

## Joshua 18:1-10, The Second Survey

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### Overview

First, follow the narrative flow of the story to see a challenge that the children of Israel face.

We will notice a lot of repetition between successive sections of the story. By comparing these repetitions, we can tease out different character traits that Joshua exhorts in the people and that they must exhibit in order to overcome the challenge.

### Narrative Flow

#### 1-2, Setting

Two details:

v.1. They move the Tabernacle from Gilgal to a more central location in Ephraim. The last clause in the verse is disjunctive (SV order), suggesting that it is the reason or the context for the move of the Tabernacle (“they moved the tabernacle, BECAUSE the land was subdued”).

- Reflects their attention to the intent of Exod 25:8, “let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” God wants to be in the midst of his people; in the OT, by means of a physical tabernacle; now, in the person of the Holy Spirit.
- Gilgal would be central from the point of view of the transjordanian tribes. The move to Shiloh might suggest to them that they were being alienated, and may contribute to the episode of the altar called “Ed” in ch. 22.

v.2. Seven tribes have not yet divided up their part of the inheritance. “Received” is too passive; the verb is elsewhere always translated actively, “divide” or “part.” Joshua’s question in v.3 makes it clear that they are standing by idly, waiting for someone else to take action, when they should have been moving ahead themselves.

**Application:** Recall the lesson from the daughters of Zelophehad on the need to treasure the inheritance that God has given us. These seven tribes are not as zealous for their inheritance as the sons of Joseph were.

A likely meaning of “Shiloh” is “rest, quiet.” After years of wandering and more years of war, there is now the prospect of resting quietly around the Tabernacle in a secured portion of the country. Not surprisingly, the people are less than eager to move away to settle their own territories. There is a parallel to this in the NT. After the day of Pentecost, the Lord desired his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel, being witnesses “unto the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). But they were so sluggish to move out that he had to send persecution to send them abroad (Acts 8:4).

**Application:** Sometimes the most comfortable place for us may not be where the Lord intends us to be. We need to be specially attentive to his direction.

### **3-7, Joshua Charges the People**

After asking the question that highlights their sluggishness, he gives the command in two stages, each ending with a reference to the tribes that do not need to participate in this round of distribution:

- 5, Judah and Joseph, because they received their allotments in the previous chapters;
- 7a, Levi, because they don't get an allotment;
- 7b, RGM/2, because they have theirs on the other side of Jordan.

The instructions that remain overlap considerably, as shown on the handout. But note the difference in addressees:

- The first round of instructions is to the tribes, instructing them to set apart three surveyors per tribe.
- The second round of instructions is to the surveyors themselves.

We'll review the details of the instructions later. For now, note the similarity between this mission and that of the spies on Num. 13 and Josh 2.

- Num 13:18-20, to report on people, land, and cities
- Josh 2:1, just focus on the city; in fact they reported on the people as well, 2:24.
- Now the people and cities are subdued, so this round of spies are to focus on the land, v.4, to determine an equitable division.

### **8-10, Execution**

As the handout shows, this follows the instructions point by point. Note the repetition of "the men ... went" (identical in Hebrew), setting off the recollection of Joshua's command as an external inclusio.

The effect of repeating the command here is to emphasize that they are carrying out his explicit instructions point by point. Because of this emphasis, it is worth our while to examine these instructions in more detail.

## **Analysis of the Command**

See table in hand-out. The responsibilities of the surveyors are described five different times, either as command or as execution. By comparing these with one another, we can tease out seven different components, each indicating a distinct character trait that was necessary to remedy the defect that we have noted.

### **Initiative**

vv.4, 8, "the men arose." They had to get up off their duffs. The inheritance would not happen independent of their effort; they had to seek it out. By contrast, consider RGM/2, or Caleb, or the daughters of Zelophehad, each of whom actively sought their inheritance.

**Application:** Many of God's blessings to his children are there for the taking, but we must take. E.g., the blessing of knowing God's word and experiencing its direction and comfort depends on

our diligence in reading, study, and meditation. There is a perversion of the doctrine of salvation by grace that says we never have to do anything to receive God's blessings. In fact, even for salvation we must repent and believe. The issue is not whether or not we do something. It is whether

- we are *able* to do the required act on our own, apart from the sovereign intervention of the Holy Spirit,
- and therefore whether we *merit* the salvation that is associated with the work.

### **Courage**

vv.8, 9, "the men ... went." They couldn't just stay where they were, in Shiloh (the place of "peace, rest") with the Tabernacle and their families. Instead, they are asked to repeat the effort of the spies forty years before. One may consider that this might be risky. Though the land is subdued, we know that there remain pockets of resistance in some of the cities, and in fact one purpose for dividing up the land among the tribes is to divide the task of cleaning up the opposition, 13:1-6. It is one thing for the nation as a whole, or even for a complete tribe, to confront hostile Canaanites; it is quite another for  $3 \times 7 = 21$  men to set out on such a mission.

**Application:** The action that God requires of us may not be convenient, or even (in the world's eyes) safe. We do not expect comfort here; we are to run our race looking unto Jesus, counting our sufferings small compared with his (Heb. 12). Let us never lose sight of the fact that we do this in order to receive an inheritance, which is the point of Heb 11:13-16.

### **Thoroughness**

v.4 "go through" = v.8 "walk through" = *hithpalel* of *halak*, "walk around," (*abar* in v.9. They are to cover the ground, not just dash out to a single point and make a bee-line back to the comfort of Shiloh. Their task is to review the remaining land to determine how it might best be divided among the tribes that yet have no inheritance. This task requires careful observation, travel, study.

**Application:** So we may need to apply ourselves in order to end up with the blessing the Lord intends for us. Cf. the blessing of education, or employment, or marriage, and the concomitant responsibility for studying the possible schools or companies or candidate partners that we might consider.

### **Commitment and Consensus**

Four of the five accounts require them to "describe" the land, literally, to "write it" (vv. 4, 6, 8, 9), and three of them associate this writing with the division of the land into seven parts (4, 6, 9). The approach is one we sometimes take with children who need to split a piece of cake: one divides it into two pieces, the other gets to pick a piece. Here, because they do not know which tribe will draw the lot for which territory, they have an incentive to make the division as equitable as possible.

This process forces them to exercise to character strengths:

- Consensus: they must agree on the division.

- **Commitment:** they must make a written record of what they find, which means that after they submit their report, none of them can come back and say, “That’s not the agreement I remember.”

(It is interesting that the boundary descriptions based on this survey differ in their vocabulary from the descriptions of Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh (and of Benjamin, which is tucked between Judah and Ephraim and reuses portions of their boundaries). The earlier boundaries perhaps rested on notes from Joshua and the first spy mission.)

**Application:** Particularly when we are seeking God’s direction with other believers, a willingness to seek consensus and a commitment to stand by the common decision are critical. Compare the emphasis in the book of Acts on the church’s activity “with one accord, with one mind” (11/12 NT occurrences of *homothumadon*): 1:14; 4:24 (in prayer); 2:1 (waiting for the Spirit); 2:46; 5:12 (worshipping and preaching in the temple); 15:25 (resolving the Gentile question) (the other times of unbelievers). Cf. the exhortation in Rom. 15:5,6, “5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: 6 That ye may with one mind [and] one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The unity of God’s people is a critical part of our witness to unbelievers (John 17:21, “21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”). We must never sacrifice holiness for unity, but neither can we sacrifice unity for the exercise of our own rights. This leads us naturally to the next point:

### **Accountability**

Four times (vv. 4, 6, 8, 9) they are told to bring their results back to Joshua. They are not on a “gold rush” to stake out their claims before others get to the good stuff. They have to bring their report back to nation as a whole and in particular to Joshua, for subsequent action.

**Application:** So we do not enjoy our inheritance in isolation, but as members of the body of Christ. Cf. 1 Cor. 8 for the important principle that our enjoyment of God’s blessings must be moderated by the impact on our brothers and sisters. When he does give us gifts, it is for the blessing of the entire body.

### **Faith**

vv. 6, 8, 10 emphasize that the final allocation will be made by lot, directed sovereignly by the Lord. Each of the surveyors may have set his heart on one or another special parcel, but they must submit the final decision to the Lord and trust in him to know what is best for them.

**Application:** How often we try to tell the Lord what blessings we need, instead of trusting his allocation. This problem surfaced in Corinth with the excitement over showy gifts; like them, we need sometimes to be reminded that “all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Cor. 12:11). He will bless us, greatly, but we need to trust him to know what the best blessing will be for each of us, rather than trying to overrule his decisions and complain about the outcome he grants us.