

Joshua 14: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Joshua chapter 14 The people of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim, and no portion was given to the Levites in the land, but only cities to dwell in, with their pasture lands for their livestock and their substance. The people of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses, they allotted the land.

Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God in Kadesh Barnea concerning you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him word again as it was in my heart.

But my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, yet I wholly followed the Lord my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.

And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness.

And now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me. My strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming.

[1 : 46] So now, give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said.

Then Joshua blessed him, and he gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. Therefore Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel.

Now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath Arba. Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim, and the land had rest from war. In Joshua chapter 14, the main conquest has occurred, and we are in the part of the book concerned with the division of the land.

The land is divided by lot for the nine and a half tribes within it, as the Lord had instructed Moses back in Numbers chapter 26, verses 52 to 56. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, The lot is used because the Lord is distributing the land.

This is distributing by divine providence, not by negotiation among themselves. Jacob had twelve sons, but Joseph received a double portion.

[3 : 21] Both of his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were treated as full tribes. Levi didn't receive a portion, but was scattered through the land, according to the judgment given by Jacob in Genesis chapter 49, verses 5 to 7.

Simeon and Levi are brothers, weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council. O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstring oxen.

Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. In chapter 19 we discover that, although they do receive an allotted portion, Simeon's portion is within the tribal land of Judah.

They don't have a separate territory of their own. Levi doesn't receive an allotted portion at all, but is scattered throughout the entirety of the land, with their own cities and pasture lands.

Manasseh is divided into two parts. One half is in the Transjordan, in the territory of the former Amorite kings, and the other half is within the land. Reuben and Gad are also in the Transjordan, which means that there are nine and a half tribes, among whom to divide the territory of the land.

[4 : 32] Eliezer, the son of Aaron, appointed at the end of Numbers chapter 20, and Joshua oversee the whole process. Caleb is mentioned at the beginning of the allotment of the land, and Joshua is mentioned at the very end, in chapter 19, verses 49 to 50, When they had finished distributing the several territories of the land as inheritances, the people of Israel gave an inheritance among them to Joshua the son of Nun.

By command of the Lord, they gave him the city that he asked, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim, and he rebuilt the city and settled in it. Caleb and Joshua were, of course, the two faithful spies back in Numbers chapter 13 and 14.

The fact that the inheritance of the tribes within the land is flanked by the inheritance of these two men underlines the importance of their earlier faithfulness, and also the way in which they are the two persons who set the pattern for this new Israel.

Caleb is the leading voice in favour of entry into the land in Numbers, and now he gets his inheritance first. He is described as a descendant of a Kenizzite, which are listed among the peoples of the land in Genesis chapter 15, verse 19.

If this is the same people group, then it would seem that Caleb was of Gentile descent. However, he was also a head of the people of Judah. Israel always had a number of people who weren't direct biological descendants of Abraham who assimilated into the people.

[5 : 55] They left Egypt surrounded by a mixed multitude, which would presumably become part of the people over time. Joshua's family were likely among the Gentile people that became part of Israel.

We should also bear in mind that Israel is in a very early stage of nation building, and that both the tribal and national level structures are likely fairly rudimentary at this point. Being situated within the land will give these structures place to form and develop.

However, much of Israel's life in the book of Judges, for instance, is still highly regionalised. Caleb recalls the events of the spying out of the land, and the promise that Moses made to him at that time, that he should inherit the land on which his foot had trodden.

This was stated in Deuteronomy chapter 1, verses 35 to 36. Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh.

He shall see it. And to him and to his children I will give the land on which he has trodden, because he has wholly followed the Lord. That was forty-five years ago, which gives a figure for the length of time taken in the conquest.

[7 : 03] Caleb was forty at the time of spying out the land, in the second year of the wilderness period. They wandered for thirty-eight years after that, which suggests that the conquest to this point took seven years.

Now the Canaanites were not fully driven out. Canaanites had also reoccupied some of the places where they had previously been driven out. Even into the book of 2 Samuel, the Israelites are still dealing with pockets of Canaanite possession in the land.

Caleb is confident, however, in the promise and the empowering of the Lord, and requests the very part of the land whose inhabitants most excited the fear of the Israelites back in the book of Numbers.

In chapter 13 verse 22, they went up into the Negev and came to Hebron. Ahimon, Shishai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak, were there. Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. Even though he is now eighty-five years old, Caleb has great energy and vigour, and continued confidence in the promise of the Lord. It might also be interesting to observe that Hebron was first mentioned in Genesis chapter 13, verses 17 to 18, immediately after the Lord made a similar promise to Abram as he made to Caleb.

[8 : 13] Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you. So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

Hebron is the place where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob primarily sojourned, and it is in that region that they were buried. It is also the site where David's kingdom would later begin.

It does not seem to be accidental that this is the place where land is apportioned first. Furthermore, as a head, and now perhaps the head of Judah, Caleb precedes Judah, the first tribe in the list of the inheritance, as its leader.

