

Conquer and Divide

Joshua

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We're going back to the book of Joshua and I invite you to turn to Joshua this evening. The Scriptures tell us about the importance of teaching the entire counsel of the word of God. We shouldn't pick and choose; we shouldn't cherry pick our favorite passages to teach on; we shouldn't teach just from a favorite Gospel or something like that. Scripture commands us, Scripture calls us to teach the whole counsel of God and I'm glad that it does because there are some portions of Scripture that you might overlook or bypass if you left it to your own desires or if you're going to pick that which you thought would make a particular emotional impact on a given night, because it's the nature of Scripture that there are a number of different genres; there is a different number of kinds of literature that are in the Scriptures: there is legal literature, there is narrative literature, there is historical literature, there is Gospels, and there is a broad range of the kinds of Scripture that we find, and taking all of that together when we come to the book of Joshua tonight, it's good for us to remember that we want to study and know and appreciate the entire counsel of God, not simply that which might most appeal to us. You could think about it as if you left a child to choose its own diet, it would choose a lot of sugar and things that weren't necessarily nutritious. As parents, we know that they need the full range of the menu in order to grow and be healthy and be strong, and so it is with the book of Joshua. There are places where the book of Joshua tends to be a little bit laborious in its reading, but as part of the inspired word of God, we need to know it all, and one of the values of that is for us to be able to see how the totality of Scripture fits together, and so that's what we're going to have in mind as we come to God's word tonight.

Christianity, it is so important for us to remind ourselves again and again, is a religion that is based on history, on time and space events that took place, and Joshua gives us time and space events about the conquest of the land by the nation of Israel. It also teaches us that the Lord has meaning in those historical events, there are lessons that we are to draw from those, but before we can get the lessons, we need to know something about the history that took place. Well, tonight we're going to look at the history and touch on some of the lessons that it means for us, and then next week we'll bring out the richness of the spiritual application of it. So with that little bit of introduction to Joshua, I invite you to turn to Joshua 1 as we begin.

Last time, we saw that in Joshua, God fulfills the promise that he made to Abraham and to Abraham's descendents, to give them land for their nation. Look at Joshua 1:2 where it says God spoke to Joshua and said, "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel."

Now, go back to Genesis 12 and I just want you to get a feel for the sweep of Scripture here. I didn't write this down in my notes so I'll probably botch a little bit of the references here, but in Genesis 12:7, I want you to just get a little sense of the feel and the flow of it all. In Genesis 12:7, "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'" That was about 2,000 years before the time of Christ, and he extended that promise also to Isaac and to Jacob and, I believe it's in Genesis 46, yes, Genesis 46, you can turn there, where it tells us, and I just want you to have a sense of these major passages that kind of act as hinges in redemptive history, and so how was it or when was it that Israel ended up in Egypt so that they needed to be delivered from there? Well, in Genesis 46:5, "Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their little ones and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. They took their livestock and their property, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him: his sons and his grandsons with him, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt." So Abraham is in the land and God promises it to him. A couple of generations go by and it has gone from Abraham and Sarah to 70 people now in Egypt, Scripture teaches us, and here in Genesis 46 we see that they're in Egypt as the book of Genesis comes to an end.

What happens after that is that they multiply greatly; they multiply exponentially in the land of Egypt. Turn over to the book of Exodus 1:7 where it says, "the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them." And I would just like for you to know where these key passages are so that you can kind of build a bridge in your mind about what the historical development of the people of Israel and the historical development of redemptive history is like.

You know what happens, the Egyptians afflict the Israelites with great slavery and they suffer greatly under them and God appears to Moses in Exodus 3:7, "The LORD said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.'" So Abraham, they multiply, God comes to Moses and says, "I'm going to deliver my people now." You know how the story goes, Moses leads them out through the Red Sea and as you come to the end of the book of Deuteronomy, God gives Moses a view of the land before Moses dies, and then the mantle of leadership is passed on to Joshua.

So it's just so good for us to have that little mental framework and to be able to tie it to Scripture because, beloved, as your sense of understanding of Scripture is anchored in specific texts and as it is anchored in the historical events that undergird the biblical narrative, you're going to have a framework to understand the fullness of divine revelation. That's why we spend time doing this. You can't separate the doctrines from the history that gave rise to them. You can't separate redemption from the cross where Christ died in time and space. It doesn't work that way. And so as we tie the truth that we believe to the history that is revealed in Scripture, we are able to process and have a firmer foundation upon which we will stand.

So, last time, last week, we dealt with an important moral question: how do we justify the slaughter of the nations who were there first when Israel went in and took the land? And we answered that based on the sovereignty and revelation of God in light of the sin of the vanquished nations. God is sovereign over the nations, he can do with them what he pleases. He revealed himself to these nations and they rejected his revelation. They were sinful. They were ripe for judgment. They deserved judgment. They were not innocent bystanders as Israel came barreling in, they were wicked people who needed to be wiped off the face of the earth because their sin had now been completed. Well, tonight and next week, we want to look at it from a different perspective. We looked at it last week from the perspective of those that were defeated, tonight we want to consider the book of Joshua from the perspective of the believing people of God. We are transitioning now into tonight's message, you might say. Here's the question: what are we supposed to take from this book? What are we supposed to understand? What are we supposed to appropriate as the significant spiritual lessons that are supposed to motivate us and shape the way that we approach life?

Now, in the English Bible, we think of Joshua as the start of the historical books: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, and others, giving the history of Israel and that's a fair way, that's an understandable way to look at them. The Hebrews thought about these books as, they would call them the former prophets, meaning not that they were prophets so much in the sense that they were foretelling what would happen in the future, but they were giving a prophetic statement about who God is and what he had done for his people. And as the Jews would read these books, they were seeing the revelation of God in the historical acts that they described and would understand that it wasn't a mere factual account that they were to appropriate, rather they were to understand the history and learn from the history what it told them about God and what it told them about their responsibilities and the promises and responsibilities that they were to take from that. There is a prophetic element in these books in that they reveal God's character and call his people to obedience.

So, beloved, whenever we come to Scripture, whatever part we come to, whatever genre of literature we come to, Old or New Testament, narrative or something else, we should always be mindful that Scripture is unveiling the character of God to us and in one manner or another calling us to trust him and to obey him. That will help us not take too much of a detached view of Scripture and just view it as an object of study over which we stand, as opposed to the revelation of God which stands over us and will hold us

accountable and is something that we are to respond to. I would love to preach that to any academic setting that would give me the opportunity to do so because that's part of what's gotten us into so much trouble is too academic, such an academic approach to Scripture that the idea of a responsibility to believe and obey is divorced from a commitment to Scripture. That's all for another time. For us here this evening, just remember there's a prophetic element to what we're seeing in that Joshua is revealing God's character and calling his people to obedience as we study it, but for us to grasp that, we need to understand and have a sense of the factual aspects, the factual aspects of Joshua in an overview fashion.

So let me just give you a little summary statement here: in Joshua, the man Joshua led the Israelites on a military campaign that brought Israel into the Promised Land. Simple enough. God gave them this area of land; he brought them out of Egypt through the Red Sea; they wandered in the wilderness for a while and God, as we saw earlier, says, "Now it is time, Joshua, go in and lead them into the land." Seven hundred years have passed since Abraham was first on the scene and now Joshua is moving the people forward and there is this great movement forward in redemptive history as Israel comes into the land. And when you think about the book of Joshua, think about Joshua with these words: conquer and divide. Conquer and divide. Joshua led the people into the land and conquered it through military means, and then once the people were reasonably established there, they divided the land up amongst the 12 tribes of Israel. So they went in as a nation comprised of 12 different tribes and they conquered the land, and then each tribe was apportioned a section of the land in which they would establish their livelihood going forward.

So, first of all, so let's just look at the conquest and the division of the land. Point 1: the conquest of the land. As you have a mental picture of the land of Israel in your mind, what happened is that Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River in the center part of Israel, going from east to west. God had brought them around and so they came from the east moving toward the Mediterranean Sea into the central part of that land. You can find details of this in a good Bible Atlas. The first attack that they made was at the city of Jericho and look at Joshua 6 with me, if you would. We're not going to focus on the miraculous elements of Joshua tonight, we're going to save that for next week, but I just want to give you a sense of the conquest that was going on as we read through the book of Joshua and you know many of these stories as it is.

Joshua 6:1 says, "Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in." You know that Jericho had a big wall around it that God commanded the children of Israel to march around and on the final day they marched seven times, blew the trumpets and the wall fell down and they went in and made their conquest of that city.

Verse 2, "The LORD said to Joshua, 'See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. You shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days.'" And on it goes.

Go down to verse 15 now, "on the seventh day they rose early at the dawning of the day and marched around the city in the same manner seven times; only on that day they marched around the city seven times. At the seventh time, when the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, 'Shout! For the LORD has given you the city.'"

Drop down to verse 21, verse 20, I should say, "the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city. They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword."

So here at Jericho, you have the first battle there in the central part of Israel where they are going in and they're starting to conquer the land. This was their point of entry, and then the conquest from that central area went southward.

Look at Joshua 10:5, and I realize that we are viewing this all in a very quick summary fashion and it's hard to keep up and I just ask you to stay with me this evening as best you can. Joshua 10:5, here they are moving southward, "the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they with all their armies, and camped by Gibeon and fought against it. Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, 'Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us.'"

Let's stop there for a moment and take a breath. See, once again, that they are coming up against the inhabitants who are fighting against them. There is a military battle going on. There is a conquest that has to take place in order for Israel to dispossess the inhabitants and take possession for themselves. This is a big part of what Joshua is teaching us in the scope of redemptive history.

Verse 7, "So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors. The LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you.' So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. And the LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makedah. As they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword." So Israel is conquering. The Lord is going before them and supernaturally aiding them as they go. And so they come in at the central part; they swept down to the south and Joshua is doing a military march, probably not completely dissimilar from what Sherman did when he marched through the south in the US Civil War. There is a march going on. The people

are being conquered, and passing over the details, we read that later they went north and conquered northern settlements as well.

Look at Joshua 11. We're just getting the facts out so that we can talk about them in a little bit. Joshua 11:1, "it came about, when Jabin king of Hazor heard of it, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon and to the king of Shimron and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings who were of the north," there we go, "in the hill country, and in the Arabah - south of Chinneroth and in the lowland and on the heights of Dor on the west - to the Canaanite on the east," and on it goes.

Verse 5, "all of these kings having agreed to meet, came and encamped together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. Then the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow at this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel; you shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.' So Joshua and all the people of war with him came upon them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and attacked them. The LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, so that they defeated them, and pursued them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim and the valley of Mizpeh to the east; and they struck them until no survivor was left to them. Joshua did to them as the LORD had told him; he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire."

So, if you look at a map in your Bible or pick up a map of a Bible Atlas, you'll see that they went from east to west; they went down south and then they went back north and conquered the land in that manner, and that's just a little bit of the geography of this conquest that took place. Now, here's what we want to see as we contemplate this: their success was thorough. Their domination was vast, and their victory was complete. I want to show you a few passages that speak of this.

Look back at Joshua's 6:21, we read that earlier. Joshua 6:21, "They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword." Utter destruction. The military victory was complete. Look at Joshua 8:26, "Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai." Chapter 10, verse 28, "Joshua captured Makkedah on that day, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword; he utterly destroyed it and every person who was in it. He left no survivor." Chapter 11, verse 11, "They struck every person who was in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them; there was no one left who breathed. And he burned Hazor with fire." Look at verse 14, "All the spoil of these cities and the cattle, the sons of Israel took as their plunder; but they struck every man with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them. They left no one who breathed." This is in keeping with the instructions of the Lord that we saw last week to go in and to judge these cities and to destroy them utterly, in part so that Israel would not be tempted to be drawn into their false religion.

Here's the point, all of that to just give you a little bit of a taste, a little bit of a flavor as we're looking at the book, and to realize that Joshua is a book of military conquest. This is how Israel came to possess the land that they would be in until they were carried off

into exile many centuries later. They went in and they conquered by military might. They went in and they conquered by the help of the Lord in ways that we'll see more about next week. So this is how they came to possess the land. This is how David had a land to reign over when you get to 2 Samuel. David was able to reign over it, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, David was there because centuries earlier Israel had conquered this land by the power of the Lord and in obedience to what the Lord commanded. So we need to have some kind of sense of this if the Bible is going to become a unit that we understand in the big picture as opposed to isolated passages that might seem to speak to us in times of sorrow. So that's why we take a few moments to look at this. Israel conquered the land.

Now, secondly here, Israel divided the land. Israel divided the land. In Joshua 13 to 22, you find that God assigns Joshua to distribute the land among the tribes of Israel. This is how the land was divided up once they had made the basic conquest of it all. Joshua 13:1, "Joshua was old and advanced in years when the LORD said to him, 'You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed.'" And then it goes on and it speaks about what the Lord wants Joshua to do. Look at verses 7 and 8, "Now therefore, apportion this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh.' With the other half-tribe, the Reubenites and the Gadites received their inheritance which Moses gave them beyond the Jordan to the east, just as Moses the servant of the LORD gave to them." So taken altogether, these 12 tribes are apportioned the land in which they were going to live, build their homes and build their cities, and settle in and enjoy the blessing of the Lord in a land that flowed with milk and honey .

Now, that prompts a thought in my mind. I don't want to ruin some of your favorite songs of heaven but maybe I'm going to do that anyway. We'll still sing them from time to time going forward, but we often sing about, as we're contemplating heaven, we will sing about, "I'm bound for the Promised Land," right? And that sounds so good that we're going to cross the river, as it were, and go to heaven, and in heaven we're going to have our heavenly reward. Well, if you think about it and realizing that the Promised Land in those songs is based on references to Joshua, I'm not sure I want heaven to be like that. I don't want to die and cross the river and then find that there's a whole bunch of military war and conquest and bloodshed that's ahead of me. I don't want to have to go to heaven and realize that there's this vast bound of people who are ripe for judgment who have to be driven out before we can take possession of heaven. It's not like that at all, and that's one of the problems with spiritualizing Scripture, is you end up using Scripture to make points which, if you're actually faithful to the text, it actually ends up saying something much different than what you want it to say. God has promised us heaven, we are going to go there, but it's going to be a place of peace and victory, not a place of war and bloodshed and dispossessing people who shouldn't be there in the first place. I think the Lord already kicked out the fallen angels and none of the sinners are going to be there who reject Christ, and so it's just not going to be like that. So while that may ruin your favorite songs about heaven, at least you can view them objectively from a view of Scripture and say, "Okay, let's look for something else to sing about other than a bad view of what it's going to be like to go to our heavenly reward."

Well, in the intervening chapters, 13 through 21, there is an historical accounting of how Joshua gave the land to each of the tribes and we're not going to take the time to look through that; it is heavy Scripture to read; it's easy to get bogged down in that in your yearly Bible reading if you're not careful. But let's go to a final passage in Joshua 21:43. Final in the sense that it's at the end of all of this apportionment. Joshua 21:43. We need to spend a little bit of time here because there is a little bit of theological significance to the statement here. Joshua, and I realize I'm asking you to just trust me and take my word for what has intervened between the end of chapter 11 and coming to this point at the end of chapter 21, but here we get a summary statement of it and we're just doing a survey so we're looking for these summary statements as we study.

Joshua 21:43, "So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass." And so what Joshua is saying here at the end of chapter 21 is that when you come to the end of Joshua, there has been, in a sense, a completion of the conquest. Israel has entered into the land; the tribes have received their portion; and now they are free to go and to establish their livelihoods in the land that God has given to them.

Now, some of our friends in other parts of Christianity who see no future today for national Israel, they would say that there is not a millennium coming where Israel is going to have the land for 1,000 years. We've taught on that in the past and our church affirms a future for natural Israel. But our critics, some of them anyway, would look at this passage and say, "You are greatly mistaken. You say that Israel still has, the land promise is still in effect for them, to be able to enjoy the land on the earth, and when you say that that is still future, you are wrong. You are mistaken because it says right here in Joshua 21 that God has already fulfilled his land promise therefore there will be no future restoration of national Israel. Your whole view of the future is skewed and mistaken and ignores the obvious implications of a very plain text."

Well, what are we to say to that? Should we jettison our theology because of that criticism? Probably not. Let me explain to you why we don't. When you first see that and when you first hear that argument if you've grown up and been taught about the future for the nation of Israel, if you're not familiar with this passage, it strikes you and it looks very compelling, but that argument falls apart pretty quickly. And as is usually the case when somebody bases a huge theological weight, a huge theological statement on one or two passages of Scripture, there is maybe three that they use to make this argument, invariably, beloved, even if you don't know the immediate answer, you can go back to this basic principle to help you have discernment and to not overreact to an argument that maybe you've never heard before. Always look at the broader context of Scripture. There is always going to be more that the Scripture has to say than what one particular passage could bear the weight of, and in this instance, it is pretty easy to see that this passage could not mean what our amillennial friends say that it means. They try to force all of the fulfillment of God's land promise to the people of Israel right into this section of

Scripture and says, "That settles it. There is no more to come." That's obviously wrong. It is clearly mistaken and this is not even a close question. You can look at this from the near context surrounding this passage in the book of Joshua and Judges, we'll do that in a moment, and also as you look at the broader context of Scripture altogether, you can see that this passage does not mean what those people say that it means.

First of all, before Joshua apportioned the land, go back to Joshua 13 and I'll show you, we read this verse earlier but I want you to see this from another perspective. Joshua 13:1, this is right before the land is being apportioned. Joshua apportions it and then that statement in Joshua 21 comes up. Joshua 13:1, "Joshua was old and advanced in years when the LORD said to him, 'You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed.'" They did not possess all of the land. From the clear statement that preceded this section of Scripture, God says there is much of the land that remains to be possessed. So it's not saying, it could not possibly be saying that this was the fulfillment and the climax and the utter fulfillment of everything that God promised to Abraham because the text of Joshua itself says it doesn't mean that.

Now, in the subsequent book of Judges which is the historical next chapter on the book of Joshua, look over at Judges 1:19, you can see both before Joshua 13 and after this statement in Judges 1, that all of the land was not possessed by Israel. Judges 1:19, "the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots. Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak. But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day."

Here's the point and we're not even finished yet: you have this statement that our amillennial friends, some of them, say shows that there can't be, that the land promises have already been fulfilled, there is nothing left for God to do regarding the land for Israel, but here's the thing, the bigger point that I want you to see is for you to just be mindful that you always want to look at context to see if a passage means what somebody says it means. Here in the context, before and after that statement, Scripture itself says there is much land that remains to be possessed. Scripture itself says that not everything was taken and therefore whatever Joshua 21 means, it cannot mean that God's promise had been exhaustively fulfilled. It doesn't mean that as shown by the broader context of what we're seeing.

Now, further, you go into an even broader sense of Scripture, go back to Genesis 17 here. Genesis 17. We've seen the close or the near context, to use a more precise term, the near context. In Genesis 17:8, God in making his promise to Abraham says, "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." It has the sense that this is going to go on deep into the future, more than simply a fulfillment in Joshua. That's before, in a more remote sense, a more remote indication that there should be a longevity to the land that exceeds what we see in the book of Joshua, as you go to the prophets, you see something even more.

Turn to the book of Amos. I'll give you a couple of moments to find the book of Amos. Just after the book of Hosea and Joel you'll come to the book of Amos 9, the very end of Amos. My mother-in-law who has nothing to do with the book of Joshua, by the way, used to tell our kids when they were small, she'd do a knock knock joke. "Knock knock. Who's there? Amos. Amos who? A mosquito bit me." And then she'd say, "Knock knock. Who's there? And he bit me again." Well, that has nothing to do with anything but I just, whenever I hear the name Amos that comes to my mind, and that joke has always irritated me, although I've never had the courage to say that directly to her face. But with that little bit of an aside there, I think you've had time to find Amos 9:14 which has nothing to do with gnats or mosquitoes or anything like that.

But here in Amos, written some, say, 500-600 years after the time of Joshua, we're actually making an important theological point here, hundreds of years after Joshua, look at what the prophet Amos delivers as the word of the Lord to the people of Israel. He says in verse 14, Amos 9:14, "I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, And they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them; They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, And make gardens and eat their fruit." Look at this, "I will also plant them on their land, And they will not again be rooted out from their land Which I have given them,' Says the LORD your God." The prophet says hundreds of years after Joshua, "There is land in the future of Israel." Therefore, getting back to Joshua 21, it cannot be that that silences the land promises forever to Israel. The context both before and after show that that's not the case. You have Amos saying, "Land is in your future," to the people of Israel, "Land, says the Lord your God."

Look at one more in Zechariah 8, which is just before Micah as the next-to-last book of the English Old Testament. Zechariah 8, which is written a few hundred years more after Amos. Zechariah 8:7 says, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; and I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.'" Multiple prophets and it's far more than just Amos and Zechariah, these passages were just particularly clear, state that there is a land in the future for the people of Israel. This is part of the reason why we believe that there will be a millennial kingdom on the earth where Christ reigns from Jerusalem for a period of 1,000 years and Israel is in their land and they are at peace and they have what God has promised them, fully given to them in a way that has not yet happened historically from the beginning of time.

Finally, just to wrap this point up, if you go to any Bible Atlas of any quality or of any size, you will find maps relating to the conquest of the land in Joshua that show that at the end of Joshua, Israel did not possess all the land that God had promised. I have three citations in my notes to "The Carta Bible Atlas, The Holman Bible Atlas, and Baker's Bible Atlas," all showing the same thing: here are big sections of the land that were not possessed at the end of Joshua. The point of all of this is that Joshua 21 does not mean what some of those amillennial friends say that it means and therefore we should not

back away or be discouraged from thinking that we are misrepresenting Scripture when we talk about a future for national Israel yet to come.

What is that passage saying, then? The Lord had fulfilled what he had promised to do up to that point but it should not be stretched beyond the author's intent to contradict the rest of biblical teaching. Think about it this way, here's an example that you'll clearly understand and relate to: God had given title to the land to Israel but they had not fully moved in yet. Those of you who have purchased a house or even rented a place, you sign the agreements and you get the key to the place that you now own or that you are going to rent. You have legal right over that area of real estate. You have legal right over that home. It belongs to you fully and completely, however, you have not yet moved in and taken possession of it. When a buyer closes the purchase of his house, he has the house but he's not in it. We all understand that from a common basic understanding of how real estate transactions work.

So at the end of Joshua, what we see is that God has given the land to Israel but they are not completely in it yet. That's all that Joshua 21 is saying. And as you read on in the book of Judges and in other places of Scripture, you see that they didn't take full possession of the land because they were disobedient. They backed away from the conflict. They allowed people to stay in the land that they could have won if they had only fought the fight that God told them to fight, and that is how we understand this possession of the land and how it relates to the future of Israel.

Now, next week, I'm not done yet, I'm saying next week and I know as soon as you hear that your mind shuts down, but we are truly not done yet because I want to, after all of this somewhat factual material, I want to give you something to take home and be able to sink your teeth into as you're thinking about these things in your heart. Next week, we're going to take a closer look at the spiritual lessons that we can learn from the book of Joshua and it's going to be a very rich study. I passed over all of the good stuff just for the sake of giving you the factual outline that I think is important for us to have. But for now let me say this, this really shapes us spiritually what I'm about to say and it all flows from this broad outline of history that we have looked at here this evening. If you have stayed with me through what was probably some kind of boring stuff, now the payoff comes for you. Now God is about to reward your faithfulness to Scripture here this evening. This, and I want you to listen. Not that you're not listening but I don't have my glasses on so I can't really see you. I have to choose between seeing you or seeing my notes. I choose my notes for your sake. This broad survey that we've had tonight, this broad survey that we've done starting in Genesis back last fall all the way through the present tonight, beloved, this shapes the way that you think about God. It shapes the way that you should think about God's promises; it shapes the way that you should think about going through difficult times in your life. It utterly, completely shapes it.

The book of Hebrews says that Abraham saw the promises from afar but he didn't get to personally experience them. This history promised to Abraham, seven centuries go by before Joshua enters into the land. That's a lot of generations coming and going, living and dying, without seeing the fulfillment of God's promises in their time. Listen to me:

God does what he says and he does it without fail, but God does it on his timetable, not ours. Many generations of Abraham's descendents had this promise in front of them, as it were, but they did not see it fulfilled in their lifetimes. They were born, they were raised in a home, they went through their adult life, they got ill and they died, and they had that promise and it was never fulfilled. But we do not measure the faithfulness of God according to the timetable and the chronology of our lifetimes. God is outside of time. He is outside of the scope of our life, and as we have talked many times and as we talked some on even this past Sunday about the purpose of the church, the purpose of the church and the purposes of the promises of God are ultimately that he would be glorified as he fulfills them. You have been conditioned over time through other teachers and through bad things that you've seen in books and all of that, and I get so sick of hearing charismatic teachers wanting to talk about how God has a breakthrough for you just ahead, and it conditions you to expect instant gratification from promises like Romans 8:28 that God works all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. That is entirely the wrong way for us to think about God and his promises. We may struggle and wonder how Romans 8:28 applies to us at any given time. We may not know what tomorrow holds, and it may seem really, really urgent to us that we get an answer right now. Sometimes God will do that for us. Sometimes we will sit and we will wait and a year goes by, and five years go by, and 10 years go by, and 20 years go by, and you're left saying, "Lord, how long?" Well, when that happens, we've got to come back to a right view of God's promises and the way that he works out his will.

God works out his will over time, over a long period of time, in a way that precedes us, and in a way that will live on after us, and so just like the Jews who heard the promises and saw them but never saw fulfillment, in those times where we pray and nothing changes, in those times where you pray and it seems like sometimes things get worse, not better, here's how you need to think about it: you and I both, we all need to realize that our desires and our expectations and our situation does not put a deadline on God. We are not to think that way about the promises of God. We are not to demand fulfillment of every promise that we might want to see fulfilled in our lifetime.

How are we to think about it then? Simply this, simply this, beloved: here is where everything extraneous gets stripped away from faith and it is brought down to its bare pure essence: in the Scriptures, we have God's promise that he will deliver us to heaven; in the Scriptures we have the promise that he will cause all things to work together for good to those of us who love God and are called according to his purpose. We have the promise and, beloved, if we have the promise of God, we have enough. That's all that we need to satisfy our souls. We have the trustworthy word of God that he knows us by name, he has promised us in the Scripture that he is going to do good for us, and that is meant to sustain our soul all the way until we get to heaven to be with him, and that's enough, beloved. I say it gently. I say it with compassion but we must say this clearly: the promise of God is enough to satisfy the believing heart. We do not have to have a breakthrough in order to believe God. We do not have to have some kind of miraculous deliverance of health or money or whatever the circumstance may be. We don't have to see in our lifetime, and certainly not by tomorrow at 10 a.m., we don't have to see it turn

the way we want in order for us to be completely confident, completely serene, completely at peace because we have the promise of God and as we look at the whole scope of redemptive history, we say, "God certainly fulfills his promise in his time." And as we said on Sunday, we are part of something that's greater than we are. There is a greater purpose at work than our lifetimes can encompass and therefore we tap in, as it were, we tap into the timeless accomplishment of the promises of God; we realize that he has brought us into his kingdom, brought us into his church, brought us into the realm of his Son, and therefore we belong to that realm even if we don't see and possess it right now as we stand here today. And because we own that promise, because God has brought us into the timeless realm of his kingdom, we no longer have to have all the answers in this life. We no longer have to have all the solutions in this life. God has promised and that's enough.

For centuries, Israel looked at those Old Testament Scriptures, for 400 years in slavery in Egypt, "O God, where is the promise?" Generation comes and goes and comes and goes, and comes and goes. Would they have been justified to say, "God is never going to keep his promise"? No, not only would they not have been justified, they would have been wrong. Well, beloved, all of this becomes very personal when you are tempted to impatience in your life's circumstances, in your unfulfilled desires, and the threats to your well-being. So many times we enjoy the faithfulness of God and we get to see it played out in our lifetimes. This church and my opportunity to be a pastor to you is a fulfillment in my lifetime of his promise, not to make me a pastor but of desires that were on my heart for decades before fulfillment ever came. But it was decades, decades of waiting. So as we see these things in Scripture, as we start to understand these things, we have to adjust our sense of time and adjust our sense of expectation to the perfect, omnipotent, omniscient timetable of God and say, "I have his promise. That's all I need."

Look at Hebrews as we close. Hebrews 11:39 says, "all these," after reviewing the heroes of the faith throughout Hebrews 11, Hebrews 11:39, "all these having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised." Some of them were stoned. Some of them were sawn in two. They were tempted. They were put to death with the sword. Where is the promise of God when your neck is being offered up to an executioner because of your faithfulness to Christ? You see, we're not to view God's promises from a strictly earthbound perspective. We're supposed to love him and trust him so completely and so serenely that even if everything earthly is arrayed against us, we are unmoved and unshaken in our confidence because our confidence and our desire is not in our circumstances, our confidence and our desire is found in this blessed book and that changes your entire perspective on life. Israel waited for centuries, we can wait a few decades. The heroes in Hebrews 11, some of them, were literally, their top half was separated from their bottom half by a saw. We can suffer and trust at the same time.

So when ear ticklers come and promise you breakthroughs, don't be deceived. God doesn't work that way. God works out his purposes over time and we are content to rest in him, to wait on him, knowing that when his fulfillment comes, the victory will be utterly complete like it was in the book of Joshua. Praise be to this great God whom we can trust so completely that if we just have his word, we have enough.

Let's pray together.

Father, that is exactly how we want to trust you as individuals and as a church. Father, separate us from our love of this world. Father, give us patience and strength and provide for us in times of need simply to wait on you, Father, for the fulfillment of the desires of our heart. We thank you that we see your daily provision so faithfully and we often forget to give you thanks for it. Father, day by day you provide for us and in those situations where we sense a lack, Father, let us put our hands over our mouth and be silent before you and simply with a trusting heart, come before you and say, "Lord, I have your promise that you will be faithful to me and, Lord, that promise is enough to satisfy my restless heart." Give us grace that we might be people who love you and trust you enough to simply take you at your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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