

~ Grumbling That Followed Blessing ~

Text: Joshua 16 & 17

Theme: The blessings of a victorious Christian life, once entered into, should not be taken for granted. We must work to obtain the blessing, not seek to enter into the blessing that another has laboured for.

Intro:

1. Several weeks back we studied Joshua chapter 15 which deals with the borders of the land given to the tribe of Judah.
 - a. Judah was the princely tribe of Israel, being the largest and most influential tribe, Judah received the first inheritance within the land. (The land on the east side of Jordan is not included in the dividing of Canaan.)
2. Today, we will be looking at chapters 16-17.
 - a. Chapters 16-17 continue the account of the division of the land between the tribes of Israel, and specifically the tribe of Joseph which was known by the two half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.
 - b. I don't plan to do a deep dive into the names of the places given in these chapters, but we'll observe the natural divisions within these chapters and note the geographical locations being described as we go through before drawing some practical helps from the passage.
 - c. We will use just two headings for our study today:
 - I. The Blessing Received (Josh 16:1-17:13)
 - II. The Grumbling Begun (Josh 17:14-18)

Main:

- I. **The Blessing Received** (Josh 16:1 – 17:13)
 - A. The land for the children of Joseph (Josh 16:1-4)
 1. The first four verses of the chapter describe the total land given to the children of Joseph.
 - a. The tribe of Levi was the Levitical tribe, and their inheritance was the LORD, rather than a portion of the land.
 - i. *"Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; **the LORD is his inheritance**, according as the LORD thy God promised him."* (Deuteronomy 10:9)
 - ii. Instead of being given a territorial inheritance, they were given 48 cities scattered throughout Israel. These scattered cities would enable to tribe of Levi to minister to the spiritual needs of the whole nation which included teaching the nation to observe God's laws.

- b. By contrast, the tribe of Joseph received a double portion, since the birthright fell to Joseph after Ruben's sin with his father's concubine.
 - i. "For he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, **his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph** the son of Israel." (1 Chronicles 5:1)
 - ii. In the custom of the day, the birthright went to the firstborn son of the first wife, however, when that birthright was forfeited, it didn't go to the second son of the first wife but rather to the firstborn son of the second wife.
 - In this case, Jacobs first wife was Leah and her firstborn Ruben.
 - The forfeited birthright fell to Joseph because he was the firstborn son of Jacob's second wife Rachel.
2. The tribe of Joseph received the double portion of inheritance which was seen evidenced through the separate portions of land given to Josephs two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.
 - a. Since the two sons of Joseph made up two half-tribes, there were still twelve territorial divisions of the land even though Levi received no tribal territory.
 - b. Verses 1-4 of our passage outline the total territory of the tribe of Joseph which would then be divided between the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.
 - i. The total land given to Joseph's two sons was the second largest portion within the promised land. When you include the land that Manasseh received on the East side of the Jordan river, the total land received by the descendants of Joseph was the largest portion of all the tribes of Israel.
 - ii. This is important to remember when we come toward the end of the chapter and find the children of Joseph grumbling to Joshua about their inheritance.
- B. The land for the two half tribes (Josh 16:5-17:13)
 1. The land for Ephraim (Josh 16:5-10)
 - a. Ephraim's portion of the land is described here in chapter 16 verse 5-10 and it is the smaller of the two portions given to the sons of Joseph.
 - i. The tribal inheritance was based upon the numerical size of the tribe, since a bigger group would need more land.
 - *"To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance..."* (Numbers 26:54)

- ii. Although Ephraim was the smaller of the two half-tribes at this time, later in Israel's history, the northern kingdom of Israel would be known by the name Ephraim, due to the influence of that tribe (See Hosea 4:17).
 - b. The tribe of Ephraim failed to drive all the Canaanites out of their inheritance.
 - i. The Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer proved to be an obstacle to Ephraim enjoying the entirety of their inheritance.
 - Gezer was a city in the southwest of the inheritance of Ephraim. Gezer was a city that remained contested even in the days of King David, who drove a Philistine incursion back at this location in 2 Samuel 5:25.
 - ii. The cities that Israel failed to conquer tended to cause them problems down the track, since they held no particular loyalty to Israel and became military weak spots, as well as being a spiritual danger by remaining a pagan influence in Israel.
- 2. The land for Manasseh (Josh 17:1-13)
 - a. The land that Manasseh inherited was a large inheritance immediately north of Ephraim and stretching from the Jordan Valley toward the Mediterranean coast.
 - i. Both the tribes of Ephraim are mentioned to have dwelled in cities that were outside their own territorial borders, which gives you an indication of just how large these tribes were. (See Josh 16:9 | Josh 17:11)
 - b. There are 5 notable women in this passage who desired an inheritance even though their father was dead.
 - i. In verses 3-6 tells us of the daughters of Zelophehad, a man who had no sons but had 5 daughters. According to the custom of the day, this would mean that his family did not receive any inheritance since there wasn't any male heir for it to fall to.
 - ii. In Numbers chapter 27, we find that Zelophehad died in the wilderness and his daughters were concerned about their future and so they asked Moses to be gracious to them (Num 27:4).
 - iii. Moses asked God what he should do and God answered, *"The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren"* (Numbers 27:7).
 - c. We find, however, that the tribe of Manasseh failed to take full possession of their inheritance.

- i. Verses 11-13 tell us that Manasseh was not able to drive out the inhabitants of the cities they had gained within the territory of Asher and Issachar, but the inhabitants of those cities continued to dwell there.
- ii. In time, the tribe of Manasseh grew large enough that they were able to impose a tax on those cities, making them subject to the rule of the tribe while still retaining a level civic independence.

II. **The Grumbling Begun** (Josh 17:14-18)

A. The Source of Grumbling (Vs 14-15)

1. The children of Joseph complained about their inheritance

- a. Having received their inheritance in the land, the tribe of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, began to complain that the land they had been given was not enough for them and they wanted Joshua to give them more. Their claim was that their combined size entitled them to more land.

- i. As we've noted already, when you include the territory that Manasseh had received on the other side of Jordan, the tribe of Joseph had received the most land out of all the tribes and was second only to the tribe of Judah in terms of the land inherited on the west of the Jordan River. Even the tribe of Judah, which was larger than both Manasseh and Ephraim combined, had not received as much land in total as the tribe of Joseph.
- ii. "The two tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim together were not greatly more numerous than the single tribe of Judah; and now that half the Manassites were provided for on the eastern side of Jordan, the remaining children of Joseph could hardly be stronger than the Danites or the Issacharites. The children of Joseph seem therefore to exhibit here that arrogant and jealous spirit which elsewhere characterizes their conduct.¹"

- b. Joshua responded by telling them to take the forested hill country of Samaria. Since this was a wooded place, it would require them to work hard to clear the land, but it would also mean they had plenty of resources to build with.
 - i. Joshua was effectively saying, "If you are such a great people, as you say you are, then it shouldn't be a

¹ Albert Barnes, [*Notes on the Old Testament: Exodus to Ruth*](#), ed. F. C. Cook and J. M. Fuller (London: John Murray, 1879), 394.

- problem for you to go and take the hill country and the valleys which you have, so far, failed to possess.
- ii. The tribe of Joseph was not impressed with this allotment, however, since there were giants living in the hill country and the occupants of the valleys were equipped with iron chariots.
 - iii. It is important to note that Joshua himself was from the tribe of Ephraim, so it was his own brethren who were now complaining to him and, rather than allowing family ties to make him bias toward his own brethren, Joshua told them to have faith in God and go and possess the remainder of their allotted territory.
- c. The problem is that these grumblers wanted to be handed a territory that someone else had conquered and they could simply turn up and enjoy.
- i. They didn't want to go up and clear the wooded country, because that meant facing the giants.
 - ii. They didn't want to go down and possess the vast pastures of the valleys because the inhabitants there possessed iron chariots.
 - iii. What they wanted was an easy, carefree, comfortable lifestyle.
 - iv. Many Christians are like this as well.
 - They want other people to do all the hard work of fighting spiritual battles in prayer
 - They want someone else to do the hard work of going out soul-winning.
 - They want someone else to do all the hard work of actually studying and standing for the King James Bible.
 - They want others to do all the work while they enter into the reward of another mans labours and make themselves comfortable Christians.
 - These are the Christians who like to use the word "We" after a job has been done even though "We" were not both present when the work was being done. They say things like:
 - a. "We stand for the King James Bible at this church" | But they were no where to be found when that stand was being contested.
 - b. "We believe in every Christian pulling their own weight" | But they've never turned up to a church working bee, and they're never at church early

enough to help set up or late enough to help pack up.
 c. “We believe in proactive soul-winning at this church”
 | But they’ve never put their own feet to the work of
 letterboxing or doorknocking.

B. The Excuse for Grumbling (Vs 16-18)

1. Hard work and hard battles

- a. The problem with their current inheritance was not in the fruitfulness of the land but in the work required to take possession of the land.
 - i. These children of Joseph were not courageous but said: *“The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both they who are of Bethshean and her towns, and they who are of the valley of Jezreel.”*
 - ii. In chapters 14 & 15 we have Caleb being courageous and taking the mountain where the giants dwelt and Othniel being courageous and taking Kirjath-sepher.
 - iii. It is sad that, following the great victories obtained by these men of faith, the children of godly Joseph were found to be small in faith and little in action.
- b. To this Joshua answered somewhat ironically perhaps:
 - i. *“Thou art a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot only: But the mountain shall be thine; for it is a wood, and thou shalt cut it down: and the outgoings of it shall be thine: for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong.”*²
 - ii. Joshua effectively used their own claims to being a great people against them, saying, “If you are a great people as you claim you are, then you will be able to overcome those giants and these chariots.
- c. It seems that the children of Joseph were like most people today. Happy to talk themselves up but not so quick to prove their greatness.
 - i. Notice the difference between the approach of the children of Joshua and the attitude of Caleb.

² H. A. Ironside, [*Addresses on the Book of Joshua*](#). (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1950), 120.

- Caleb said, "...if so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out".³
- Of the children of Joseph, it is said:
 "And they drave not out the Canaanites (16:10)"⁴
 "Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out *the inhabitants of those cities* (17:12)"⁵
- ii. The children of Joseph were not trusting God to deliver their enemies into their hand. They had come this far with God and then their attention turned to their own efforts and they say, "We can't do this anymore."
- iii. "We may well learn from the failures of Israel to beware lest we ourselves fail to judge every evil thing that Satan would use to hinder our enjoyment of the things of Christ. We are called to deal unsparingly with every unholy thought and every sinful tendency, cleansing ourselves from "all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." It is only thus that we can appreciate truly and enjoy, in the way God would have us, the great privileges and manifold blessings He has bestowed upon us. Sin unjudged results in weakness and loss of communion, which can only be restored as we face the sin in the presence of God, confessing and forsaking it, and thus obtaining mercy and the assurance the all is forgiven."⁶

Conclusion:

1. Beware of becoming a grumbling Christian. Israel spent much of their time in the wilderness wandering grumbling against Moses and even against God and it resulted in the chastisement from God.
2. Beware of becoming a comfortable Christian, coasting along on the tails of another Christians success.

³ [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#), Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Jos 14:12.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#), Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Jos 16:10.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#), Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Jos 17:12.

⁶ H. A. Ironside, [Addresses on the Book of Joshua](#). (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1950), 120–121.