

August 16

Scriptures: Read Joshua 18

Key Verse: “How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers has given you?” (Joshua 18:3)

Overview

An important event is recorded in Joshua 18: the moving of Israel’s religious and political base from Gilgal (where they had first set up camp after crossing the Jordan River) to Shiloh, a city in the center of the land within Ephraimite territory. There it was to remain for almost three centuries. Shiloh may have been chosen because it was not only in the area where their leader Joshua, an Ephraimite, would naturally dwell, but also because of its central location in the Promised Land (between Jerusalem and Shechem, about 17 kilometers south of Shechem). Also, God must have made it clear to Joshua that it was there He chose to set up His Name (Deut.12:11; Jer.7:12).

Although Israel was likely very busy with the moving of the camp and the tabernacle, they were still expected to carry on the work of the Lord by driving out the heathen inhabitants, yet it appears they lacked the necessary zeal. The seven remaining tribes were even slack in pressing Joshua to give them their land of inheritance, unlike Caleb and the tribe of Judah who were the first to enthusiastically come before Joshua; he had to motivate and encourage them. One way he did this was by sending out the three delegates from each of the seven tribes to bring back a detailed report about the land around the inheritance of Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh. As Moses had ordered, the division was done by casting lots “before the Lord” (vv.6, 8). Although the size of the land allotted would depend upon the size of the tribe, they could not choose their specific area, for this was up to God, as the outcome of the lot would indicate (cf.Num.26:54-55).

The first lot fell to Benjamin. The hand of the Lord was evident in the placement of their inheritance. Although it was a small portion of land (because Benjamin was a small tribe), it was very important because of its location and the fact that Jerusalem, which later came to be the royal city and the temple site, was within their boundaries, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Moses (Deut.33:12). Benjamin was between the territories of Judah to the south and Ephraim to the north. It served as a buffer state because those two tribes were the strongest and therefore most inclined to rivalry.

In the book of Judges, we read how the Benjamites became almost extinct by the other tribes executing judgment upon them for sin (Judges 20:12-14, 34). However, in the plan of God, the remnant that remained multiplied so that the tribe carried on their identity. They never regained their original strength, but became closely associated with the tribe of Judah, especially during the period of the divided kingdom. Even so, they had the distinction of giving Israel their first king—Saul, a Benjamite. An ever-greater distinction was that the tribe of Benjamin gave us the Apostle Paul, the great early church missionary to the Gentiles and the inspired writer of much of the New Testament.

Prayer

Lord, our key verse speaks of neglect. You spoke through the apostle Paul and said, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation” (Hebrews 2:3). Please help us, Lord, not to neglect any of the many promises You’ve made to us in Your Word.