

# The Book of Joshua

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## The Third in a Series of Four by the Editor

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### 10:1-43 Credit where Credit is Due

This chapter finds itself structurally defined by the two introductory formulae of 10:1 and 11:1. But what a peculiar chapter it is! It begins with one of the most remarkable stories in the whole of the Bible (1-29); only to end with the first instalment of one of the many 'boring' lists in Joshua (30-43). To the first reader, however, the latter would have been far from boring and, overall, the message of the chapter would have accelerated the heart beat . . . for here something of vital and exciting significance to their past was being retold.

Up till now the Israelites have had it easy: Jericho fell down, Ai was an insignificant provincial town and the Gibeonites had given up without a fight! However, this has secured a wedge of territory in the middle of Canaan and the southern cities are in danger of being isolated. Thus, the situation changes . . . big time. Enraged, and, understandably, 'very much alarmed' at the capitulation of the Gibeonites (who, hitherto, had been part of the coalition's crack troops: 'all its men were good fighters' 2), the confederation of Egyptian-backed cities based around Jerusalem are aroused to action.<sup>1</sup> The size of the threat is probably emphasized in two ways: first, by repetition (3-5). The Israelites are no longer playing war games: this is serious, the 'big boys' are threatened. Secondly, however, we are struck that Gibeon, with its strong standing army, sends word saying 'quickly . . . save us! Help us' (6). Indeed the reference to 'the Amorite kings from the hill country' may be a veiled reference to 'crack' troops.<sup>2</sup>

So Joshua prayed . . . well no he didn't! Sometimes action not prayer is the answer when the way ahead is clear. Joshua had an obligation to the Gibeonites and so he 'marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men' (7). Granted, the LORD encourages him: but the words are old and familiar ones: 'Do not be afraid . . . I have given them into your hand' (8). This is little more than an invitation to trust an old promise, but in a new and far more threatening situation. Gradually, the LORD is disciplining his people for ever greater challenges.

The following story is well known and scarcely needs retelling. However, as with many familiar stories, familiarity can breed contempt or, at least, cause us to miss the point. Several things stand out in the verses 8-21. First of all, the LORD expected Joshua to think for himself and take action. Thus, we are told that 'After an all-night march . . . Joshua

took them by surprise' (9). Nevertheless, and secondly, 'The LORD threw them into confusion . . . The LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel . . . Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!' (10, 12, 14). For all Joshua's efforts (and they are not minimised) they would have been in vain if the LORD was not fighting with Israel: Ai had proved that. Thirdly, while Joshua's prayer is remarkable ('sun, stand still', 12),<sup>3</sup> emphasis still lies on the LORD who is the subject of all the verbs in verses 10-12. Joshua is not the hero of the story: the LORD is! Finally, the victory was overwhelmingly complete (16-21). The insurmountable enemy and its cities is routed: 'Joshua destroyed them completely' (20, see also 27).

Meanwhile the kings of the five confederated cities had been discovered and captured (16-18) pending the end of the battle. Afterwards (and how the author relishes repeating 'the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon . . . these kings', 23,24), they are slain 'and left hanging on the trees until evening' (26). Such would have emphasized that they were cursed: and their final resting place would have been a warning to others not to rebel against the LORD (27). Before this, however, the leaders of Israel were called upon to 'put your feet on the necks of these kings' (24) as a sort of promise that 'This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight' (25).

Hence the final verses! The victory just described was but the first of a long campaign: but one in which, as predicted, victory was succeeded by victory until 'Joshua subdued the whole region' (40). Thus, not only was the centre of the land secured but, now, all the territory to the south was too, and all that was needed was for the tribes to undertake the 'wiping up' operations. No wonder every next battle is loving and awesomely recorded by the author as an act of worship!

Indeed, credit is given where credit is due: 'Joshua conquered . . . because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel' (42). Thus Pink says, 'There is no magnifying the human instrument, no paying homage to the national hero, but, instead, a placing of the glory where it rightfully belongs.'<sup>4</sup>

### 11:1-23 The Big One

This chapter continues the description of Joshua's victories. It does so in such a 'laid back' manner, omitting all the details that might have made it interesting, so that it is possible we miss the fact that some very important truths are being communicated.

The final verse of the chapter is the provisional conclusion of the first half of the book of Joshua (the full conclusion is reached in the following chapter). Simply, and in a very matter-of-fact manner, we are told, 'the land had rest from war', because 'Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD

had directed' (23)

The steady progress of the previous verses has, inexorably, led up to this. In words that are carefully crafted to reflect God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:18-21) and Moses (Ex. 3:8, 17), the LORD fulfils his promises to the letter. The very understated way the story is told is surely intended to communicate the thought, 'well he would, wouldn't he!'

In the meanwhile, however, the chapter also stresses that to do this, the LORD accomplishes the humanly impossible. In chapter 10, we noted that Israel was faced with a 'real' enemy for the first time. In this chapter, they face a super-power! There they subdued the substantial powers in the south of the land, here they are faced with the northern coalition.

Archaeological studies have confirmed the picture hinted at in the early verses. 'Hazor' (1) was one of the megalopolis' of the ancient world. The size of the ruins suggests it could have contained a population of 40,000 people: larger than the population of London until the last few centuries. But that is not all. It was the centre of a massive federation of city states (10) that were capable of raising a vast army: 'as numerous as the sand on the seashore' (4). Such were equipped with the most sophisticated military hardware of the ancient world, 'a large number of horses and chariots' (4), and had placed themselves, strategically, in the best defensive position 'at the waters of Merom' (5). In the face of this Israel was an ant engaged in battle with an elephant! The situation was hopeless.<sup>5</sup>

In the previous chapter (10:8) the LORD merely repeated his earlier promises and encouraged Joshua to use his particular abilities as a military strategist. Here the story is different and Joshua is given specific instructions: 'You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots' (6). Throughout this book we have discovered that the LORD does not use an inflexible method: but whichever way he adopts, he leads his faithful people to victory!

And so it proved (6-15). Hazor and all the surrounding cities are razed to the ground (10,11), 'totally destroyed' and plundered (12-15). Just as God had said to Moses (note this point is repeated 12,15,20, 23) so he delivered. Thus 'although the narrative almost has the form of a chronicle, it does not fail to note that the credit for the victories belonged to the LORD'.<sup>6</sup>

The one great victory is followed by a brief description of what was a 'long' campaign (18): perhaps as much as seven years.<sup>7</sup> Victory was won over the long-haul: doubtless amid privation, danger, fear, uncertainty and disappointment. The LORD was rewarding faithfulness, endurance and stickability . . . even in an octogenarian!

In all this, the LORD demonstrated that the worst fears of the Israelites were unnecessary. Joshua, we are told, 'went and destroyed the Anakites' so that 'no Anakites were left in Israelite territory' (21,22). Forty-five years earlier these 'incredible hulks' had been seen as too great a challenge; even to the LORD who had divided the Red Sea (see Num. 13). Now they are given the briefest of mentions: 'game, set, and straight sets win' to the LORD. Thus God exposes the groundlessness of the fear and unbelief' of the previous generation.<sup>8</sup>

But why such carnage? Interestingly 19, 20 seem to echo the start of this story, back in Egypt. Sustained and repeated

acts of unbelief had first hardened Pharaoh's heart, a condition that the LORD then 'confirmed' by hardening it!<sup>9</sup> Thus, it was the 'LORD himself who hardened their hearts' (20) because they had been persistent rebels against his grace: they had had more warnings than the Gibeonites! What a solemn warning against persistent unbelief.<sup>10</sup> What a fantastic chapter!

## 12:1-24 Name them One by One

Most of us don't like reading lists . . . so this chapter is a bit of a 'turn off' (but just wait for the following chapters)! However, like it or not, this is the climax to the first half of the book. Lovingly, dwelling on each little detail, it provides a 'song of praise to the Lord's honor' for all the mercies of the conquest.<sup>11</sup>

First, then, the victories won by 'Moses . . . and the Israelites' in Transjordan are recounted (1-6); with the inevitable reminder that Moses was 'the servant of the LORD' (6). The victories over 'Sihon' (2-3) and 'Og' (4-5) are often celebrated in the Old Testament. They were the two victories under Moses that promised so much for the future under Joshua.

And what Moses started 'Joshua and the Israelites' (7) completed. It was one work; albeit performed through two very different people. Again we hear an echo from Gen. 15:18-21: everything God had promised Abraham so many centuries earlier was fulfilled as 'Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizites, Hivites and Jebusites' were conquered (8).

What victories they were! One by one the kings who were overthrown are listed from great 'Jericho' (9) to little 'Tirzah, thirty one kings in all' (24). The writer wants to dwell on every single success . . . every little (or big) token of the LORD's faithful mercies to his faithful children. Hallelujah!

Of course this is not simply a history lesson; any more than any part of Joshua is simply that. It is a challenge to all its subsequent readers. These verses are to encourage others to take up the mantle of obedience, to galvanise for the long-haul and 'steel and strengthen' for our own grand 'finale'.<sup>12</sup>

## 13:1-33 The Mortgage Discharged!

Title deeds are not exciting . . . not at least, unless they have been received because the mortgage has been paid off. Then, perhaps, every line confirming possession may be thrilling indeed! So chapters 13-19 of Joshua, which describe the allocation of the land to each of the tribes may not be of great interest to us . . . but to those who were receiving the inheritance promised for hundreds of years, it was a very different story.

These verses set the scene. Joshua is now 'old and well advanced in years' and he is reminded that, for all his achievements, the mopping up operations still require that 'there are still very large areas of land to be taken over' (1). This is specified (2-6). The implication clearly is that others must complete the task he has begun. There is, however, a reminder and encouragement, of what Joshua himself had experienced: 'I myself will drive them out before the Israelites' (6).

Interestingly, in order to achieve this the land must be allocated to the tribes. The implication here is to be noted. From now on, it is not going to be one campaign under one leader. There is no suggestion that Joshua is to have a successor in the same way that he had followed Moses. No! Now the responsibility is to be shared: others who have lived in the shadow of Joshua's example, have to take responsibility for themselves. Meanwhile, as ever, Joshua is to act 'as I have instructed you' (6).

And so the title deed begins (8-33)! Yet the list here is different from the one that follows. Here we are given an account of the allocation of 'the other half tribe of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites'. The significant difference is that these already 'had received the inheritance that Moses had given them' (8). This is repeatedly emphasized. Thus, 'Moses had defeated them and taken over their land' (12). See also, verses 13, 24, 29, 32. They had to be allocated to each family 'clan by clan' (23,28,31).

At the same time the importance of dealing with every threat to community life is stressed. Thus, the 'Israelites had put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practised divination' (22). Sadly, the writer adds, with great honesty, 'But the Israelites did not drive out the people of Geshur and Maacah, so they continue to live among the Israelites to this day' (13). Some were simply not up to the challenge to be faithful to God in all things and in the 'long haul'.

Finally, there is the brief reference to the Levites.. so brief that it might be missed (33). After all, they will get a chapter to themselves later!<sup>13</sup> However, the author wants here to ram home one point about them: 'the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance'. Put another way, they were to constantly remind Israel, by their own lifestyles, that what was true for them in a very visible way was, in fact, the calling of all.

In all this, therefore, the transjordanian tribes were to be both an encouragement, challenge and warning to all the other tribes whose allocation will now be recorded.

### **14:1-15 Faith Rewarded . . . Eventually!**

The next six chapters describe the allocation of the land to the remaining 'nine and a half tribes'. Emphasis falls upon the fact that this 'inheritance' is 'in the land of Canaan': the territory that was specifically promised by the LORD to his people (1). Wisely, the various areas were 'assigned by lot' in order to ensure that allegations of bias were avoided (2) and were supervised by the ecclesiastical, military and political leaders: 'Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans' (1). Here was no free-for-all. Overarching all this is that it was undertaken 'as the LORD had commanded through Moses' (2, 5).<sup>14</sup>

By now we are familiar with the way the author keeps us waiting. Once again, just as we expect to be told the details of the allocation, we are re-introduced to Caleb (6-15).

What is particularly interesting is the way this story fits in the larger context. Caleb was one of the two spies who had demonstrated faith in the LORD's ability to give the Israelites the land: now he receives his own inheritance. Then, at the end of chapter 19 we are told how Joshua, the other faithful spy, received his territory. Thus the two accounts of the LORD's faithfulness to these two old men

begin and close this section of the book. At the same time, there is also a break between chapters 17 and 18 that is signalled by the 'new start' in 18:1 ('The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered'). In the light of this we notice that chapter 17 ends with the complaints of the Ephraimites whom Joshua encourages to take the hill country. This suggests Caleb and the Ephraimites are being offered as counter-examples. However, Joshua, an Ephraimite, takes the hill country for himself at the end of chapter 19!. Thus his story is a counter-point to the failure of his own tribe. All in all, then, this is a very clever piece of writing that helps us to acknowledge the author's focus.

The vividness of the story, suggests that it may well have been recounted by an eye-witness.<sup>15</sup> It introduces us to an old man of eighty-five (compare 7 and 10) who recalls that forty five years previously he had 'followed the LORD wholeheartedly' when others had 'made the hearts of the people melt with fear' (8) by emphasizing the difficulties rather than looking to the LORD. On that occasion he had been promised 'the land on which your feet have walked' (9). To many this would have been something of a two-edged promise: he had actually visited the territory of the Anakites (12) before whom the other spies had trembled. However, just as the LORD had kept him alive (10), so that he was 'just as vigorous to go out to battle as I was then' (11), so his faith had burned bright throughout the years. Thus, he asks, '(G)ive me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day' and 'I will drive them out' (12).

Under the blessing of Joshua, on account of his wholehearted obedience, Caleb entered his inheritance. We shall discover how this was achieved later.<sup>16</sup> Here it is described as though it was 'simplicity itself': despite the fact that 'Arba, who was the greatest of man among the Anakites' lived there (14). Thus, after years of 'weary wandering, of incessant toil and ceaseless conflict, of unfulfilled hopes',<sup>17</sup> Caleb's faith had burned bright and had reaped its reward. Thus he experienced 'peace' (15): the full experience of all those blessings that accompany the end of hostility and the enjoyment of the promises of God.

### **15:1-63 The LORD gets his Hands Dirty**

The initial verse of this chapter introduces a formula, 'the allotment of the tribe of', that repeats itself (in at least a similar pattern) throughout chapters 15-17 and, thus, binds them together into a unity. Here the allocations of the 'senior' tribes of Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh are recounted. Judah comes first: probably as the tribe to whom the messianic promises had been given (Gen. 49:6-12).

A closer look at the three chapters reveals diversity amid the sameness. For example, in the present chapter, 2-12 describe in detail the boundaries of the allocated territory and 20-62 list the detailed allocation clan by clan, city by city, village by village.<sup>18</sup> Each of these two sections is footed by a story: one of success (13-19) and the other of failure (63).

But to what purpose? Several points are apparently stressed here. The first is that God's promises have their fulfillment in the 'concrete . . . his gifts are tangible and visible'.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, many, though often small, are very spe-

cific. How must the inhabitants of a tiny village near 'Beth Dagon' (41) have rejoiced in the LORD's provision of their little plot of land . . . and those in the next . . . and the next . . . and the next! Thirdly, such provisions were those of a God who was interested in 'small' people, clan by clan. Fourthly, these very specifics confirm the LORD's faithfulness to his promises to their ancestors to the minutest detail. Fifthly, as Butler notes, such detail may emphasize that the world of society and politics is not independent of the authority of God.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, and in the midst of all this, we have a fuller account of Caleb's securing Hebron (13-19). It is evidence of a vigorous faith put into action in a rather canny way! It contrasts with the indolence of others who were younger and should have known better (63). The latter marks a jarring, warning note that is amply justified in the light of the book of Judges.

Caleb's offer has something of ancient Palestinian culture about it (as does Acsah's rather delightful twisting of the old man round her little finger, 18,19)! But it was also an incentive to bravery since 'only a man of faith and courage would attack such a place'.<sup>21</sup> Possibly it anticipates the answer to the question, who will be the leader to follow Joshua? Othniel, of course, re-emerges as the first judge after the death of Joshua (Judg. 3:7-11).

Thus a long and apparently tedious chapter comes to life as the word of God: an ongoing encouragement and challenge to all those who are children of God. And such 'life from the dead' offers us some encouragement, too, as we dive into the next two chapters!

## 16:1-17:18 Faith and Faithlessness

One of the interesting things about apparently boring bits of the Bible like this is to notice the clever 'tricks' the authors play with their information. We have already noticed this in the previous chapters of Joshua. It is evident again here. In chapter 15 we were provided with an enormous amount of detail as to the allocation of land to Judah: it included, for example, a description of the boundaries as well as the specific allocation of towns and villages. In these two chapters, however, the former are described more sketchily and the latter not mentioned at all. Instead, the account seems, first of all, to focus upon the final verses of each chapter (16:10; 17:18): verses that appear to be designed to echo 15:63. Secondly, the beginning and end of the passage include two cameo stories (17:3-6; 17:14-18) that contrast with one another. Thirdly, the latter story seems to pointedly contrast with 15:13-19 and 19:49-50: passages that form part of the introduction and conclusion of this major section of Joshua. Here then is the work of an artist with words; and art with a purpose, since such patterns throw light upon the reason the story is told.

The prominence afforded to Judah in chapter 15 is to be understood in the light of the messianic promise of Gn. 49:9ff. Verses 1-4 also gain focus in the light of the death-bed scenes of Jacob. In Gn. 48 the birth order of Manasseh and Ephraim was set aside by a divine oracle. The divine order is followed here. It prompts Davis to comment that while the author 'does not ring any bells about it; it's just a reminder,

another hint of Yahweh's strange ways. How often the divine way reverses the conventions of men, overthrows the human canon of what ought to be. That's why the God of the Bible is so stimulating and refreshing. He is never a prisoner of what fallen man regards as normal. Again and again he turns human standards on their heads, causing us to wonder and cheer . . . And that is reason to adore him.<sup>22</sup>

So, first of all, Ephraim's allotment is briefly recorded (5-10). However, we begin to recognize something of an emerging chorus line in verse 10: 'They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer'. This compares with 15:63 but here there is the added detail that they 'live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labour'. There is just a hint here, therefore, that the decision was a commercial one: this way the Ephraimites could improve their standard of living. Such would, however, have dire consequences (see Dt. 7:1-5) and Gezer would never be fully subjugated for centuries (1 Kings 9:16). Here then were a people who failed to 'seize the moment', found a better route to satisfy themselves than obeying the LORD's commands and used God's blessing as an opportunity to march to their own tune. Rather than rejoice in God's grace and renew their faithful commitment to him, they were seduced into believing that the LORD's blessing justified their unsanctified strategies.

17:1-13 is almost an exact parallel to 16:5-10. Here the allotment of the half-tribe of Manasseh is concluded with a similar, but more serious, failure (12,13). They too subjected the 'Canaanites to forced labour'. However, the problem was that they 'were determined to live in that region' and the faith and resolve of the Manassehites was generally unable to match it. Thus, even the subjugation of the Canaanites was a partial and temporary thing. The result was inevitable syncretism: faith in the LORD rendered weak, the hold on true religion frail and the development of a powerless religion the inevitable result.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps we detect here a further problem that has been noted elsewhere. The people may have been effective in the sprint but poor at the marathon. The latter can be boring, unsatisfying and the crowds may have gone home by the time the race is completed! But faith is demonstrated far more in the 'long haul' than in the adrenalin-driven crisis or project. Here the Manassehites signally failed . . .

But not all of them. Embedded in this narrative of partial success amid faithlessness is the story of the daughters of Zelophehad (3-6) . . . and what a glowing example it provides among the encircling gloom. The background of the story is found in Num. 27:1-11. Here, we are introduced, however, not to a great leader of the land like Caleb but a specific family (names and all!) of disadvantaged, marginalised and otherwise vulnerable women, who plead the promise of God through Moses. Yet, like Caleb before them, (who also 'went to' Joshua, 4, compare 14:6) they demonstrate their faith and a 'forthrightness to plead Yahweh's past word'.<sup>24</sup> When the LORD speaks, he addresses all sorts and conditions of people. And when he speaks, he expects faith to be exercised from the greatest to the most insignificant.

The final little story (17:14-18) is told with the skill of a consummate story-teller. There are, perhaps, echoes to be heard of 14:6-15. And it all sounds so plausible . . . even spiritual: 'We are a numerous people and the LORD has blessed

us abundantly' (14). In fact, a comparison with Num. 26, suggests that this was an overstatement. The tribe and a half amounted to no more than 60,000 whereas Judah (76,000) and even Dan (64,300) and Issachar (64,300) were bigger. Moreover, their allocation included some of the most fertile territory in Palestine.<sup>25</sup> The vale of Sharon was the breadbasket of Palestine and had sufficient resources to feed all the tribes.<sup>26</sup> The problem was that to possess this land required hard graft and danger. Such was also true of the upland regions. Thus, it is probably best to translate 'The hill country is not enough for us' (16) as 'we cannot acquire the forests'.<sup>27</sup> In other words it requires too much effort.

One other little subtlety seems present here. Joshua is asked, 'Why have you given us only one allotment?' (14). Joshua, himself, was an Ephraimite (indeed he will take up his residence in the hill country, 19:49,50). It appears, then, that the people may be suggesting that Joseph should, therefore, receive preferential treatment from a fellow-Josephite: whatever the LORD might apportion! Perhaps better, however, the words may imply that since the LORD had singled out Joseph in the past, they should be given preferential treatment as God's 'favourite'. God's grace is, therefore, seen as a ground for preferment and status rather than an encouragement to greater fidelity.

Not surprisingly, Joshua cuts through the cant! If God has blessed them and they are 'so numerous' then 'go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves' (15). He acknowledges that this may not be easy. Forest-clearance is arduous and, after all, this is the territory of the 'Perizzites and Rephaites' who have 'iron chariots' and 'are strong' (18). Nevertheless, in the face of their continuing wingeing, he argues that since they are 'very powerful' they surely have the ability to 'have not only one allotment, but the forested hill country as well' (17,18). Thus he exposes their fear to venture on God that they were clothing in pious clichés.

Consequently, the Josephites were challenged to recognize that 'God is not a prisoner of human odds, that his promises are at least as real as the iron plating on Canaanite chariots, but that we will see little of his power until we venture out into the way of obedience, until we trust his promise enough to walk in it'.

### 18:1-19:51 Moving On

This much neglected and devotionally unpromising passage quickly springs to life when several factors that the author emphasizes are recognized. As we have noted above, chapters 1-12 describe the conquest, 13-19 the settlement and 20-24 provide the framework for living in the land. Thus, these two chapters conclude a major section of the book: and conclusions are normally important! In addition to this there are several other features of interest. Thus, toward the beginning of the section, Caleb's inheritance was recorded (14:6-15). Here 'at the other end' is that of Joshua (19:49,50). Thus the two faithful spies receive their promised inheritance. Earlier, too, Caleb's active faith as an octogenarian is contrasted to the half-heartedness of those around him. Here, too, Joshua contrasts with the example of the tribes in the previous verses.

At the same time, these two chapters begin to prepare us

for what follows. 'Shiloh' the central sanctuary during the entire period prior to the monarch makes its first appearance (18:1), the place where 'the whole assembly of the Israelites' would often, thereafter, gather. Shiloh's name, 'rest', also hints that the conquest is nearly at an end. Further, the 'Tent of Meeting' occurs at the beginning and end of this section (and for the first time in Joshua, 18:1; 19:51) together with 'Eleazar, the priest' (19:53). From now on Shiloh, the Tent and Eleazar have an increasingly central role.

Indeed all these factors together indicate the people are moving through a transitional stage from conquerors to residents: from one stage of their experience to another. Life does move on. Joshua, for example, is ready to move into a well-earned semi-retirement (19:49,50).

But if life does move on, the people need to rise to the challenge rather than sink into inertia (18:1-10). Indeed, 'there were still seven Israelite tribes who had not yet received their inheritance' (18:2). It is easy to imagine reasons for this. They appeared to be at peace and happy. It may be that they were waiting for a fresh outbreak of miracles to arouse them to action. However, they had to recognize that God's past actions, his present blessings and his future promises were not a ground for inactivity but were to provide the framework for their onward pilgrimage amid the 'disappointing side of God's gifts':<sup>28</sup> the hard slog of discipleship. Meanwhile, they were missing the moment . . . Thus, faithful old Joshua arouses them to action! The land has been 'given', so how long are they going to hang around before getting off their backsides to do something (3).<sup>29</sup>

What follows is a masterly example of leadership (4-10)! Joshua helps establish the vision, delegates responsibility and encourages the responsible and united leadership of others. His strategy also encourages unity; the division of the land by a committee representing all parties before the use of the lot 'at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD' (10) is a masterstroke! In this way none are elite but only God's elect: and all are his people!

Some of the allotments that follow (18:11-19:48) were rather double-edged. 'Issachar' (19:17-23) inherited the plain of Esdraelon: the most fertile area but also the one most easily subject to enemy attack (as any atlas of the Bible will demonstrate). Throughout the list, however, the details emphasize the sheer graciousness and greatness of the gift and the working of the lot stresses divine ordering. Thus, while some (like 'Dan', 19:40-48) were unsatisfied and unwilling to face the challenge of faithful obedience, the others were encouraged to recognize and rejoice in the fact that their 'lot' was what the LORD, in his grace, had appointed for them. And in all this the LORD proved that he was no-one's debtor.

Indeed, if this was true for tribes and clans it was also true for individuals (19:49-51). Thus, little 'Timnath-Serah, in the hill country of Ephraim' at which the tribes of Joseph had 'turned up their noses' became, for Joshua, the place where, last of all (49), he entered his promised inheritance, 'built up the town and settled there' (50).

Davis notes this is a fitting conclusion not only to this section but to the events described in Numbers 13,14. He says, 'It is a standing witness to the fact that the majority may be neither faithful nor right . . . that Yahweh keeps his

promises (Num. 14:24,30), even if he must preserve his two faithful men from Anakim, chariots, and high water to do so . . . There is more in Hebron and Timnath-Serah than one usually hears.<sup>30</sup>

As for Joshua's leadership it is nearly done. Moving into semi-retirement the baton is passed on (not jealously treasured): it is the LORD's work (51). 'Eleazar' and the 'heads of the tribal clans' are now responsible for seeing the LORD's work to completion.

## Notes

- 1 This interpretation follows T. C Butler, *Joshua* (Waco: Word, 1983), 114 and J. Garstang, *Joshua/Judges* (London: Constable, 1931), 170, 175, 177.
- 2 F. Delitzsch, Joshua, in Keil and Delitzsch, *Old Testament Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 106.
- 3 This reads like an old hymn! Was it often sung in the days that followed in the worship of Israel's God?
- 4 A. W. Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua* (Chicago: Moody, 1964), 295.
- 5 M. H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 190.
- 6 C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 103.
- 7 Compare 14:10. The sending out of the spies appears to have been two years after the exodus; see Num. 13.
- 8 D. R. Davis, *Joshua* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000), 102.
- 9 The 'hardening' phrases in Exodus repay examining so as to

trace out the above pattern.

- 10 Davis, 104.
- 11 Woudstra, 200.
- 12 Davis, 105.
- 13 See chapter 21.
- 14 Compare Num. 34:16-29.
- 15 So Woudstra, 228.
- 16 See 15:13-19.
- 17 A. Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living* (London: Revell, 1971), 198.
- 18 Scholarly commentaries are full of discussions as to precise locations etc.. Such are generally sleep-inducing and unnecessary to the purpose of the present volume.
- 19 Davis, 193.
- 20 Butler, 189.
- 21 Pink, 356.
- 22 Davis, 130, 131.
- 23 Compare Ex. 23:23-33; 34:11-16; Dt. 7:1-6.
- 24 Davis, 132.
- 25 Keil & Delitzsch, 182, 183.
- 26 A. Edersheim, *Israel under Joshua and the Judges* (London: RTS, n/d), 94.
- 27 So Davis.
- 28 H. L. Ellison, *Joshua-2 Samuel* (London: Scripture Union, n/d), 17.
- 29 Perhaps the reference to the 'God of your fathers' (3) is a subtle hint that unfaithfulness in the path caused the fathers to miss the blessing.
- 30 Davis, 147.