

# 10, Incomplete conquests and the cities of refuge

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This section includes the apportionment of the Promised Land given to the tribes that settled on the west side of the Jordan River. Chapter 15 deals with Judah's portion; chapter 16 with Ephraim's portion; chapter 17 with Manasseh's portion; and chapters 18 and 19 with the portions of Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. Chapter 20 talks about the cities of refuge.

## A. A FATHER LIKE A DAUGHTER

*Joshua 15:13-19 Now to Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a share among the children of Judah, according to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, namely, Kirjath Arba, which is Hebron (Arba was the father of Anak). 14 Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak from there: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, the children of Anak. 15 Then he went up from there to the inhabitants of Debir (formerly the name of Debir was Kirjath Sepher). 16 And Caleb said, "He who attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give Achsah my daughter as wife." 17 So Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife. 18 Now it was so, when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. So she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" 19 She answered, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water." So he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.*

In chapter 14 we saw that Caleb was not only a man of great and bold deeds by asking Joshua to give the land where the children of Anak, the giants lived and he was willing to fight against them at his age 85 years old, but also a man who encouraged others to great and bold deeds. He did this by offering his daughter in marriage to the man who was bold enough to conquer a city to have her.

The man who accomplished the task of conquering Kirjath Sepher was Othniel who became the first judge that we find in the Book of Judges 3:9-11.

## B. INCOMPLETE CONQUESTS

*Joshua 15:63 As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day.*

The Israelites' failure to completely drive out the Canaanites is typical of all the tribes.

The main reason why they couldn't conquer them was that they didn't ask God to help them drive the Canaanites out of the land. No matter how hard the struggle, with God's promise and help, we can triumph.

Without God's help, we can not conquer our flesh within us. When we try to do it with our own strength and willpower, it might even seem that we are in control over flesh. But in reality, it is nothing more than a keg of gun powder on top of a hot stove. It is a matter of time before it is to blow up in our faces.

It also is repeated in 16:10 and 17:12-13. The Ephramites also didn't conquer the Canaanites but made them to be forced laborers. If they had the power to make the people of Gezer forced laborers, they certainly had the power to defeat them completely.

This sort of compromise seems innocent, but it was the way that much idolatry and immoral worship came into the people of Israel. This is one reason why we see so many struggles in the days of the Book of Judges.

The Israelites did not fully conquer for two reasons:

- 1) They wanted peace at any cost.
- 2) They wanted wealth.

For the sake of ease and money, they disobeyed God and fell short of what He had for them – as we often do today also.

### **C. GET ON IT, BOYS**

*Joshua 17:14-18 Then the children of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, "Why have you given us only one lot and one share to inherit, since we are a great people, inasmuch as the Lord has blessed us until now?" 15 So Joshua answered them, "If you are a great people, then go up to the forest country and clear a place for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the giants, since the mountains of Ephraim are too confined for you." 16 But the children of Joseph said, "The mountain country is not enough for us; and all the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both those who are of Beth Shean and its towns and those who are of the Valley of Jezreel." 17 And Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph--to Ephraim and Manasseh--saying, "You are a great people and have great power; you shall not have only one lot, 18 but the mountain country shall be yours. Although it is wooded, you shall cut it down, and its farthest extent shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots and are strong."*

As you may recall, the tribe of Manasseh was divided. Half of the tribe settled on the east bank of the Jordan, but the other half crossed over and are now given their portion.

Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons of Joseph, whom Jacob "adopted" and especially blessed according to Gen. 48. Since the tribe of Levi wasn't given any territory, these two tribes made up the difference so that there were still twelve tribes in Israel. The birth order was "Manasseh and Ephraim", but Jacob reversed it. God rejects our first physical birth and gives us a second spiritual birth. He accepted Abel and rejected Cain. He rejected Ishmael and accepted Isaac, Abraham's second-born son. He rejected Esau and accepted Jacob.

How different is their attitude than Caleb's attitude! They want "easy land" given to them, instead of taking God's promises and going out and taking what God has given them. Not only that, their hearts were filled with criticism and pride. In many times, those who talk the most accomplish the least.

The principle applies just as strongly for us today. If we desire more of something, the first thing to do is to be as faithful as we can where we are and with what we have.

### **D. WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?**

*Joshua 18:1-10 Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them. 2 But there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes which had not yet received their inheritance. 3 Then Joshua said to the children of Israel: "How long will you neglect to go and possess the*

land which the Lord God of your fathers has given you? 4 Pick out from among you three men for each tribe, and I will send them; they shall rise and go through the land, survey it according to their inheritance, and come back to me. 5 And they shall divide it into seven parts. Judah shall remain in their territory on the south, and the house of Joseph shall remain in their territory on the north. 6 You shall therefore survey the land in seven parts and bring the survey here to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord our God. 7 But the Levites have no part among you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance. And Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave them." 8 Then the men arose to go away; and Joshua charged those who went to survey the land, saying, "Go, walk through the land, survey it, and come back to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord in Shiloh." 9 So the men went, passed through the land, and wrote the survey in a book in seven parts by cities; and they came to Joshua at the camp in Shiloh. 10 Then Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord, and there Joshua divided the land to the children of Israel according to their divisions.

Here we find Joshua is rebuking the seven tribes for not doing what they were supposed to do. It is a tragedy that they did not possess the entire land because the failure to do so ultimately led to what we find in the Book of Judges, as their worship was corrupted and they were punished by God and conquered by other nations.

When we are complacent and satisfied with our lack of spiritual growth and we fail to continue in our spiritual journey full-force, we too, set ourselves up for failure. God may be say to us today, "How long are you going to neglect to possess My promises for you? What are you waiting for?"

Joshua moved the camp from Gilgal to Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim, where the tabernacle remained until David moved the ark to Jerusalem.

## **E. THE HUMBLE LEADER**

*Joshua 19:49-51* When they had made an end of dividing the land as an inheritance according to their borders, the children of Israel gave an inheritance among them to Joshua the son of Nun. 50 According to the word of the Lord they gave him the city which he asked for, Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim; and he built the city and dwelt in it. 51 These were the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel divided as an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So they made an end of dividing the country.

Joshua received what was promised to him by God, but in remarkable humility, he receives his portion last. Like his friend Caleb, Joshua preferred living in the mountainous region of the land. This is the kind of humble service and concern for others that makes Joshua such a wonderful picture of Jesus Christ.

## **F. THE CITIES OF REFUGE**

*Joshua 20:1-9* The Lord also spoke to Joshua, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Appoint for yourselves cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, 3 that the slayer who kills a person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there; and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. 4 And when he flees to one of those cities, and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares his case in the hearing of the

elders of that city, they shall take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. 5 Then if the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not deliver the slayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unintentionally, but did not hate him beforehand. 6 And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the slayer may return and come to his own city and his own house, to the city from which he fled.' --

7 So they appointed Kedesh in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kirjath Arba (which is Hebron) in the mountains of Judah. 8 And on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh. 9 These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwelt among them, that whoever killed a person accidentally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stood before the congregation.

When the nation was still on the east side of the Jordan, God told Moses to have the people set aside special cities for the Levites, as well as six "cities of refuge". Now that the tribes had received their territories, Joshua could assign these cities.

Even before the Law of Moses was given, God had laid down the basic rule that those who shed blood should pay for their crime with their own blood in Gen. 9.

*Genesis 9:6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.*

This principle was elaborated repeatedly throughout the OT, but God made a distinction between murder and manslaughter.

The six "cities of refuge" were needed because society in that day had no CSI units to investigate crimes. It was the responsibility of each family to see to it that murders were avenged, but how could they tell whether it was a case of premeditated murder or accidental manslaughter? In the heat of anger a relative of the dead person might kill somebody who was really innocent of a capital crime.

Joshua set apart three cities of refuge on each side of the Jordan River. Since the Holy Land is about the size of the state of Maryland, you can see that nobody was very far from a city of refuge.

The law was really quite simple. Anybody who killed another person could flee to a city of refuge and be protected from "the avenger of blood" until the elders of the city could investigate the circumstances. If they found the fugitive guilty, he or she was put to death. But if they concluded that it was a case of manslaughter, the fugitive was allowed to live in the city and be protected from the avenger. Upon the death of the high priest, the fugitive could go home again. It was a case of forfeiting freedom in order to save his or her life.

Throughout the Book of Psalms, we can find "God is our refuge" for more than 16 times.

*Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.*

There are many points of similarity between the cities of refuge and our refuge in Jesus:

- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are within easy reach of the needy person. They were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are open to all, not just the Israelite. No one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would live. You didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only alternative for the one in need. Without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.

But there are a couple of crucial distinctions between the cities of refuge and our refuge in Jesus:

- The cities of refuge only helped the innocent, but the guilty can come to Jesus and find refuge.
- If the fugitive prematurely left the city of refuge, he could be killed. But our salvation in Christ is not conditional. Our High Priest will never die, and we are forever secure.

## **G. APPLICATIONS**

- 1) Without God's help. we can not conquer our flesh within us.
- 2) If we desire more of something, the first thing to do is to be as faithful as we can where we are and with what we have.
- 3) God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.