

Open Heart, Open Bible

Joshua and Acts of the Apostles

Linking Theme: Fulfilment

Passage for weekly reading (week 30):

Joshua 20 – 24

Renewing the Covenant

We read about the three cities of refuge designated by Moses east of the Jordan in Deut. 4 v.'s 41-43, and more generally the reasons for the setting up of such cities in Deut. 19 v.'s 1-13. Joshua's penultimate task is to determine the locations of these havens to the west of the river. Ch. 20 repeats some of the earlier detail, and identifies the chosen townships, namely Kedesh to the north, Shechem in a central location, and Hebron to the south. (They can be seen on the map "Land of the Twelve Tribes".)

Joshua's final job is to allocate towns for the Levites. To summarise, there are 13 towns in the south of Canaan for the Kohathites, as well as 10 towns centrally located, 13 towns in the north for the Gershonites (including settlements east of the Jordan), and 12 towns for the Merarites, mainly east of the river in Reuben and Gad, but also in Zebulun, to the west, in a north/central situation. (The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath and Merari - Num.3 v.'s 17-20). The cities of refuge were included in this Levitical distribution. The important verses in this chapter for us are 43-45, particularly v.45 – **"Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled"**. Compare this with 2 Cor.1 v.20 – our God does not change!

Ch.22 shows us alarmingly of the potential for division and misunderstanding that can invade national life when there is geographical separation. The idea of the two-and-a-half tribes settling beyond the river seemed an impulsive proposal in the first place, and the near outbreak of civil war that this chapter records does nothing to increase confidence in the arrangement. Nevertheless communication restores relationship (it often does!), and the scene is now set for Joshua's final speech to the people. This address really takes the form of Moses' concluding words to the Israelites, when he spelt out the blessings and curses (Deut. ch's 28-30). The Lord tells them, time and again, that it is a serious matter to be in covenant relationship with Him, and that their well-being is utterly dependent on their keeping covenant conscientiously.

In this final chapter of the book, Joshua speaks prophetically to the people, i.e. - he speaks in the first person as a direct word from God. It is God speaking through him. He reverts to a preaching, exhorting style in v.14, telling them to **"serve the**

Lord with all faithfulness", but if they would rather serve foreign gods, it's up to them! The choice is the same as Moses gave them before his death. Three times the people declare their intention to remain faithful (v.'s 18, 21&24), although it seems that Joshua is unconvinced by their repeated vows. The "making" of the covenant referred to in v.25 was really an underscoring of the law of Moses, but Joshua recorded this new occasion of rededication in the Mosaic Book of the Law (Deut.31 v.'s 24-26). The stone of witness that he set up was in the same place as the altar built by Abraham when he arrived in Canaan some 700 years previously (Gen.12 v.'s 6&7). It was indeed "**the holy place of the Lord**" (v.26). "**Not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed**" (23 v.14). The faithfulness of God!

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) Even though Israel had the command of the Lord to totally drive out the occupying Canaanites, it was obvious that this was not done by the death of Joshua, so whilst telling the people to press on with the task (23 v.5), he also warned them not to associate with the idolaters in the meantime (23 v.7). The fact that Israel never managed to do this was the beginning of the nation's eventual apostasy and exile. The Canaanites were always a snare, even though they had been subjugated. God looked for total separation, then as now. Paul says in Ephesians 4 v.27 that we should not "give the devil a foothold". Israel did exactly that. Can you see ways in which we are doing that to-day?

2) The whole story of the possession of the land under Joshua's leadership is illustrative of the fact that, although the Lord gives promises, warfare is involved in entering into the good of those promises. For us, of course, that warfare is spiritual. We are always inclined, just like the Israelites, to rest back on our laurels and leave the task unfinished, when "**there are still very large areas of land to be taken over**" (13 v.1). Can you relate to this? How can we keep moving spiritually?

3) The Joshua story finishes where the Abraham pilgrimage began, at the great tree at Shechem. What a fitting place to acknowledge the faithfulness of the covenant-making God! Let's acknowledge His faithfulness this week, in both worship and prayer, as His promises hold good for us in exactly the same way through the obedience of faith.

Next week's passage: Acts 1 – 4