

Sermon Outline

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

JOSHUA TOOK AND GAVE THE LAND

JOSHUA 11:21-23

I. Introduction

II. Joshua Destroys the Anakim (Joshua 11:21, 22)

- A. Joshua 11:21-23 is a summary of the end of the war as well as the parcelling out of the land to God’s people.
- B. Most of what comes after this simply explains in detail what we have seen.
 - 12:1-24: The defeated kings of the land.
 - 13:1-7: Parts of the land that remain unconquered.
 - 13:8-21:45: The land is divided amongst the tribes of Israel.
 - Final three chapters: Joshua’s final words to the people of Israel and the covenant renewal ceremony where Israel pledges continued obedience to the Lord.
- C. While there is still more to be covered, the historical record of the wars and the inheritance of land is essentially concluded.
- D. In verse 21, we read: “And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim...Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities.”
- E. Who were the Anakim? Consider the following texts:
 1. Numbers 13:27-28: “And they told him, ‘We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.’”
 2. Numbers 13:32-33: “So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, ‘The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.’”
—The Anakim were those who intimidated Israel from obeying God in the first place!
- F. We can see how significant this conquest of the Anakim is.
 1. The destruction of the Anakim repairs the sin of the previous generation of Israelites.

2. Joshua represents a new generation of Israelites who will obey God faithfully.
- G. Yet, some of the Anakim remained: “Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain.”
1. Why did God allow some of the Anakim to remain?
 - a. It is to test the faithfulness of Israel.
—Judges 2:21, 22: “I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not.”
 - b. It is to keep Israel sharp and vigilant.
—Judges 3:1-2: “Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What do we see in Joshua 11:21-23? (2) Who are the Anakim? How are they tied to Israel’s earlier failure to take the land? (3) What is the significance of Joshua’s destroying of this race? (4) Why did God allow the Anakim to remain?

III. The Promised Land Is not the Promised End

- A. All these reasons come together to teach us one important truth: The Promised Land itself is *not* the ultimate blessing God wants his people to have.
 1. The fact that pockets of resistance still remain teach us that a far greater blessing—a far greater experience of rest—still awaits the people of God.
 2. The Promised Land in the Middle East is simply a taste of that greater reality to come—the Kingdom of God over the entire world.
- B. There are also lessons here for the Church today.
 1. Why does God allow the Church to struggle with all kinds of problems?
 2. Like Israel, it is to keep us humble.
 3. Our situation is akin to that of ancient Israel’s and the apostle Paul’s.
 - a. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, the apostle Paul talks about a mysterious thorn in the flesh—a messenger of Satan—that troubles him.
 - b. Paul acknowledges why God allowed him to have this problem: “*So to keep me from becoming conceited* because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, *to keep me from becoming conceited.*”
 4. In the same way, God allows us to have problems in our lives and sins to struggle with to keep us from becoming proud.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the fact that pockets of resistance remain tell us about the limits of the gift of the Promised Land? (2) Why does God allow the Church’s struggles to remain?

IV. Joshua Gave and Took the Land (Joshua 11:23)

- A. Verse 23 brings the chapter to a close. It tells us what Joshua did.

- B. First, “Joshua *took* the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses.”
 - 1. The theme of obedience re-surfaces.
 - 2. Joshua has obeyed the Lord’s instructions.
 - a. He has been a faithful keeper of the Law.
 - b. He has been a faithful enforcer of the Law.
 - 3. He has done “according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses.”
 - a. Joshua is an example of a good prophet leader who conquers the land for the kingdom of God.
 - b. Of course, we know that Joshua did not singlehandedly take over the land.
 - c. He did it with the help of his fellow Israelites.
 - d. But it is his leadership that is emphasized at this point.
 - e. It was under the rule of Joshua that the land was taken.

- C. Second, “Joshua *gave* [the land] for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments.”
 - 1. Joshua guides God’s people into their inheritance.
 - 2. Remember that Joshua is acting in his capacity as the prophet leader of God’s people.

***Questions for reflection:** According to verse 23, what are two things that Joshua did?

V. Jesus Gives the World for an Inheritance to His Church

- A. Joshua’s taking and giving of the land calls to mind Daniel 7.

- B. In this passage, the prophet Daniel is given a vision of an event in heaven.
 - ¹³“I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
 - ¹⁴*And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,*
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

- C. Daniel is seeing the heavenly enthronement ceremony of the divine Son of Man, who is the Lord Jesus Christ in his exalted state.
- D. What happens after the kingdom is given to the Son of Man?
—“But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever” (7:18).
- E. The Son of Man does not receive the kingdom merely for himself.
—Instead, the Lord Jesus shares the kingdom with his people.
- F. In Revelation, we read that the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, has made his people into his priests and his kingdom on earth.
1. Consider the following:
 - 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.”
 - Revelation 5:10: “and you [the Lord Jesus] have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”
 2. Revelation is showing us is simply an amplification, a more detailed vision, of what the prophet Daniel was seeing.
 3. The Son of Man is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who, having received absolute authority over the creation from God the Father, proceeds to share the kingdom, the rule, with his holy people.
- G. How does this relate then to what we have read in Joshua 11?
1. Joshua’s taking and giving of the land to Israel is preparation for the great taking and giving of the kingdom by the Lord Jesus.
 2. Joshua’s giving of the land to Israel is a dress rehearsal, we could say, of the coming inheritance of the world by the people of God.
 3. When the kingdom is finally given, no more resistance would be left—and God’s purposes for us would have reached their final goal.
 4. On that day, the final words of verse 23 would be fully realized in all their glory and perfection: “And the land had rest from war.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What prophetic passage does Joshua’s giving and taking of the land call to mind? (2) What does Daniel see in his vision? Who is the Son of Man? (3) To whom does the Son of Man give the kingdom? (4) How does Revelation 1:5, 6 and 5:10 define the vision of Daniel? (4) How does Joshua’s taking and giving of the land relate to Jesus’ taking and giving of the kingdom?

VI. Rest from War (Joshua 11:23)

- A. The word “war” accurately describes our existence in this world.
- B. This does not mean, of course, that there is no peace, no joy, no rest.
1. Because of Christ, we do have all these things.

2. God graciously provides times of rest and peace for all of us. So to say that our existence is war does not mean that we are always fighting all the time.
- C. Yet, war accurately describes our lives today because we do have spiritual enemies arrayed against us, intent on destroying us.
 - D. As long as we are in the world, we will still suffer from our own sins, the sins of others, and the general broken condition of the world.
 - E. The sooner we admit that we are at war, the better.
 1. It prepares us for suffering.
 2. It keeps us dependent on God.
 - F. Yet, precisely because God has called us to be *soldiers* in his war, we are not simply resigned to our suffering and injustice.
 - G. Using the spiritual weapons God has given to us, we seek to do what we can—in Christ—to form our society more and more...
 1. Pleasing to God
 2. Conducive to human flourishing
 3. Protective of the image of God in each human being.
 - H. But be clear: This kind of culture transformation is not the same as building the Kingdom of God in the world.
 1. It is simply seeking to obey God in the context of our society.
 2. It is simply doing what we can to conform our society that much more to the goodness of God—while recognizing that whatever changes we make are still highly imperfect and filled with sin.
 - I. This is the tension in which you and I are called to live.
 1. We are to expect suffering because we live in a fallen world.
 2. We are to change what we reasonably can because we love God and our fellow human beings.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why does the word “war” accurately describe our existence in this world? (2) Where can you see the war in your own life today? (3) How do we benefit by admitting that we are at war?

(4) What is the tension that Christians are called to live? (5) Our cultural transformation is not the same as building the Kingdom of God. Why is it important to recognize this distinction?

VII. Receive the Kingdom from Christ Jesus Our Lord

If the Kingdom of God is our greatest good, who will bring the Kingdom of God? Who will bring us this final and eternal rest our souls so desperately crave? Who will finally heal this world and make it whole once again? In the end, it is not us. It is the greater Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is

himself the Kingdom of God in human flesh. The hero of the world story is *not* the Church. The hero of your life story is *not* you. Christ Jesus is the Savior of us all.

- A. What this means therefore is that no matter how much we stress...
 - the need to change
 - the need to grow in holiness
 - the need to be more prayerful
 - the need to be more loving
 - the need to be engaged in our culture,
—the first and final word is always, always what God himself has done for us in Jesus Christ.

- B. We can grow in holiness, love, prayer, and righteousness because we already are all these things in our King, the Lord Christ.

- C. By trusting in Christ, we draw all these good qualities and virtues from him.
 - 1. In John 6:51, our Lord says, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”
 - a. To “live forever” is the reality of life in the Kingdom of God.
 - b. Only those who eat the flesh of Christ—only those who depend on Christ solely and entirely for eternal life—will live forever.
 - 2. In John 15:5, our Lord says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
 - a. Our Lord Jesus is teaching us that just as faith is the instrument by which we enter the Kingdom, faith is also the instrument by which we grow in obedience.
 - b. It is only when we keep look to Christ, depending on him, asking of him to help us, would we be able to do what God calls us to do.

- D. The Kingdom of God and all its powerful realities is given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

- E. Just as the Israelites received the temporary kingdom of the Promised Land through Joshua, we receive the eternal Kingdom of God through Jesus.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who gives us the Kingdom of God? (2) What does John 6:51 teach us about how we gain eternal life? (3) What does John 15:5 teach us about how we do good things (of which growth in holiness is one)? (4) Who is the hero of your life story? Why is it important to get this straight?