

Sermon Outline

“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”: A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

THE NOT-YET PART (JOSHUA 13:1-7)

I. The Heart of the Book

II. Now Joshua Was Old (Joshua 13:1)

- A. 13:1 begins with, “Now Joshua was old and advanced in years...”
- B. Many years have passed since the fall of the last enemy kingdom of Canaan.
- C. In his old age, Joshua hears yet again the familiar Voice of the living Lord: “and the LORD said to him, ‘You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to possess.’”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was Joshua’s condition when 13:1 begins?
(2) What does the Lord say to Joshua?

III. Remaining Lands Southwest: Philistines and Neighbors (Joshua 13:2, 3)

- A. Verses 2-6 tell us about the lands that remain to be possessed.
- B. In general, the remaining land consists of three major sections (Butler, *Joshua*, 148).
 - 1. Southwest: The land of the Philistines and their allies (vv 2, 3)
 - 2. North: Phoenician coast.
 - 3. Upper north: Mountain country of Lebanon
- C. We begin with the land of the Philistines and their neighbors: “This is the land that yet remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all those of the Geshurites...” (v 2)
 - 1. The *Philistines*
 - a. These lived on/near the coastal region facing the Mediterranean Sea.
 - b. The Philistines will later pose significant opposition to Israel.
 - 2. The *Geshurites*
 - a. These also lived on the coastal plain on the southwestern part of Canaan.
 - b. They were neighbors to the Philistines.
- D. Verse 3 presents a more detailed description of the scope of the lands that remain in the south-western regions: “from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron...”

1. The Shihor is the southern boundary of this region.
 2. Ekron, one of the Philistine cities, marks the northern boundary.
- E. This entire area, as the Scripture says, “is counted as Canaanite.”
- F. Heading northward, we come into Philistine territory itself.
1. The Philistines lived on the western edge of the Promised Land, facing the Mediterranean Sea.
 2. Scripture tells us at this point that there were five rulers of the Philistines.
 - a. Gaza
 - b. Ashdod
 - c. Ashkelon
 - d. Gath
 - e. Ekron
- G. We do not know much about the *Avvim* except that...
1. They were destroyed by the Caphtorim (Dt 2:23)
 2. They worshiped Nibhaz and Tartak (2 Kgs 17:31)
- H. The first phrase of verse 4 wraps up this section for us: “in the south, all the land of the Canaanites...”
- This little note tells us that there is a lingering Canaanite presence in the south-western regions of the Promised Land, by the time Joshua was old.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What are the three outstanding portions of land that still needs possession? (2) Who are the Philistines and where/what were their five major cities? (3) Who were the Geshurites? (4) What do we know of the Avvim?

IV. Remaining Lands North(west): Phoenician Coast (Joshua 13:4)

- A. In the rest of verse 4, we come to the next major portion of land that remains to be conquered: “and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites,”
- B. While we are not sure where Mearah is, we can roughly tell by who lived there—the Sidonians.
1. The Sidonians were descendants of Canaan himself (Gen 10:15).
 2. Sidon is a coastal area located in Lebanon.
- C. We have now moved from the southern regions to the northern regions. —We are looking specifically at the Lebanon side of that region to “the boundary of the Amorites.”
- D. The Amorite city of Aphek is in present-day Syria, east of Lebanon.
- E. Verse 4 directs us to a section of land in the north, near the Phoenician coast of the Mediterranean Sea that Israel has yet to overcome.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who were the Sidonians and where did they live? (2) Who were the Amorites and where did they live?

V. Remaining Lands Far North: Mountains of Lebanon (Joshua 13:5, 6)

- A. In verse 5, we see the third section of unconquered land—the mountainous regions of Lebanon: “the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath.”
1. *Lebanon*
 - a. According to Trent Butler, *Lebanon* here refers to the western mountain range rising from the Phoenician coast, along with the country dominated by that range of mountains (Butler, *Joshua*, 151).
 - b. Lebanon was part of the land promised to Moses and Joshua (Dt 1:7; 3:25; Josh 1:4), but was not taken during Joshua’s time.
 - c. Butler further explains that Lebanon in this particular passage is the western border of that section of territory whose eastern border is the line from Baal-gad to Lebo-Hamath (151).
 2. The *Gebalites* derive their name from the ancient city of Gebal (a.k.a. Byblos), which is on the Phoenician coast north of Sidon (Woudstra, *Joshua*, 212).
- B. In time, Lebanon comes under the rule of Solomon.
- First Kings 9:19: “And all the store cities that Solomon had, and the cities for his chariots, and the cities for his horsemen, and whatever Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in *Lebanon*, and in all the land of his dominion”
 - First Kings 8:65: “So Solomon held the feast at that time, and all Israel with him, a great assembly, from *Lebo-hamath* to the Brook of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days.”
- C. Verse 6 summarizes what we have seen in verses 4 and 5.
1. These are “all the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, even all the Sidonians.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the third major section of unconquered land? (2) Find Lebanon on a map. (3) Who were the Gebalites? (3) Who rules Lebanon in time to come?

VI. Remaining Lands and the Not-Yet Part of Life

- A. The remaining lands in Joshua 13 are like this *not-yet* part of history.
- B. What do we Christians already have?
1. Salvation has already come to us through our Lord Jesus.
 2. By his obedient life, his atoning death, and his resurrection and ascension, our Lord Jesus has accomplished salvation for us.
 3. Christ has reconciled us to God our heavenly Father.
 4. God promises us eternal life with him.
 5. All that is the work that Christ has already accomplished for us.
- C. However, the world around us is not yet what it should be.

1. While salvation has been given to us, the reality of salvation has not yet been fully applied everywhere, whether in our lives or in the world at large.
 2. In our own lives, our “interior lands,” we still see the remnants of sin, pockets of resistance to the lordship of God and Jesus Christ.
 3. Multiply the effects of personal sin on a national or global scale and it is not that hard to see the great mess this causes!
—Behind all the conflict, injustice, and ecological problems in the world is a deeply spiritual cause—*people are not submitted to the one true God and his life-giving Son.*
- D. This is the *Not-Yet* part of our present reality.
1. Not everything has been subjected to God.
 2. Not everything has been placed under the life-giving rule of Christ Jesus.
 3. Demonic powers still influence the world.
 4. Until their reign is totally dismantled, Canaanites, Philistines, and Sidonians will still be in power.
 5. *Where in your own life are you feeling the effects of the Not-Yet?*
 - Are you frustrated that you are not courageous enough to share the Gospel with your friends?
 - Are you saddened that you still find it hard to trust God for everything?
 - Are you frustrated that you cannot pray as readily and frequently as you would like?
 - Are you still calculative and overly-guarded with your love?

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How are the remaining lands in Joshua 13 reflective of our lives? (2) Where are you feeling the Not-Yet of salvation?

VII. The Lord Will Overcome Israel’s Enemies (Josh 13:6)

- A. The good news is that the *Not-Yet* is not *Never-Ever*.
- B. God himself promises Joshua: “I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel” (v 6).
- C. God is awesome, self-sustaining immortality!
 1. God never ages. God never weakens. His strength is always fresh. Even when his servants grow old and weak, God does not.
 2. Herman Bavinck wrote:

God is the real, the true essence, the fullness of essence, the sum-total of all reality and perfection, the totality of essence, to which all other essence owes its origin, an ocean of essence, unbounded and immensurable [*sic*], the absolute Being, the only Being who has the ground of his existence in himself. This description of the being of God is to be preferred above that of love, personality, fatherhood, etc., because in it all God’s attributes are included, and by it they are

all ascribed to God in an absolute sense; i.e., by this description God is recognized as God in *all* his perfections.” (Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, Trans. William Hendricksen, 126).

3. Our God is “I Am that I Am” (Ex 3:14)—the Self-Existent One, the Eternal and Indestructible Life.
- D. Most of all, this truth is a summons for us to look away from ourselves and delight in God for who he is.
1. Who is God? *God is GOD.*
 - a. God is the Life from Whom all life flows.
 - b. God is the Power from Whom all power comes.
 - c. God is the Goodness from Whom all goodness is derived.
 2. If you want to be a human being of lasting value, give yourself to God, who bestows immortal life on those who serve him.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does God promise Joshua in v 6? (2) Who is God? (3) How does the truth that God is self-existent and eternal affect you?

VIII. The Final Assignment (Josh 13:6, 7)

- A. God has one final, major assignment for his servant: “Only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you...”
- B. This was the main work that Joshua was called to do—he must finish it.
- C. We see here a lesson on *perseverance*, not quitting until you’re done.
- D. The apostle Paul describes the Christian life as a race to the end (2 Tim 4:7).
- E. But to persevere in our race, we must keep the end goal all throughout our lives. What is it that God has given us to do? What is the ultimate purpose of our lives here on earth?
 1. How we answer those questions will shape the decisions that we make in life.
 2. If our goal is to simply staying alive, we may not try our best at what we do—we will live a mediocre life.
 3. God wants us to do more than stay alive. God wants us to aim to serve his holy and loving purposes in this world.
 - a. In the end, children of God should not seek a mediocre life.
 - b. We should seek an excellent life lived for the glory of God and the good of others.
 - c. An excellent life does not mean that we will be famous.
 - d. It does mean that the general complexion of our lives would be one of dignity before the Lord and others.
 - e. Some questions:
 - Am I bringing honor to God in how I live and work?
 - Am I enriching others, God’s image on earth?
 - Am I exercising a sanctifying, loving influence over others in what I do and say, and in my general manner of life?

- Looking at the gifts/talents that God has given to me, how would God want me to use those to support his works in this world?
4. God is doing a number of things in the world.
 - a. God is building the Church (Eph 2:20, 21).
 - b. God is calling people to come to Jesus Christ for salvation and instruction (cf. Mt 28:19, 20; Jn 20:31).
 - c. God is restraining and punishing evil through earthly government (Rom 13:1).
 - d. God is blessing believers and unbelievers alike with life-sustaining gifts (Mt 5:45).
 5. We should seek to support those works that God is doing—thus, we serve God by both serving his Church and the world in which we live.
 6. As to *how* and *where* specifically God wants us to serve, this needs prayer and discernment of how God has equipped us.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is God’s final assignment for Joshua? (2) What is God doing in the world today and how can we support those works?

IX. Persevere and Press On

Although we live in the painful Not-Yet moment of God’s plans, let us keep doing what God has called us to do. God has promised us complete redemption of our lives through Jesus Christ. In view of this certain glory, we persevere in the work that God has given to us, knowing that we are working in harmony with God’s ultimate designs. Let us pursue a deeper obedience to God. It was God himself who placed such a desire in us. He who started this work will finish it for his glory.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does God want us to conduct ourselves in this Not-Yet moment of history? (2) What truths sustain us in our good works?