17:14-18

If you remember back to the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis, Joseph had 2 sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and there came to be a tribe from each of those sons. Well, together those two tribes are referred to here as the people of Joseph. And they are complaining about their allotment of land, that it's too small.

You may also remember earlier in Joshua, in chapter 1, that half the tribe of Manasseh, along with the tribes of Gad and Reuben, asked to have their allotment of land on the east side of the Jordan. And that was permitted as long as the men of those tribes still participated in the conquest, which they agreed to do.

So, as you see on the map, there is an area for east Manasseh, and then also an area for west Manasseh and an area for Ephraim. And according to the census in the book of Numbers, these weren't even the largest tribes. So it seems that they were being a bit greedy.

Joshua's response to them is interesting. He basically tells them, If you're so numerous, then why don't you go ahead and take control of more the land within your allotment. For once you conquer it and clear it, you will then have the equivalent of more than one allotment.

In this sense being content with what God has given and taking what God has given are like two sides of the same coin. And I tell you, brothers and sisters, that is convicting and encouraging to me.

It's very easy to slip into the mindset of being jealous of someone else's blessings, someone else's gifts, someone else's success. The people of Joseph might have thought, Oh look at all that nice land Judah got. I wish we could have some of that land, too.

But the way God apportions the land is His prerogative. And the way He distributes spiritual gifts is His prerogative. And the amount of visible fruit that grows from any particular church or ministry is His prerogative.

It's not my place, or your place, to complain to God because He hasn't given us enough of this, that or the other thing. The chastening response to those complaints would be, Work with what you got. Do the work I've called you to do with the gifts I've given to you. Don't fall into the comparison trap. Don't be jealous or competitive. Keep your eyes on the opportunities God is giving to *you*. And you'll have plenty to keep you busy and joyful for the rest of your life.

So take what God gives, and be content with what God gives.

Trust and Obey . . . Wholeheartedly

There's one more portion of our text that I'd like to read and talk about.

Joshua 14:6-15

Promises

First, let's talk about promises, and the connection between trusting and obeying. Caleb was a man who believed God's promises. He believed that the Promised Land—the land which the Lord had promised to give them—was actually going to belong to them. He believed that the Lord's promise would come true, that God would make good on His Word to His people.

He was 40 years old at that crucial moment in Israel's history. The story is told in the book of Numbers chapter 13. Moses sent 12 spies into the land to bring back a report about the inhabitants of the land, the produce of the land, the cities, and so forth. When those spies returned after 40 days, they were all agreed that it was a good land. It was, indeed, a land flowing with milk and honey. They even brought back some grapes and pomegranates and figs as evidence of the abundance they found there.

But 10 of the spies, all of them except Joshua and Caleb, were scared of the Canaanites. They were intimidated by the strength of the people, the fortified walls of the cities. And besides, they said, we saw the descendants of Anak there, the giants. And we seemed like grasshoppers compared to them. That was the majority opinion, and that unbelieving attitude is what infected the rest of the people of Israel and caused them to rebel. They grumbled against Moses and Aaron and wanted to return to Egypt.

Caleb was the one who spoke up, the dissenting opinion. Joshua was of the same opinion. Numbers 13:30 tells us that Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “*Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.*” I love the confidence of those words. He was believing the promises of God and therefore ready for risk. He was ready for battle. He was ready for whatever might be ahead of them. He saw the challenges, just as the rest of the spies saw them. But Caleb knew that the Lord is bigger than those challenges. The Lord is stronger than those giants. The Lord is strong enough to knock down those fortified walls.

I want to tell you, for a moment, about a man named William Carey, a well-known missionary to India who lived in the late 1700s and early 1800s. As I think about Caleb, it makes me think of William Carey. I think some of the same evidences of grace were present in the lives of these two men.

William Carey had a great passion for taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to parts of the world, to people groups, that had never heard, where there was no Gospel witness. He ended up in India, where he spent 40 years preaching the Bible, teaching the Bible, and translating the Bible into various languages and printing it in order to get it into the hands of the people. Amazingly, he and his team were able to translate the Bible into 40 different languages and dialects.

At the end of his life, in 1834, a young missionary named Alexander Duff came to see Carey, and Duff was apparently enamored by Carey’s accomplishments. And as Duff was leaving the room, Carey said, “Mr. Duff, you have been speaking about Dr. Carey, Dr. Carey. When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey—speak about Dr. Carey’s Saviour.”

Carey was a man who was humbled by the greatness of God, encouraged by the sovereignty of God, and motivated by the assurance that God is at work to save His sheep from other folds.

Let me read you a quote from Carey that illustrates the hope he had, the trust he had, in the promises of God . . . like Caleb.

“When I left England, my hope of India’s conversion was very strong; but amongst so many obstacles, it would die, unless upheld by God. Well, I have God, and His Word is true. Though I were deserted by all and persecuted by all, yet my faith, fixed on the sure Word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God’s cause will triumph.”

The motto of William Carey's life was, "*Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.*" That was Caleb's attitude as well, and should be ours too. Believe the promises of God. Trust that He is powerful, more powerful than the challenges we see with our eyes. We can truly expect very great things from Him. And that trust will result in risky obedience to God's call. When God says, Go take on the giants. We will say, Yes Lord, let's go today. Let's do it right now.

I came across another quote that summarizes well the difference between Caleb and the other spies. This is from a writer named Alan Redpath. He says, "*The majority measured the giants against their own strength; Caleb and Joshua measured the giants against God. The majority trembled; the two triumphed. The majority had great giants but a little God. Caleb had a great God and little giants.*"²

Passion

I also have to point out the passion of Caleb's life. He not only believed the promises of God, he did so with a passion that was evident in his words and actions. At age 40 when he returned from that mission to spy out the land he said to all the people, "Let us go up at once and occupy [the land], for we are well able to overcome it." If we read those words in isolation from the rest of the story we might think Caleb to be foolish or arrogant. But that wasn't the case. He was simply trusting the Lord and eagerly wanting to obey. That kind of enthusiasm is refreshing, and it can be contagious. Unfortunately, that attitude didn't prevail at that sad moment in Israel's history. The crowds were persuaded by the attitude of the doubters, the fearful.

But Caleb didn't give up. He didn't let that passion wane. Here he is now at age 85 and what do we find him asking for? He wants to take the land where the giants are. Do you see that in verse 12?

Caleb was trusting the promises of God. He was trusting that he would be able to drive out these giants just as the Lord said. And Caleb was trusting and obeying with a passion. He did this wholeheartedly. Verse 14 tells us that Caleb wholly followed the Lord. Again, what a great example and inspiration for us.

² Quoted in Boice, Joshua, page 144.

Perseverance

The final thing I want to highlight about him is his perseverance. Caleb didn't give up. At age 40 his passionate appeal to the people was ignored. But another 40 years later he was still anticipating the fulfillment of those promises. He persevered.

I hope, by God's grace, some of these things will be true of me when I'm 85. He says in verse 11, "I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming." This guy had not bought into the retirement mentality of coasting through the last few decades of life. He was not about to sit back and let the younger folks do all the hard work. He was just as energetic, just as passionate, as he was at age 40.

Do you know why? Because he still had the right focus. He still had his eyes fixed on the Lord. He was still believing those promises and pursuing them passionately.

Think of Peter when he ventured out of the boat to meet Jesus on the water. Do you remember that scene? Peter courageously asked,

"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"" (Matthew 14:28–31, ESV)

What's going on there? Well, it makes a big difference where your focus is. When Peter had his attention focused on Jesus, he was actually walking on the water. But when he turned his attention to the raging storm around him, he became scared. Fortunately, his reflex was to cry out to Jesus for help, and Jesus rescued him.

If Caleb had focused his attention on the giants, how big and strong they were, and how tall those walls of their cities were, he would have been pretty discouraged, like the other 10 spies. But Caleb was looking past the giants to His great Lord and Savior. He was trusting in His God who is greater than the giants.

How about you? What giants, what storms, are staring you in the face? And what are you going to do about it? Are you going to back down in fear, doubt the promises of God, quit the

mission? Or will you cling to the promises of God and passionately attempt great things for God as you expect great things from Him? Let this be an encouragement to you this morning to persevere in doing that.

Of course, Caleb is not our ultimate example of passionate perseverance. Jesus is. And Jesus is even much more than an example to us. He's our Savior who died for us, rose again on the third day, and now sits at the right hand of God.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”
(Hebrews 12:1–2, ESV)

Jesus Christ believed the promises perfectly, pursued them passionately, and persevered to the end. Let's all look to Him in faith today.