

August 17

Scriptures: Read Joshua 19 & 20

Key Verse: “These were the inheritances... divided... by lot in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So they made an end of dividing the country.” (Joshua 19:51)

Overview

Eleazar and Joshua continued their divinely appointed task of dividing up the land and thus brought Israel to yet another stage in its development. It must have been a very solemn ceremony, since God was in their midst to sovereignly overrule. The chiefs of every tribe were gathered together at the door of the tabernacle to hear the outcome from the lord.

All the land of inheritance for the remaining tribes was to fit around the large portions of land already designated for Judah and the house of Joseph, except for the smallest tribe of Simeon, which only received seventeen cities that were within the southern portion of Judah, because Judah had too much land (19:9). The smaller tribe of Simeon soon became swallowed up in the larger Judah, probably a fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy concerning the scattering of Simeon (Gen.49:7).

Most of the tribes were situated north of Manasseh, around the area of the Sea of Galilee (see map on page 139). Zebulun received an inheritance in the lower Galilee region, west of the sea. Issachar’s portion went to the southwest of the sea of Galilee, including the beautiful and fertile Jezreel Valley. Naphtali was allotted the territory mostly north of the Sea of Galilee with the tribe of Asher to the west. Asher’s inheritance went from Mount Carmel (Haifa) to the north along the coast of the Mediterranean as far as Sidon.

The last tribe to which the lot fell was Dan. The Danites also received coastal land west of Benjamin between Judah and Manasseh. Much of their territory however, was occupied by Amorites whom they could not drive out (clearly a lack of faith in God who had given them that land), but shamefully the Danites were pushed into the hill country where they did not have enough land for their great numbers (Judges 1:34). This necessitated a large migration to some northern unsettled areas of the Upper Jordan Valley where they conquered the town of Leshem, or Laish, from a settlement of Sidonians (Judges 18:1, 27-29).

Joshua was a true leader. He did not use his high position for selfish gain; rather, he first saw to it that all the people had their land of inheritance and were content. Then the elders from the various tribes asked Joshua to choose for himself the inheritance he desired, which they would gladly give him. This was what the Lord wanted them to do, since God’s faithful servants are worthy of their reward. In such a way the children of Israel honored Joshua for the hard work he had done for their good (19:49-50).

Joshua requested Timnath Serah in the mountains of his tribe Ephraim. This was in the territory that he had told his tribesmen to take so that they might expand, but his tribesmen complained since those mountains were heavily forested and in enemy hands (17:14-18). Once again, Joshua

proved to be a good leader, for he did not ask his people to do something that he himself was not prepared to do.

The Lord had yet another administrative duty for Joshua which we read of in chapter 20, and that was to fulfill the command of Moses to “appoint” (20:2; this Hebrew word literally means “sanctify”) three cities of refuge on the west side of the Jordan which would provide sanctuary and justice for innocent manslayers. Moses himself had already set up three east of the Jordan (Num.35:9-15; Deut.19:1-2; 4:41-43). All the cities of refuge were chosen from the Levitical cities, and their geographical locations were important: Kedesh in the north, Shechem in the midlands, and Hebron in the south. In this way they were easily accessible from all parts of the country. The Lord was concerned for justice in His land and wanted the people to understand that they would find refuge only in Him. We, too, can run for refuge to the loving arms of our God, and he has made the way accessible through His Son Jesus.

Prayer

O Lord, we live in a time of unrest and dissatisfaction. Nationalism that cause of so much trouble is on the rise. Selfishness seems to be everywhere. Help us, like Joshua, to be wise and just, teaching by example that serving You is accomplished by selfless service to others.