

The Book of Joshua

Lesson 10: Dividing the Land; Caleb's Inheritance -- Joshua 13:1–15:63

Joshua is an old man now. The text says it plainly: 'Joshua was old and stricken in years' (Joshua 13:1). The trumpets have fallen silent, the great battles in the south and north are behind him, and the warrior who once stood barefoot before the Captain of the Lord's host outside Jericho is gray and worn. You might expect God to tell him to rest. Instead the Lord says something that should land on every one of us: 'there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.' The work is not finished. The promise is real and the victory is sure, but there is still ground to take, still inheritance to claim, still life to be lived in the strength of God before the day is done.

Then the long chapters of names begin, tribe by tribe, border by border, town by town. We tend to skim these pages the way we skim the credits at the end of a film. But slow down and look again. These are not dry property records. This is the land God swore to Abraham four hundred years before, when Abraham had not so much as a field to call his own. Every boundary line is a kept promise. Every allotment is God writing, in dirt and stone and river, the words He had spoken in the dark to a childless old man under the stars. The God who keeps lists is the God who keeps His word.

And then, right in the middle of all that surveying, one man steps out of the crowd and asks for something. His name is Caleb, and he is eighty-five years old. Forty-five years earlier he had stood at the edge of this same land with ten frightened spies, and while they trembled at the giants, Caleb said the land was good and the Lord would give it to them. He believed God when believing God cost him forty years of wandering for somebody else's unbelief. Now he comes to Joshua and says, in effect, do not give me the easy valley. Give me the hill country where the giants still live. 'Give me this mountain' (Joshua 14:12). At eighty-five, his faith has not gone soft.

Maybe that is what we most need to hear. Most of us are tempted, somewhere along the way, to think the time for great faith is behind us, that we have already had our chances and the bold days belong to younger people. Caleb stands in the middle of this lesson like a rebuke to that whole idea. Twice the text says he 'wholly followed the Lord God of Israel' (Joshua 14:8, 14). Not perfectly, but wholly, with his whole heart, all the way to the end. As we walk through these chapters, do not let the long lists numb you. Listen for the heartbeat under them: God keeps His promises, and the God who keeps them is looking for people who will follow Him wholly, to the last hill, at any age.

Group Discussion: God tells Joshua, an old and weary man, 'there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed' (Joshua 13:1). Why do you think God so often pairs the assurance of a sure promise with the call to keep working and taking ground, rather than simply handing us a finished rest?

Personal Reflection: Caleb at eighty-five asked for the hardest part of the land, the hill country of the giants, rather than the easiest. Where in your own life are you tempted to ask God for the easy valley, and what would it look like for you to say, 'Give me this mountain'?

Read Joshua 13:1–15:63

Study Questions

1. When God speaks to the aging Joshua, He does not say the conquest is finished; He says 'there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed' (Joshua 13:1), and yet He also commands Joshua to divide the whole land as an inheritance (Joshua 13:6–7). How do these two realities hold together, the land already given by promise and the land still to be possessed by faith, and what does this teach us about how God's promises actually come to us?
2. God told Joshua to divide land that had not yet been fully taken, calling Israel to live on the strength of a promise rather than the sight of a finished victory. Where in your life right now are you being asked to step forward and live as though God's promise is already true, before you can see it fully accomplished?
3. Twice the Scripture says Caleb 'wholly followed the Lord God of Israel' (Joshua 14:8, 14), and Caleb himself traces it back forty-five years to the day he brought back a faithful report when ten others spread fear (Joshua 14:7–9; Numbers 14:24). What does it mean to wholly follow the Lord, and how does Caleb's life show us that such faith is the steady work of a lifetime and not a single moment?
4. Caleb is eighty-five years old when he says, 'as yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me' (Joshua 14:11), and he asks for the hardest inheritance rather than the easiest. When have you been tempted to think your most useful days for God are behind you, and how does Caleb's bold old age challenge that thought?

5. Caleb says, 'if so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out' (Joshua 14:12), looking straight at the Anakim, the very giants that had terrified the ten spies and a whole generation. Where did Caleb's courage come from, and how does his confidence in the Lord's presence, rather than in his own strength, instruct our courage today?
6. For forty-five years Caleb carried Moses's promise in his heart while a whole generation died in the wilderness around him for their unbelief (Numbers 14:24, 30). When have you had to keep believing a promise of God through a long, painful season caused partly by other people's failures, and what kept your faith alive?
7. Caleb received Hebron 'because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel' (Joshua 14:14), and God is described again and again in these chapters as the one who gives the inheritance He had sworn (Joshua 13:6; 14:9). What do these chapters reveal about how God remembers and rewards those who faithfully follow Him, and how do we hold this truth without turning grace into mere payment for service?
8. After the land is divided, the record quietly notes that Judah 'could not drive out' the Jebusites in Jerusalem, who dwelt with them 'unto this day' (Joshua 15:63), a small failure tucked among the victories. Where in your own life is there a 'Jebusite' you have learned to tolerate and live alongside instead of dealing with it, and why is partial obedience so easy to make peace with?
9. These long chapters are, at their heart, the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham centuries earlier, that his descendants would possess this land (Genesis 12:7; 15:18–21; compare Joshua 21:43–45). Yet the New Testament insists that this land and this rest were never the final word, but a shadow of a greater rest that still remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4:1–11), and that all the promises find their yes in Christ and His church (Galatians

3:16, 26–29). How does the dividing of Canaan display God’s covenant faithfulness, and how should we understand the land promise rightly, as a real and kept promise that points beyond itself to the eternal inheritance we have in Christ?

10. Look back over these chapters, the old man told there is still much land to possess, the long roll of kept promises, and Caleb standing before his mountain at eighty-five. Name one specific way the Lord is calling you to follow Him more wholly and to keep claiming the inheritance He has promised. What is the ‘mountain’ He is asking you to face this week?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Numbers 14:24, the Lord promises that Caleb, who followed Him fully, will be brought into the land his unbelieving generation forfeited; Genesis 15:18–21, the ancient covenant in which God swore this very land to Abraham’s descendants long before they possessed it; Joshua 21:43–45, the summary declaration that the Lord gave Israel all the land He had sworn and not one good word of His promises failed; Hebrews 4:1–11, the rest of Canaan revealed as a shadow of the greater, eternal rest that still remains for the people of God in Christ; Galatians 3:16, 26–29, the promises to Abraham finding their yes in Christ, so that all who belong to Him are Abraham’s heirs.

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