

JOSHUA—WEEK 11

FAILURE



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A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Joshua, Week 11 — Failure
The Cover Picture is by Jean Fouquet (1420–1477)
On display in Paris at the Bibliotheque nationale de France.

The Israelis' strength to conquer suddenly wanes. Time after time, they either can't drive out the Canaanites, or they delegate the task.

This is related to individual vs. collective responsibility.

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1 Joshua 15:13–19

Now to Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a share among the children of Judah, according to the commandment of the LORD to Joshua, namely, Kirjath Arba, which is Hebron (Arba was the father of Anak). Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak from there: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak. Then he went up from there to the inhabitants of Debir (formerly the name of Debir was Kirjath Sepher).

And Caleb said, “He who attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give Achsah my daughter as wife.” So Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife. Now it was so, when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. So she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you wish?” She answered, “Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water.” So he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

Hoo-boy. An arranged marriage? Caleb’s daughter *Achsah* as a prize? This “collective,” “people not as individuals” theme just won’t let up.

Caleb is all full of the confidence of faith, right? Yet now he wants to pawn off the task of conquering Kirjath Sepher. If one guy conquers the city, everyone benefits, but one guy gets the prize and *Achsah* pays the price. Actually, she is the price. She gets a husband whether she likes him or not.

This might be best for “everyone” collectively, but at an individual level, it’s got issues. To the western mind this almost looks like human trafficking. Remember Joshua 14:10–11?

And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in.

Could it be that Caleb’s daughter’s attractiveness counts as his *strength*?

All this bargaining has put *Achsah* in a position to make demands, but only of her father. First, she has to persuade her new husband *to ask her father for a field*.

But once that’s done, she ready to make the big ask. When she *dismounted from her donkey*, that signified, in the lingo of the day, that she wants something. So Caleb asks, “*What do you wish?*”

Her demand for springs is bold. Springs are precious. Caleb allocating them to her is huge.

His sons just lost out.

This shows a relationship between collective responsibility and individual responsibility.

Here, the collective feels its debt to the individual.

2 Joshua 15:20–63

This was the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families:

The cities at the limits of the tribe of the children of Judah, toward the border of Edom in the South, were Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, Hazor, Hadattah, Kerioth, Hezron (which is Hazor), Amam, Shema, Moladah, Hazar Gaddah, Heshmon, Beth Pelet, Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Bizjothjah, Baalah, Ijim, Ezem, Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah, Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon: all the cities are twenty-nine, with their villages.

In the lowland: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, Zanoah, En Gannim, Tappuah, Enam, Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, Sharaim, Adithaim, Gederah, and Gederothaim: fourteen cities with their villages; Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal Gad, Dilean, Mizpah, Joktheel, Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, Cabbon, Lahmas, Kithlish, Gederoth, Beth Dagon, Naamah, and Makkedah: sixteen cities with their villages; Libnah, Ether, Ashan, Jiphtah, Ashnah, Nezib, Keilah, Achzib, and Mareshah: nine cities with their villages; Ekron, with its towns and villages; from Ekron to the sea, all that lay near Ashdod, with their villages; Ashdod with its towns and villages, Gaza with its towns and villages—as far as the Brook of Egypt and the Great Sea with its coastline.

And in the mountain country: Shamir, Jattir, Sochoh, Dannah, Kirjath Sannah (which is Debir), Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim, Goshen, Holon, and Giloh: eleven cities with their villages; Arab, Dumah, Eshean, Janum, Beth Tappuah, Aphekah, Humtah, Kirjath Arba (which is Hebron), and Zior: nine cities with their villages; Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah: ten cities with their villages; Halhul, Beth Zur, Gedor, Maarath, Beth Anoth, and Eltekon: six cities with their villages; Kirjath Baal (which is Kirjath Jearim) and Rabbah: two cities with their villages.

In the wilderness: Beth Arabah, Middin, Secacah, Nibshan, the City of Salt, and En Gedi: six cities with their villages.

As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day.

Time out. They “could not” (לֹא יָכֹּחַ “Lo Yakh-lu”) drive them out? What’s going on here?

The Hebrew is simple. “Lo” means not, and the BDB lexicon defines “Yakh-lu” as “*be able*, to do a thing, whether ability means physical, moral, constitutional, or dependent on external authority.” The problem is constitutional. Physically, they could do it.

But they quit.

With the introduction of Burmese pythons, the Everglades now has two apex predators. When an alligator battles a python, one of them dies. They don’t quit.

Even in the unheard-of situation that both survive, one would still *drive out* the other.

3 Joshua 16:1–10 (ESV)

The allotment of the people of Joseph went from the Jordan by Jericho, east of the waters of Jericho, into the wilderness, going up from Jericho into the hill country to Bethel. Then going from Bethel to Luz, it passes along to Ataroth, the territory of the Archites. Then it goes down westward to the territory of the Japhletites, as far as the territory of Lower Beth-horon, then to Gezer, and it ends at the sea.

The people of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, received their inheritance.

The territory of the people of Ephraim by their clans was as follows: the boundary of their inheritance on the east was Ataroth-addar as far as Upper Beth-horon, and the boundary goes from there to the sea. On the north is Michmethath. Then on the east the boundary turns around toward Taanath-shiloh and passes along beyond it on the east to Janoah, then it goes down from Janoah to Ataroth and to Naarah, and touches Jericho, ending at the Jordan. From Tappuah the boundary goes westward to the brook Kanah and ends at the sea. Such is the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Ephraim by their clans, together with the towns that were set apart for the people of Ephraim within the inheritance of the Manassites, all those towns with their villages. However, they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites have lived in the midst of Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor.

This time it doesn't say they "could not" drive them out; it just says they did not. The verb is simply "drive," preceded by "not" (לֹא הִרְיִשׁוּ "Lo Hor-e-shu"). There's no mention of what they could or couldn't do.

As noted in the previous lesson, "could not," was just a failure of the will, not of the physical ability granted by God.

But the words here are different. This time the failure is greater. It's one thing to lack the will and the faith to complete a task. It's quite another to turn it down in the first place.

The report here is brief, but it sounds like the Ephraimites simply decided to make the Canaanites slaves instead of driving them out. We aren't told whether this was in response to some kind of negotiation.

But the important thing is it doesn't seem to be in response to how battles were going.

The Ephraimites didn't even try.

These failures are going to come back to haunt Israel, for two reasons.

First, the long-term consequence of servitude isn't more servitude; it's resentment. The Canaanites will be a great headache in the long run.

But the bigger problem is with the Israelites themselves. While servitude isn't permanent, the attitudes of disobedience and quitting are.

Israel is developing deadly habits.

4 Joshua 17:1–13 (ESV)

Then allotment was made to the people of Manasseh, for he was the firstborn of Joseph. To Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, were allotted Gilead and Bashan, because he was a man of war. And allotments were made to the rest of the people of Manasseh by their clans, Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hopher, and Shemida. These were the male descendants of Manasseh the son of Joseph, by their clans.

Now Zelophehad the son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, had no sons, but only daughters, and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They approached Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the leaders and said, “The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance along with our brothers.” So according to the mouth of the LORD he gave them an inheritance among the brothers of their father. Thus there fell to Manasseh ten portions, besides the land of Gilead and Bashan, which is on the other side of the Jordan, because the daughters of Manasseh received an inheritance along with his sons. The land of Gilead was allotted to the rest of the people of Manasseh.

The territory of Manasseh reached from Asher to Michmethath, which is east of Shechem. Then the boundary goes along southward to the inhabitants of En-tappuah. The land of Tappuah belonged to Manasseh, but the town of Tappuah on the boundary of Manasseh belonged to the people of Ephraim. Then the boundary went down to the brook Kanah. These cities, to the south of the brook, among the cities of Manasseh, belong to Ephraim. Then the boundary of Manasseh goes on the north side of the brook and ends at the sea, the land to the south being Ephraim’s and that to the north being Manasseh’s, with the sea forming its boundary. On the north Asher is reached, and on the east Issachar. Also in Issachar and in Asher Manasseh had Beth-shean and its villages, and Ibleam and its villages, and the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, and the inhabitants of En-dor and its villages, and the inhabitants of Taanach and its villages, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; the third is Naphath. Yet the people of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. Now when the people of Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.

We’re back to “could not.” Yet the people of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities.

The line, “when the people of Israel grew strong,” is the problem. They’re counting on their own strength.

The news of 2022 provides a good example of failure to achieve a military objective. The invasion of Ukraine has not gone well for Russia, and if, as many expect, they abandon the mission, it will be genuine failure.

But, presumably, it’s a failure of planning rooted in overconfidence rather than a true inability. Russia committed a fraction of their forces and set up poor logistical pipelines. The resistance surprised them.

Manasseh has no such excuse. God told them what to expect.

5 Joshua 17:14–18

Then the children of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, “Why have you given us only one lot and one share to inherit, since we are a great people, inasmuch as the LORD has blessed us until now?”

So Joshua answered them, “If you are a great people, then go up to the forest country and clear a place for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the giants, since the mountains of Ephraim are too confined for you.”

But the children of Joseph said, “The mountain country is not enough for us; and all the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, both those who are of Beth Shean and its towns and those who are of the Valley of Jezreel.”

And Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh—saying, “You are a great people and have great power; you shall not have only one lot, but the mountain country shall be yours. Although it is wooded, you shall cut it down, and its farthest extent shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots and are strong.”

Seriously? Take a look at the allotment that *Ephraim and Manasseh* are complaining about.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_Tribes_of_Israel#/media/File:12_Tribes_of_Israel_Map.svg

No other tribe gets as much land. Judah is the only one that even comes close. Their pathetic whining is a great example of the many ways that the tribes “could not” do what they actually “could” do if they were serious.

Joshua does a beautiful job of not catering to this nonsense. He doesn’t hint that the task before them is easy. He even emphasizes how hard it will be when he says, “*you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots and are strong.*”

But this isn’t simply a lack of faith. They don’t even understand the promise.

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. — Joshua 1:5

The LORD never said this would be easy.

We’re not all that different. Jesus warned us that following Him wouldn’t be easy. Yet we act like the going should never get tough. We forget that challenges are an essential part of our walk.

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” — Matthew 5:11–12

We actually need this.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Does society owe a debt to those who contributed?
2. Do we quit on God's promises?
3. What deadly habits are we in danger of developing?
4. What's an example of failing by counting on one's own strength?
5. What trial has helped you grow?

Items for prayer: