

## Dividing the Land (Joshua)

What Israel had done to Jericho and Ai became known to the people of Canaan. The Gibeonites, instead of fighting, decided to try to trick the Israelites into making a covenant. The Gibeonites dressed up and acted like envoys from a far country. They found Joshua at the camp in Gilgal and said, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us" (Joshua 9-10).

The Israelites were not free to make a covenant with people in the land, and they were a bit skeptical. Yet the Gibeonites insisted, "We are your servants." Their plan worked. The mistake that Israel made at this point was that they "did not ask for the counsel of the Lord" (9:14). Joshua made a covenant with them, and the Gibeonites then returned to their city.

A few days later, Israel came up against the city and found that the Gibeonites were indeed in the land. Because of their oath, they did not destroy Gibeon, but made them servants instead. Joshua was angry with their deception.

When other kings in the land heard of this, they tried to fight against Gibeon. Israel came to their aid and defeated the other armies. While the armies fled, Joshua asked God that the sun would "stand still" to give them time to pursue the enemies. God



granted this, and Israel destroyed their enemies. The reason why Israel was so effective is stated several times: God fought for Israel. The pattern was consistent throughout. When God fought for His people, they would win. As long

as they trusted Him, they would be able to dwell in the land without fear of their enemies.

The taking and dividing of the land was a slow process, not an overnight matter. The book of Joshua describes how this happened. After Joshua defeated the five kings, they continued to overtake southern Palestine, where the tribe of Judah would primarily take up residence. Then they started working on the northern territories. When the enemies would come against them, "The LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, so that they defeated them..." (11:8). Joshua was intent on doing exactly as God had said. "Just as the Lord had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses" (11:15). What a great example!

As they were now taking command of the land, Joshua began dividing the land up according to the tribes. Much of the book of Joshua describes how the land was divided up and where each tribe would live. Recall, though, that Levi would not get territory, but

rather certain cities. There were forty-eight cities given to the Levites in all, including six cities of refuge (chs. 20-21). Also recall that Joseph, through Ephraim and Manasseh, would receive a double portion. The summary statement given in 21:43-45 is instructive:

“So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.”

Let’s refresh ourselves: God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation, that they would possess the land God had shown him, and that through his seed (Jesus) all the families of earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-7). While in Egypt, Abraham’s descendants grew into a great nation. Their defining moment came when they departed from Egypt and received the Law from God through Moses (cf. Exod. 19-20). However, before they would receive the land promise, they would spend 40 years in the wilderness.

Finally, under Joshua’s leadership, they conquered the land of Canaan and divided it up according to their tribes as God had commanded. Before Moses died, he told the people that if they remained faithful to God, He would bless them “in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Deut. 28:8). Their blessings would be great. The warning was also given that if they did not continue to obey God, then they would lose the blessings God was offering, including the land. They simply needed to listen to God.

As long as Joshua was alive, the people stayed faithful. Joshua spoke to the people, reminding them that God had kept His word and that no promise had failed (23:14). Yet there was concern that when Joshua was gone, the people would transgress the covenant (23:15-16). Thus Joshua reminded them of their history, what God had done, and warned of turning away. He told them, “fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth,” and to put away false gods (24:14). They were always to choose the Lord, just as Joshua’s choice was clear: “but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (24:15). May we so choose the Lord today!

*Doy Moyer*