

## TAKING POSSESSION OF WHAT GOD PROVIDES - Part two

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### LEARNING TO POSSESS WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY GIVEN - Joshua 10-18

The lessons will be drawn from nine chapters of the book of Joshua. We'll just fly over them quickly. The key idea of these two teachings - and this second teaching particularly - is this: just because God has **provided** something, doesn't mean I **have** it.

This applies to absolutely **all** things spiritual. Salvation itself isn't **received** just because it has been **provided**. In spite of all sorts of theological systems to the contrary, the Bible couldn't be clearer - **1 John 2:1-2** - "**My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [2] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**"

In spite of what our Calvinist brothers and sisters do with these words, John is adamant. Jesus provided **propitiation** - that's the bearing of God's wrath against sinners - for the "**whole world.**" That covers most everybody, I think. But they're not all **saved**. People must **receive** Christ's provided redemptive work.

My point here is that - apart from the showered blessings of sheer common grace - what holds true for salvation holds true for absolutely **everything** God gives to us in the spiritual realm. His **providing** it and our **possessing** it aren't exactly the same thing.

That's what is so important about these nine chapters about two-thirds through the book of Joshua. They are all about **possessing** the land. We call it the **promised** land because God **promised** it to His people, Israel.

He brought them **into** this land supernaturally. In other words, God **gave** them their **entry** into the land. It was clearly a supernatural work of God. But now they have to **possess** it. Or to emphasize it a bit differently, now **they** have to possess it. In other words, God's **giving** of it and their **possessing** of it are **two** things, not **one**.

How is this done? How do **we** enter into all that God has promised and provided for **us**? Is everything possessed the **same** way? If not, what are the **ways** in which we, like Israel, move into what God has given?

**Joshua 13:1-6** - "**Now Joshua was old and advanced in years, and the Lord said to him, "You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to possess. [2] This is the land that yet remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all those of the Geshurites [3] (from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is counted as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim, [4] in the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites, [5] and the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath, [6] all the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, even all the Sidonians. I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel. Only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you."**

This passage sets the stage for the other events in these chapters. We see at once the difference between **entering the land** and **possessing the land**. Even though the last eight chapters record some incredible victories and unbelievable struggles, **they were not to be thought of as the end of the story**. The land was now to be **parceled out**. **Names** were to be attached to each section. **Boundaries** were to be established. They had to **occupy and take charge of their inheritance**.

Don't let all those awkward names in **verses two to six** keep you from seeing what's there. These verses are crucially important. God commands the people of Israel to **mark out the land they don't yet possess as though they were already occupying it**. They are to mark out the land **while it is still occupied by the enemy**. They are not to think the job is done just because they have **entered promised** land.

And even more important and relevant to us, they are not to think the land isn't **for** them just because there are still enemies occupying it. Because of God's promise and love the land is to be **treated** as though it were already in their possession. In other words, there is to be no **excuse** for resting in their present condition. They are to resolutely refuse to **rest with a job half done**. There is **more** to be possessed and they are immediately called to **get on with it**.

You can imagine the people gathered around the fire at night: "**Boy, we've waited a long time for this promises land. It's wonderful to be right where we are. It's great to finally be home. This portion is quite enough for my present needs.**"

**Why risk life and limb to move on to those other God-assigned allotments? After all, we're in the promised land, aren't we? What more do we need?**" That kind of attitude would have been so easy to latch on to.

What the Lord says to the Israelites through Joshua, Paul shouts to the church - **Philippians 3:13-15** - "**Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [15] Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you."**

Then and now, God's promised provision and blessing doesn't usually just fall into our laps while we're thinking about other things. There is an art to spiritual possession. There were no exact repetitions of the falling walls of Jericho. Today we'll quickly consider some of the forms spiritual possession can take in different sets of circumstances:

#### 1) **FIRST, THERE IS POSSESSION BY PERSISTENT FAITH IN THE PROMISE OF GOD**

Here is one of my favorite accounts in the whole Bible:

**Joshua 14:6-14** - "Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal. And Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God in Kadesh-barnea concerning you and me. [7] I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him word again as it was in my heart. [8] But my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; yet I wholly followed the Lord my God. [9] And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.' [10] And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. And now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. [11] I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming. [12] So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said. [13] "Then Joshua blessed him, and he gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. [14] Therefore Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel."

Is there a better story in the whole Bible than this? I absolutely love it. Caleb is an old man now - eighty-five years old. As all of the parcels of land are being distributed, he comes to Joshua with a request. You can't help but think he had a special place in Joshua's heart. These two old soldiers take a moment to remember the "good old days." They were the only two of the twelve spies who came back from their advance search mission into the promised land with the report that, no matter what the obstacles, God was able to give them the land He promised.

"Joshua, when we went in to spy out the land, God promised me I could have all the land I walked on" (9). "Now I want you to grant me that chunk of land."

Now, that expedition into Canaan was **45 years ago!** That was the last time Caleb was able to put a foot into the Promised land - but not because of any lack of faith on **his** part. He suffered solely because of the grumbling of the people. Yet here he is, **45 years later - 85 years of age** - "Now, about that promise God made to me. I'm still ready to take hold of it!"

First, miraculously, you're looking at a man **without an ounce of bitterness, doubt, or anger in him**. Forty years of his life were spent sharing in the judgment of God on the doubters and grumblers. He was not one of them. And now he still seems as optimistic and confident in the Lord as he was back then. He got old, but never turned into a bitter religious dead-beat. He could have found good reason, but refused to become a complainer. He never put himself on the sidelines of life.

**Caleb recognizes he's been blessed - Joshua 14:10-11** - "And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. And now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. [11] I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming."

He doesn't just assume that his strength, long life, and good health are some kind of cosmic accident. **Why** has God blessed him in this way? **Why** has God kept him strong and determined? Caleb knows God always - **always** -

blessees for a purpose. And Caleb's mind has a big, bold notice pinned to its bulletin board. He still has a call from God.

We can all learn so much from this. This is the **real** purpose driven life style. I encounter people in the church all the time - **no where near 85** - who assume that because they've been serving the Lord in some role in the church for **even 20 years**, it must be time for Florida and the beach or summer at the cottage and let some of these new people take over - "I'm done!"

What a gem Caleb is! Through all those years of wandering in the wilderness, through the passing of half a life-time, he never forgot God's call on his life. He never let God's promise slip into some dim region of his memory. He has a **promise**. And he seasons his whole life with it. He's still alert to this opportunity, even though it hasn't presented itself for forty-five years. The moment the opportunity presents itself - 45 years later - Caleb's ready to go. It's still like it was **yesterday** as it burns in his heart. How **good** is that!

I believe God is thrilled to see people take stock of where they are on their spiritual journey. I believe God loves to fix His favor on people who never quit or rest. I believe the greatest joy comes to those who say, "This inactivity has been long enough! My moment is right now. I will not leave this unfinished. Finally, let's get on with the business at hand!"

How long will you wait to be baptized? How long before you anchor down into a solid devotional life? What will it take to make you go to church regularly? Are you going to go the next ten years, never once leading anyone to Christ? And just when are you going to make things right with that brother or sister in the church? Caleb says, "Enough! Too much time has been wasted. I'm not getting any younger. Give me that land!" Beautiful.

## 2) **SECOND, THERE IS POSSESSION BY CONFLICT**

Not everyone comes at life like Caleb. Here's a very different account:

**Joshua 17:14-18** - "Then the people of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, "**Why have you given me but one lot and one portion as an inheritance, although I am a numerous people, since all along the Lord has blessed me?**" [15] And Joshua said to them, "If you are a numerous people, go up by yourselves to the forest, and there clear ground for yourselves in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you." [16] The people of Joseph said, "The hill country is not enough for us. **Yet all the Canaanites who dwell in the plain have chariots of iron**, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel." [17] "Then Joshua said to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, "You are a numerous people and have great power. You shall not have one allotment only, [18] but the hill country shall be yours, for though it is a forest, **you shall clear it and possess it** to its farthest borders. For **you shall drive out the Canaanites**, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong."

What we learn immediately is **possession of promise doesn't come about in the same way every time**. These lessons must be remembered and applied **together**, not in isolation. The people of Joseph came to Joshua with a complaint - 14 - "Then the people of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, "**Why have you given me but one lot and one portion as an inheritance, although I am a numerous people, since all along the Lord has blessed me?**"

The complaint is clear. "You haven't given us enough room to grow!" The people of Ephraim and Manasseh felt cheated. They had lots of families and too little land. Clearly, they were looking for more room than they had been given. Either Joshua or God was being lean and unfair with them.

But the real problem was different from their perception of it. Joshua's correction leaves no doubt - **Joshua 17:12-13** - "**Yet the people of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land.**" [13] Now when the people of Israel grew strong, **they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.**"

This is fascinating. These tribes weren't really short of **space**. They were short on **obedience**. Their cramped living quarters were their own doing. Something profound is being unfolded in this account. Please notice it. Though they weren't **thinking** about some of their past decisions, they were still reaping the **results** of them. I think that happens quite a bit in our lives.

Here was the **real** problem. Ephraim was forced to live up in the hills. And the hills weren't as good for farming as the

plains. But they didn't go down into the plains because the Canaanites were there. And, as the text clearly points out, they had "**chariots of iron.**"

But there's more. When Ephraim finally grew strong she **still** didn't drive the Canaanites out of the land. She had gotten used to being near them. They probably came to seem like decent people - not monsters. **So Israel did what lots of us do with things that are difficult to change. She compromised. She made adjustments. She lived** with things she was commanded to drive out and eliminate.

And here's the point. She was free to do that. God didn't strike her dead. Life went on as usual. Only she began to feel **cramped**. That's what happens when God gives provision for growth, but it's **challenging** and **costly**, so we silently choose to stay where we are.

But remember what I said a minute ago. We usually forget those gradual compromises - the thousand and one small, seemingly insignificant choices - that **create** the small lives we end up with. And then we blame God, or the devil, or our spouse, or some combination of the above.

Joshua's response is right on the button. "I'm not the tooth fairy. You've been **offered** land a plenty. And I'm not just going to dish out more. The issue is clear. **How badly do you want more land?** There's a **cost** to growth. If you want to take more of your land God will help you. Now, quit stalling and complaining and start displacing the enemy!"

Notice the difference between **these** tribes and **Caleb**. These people limited their horizons to **what they already possessed**. They could see nothing further. They knew there was land out there for the taking, but they chose to see only **forests that had to be cleared (15)**, and enemies with **"iron chariots"(16)**.

O, how quickly we become spiritually sightless. We lose all perspective. Can you imagine, people who had seen the **walls of Jericho fall** worrying about trees and iron chariots? How soon we forget! How frequently we limit God!

So Joshua says "You really don't need to complain to me anymore. This isn't a matter of prayer. You have all the land you really **want** and all the promise you really **need**. It is already there for the taking through the provision and promise of God!"

This story slices so close to the bone, doesn't it? We can't just **wait** for growth to happen. It never comes that way. Look at **verse 18** - **"...but the hill country shall be yours, for though it is a forest, you shall clear it and possess it to its farthest borders. For you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong."**

These words remove all doubt from the issue. They **had** the ability to do what God told them to do. **God** - the God who felled the walls of Jericho - was on their side. There was no reason to doubt their capacity to take the land and enter into God's full promise for their future. But they **did** have to confront their lack of **faith** and **desire**. Everything great has a price-tag attached. This is God's way of testing our hearts.

### 3) **FINALLY, THERE IS POSSESSION BY CAPACITY**

This is similar to the last point, but a little more involved. Look carefully at the account:

**Joshua 19:9,47** - **"The inheritance of the people of Simeon formed part of the territory of the people of Judah. Because the portion of the people of Judah was too large for them, the people of Simeon obtained an inheritance in the midst of their inheritance....19:47...."** **"When the territory of the people of Dan was lost to them, the people of Dan went up and fought against Leshem, and after capturing it and striking it with the sword they took possession of it and settled in it, calling Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor."**

This is a fascinating passage. These are simple little incidents in the whole scheme of the story that make us wonder **why** God dispersed the land in this fashion. It almost looks like He didn't know precisely what He was doing.

For example, the land of **Judah** was **too big for them**. They ended up sharing it with **Simeon**. Then the land of **Dan** was **too small for them**. They ended up pushing back its borders. There seems to be such an **elasticity** in the whole process. Possession was relative to **capacity** in some strange way. Allowance was made both for **expansion** or **diminishment**.

But **why?** What was God doing here? What was His point? What was He trying to demonstrate and teach? I actually

think these Old Testament accounts are prophetic glimpses of the same concept Jesus described in His well-known account of the master who distributed talents to his servants. As Luke closes his account of that parable He quotes these striking wrap-up words from our Lord - **Luke 19:26** - "I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

The greatest reward of devotion is **increased capacity**. The greatest danger in apathy is **gradual spiritual dementia**. How like our Lord to be so honest. He always comes with such **grace** and **warning**. Rarely do things stand still in our hearts. **Grace is gloriously given**. Increased capacity is the reward of **faithfulness**.

That's the whole point of the parable. It's not just a story about what these servants **received**, but how they **used** what they received that reveals their understanding of their master. Only expanding in kingdom usefulness proves we actually get it - we actually know what the mind of our Master is all about.

Remember, there's **possession by faith**. There's **possession by conflict**. And there's **possession by capacity**. These three, taken together, put meat on the idea of **seeking first God's kingdom**. These three are what seeking God's kingdom **means**. It's not just a religious slogan. There's no possession by **heredity**, or by **wishing**, or by **dreaming**.

There are people here this morning who will know Jesus in fuller, more joyful ways at the close of this year. And there are, sadly, others who won't even care that they are Christians in name only at year's end. And the difference will be found in these three possession principles. So keep the book of Joshua close at hand all year long.