

**Title: Choices! Choices! - Joshua 13-19**

**Purpose:** To consider how well we are taking up our possession that God has given to us by way of looking at choices.

**INTRODUCTION**

Choices! Choices!

We recently got taken to an Italian restaurant that Bola and I had never been to and at the end, if you wanted to order your pudding - rather than roll a trolley in your direction - you actually had to get out of your seat go out the front door of the restaurant and look through the front window to choose what you wanted.

Perhaps not ideal! **HOWEVER** - when we decided that we COULD BE BOTHERED to do this (and not just settle for a couple of cappuccinos) we were confronted by quite an array of deserts.

It was truly a case of CHOICES! CHOICES!

- Did we go for that rather amazing looking chocolate gateaux with the enticing piece of pure twisted chocolate to top it off
- OR did we settle for something that didn't look as amazing but which might actually deliver more in the end

As I say truly a case of CHOICES! CHOICES!

And this book of Joshua is one which progressively draws us in (and if you didn't realise it - the book of Joshua is like a mirror in which we see ourselves). Conquering and occupying the land is all about Christian life and the extent to which we appropriate everything that God has given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ down here.

So this book draws us in and it gives us CHOICES whereby we are forced, in our more reflective moments to say to ourselves: "CHOICES! CHOICES! - Q. What am I going to choose?"

Well we're going to come back to choices in a moment - but before we do I have a confession to make and that is that we are going to tackle \*not\* 1, \*not\* 2 \*BUT\* 7 chapters in one go!!

When it comes to **READING** - 7 whole chapters

Now normally we would **READ** the section we are preaching on at some earlier point in the service.

But I think it fair to say that probably no-one would have wanted to **READ** this entire section of Joshua that we are covering today:

- **\*NOT JUST\*** because it is **somewhat long**
- **\*BUT BECAUSE\*** it has, **literally, hundreds and hundreds of place names** - and if you think that pronouncing the names of OT people is bad - well place names are certainly no easier!!

When it comes to **PREACHING** - 7 whole chapters

Well that's just the **reading** part:

Q. But what about **PREACHING** these same 7 chapters?

Q. How are we to **PREACH in a sensible fashion** - a very long stretch and one that contains great long lists of place names marking out territorial boundaries for the 12 tribes (When I had a computer-aided stab at adding them up they came out around the 300 mark)!!?

Well as we said last week, **we are now MOVING ACROSS:** (in this second half of the book of Joshua)

- from a **chapter-by-chapter, section-by-section** approach
- to a **theme-by-theme** approach

And so it is fully reasonable to take the 7 whole chapters in one go because they have **the common theme of:**

**THE ALLOCATION & then THE APPROPRIATION of the land that has been now conquered.**

Still it's 7 chapters long

Even having said that - it is still 7 chapters long - so let me suggest **3 GOD-GIVEN "HANDLES"** by which we can make better sense of it:

- **NUMBER #1** - You look at "**PLACEMENT**"
- **NUMBER #2** - You look at "**PROPORTION**" and then finally
- **NUMBER #3** - You look at things that seem to be, in some sense "**PLUGGED**", (things that come up again & again)

So let me dig out a few verses that fit these **3 categories OR "handles"** to illustrate what I mean:

### **1] PLACEMENT**

**Placement** is simply noticing what God has placed at the start, what He has placed at the end - whatever God has chosen to put in a strategic position in the text.

And what we are affirming by saying this - and it really isn't rocket science in any sense - is that when it comes to Scripture God hasn't left anything to chance - He has not given us a book (or a library of book - which is what the bible is) He has not given us a book that is just a rather random book of clippings. The Bible is not a SCRAPBOOK.

So here's a few - what I'm going to call "**PLACEMENT VERSES**" - verses which have a particular weight because of where they come in the sweep of things:

- **Joshua 13 verse 1** (and we mentioned this last week when we came to look at Caleb) it reads:

"When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the Lord said to him, 'You are very old, **and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.**'"

So in essence a key message that is going to run through these 7 chapters is the idea that "**GUYS - there's a lot of work still to be done - this is no time to be sitting on your laurels!!**"

- **Joshua 18 verse 3** (this is effectively the start portion of the very last section where the remainder of the land is getting apportioned) we read:

"So Joshua said to the Israelites: '**How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you?**'"

The message here is effectively "**LOOK GUYS** - there's **was** lots of work to do BUT THAT WAS SOMETIME BACK and there is **still lots of work to do so WHAT'S THE DELAY?**"

- One other aspect of placement is that we see CALEB coming up at the top of this 7 chapter section and then Joshua taking up the rear. They are like a couple of HEROIC BOOKENDS.

OK - let's go on to the second thing and that is:

## **2] PROPORTION**

By proportion, I simply mean the amount of space that the Scripture gives to commenting on something - so let me give you two examples:

- **CALEB** - and his request and subsequent conquering of **Hebron** (that is **Kiriath Arba** - literally the town of Arba - Arba was the most significant of ancestors in this long line of Anakite giants) - this whole episode is given two whole chapters - Joshua chapters 14 & 15.

So from this (and given it is right at the start of the allocation of land to the tribes in the Promised Land) - from this we are meant to realise that this is something VERY SIGNIFICANT.

In Caleb we are seeing is **the glorious HIGH WATERMARK of FAITH & OBEDIENCE**.

- Our second example of PROPORTION is there at the end of chapter 17.

Chapters 14&15 (where we mostly see Caleb) was the allocation of the main Southern Tribe - JUDAH  
Chapters 16&17 is where we get a matching pair of chapters relating to the allocation of the main Northern Tribe - this tribe is the tribe of Joseph which you may know is actually comprised of 2 tribes which are Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh.

And at the end of chapter 17 we are given a summary section - which is quite lengthy and very descriptive or illuminating.

In reality this is strongly CONTRASTED with Caleb and represents essentially **the rather grim LOW WATERMARK of FAITH & OBEDIENCE**.

So very quickly the third thing and that is:

## **3] Verses or ideas that are "PLUGGED" (or if you prefer "PHOTOSTATED" over and over again)**

So let me read just one 2 verse section that contains a couple of things that are going to consistently turn up multiples of times:

Joshua 13 verse 13&14 "But the Israelites did not drive out the people of Geshur and Maacah, so they continue to live among the Israelites to this day.

But to the tribe of Levi he gave no inheritance, since the offerings made by fire to the Lord, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as he promised them."

- So one idea is that the Levites are different from everybody else - they don't get any inheritance of land in the same way that all the other tribes do. This idea comes up **AT LEAST 3 TIMES** in these 7 chapters.
- The other idea and this one comes up **AT LEAST 5 OR 6 TIMES** - (and so it would be hard for you to not notice this if you were doing a quick read of these land allocation chapters) - is the simple fact that the Israelites do not do a wholehearted job of getting rid of the Canaanites as they were supposed to.

### Structure

We started off talking about CHOICES - so let me give you two nice easy headings which reflect the CHOICES that the book of Joshua PAINTS FOR US IN BOLD COLOURS:

- **CHOICE #1 - is that of "FAITH & OBEDIENCE"** (and I'm not going to labour on this one very much - I really only just want us to be see where this turns up - and then I'm going to move on)
- **CHOICE #2 - is that of "FEAR & CONVENIENCE"**

So then - somewhat briefly:

## **1] CHOICE #1 - "FAITH & OBEDIENCE"**

**Mark Dever** (the Senior Pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist church Washington DC) writes in his **OT Overview**:

"Q. What happens in the book of Joshua? In one sense, you could say that **Joshua is about CHOICES**."

He goes on:

"The Israelites' **choice** to **CONQUER and DIVIDE** the land of Canaan fills almost all of Joshua. In that sense, this **IS** what the book is about. **BUT** preceding all this activity, and continuing through it, you find another important **subtext**. The people do this **BECAUSE** they have vowed to **FEAR and OBEY God**."

Put simply - the whole issue of CONQUERING and DIVIDING up the land (these chapters that we are now considering) do not bring with them the FIRST CHOICE that the Israelites need to make BECAUSE there has already been one choice that they have made and that choice was to have FAITH and to OBEY God.

Q. Where do we see this - you might ask?

I'll give you a few places that you might remember if you've been with us from the start of this series:

- **Joshua chapter 1 and verses 16-18** Israel's leaders have this to say to Joshua:  
"Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"

So as you can see very clear and committed words.

- In **chapter 5**, after crossing the Jordan, they begin practicing **circumcision** and **Passover** again in accordance with the command of the LORD.

By re-instituting these 2 ordinances they are vowing to have the LORD as their God.

- Then in chapter 8 when the people all assemble at Mount Ebal and Gerizim - they have the whole of the Law re-read to them by Joshua - they re-enact God's instruction of them at Mount Sinai and this symbolizes the fact that they are indeed God's people.
- And finally at the very end of the book - Joshua 24 - we see them being challenged as to whether they still want to keep to their initial vow of FAITH & OBEDIENCE and they respond:

Joshua 24 verse 24 "We will serve the Lord our God and obey him."

So that then was the FIRST CHOICE that the Israelites as a whole took:

They choose to walk in FAITH & in OBEDIENCE (of course I'm not saying that they did that perfectly - because of course they didn't) - but nonetheless, that was their primary CHOICE #1 - FAITH & OBEDIENCE.

The second choice that we are coming to look at has no reality without this first choice:

- you see there can't be any OCCUPYING the Land that God gives if you have never chosen to accept the VICTORY GIVING work of Jesus
- You see we have to recognize that we are either going to be in the position of the Canaanites - those people who had over time exhausted the kindness and mercy of God OR we will be in the situation of those that have put their trust in the hands of the LORD to take them out of slavery to sin.
- You have to ask yourself: Q. AM I A CANAANITE or I AM A CHRISTIAN - a Christ Follower?
- If you say this land where I live belongs to me and my life and destiny belongs to no-one but me - then you're in the shoes of the Canaanites and judgment was being served.

If by contrast you say - the LORD, He is God, He is the One who made me, owns me and has actually loved me enough to send Jesus to die for me - THEN you have made that first vital choice of FAITH & OBEDIENCE.

Ok then - for the rest of our time let's look at - Choice #2 - \*not\* FAITH & OBEDIENCE \*but\*:

## **2] CHOICE #2 - "FEAR & CONVENIENCE"**

Now I was never very good at Geography at school - it was one of two subjects that I managed to fail!

However one thing I do know is that Israel never managed to occupy 100% of the territory that God purposed for them to have. Not here in the book of Joshua OR at any later stage of Israel's history.

Isn't that a sad fact!!

But the Bible is very realistic and true to life - true to their lives and sadly also true to ours as well.

God wants for us to have everything that is ours this side of glory and we are to press in and take hold of it.

So a question we have to ask is: Q. What stops us possessing everything that God has to give?

I want to suggest **THREE AREAS** where we tend to fall short - they're not exhaustive but they may ring true for you:

## 1] The matter of the KNOWLEDGE OF GOD/CHRIST

The **FIRST** is this area of **THE MATTER OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND OF HIS CHRIST.**

Now I should be clear I am definitely **\*not\* talking at all about our level of intellect** - no I'm talking about what the apostle Paul expresses there in Philippians chapter 3:

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

He goes on:

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

Now I want you to imagine a map of the Promised Land in Joshua's time and imagine that I have coloured the areas that they have occupied in say GREEN and then all the other areas that are held by the enemy - those areas are coloured in RED.

And we would see that there are both large areas that are not occupied and also that there are pockets fairly liberally dotting the whole land where the enemy is successfully holding out.

Now it may well be that you think that that would really not be a very good advert for the spiritual success of the Israelites.

**BUT BEFORE YOU GO TOO FAR IN THAT DIRECTION**

Now imagine that we redraw that map of the promised land and let it represent our knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ and to do that we'll simply divided the land up not into twelve pieces but into 66 pieces - and then what you need to do is put the various names of the bible books onto the map.

Then you just need to do a colouring-in exercise GREEN for the books that you have read and have some familiarity with.

Then RED for all those books you have never read and those that you couldn't say anything very specific about.

**YOU SEE WHEN WE PUT THINGS THAT WAY - MAYBE WE START TO SEE THAT WE MIGHT BE A LITTLE BIT MORE LIKE THE ISRAELITES THAN WE THINK.**

Unless we are a brand new, freshly minted Christian believer - surely we cannot be content to know nothing more than the ABC's of God's word when there is a massive alphabet to explore and enjoy.

Let's go into a second area:

## **2] The matter of SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**

And this area is that of what I'll call **SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE.**

Alan Redpath in his book "**Victorious Christian Living**" says:

"In the life of every one of us, as indeed it was true in Canaan, are **kings, enemies, strongholds, and habits** which are

deeply entrenched. They seem to be so **strongly fortified** that, **in spite** of every endeavour, **in spite** of all our prayers and Bible study, **in spite** of all our pleading at the throne of God , it **seems impossible to get rid of them**.

Our peace is constantly disturbed by the raids of an evil one inside our personality. The enemy has captured us again and again, and his strongholds stand against all attempts we make to pull them down."

He goes on:

"Q. Is that true of you? If this book of Joshua...means something to you, it means more and more to me everyday."

So maybe you can identify with the Israelites and not perhaps look at them as rather inept and useless.

What I want to do is end up by focussing down upon the story of Joseph's people there in Joshua 17:

The whole story of the people of Joseph (so that is the tribe of Ephraim and the tribe of Manasseh) comes in chapters 16 and 17 and neither of them were fully successful in possessing their large tribal allotments:

Regarding Ephraim - Joshua 16 verse 10 says:

"They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labour to this day."

And then regarding Manasseh - Joshua 17 verse 12 and 13 says:

"Yet the Manassites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region. However, when the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out completely."

Then jointly they come to Joshua and this is how the conversation goes:

- following on from Verse 14 there in Chapter 17:

The people of Joseph said to Joshua,  
"Why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance? We are a numerous people and the Lord has blessed us abundantly."

"**IF** you are so numerous," Joshua answered, "**AND IF** the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, **GO UP into the forest and CLEAR LAND FOR YOURSELVES there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites.**"

The people of Joseph replied, "**The hill country is not enough for us, AND** all the Canaanites who live in the plain have **iron chariots**, both those in Beth Shan and its settlements and those in the Valley of Jezreel."

But Joshua said to the house of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh—

"**You are numerous AND very powerful.**

You will have not only one allotment but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours;

**THOUGH** the Canaanites have iron chariots and **THOUGH** they are strong,

**YOU** can drive them out."

## CONCLUSION

Now what we see here are a number of things - let me mention 4 of them to conclude:

- **FIRSTLY** - it is clear that Joseph's tribes were **SETTLERS** (so they took up the large swathes of land in Central Canaan) **BUT** - they were clearly **SETTLERS** in *\*not\** one *\*but\** two senses:
  - they were **BOTH** (that is Ephraim and Manasseh) "**SETTLING**" for a bad & definitely sub-standard situation.
  - they were **ALSO** happy to let the Canaanites co-exist under the situation that they would be subject to them.

So when God said - "Show them no mercy"

They said - "We'll keep them around as servants"

When God said - "Make no treaty with them - destroy them from the land"

They said - "We'll tolerate them - we'll accommodate their subdued presence"

**APPLICATION:** And maybe there's something you are wanting to keep which God says must go.

You are saying **TOLERATE** and God is saying **TURF IT OUT!**

- **SECONDLY** - they complained. Even though their portion of the land was massive they had the attitude that somehow (maybe due to past blessing) that they were "**ENTITLED**".

Joshua sees through them and uses their own words to expose them.

He says: "If you are so numerous and if the hill country is too small... **THEN** go and do something about it!! Go and clear the forested areas where the Perizzites and Rephaites are."

**APPLICATION:** Maybe this is you - you have a sense that God somehow owes you. And God might say Q. Haven't you heard of **RESPONSIBILITY?!!** You think that the lack of blessing has nothing to do with your laziness and your lack of action - you are preferring comfort and ease over obedience.

- **THIRDLY** - Notice the way the people answer back. They completely dodge Joshua's idea of clearing the forested areas (that is way too much hard work and trouble) - surely our inheritance - everything we have in Christ **MUST** (most of the time) simply, **FALL IN OUR LAPS!!**

**APPLICATION:** Maybe that's you, if you're honest - if there's **MUCH** bible study, if there's **MUCH** prayer, if there's **MUCH** training ourselves to be unashamed workmen - then we say **COUNT ME OUT!!** We say: "Don't expect me to be a spiritual Olympian like Peter or Paul!!"

- **FOURTHLY** - Joshua points out that the rewards of hard work in the forested areas are **LIMITLESS**. He also says that those things that they consider **IMMOVABLE, UNCONQUERABLE OBSTACLES** (e.g. chariots etc.) are nothing of the kind because they are **POWERFUL** as a people and they can **DRIVE THEM OUT!**

**APPLICATION:** Maybe you too need to recognise that **FEAR** might be speaking more strongly in your heart than **FAITH** and **COMFORT** than **OBEDIENCE**.

**CHOICES! CHOICES!** This is the reality that we have in Joshua and we too have ours to make as well in terms of how much of the land we will ourselves possess. Let's pray we can take a leaf out of Caleb's book out of Joshua's book - to God's greater glory - **AMEN**