



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

Setting Up the Tabernacle at Shiloh and the Boundaries for Benjamin

Joshua 18:1-28

"Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them. ² But there remained among the children of Israel seven tribes which had not yet received their inheritance.

³ Then Joshua said to the children of Israel: "How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers has given you? ⁴ Pick out from among you three men for each tribe, and I will send them; they shall rise and go through the land, survey it according to their inheritance, and come back to me. ⁵ And they shall divide it into seven parts. Judah shall remain in their territory on the south, and the house of Joseph shall remain in their territory on the north. ⁶ You shall therefore survey the land in seven parts and bring the survey here to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD our God. ⁷ But the Levites have no part among you, for the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance. And Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them."

⁸ Then the men arose to go away; and Joshua charged those who went to survey the land, saying, "Go, walk through the land, survey it, and come back to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD in Shiloh." ⁹ So the men went, passed through the land, and wrote the survey in a book in seven parts by cities; and they came to Joshua at the camp in Shiloh. ¹⁰ Then Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD, and there Joshua divided the land to the children of Israel according to their divisions.

"Now the lot of the tribe of the children of Benjamin came up according to their families, and the territory of their lot came out between the children of Judah and the children of Joseph. ¹² Their border on the north side began at the Jordan, and the border went up to the side of Jericho on the north, and went up through the mountains westward; it ended at the Wilderness of Beth Aven. ¹³ The border went over from there toward Luz, to the side of Luz (which is Bethel) southward; and the border descended to Ataroth Addar, near the hill that lies on the south side of Lower Beth Horon.

¹⁴ Then the border extended around the west side to the south, from the hill that

lies before Beth Horon southward; and it ended at Kirjath Baal (which is Kirjath Jearim), a city of the children of Judah. This was the west side.

¹⁵ The south side began at the end of Kirjath Jearim, and the border extended on the west and went out to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah. ¹⁶ Then the border came down to the end of the mountain that lies before the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is in the Valley of the Rephaim on the north, descended to the Valley of Hinnom, to the side of the Jebusite city on the south, and descended to En Rogel. ¹⁷ And it went around from the north, went out to En Shemesh, and extended toward Gelliloth, which is before the Ascent of Adummim, and descended to the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben. ¹⁸ Then it passed along toward the north side of Arabah, and went down to Arabah. ¹⁹ And the border passed along to the north side of Beth Hoglah; then the border ended at the north bay at the Salt Sea, at the south end of the Jordan. This was the southern boundary.

²⁰ The Jordan was its border on the east side. This was the inheritance of the children of Benjamin, according to its boundaries all around, according to their families.

²¹ Now the cities of the tribe of the children of Benjamin, according to their families, were Jericho, Beth Hoglah, Emek Keziz, ²² Beth Arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, ²³ Avim, Parah, Ophrah, ²⁴ Chephar Haammoni, Ophni, and Gaba: twelve cities with their villages; ²⁵ Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, ²⁶ Mizpah, Chephirah, Mozah, ²⁷ Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, ²⁸ Zelah, Eleph, Jebus (which is Jerusalem), Gibeath, and Kirjath: fourteen cities with their villages. This was the inheritance of the children of Benjamin according to their families.”

Background Notes

Verse 1 tells us that the children of Israel set up the Tabernacle at Shiloh. All during the wilderness wanderings, the Tabernacle was set up in the midst of the congregation. When the people moved, the Tabernacle moved. When the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan River and came into the Land, they set up the Tabernacle at Gilgal. Gilgal was their base camp during the conquest of Canaan. Once the Promised Land was conquered, the Tabernacle was moved to Shiloh. This location was close to the center of the Land, for easy access. The site of ancient Shiloh can still be visited today.

After the Tabernacle was set up at Shiloh, one of the first things that Israel did was to divide up the rest of the land among the seven tribes that still had no assigned tribal territory. Joshua rebuked the children of Israel for their procrastination: “How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers has given you?” (v3).

Do you see a lesson here already for us? Perhaps the Lord would rebuke us for neglecting to fully possess the spiritual land that he’s already given us. He wants

us to possess that land of spiritual blessings and be more victorious in the spiritual battles that we fight.

Joshua sent out a surveying team that consisted of three men from each of the seven tribes. These 21 representatives divided up the remaining land into seven equal shares, determined by water supply, arable land, defensible positions, etc. Then the seven tribes chose lots for these territories. We don't know the exact mechanics of this drawing of lots. Jewish tradition says that they took two urns and put the territories in one urn and the names of the tribes in the other urn, and then the high priest drew a territory and a tribe out of each urn. Regardless of the mechanism of drawing lots, God controlled the division of the Land. Proverbs 16:33 says, *"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."*

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Worship should have a central place in the believer's life.

Verse 1: *"Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there."* The Tabernacle was the focal point of Israel's worship of the Lord. The Tabernacle was the place where the sacrifices took place. The Tabernacle contained the Holy of Holies and, in it, the Ark of the Covenant. There the blood of the atoning sacrifice was taken once a year and placed on the mercy seat of the Ark, so the relationship between a holy God and a sinful people could be maintained. Thus, the Tabernacle was where God dwelt amongst His people.

In Joshua 18, the Tabernacle was set up in the center of the Land at Shiloh. The Tabernacle would remain at this central location in the heart of the Land for over three hundred years – all during the time of the Judges, until the time of Samuel.

There's a spiritual lesson here. As Israel became established in the Land, a top priority was to have a central place of worship. Worship was central to their lives. In the same way, worship should have a central place in the believer's life. Psalm 95:6-7 *"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand."*

John 4:23 says, *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."* It's great to be involved in Christian service, but the best and purest kind of Christian service comes from believers who take time to worship the Lord. This is true for believers individually and for believers collectively. That's one reason why we remember and worship the Lord in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Is celebrating the Lord's Supper important to you? Worship should have a central place in the believer's life.

2. Life's major decisions should be made before the Lord.

In verse 6, Joshua said to the representatives of the seven tribes that still needed territories: *"You shall therefore survey the land in seven parts and bring the survey here to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the LORD our God."* These were major decisions. These decisions would greatly affect not only the tribes' location in the land, but much of their future history as well. No wonder these decisions were to be made in the presence of the Lord at the Tabernacle!

Do you take the Lord into account when you make your major decisions in life? Do you take your decisions "before the Lord" -- into the presence of the Lord? Of course all our decisions should be made before the Lord, but for small decisions (like whether or not to eat wear a jacket on a chilly day) we usually use the common sense that God has given us. We could call it "sanctified common sense."

However, the major decisions in life need to be brought to the Lord for His wisdom and direction -- whether or not to be married, or whom to marry, or whether to attend university, or what college or university to attend... (well, that's an easy one -- Emmaus Bible College, of course!) [laughter] ... or what career to enter, or when to make job change, or what home to buy, or what town to live in, or what church to attend, or whether to start a new church, or change churches, etc. These are major decisions in life, and they should be made before the Lord.

How do we go about making major decisions in life before the Lord?

1. **Pray!** God promises to guide us in making life's decisions, so pray on that basis. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to *"trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths."*

2. **Know the Word of God!** The Lord will never guide us to make a decision that is contrary to His Word. For example, it is never the Lord's will to cheat on tests or income tax returns. Dishonesty and cheating are never in line with God's Word. A career that does not honor the Lord is never His will. Not too long ago a former student asked me, "Dr. Dave, is it OK for me to take a good-paying job at a casino -- because I'll be able to give more money to the Lord?" A job that involves encouraging people to gamble away their paychecks (or whatever) so we can "give more money to the Lord" is not in line with the Word of God. God doesn't need our money!

In life's major decisions -- jobs, careers, whatever -- we should always pray that we will not make a decision that is contrary to the teaching of God's Word.

There are other factors that come into making decisions before the Lord -- such as circumstances. As our sovereign Lord controlled the drawing of lots, so God can control our circumstances to help us make decisions. God can "open doors" and "close doors."

When I made one of the major decisions in my life, the decision to leave my employment as a research engineer and go into the Lord's work full-time, God certainly opened some doors, and He closed other doors. He did this to "direct my paths." So God does use circumstances in helping us make life's major decisions, but the two big factors are **prayer** and **knowing the principles of God's Word**. Life's major decisions should be made before the Lord.

Practical Application

Good things can come in small packages!

I think we've all had at least one experience that proves this statement -- maybe even this past Christmas! Where do we see this lesson taught in this chapter? We see it in the tribal territory allotted to Benjamin, in verses 11-28. Benjamin was one of the smallest tribal territories. It was stuck right between two major tribes: Ephraim on the north, and Judah on the south. In fact, Benjamin would become a kind of buffer zone between Ephraim and Judah.

But good things can come in small packages! Benjamin's tribal allotment was in the heart of the land, and this was choice real estate! Notice in verse 28 that Jerusalem was one of the cities given to Benjamin. Jerusalem would become the capital of the nation, and the Temple eventually would be built in Jerusalem. Saul, the first king of Israel, would come from the "little" tribe of Benjamin, and so would the apostle Paul!

Here's the application. Maybe some of you feel like you're a "small package," like the tribal territory of Benjamin. You're a little discouraged because you don't feel have any big, upfront spiritual gift or talent. Hey, listen -- be encouraged! 1 Corinthians 12:22 says, "*...much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.*" Notice that the members of the body that "seem" weak are essential to the life and health of the body!

Maybe you're "only" a quiet peacemaker. **Only** a peacemaker? That's choice territory in the heart of the Land! Your choice territory is necessary for establishment in the Land -- for the wellbeing and growth of the body of Christ! So if you're feeling like you're a "small package" and not very useful for the Lord -- remember that **very good things** can come in **small packages!**