

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

**GOD’S GIFTS TO JOSEPH
(JOSHUA 16:1-17:18)**

I. Introduction

II. Introduction to the Inheritance of Joseph’s Sons from God (Joshua 16:1-3)

- A. The the introduction to this new section: “The allotment of the people of *Joseph* went from the Jordan by Jericho, east of the waters of Jericho, into the wilderness, going up from Jericho into the hill country to Bethel.”
- B. Moving on to verses 2 and 3, we read: “Then going from Bethel to Luz, it passes along to Ataroth, the territory of the Archites. Then it goes down westward to the territory of the Japhletites, as far as the territory of Lower Beth-horon, then to Gezer, and it ends at the sea.”
 - 1. As Robert Hubbard explains, the southern border of the tribe of Joseph “runs from east of Jericho to Bethel then south-westerly near Lower Beth Horon to Gezer and on to the Mediterranean” (Hubbard, *Joshua*, 409).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) To whose inheritance does 16:1 introduce us? (2) Describe the general boundaries of the people of Joshua.

III. The Inheritance of Ephraim (Joshua 16:4-10)

- A. Beginning in verse 4, we come to the detailed description of the inheritance itself: “The people of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, received their inheritance.”
- B. Starting in verse 5, we have the description of the inheritance of Ephraim: “The territory of the people of Ephraim by their clans was as follows: the boundary of their inheritance on the east was Ataroth-addar as far as Upper Beth-horon, and the boundary goes from there to the sea.”
 - 1. The northern boundary: “On the *north* is Michmethath.”
 - 2. The eastern boundary: “Then on the *east* the boundary turns around toward Taanath-shiloh and passes along beyond it on the east to Janoah, then it goes down from Janoah to Ataroth and to Naarah, and touches Jericho, ending at the Jordan” (vv 6, 7)
 - 3. The western boundary: “From Tappuah the boundary goes *westward* to the brook Kanah and ends at the sea.”
- C. Then we have a concluding statement: “Such is the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Ephraim by their clans, together with the towns that were set apart for the people of Ephraim within the inheritance of the Manassites, all those towns with their villages” (vv 8-9).

- D. Then we come to an all-too-familiar statement: “However, they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites have lived in the midst of Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor.”
1. This is not a justification for forced labor today because...
 - a. There are no earthly theocracies of the same nature as Israel.
—Whatever Old Testament Israel did was unique.
 - b. It is highly unlikely that God himself was pleased with Israel’s forced labor of the Canaanites: It represents a compromise with disobedience. Israel was supposed to destroy the Canaanites, not live with them.

***Questions for reflection:** How are we to apply the fact that the Ephraimites used the Canaanites as forced labor? Is this a justification for modern-day slavery? Explain your answer.

IV. The Inheritance of Manasseh (Joshua 17:1-2)

- A. In chapter 17, we move on to consider the other tribe of Joseph: Manasseh. How does Manasseh do in its inheritance of the land?
- B. In 17:1, we find the introduction to the allotment of Manasseh: “Then allotment was made to the people of Manasseh, for he was the firstborn of Joseph.”
- C. We find a reference to Machir, Manasseh’s firstborn.
 1. We came across Machir’s name back in 13:31, where we were told that half of Gilead, Ashtaroth, and Edrei were allotted to him.
 2. Now in chapter 17, we are told the same facts. We are told that Machir was “allotted Gilead and Bashan, because he was a man of war.”
 3. Machir had inherited these cities because he and his sons had fought for them earlier.
—Numbers 32:39-40: “And the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, and dispossessed the Amorites who were in it. And Moses gave Gilead to Machir the son of Manasseh, and he settled in it.”
 4. Gilead and Bashan are rewards for the bravery that Machir showed in battle.
- D. When we come to verse 2, we read of the allotments that were made to the rest of the people by their clans: Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hepher, and Shemida.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why was Machir given the cities of Gilead and Bashan? (2) What are the clans of Manasseh?

V. The Daughters of Zelophehad (Joshua 17:3-6)

- A. Just as there was a noteworthy episode concerning a daughter that took place during the allotment of Judah, we have another noteworthy episode concerning daughters that occurred during the allotment to Manasseh—the daughters of Zelophehad: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.
 1. If Achsah was the stereotypical spoilt princess, then these five women are the ideal of the godly woman.
 2. These daughters “approached Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the leaders...”

3. They “said, “The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance along with our brothers.””
 4. “So according to the mouth of the LORD he gave them an inheritance among the brothers of their father.”
- B. To evaluate this episode, we would have to go back in time to Numbers 27.
1. There, we learn of how the daughters of Zelophehad approached Moses concerning their inheritance.
 2. In those days, women did not usually inherit land.
 3. But since Zelophehad had no sons, and he was one of those who died in the wilderness for his sins (v 3), the daughters approached Moses to see if they could inherit the land on behalf of their father.
 4. Numbers 27:4 reads: “Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father’s brothers.”
 5. In response to that request, “Moses brought their case before the LORD.”
 6. The Lord does grant the requests of the daughters (Num 27:6, 7).
 7. As it turns out, a new ruling emerges from this situation.
—According to this new ruling, if a man dies and has no son, his inheritance shall be transferred to his daughters. And if had no daughters, then his inheritance shall be given to his brothers, etc (Num 27:8-9).
- C. When we read about this case involving the daughters of Zelophehad coming to Joshua, and asking for their land, we must realize that this is entirely in line with the Lord’s will.
- D. Therein lies the difference between Achsah and these women.
1. Unlike Achsah who used manipulation for her ends, the daughters of Zelophehad approached the prophet Moses directly.
 2. Unlike Achsah who was determined to get what she wanted, the daughters of Zelophehad kept their decision open to the Lord.
 3. Unlike Achsah who cared only for herself, the daughters of Zelophehad cared for their father’s reputation.
—They wanted land for the sake of their late father’s name.
- E. These is now a positive lesson to all women: If Achsah demonstrated what it means to be an awful woman, then the daughters of Zelophehad are pictures of godly women.
1. A truly godly and beautiful woman is one who...
 - demonstrates honor for her parents.
 - looks out for others.
 - is respectful to those in authority.
 - keeps her agenda open to the Lord.
 - looks out for the good of others.
 2. This is in contrast to the vision of secular womanhood that is primarily self-absorbed and self-centered.
- F. The only thing that can sustain the practice of such godly and loving femininity is a deep and all-pervading rest in the Lord. Only when one is contented in the Lord—assured that the Lord has met all your deepest needs in Jesus Christ—can one go out of oneself to give life to others.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How are the daughters of Zelophehad different from Achsah? (2) What is the vision of godly womanhood that emerges from the five daughters?

VI. The Territories of Manasseh (Joshua 17:7-11)

- A. Having explained how the daughters of Manasseh were able to hold land along with his sons, we come to a description of the territorial boundaries of Manasseh.
- B. And this goes from verse 7 to verse 10 (Howard, Jr., *Joshua*, 352).
 - 1. In the first part of verse 7, you have the northern and southern extremities of Manasseh's inheritance: "The territory of Manasseh reached from Asher to Michmethath, which is east of Shechem..."
 - 2. From the second part of verse 7 all the way down to verse 10, you have the description of the southern boundary: "Then the boundary goes along southward to the inhabitants of En-tappuah..." and so on.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What are the northern and southern extremities of Manasseh's land? (2) What is the south boundary?

VII. The Cities Manasseh Failed to Possess (Joshua 17:11-13)

- A. In verse 11, we learn that several of Manasseh's cities lay within the territories of Issachar and Asher.
- B. But Manasseh did not finish taking possession of those cities (v 12).
—The language is similar to what we heard in the case of Judah in 15:63: "Yet the people of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land."
- C. Much like Ephraim, Manasseh also turned the remaining Canaanites into forced labor.
- D. Again, we have this theme of *half-hearted obedience*.
—Like Ephraim and Judah before, Manasseh chose to coexist with the enemy nations. And in time, this will prove to be a liability to Israel.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What were Manasseh's towns in the territories of Issachar and Asher? (2) What does verse 12 tell us about Manasseh's failure? (3) What did Manasseh do to their remaining Canaanites?

VIII. Joseph's Complaint to Joshua (Joshua 17:14-18)

- A. In verse 14, the people of Joseph take up an issue with Joshua concerning the size of their allotments: "Then the people of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, 'Why have you given me but one lot and one portion as an inheritance, although I am a numerous people, since all along the LORD has blessed me?'"
—Apparently, the tribes of Joseph are feeling a little bit short-changed in the way the land was allotted. In their view, the fact that they had so many people was justification for more land.
- B. Old Testament scholar David Howard is spot-on in his evaluation:

The Joseph tribes exhibited a degree of arrogance and greed in their confrontation with Joshua. The tone here sharply contrasts with the far more humble requests presented by Caleb (14:6-12) and the daughters of Zelophehad (17:4), both of whom appealed to the Lord's promises as the basis for their requests. Here these tribes cited no such precedent, only their subjective evaluation that their great numbers justified the request. Furthermore, they challenged the outcome of the lot [*goral*] which was controlled by God. Thus, in their request they were challenging the very workings of God himself. (Howard Jr., *Joshua*, 356)

- C. It looks like Achsah isn't the only one with an issue of covetousness: Greed, discontentment, complaining against the Lord, an inflated sense of self—these are all problems that are systemic in Israel. They reside deep within the hearts of the Israelites and all human beings.
- D. How does Joshua address the issue? He lays down a challenge to them and calls them to clear ground for themselves (v 15).
- E. The response that follows is enough to make any person's blood boil: "The people of Joseph said, 'The hill country is not enough for us. Yet all the Canaanites who dwell in the plain have chariots of iron, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel.'"
- F. Joshua responds by allowing the Joseph tribes more land—if they can do the hard work of fighting the Canaanites who remain there (vv 7, 8).
- G. There are two major lessons that can be learned from this case.
 - 1. We must always be appreciative and content with what God has given to us.
 - a. Replace complaining with thanksgiving.
 - b. Ephesians 5:4: "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving."
 - 2. We must strive to obey God fully.
 - a. In spite of the promises of God, in spite of all the assurances of God's grace, Israel was reluctant to go through with the destruction of the remaining Canaanites.
 - b. We have seen this disturbing trait now in Judah (15:63), and then in Ephraim (16:10), and then in Manasseh (17:13).
 - c. Do not be like Israel!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was the request of the tribes of Joseph? (2) What was the problem with the request? What deep spiritual issues did these requests reveal? (3) Do you recognize greed, discontentment, and complaining in yourself? When do these attitudes flare up? (4) What are two lessons that we learn from the Josephites' bad attitudes?

IX. The Central Ethical Principle: Trust God and Obey Him

Our heavenly Father wants us to take his promises seriously—and act upon them in our lives. In short, we are to trust and obey. This is the central, driving instruction that unifies the book of Joshua. And it is also the central, basic instruction that binds the people of God across all the ages.

- A. Granted, there are differences in how obedience was motivated in Joshua’s day and how obedience is motivated in our day, in the age of the New Testament.
1. In the Old Testament, God’s children lived primarily with a view to the promised rewards that will come from their obedience to God.
 2. In the New Testament, God’s children live primarily with a view to the rewards that have already been secured for them by Jesus Christ, the perfectly obedient Son of God.
- B. Yet, all things considered, the central instruction remains the same for all of God’s people, whether Old Testament or New Testament: God wants us to trust in him and obey him in all the days of our lives.
- C. In our case, our obedience is grounded on what God has already done for us in Christ.
1. God’s accomplishment for us through Christ has done very clearly in two passages: Galatians 1:3-5 and Revelation 1:5-6.
 - a. Galatians 1:3-5: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins *to deliver us from the present evil age*, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”
 - b. Revelation 1:5, 6: “To him who loves us and has *freed us from our sins* by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”
 2. Those two passages carry the promise of the Gospel that God has given to us who believe in Christ.
 - a. God has freed us from our sins by the blood of Christ.
 - b. God has freed us from the powers of the world.
 - c. God has made us his servants—free to serve him all the days of our lives.
- D. The Israelites in Joshua’s day never saw this promise so clearly. But you and I do. We have seen Jesus fulfil Israel’s mission. We have seen Jesus succeed where Israel failed. And the best part is, the righteousness of Jesus has been granted to us. When God sees us, God sees Jesus and his perfect obedience. We are therefore free forever from the curse of the Law.
- E. And so—given what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ—will we live according to God’s promises; or will we still live according to our fears, discontentment, and the powers of this world? Whose voice will we listen to more? Whose word will get the upper hand in our hearts?
- F. If we live according to Christ’s finished work, or to use Paul’s phrase “live by faith in the Son of God” (Gal 2:20); we realize that...
1. We do not have to obey the pressures of the world that lead us to sin.
 - a. We can say *no* to the promises of the world—rewards for living according to their ways.
 - b. We really are free to reject the world and the pressure of our sinful fears.
 2. We realize that we can now find our joy in God—and say a wholehearted yes to God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How are we different from Israelites of Joshua’s day? (2) In what sense are we still the same with the Old Testament Israelites? What is the same instruction we have inherited from God? (3) How does Christ’s finished work free our hearts to obey God?