

Tragic Trends (Joshua 15-17; Luke 9:62 and Philippians 3:12-13)

12-Jul-26

Joshua 15:1-19

Allotment for Judah

15 The allotment for the tribe of Judah, according to its clans, extended down to the territory of Edom, to the Desert of Zin in the extreme south.

² Their southern boundary started from the bay at the southern end of the Dead Sea, ³ crossed south of Scorpion Pass, continued on to Zin and went over to the south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it ran past Hezron up to Addar and curved around to Karka. ⁴ It then passed along to Azmon and joined the Wadi of Egypt, ending at the Mediterranean Sea. This is their southern boundary.

⁵ The eastern boundary is the Dead Sea as far as the mouth of the Jordan.

The northern boundary started from the bay of the sea at the mouth of the Jordan, ⁶ went up to Beth Hoglah and continued north of Beth Arabah to the Stone of Bohan son of Reuben. ⁷ The boundary then went up to Debir from the Valley of Achor and turned north to Gilgal, which faces the Pass of Adummim south of the gorge. It continued along to the waters of En Shemesh and came out at En Rogel. ⁸ Then it ran up the Valley of Ben Hinnom along the southern slope of the Jebusite city (that is, Jerusalem). From there it climbed to the top of the hill west of the Hinnom Valley at the northern end of the Valley of Rephaim. ⁹ From the hilltop the boundary headed toward the spring of the waters of Nephtoah, came out at the towns of Mount Ephron and went down toward Baalah (that is, Kiriath Jearim). ¹⁰ Then it curved westward from Baalah to Mount Seir, ran along the northern slope of Mount Jearim (that is, Kesalon), continued down to Beth Shemesh and crossed to Timnah. ¹¹ It went to the northern slope of Ekron, turned toward Shikkeron, passed along to Mount Baalah and reached Jabneel. The boundary ended at the sea.

¹² The western boundary is the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea.

These are the boundaries around the people of Judah by their clans.

¹³ In accordance with the Lord's command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion in Judah—Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) ¹⁴ From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites—Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi, the sons of Anak. ¹⁵ From there he marched against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher). ¹⁶ And Caleb said, "I will give my daughter Aksah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures

Kiriath Sepher.” ¹⁷ Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Aksah to him in marriage.

¹⁸ One day when she came to Othniel, she urged him to ask her father for a field. When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What can I do for you?”

¹⁹ She replied, “Do me a special favour. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me also springs of water.” So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

Joshua 15:63

⁶³ Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah.

Joshua 16:1-10

Allotment for Ephraim and Manasseh

16 The allotment for Joseph began at the Jordan, east of the springs of Jericho, and went up from there through the desert into the hill country of Bethel. ² It went on from Bethel (that is, Luz), crossed over to the territory of the Arkites in Ataroth, ³ descended westward to the territory of the Japhletites as far as the region of Lower Beth Horon and on to Gezer, ending at the Mediterranean Sea.

⁴ So Manasseh and Ephraim, the descendants of Joseph, received their inheritance.

⁵ This was the territory of Ephraim, according to its clans:

The boundary of their inheritance went from Ataroth Addar in the east to Upper Beth Horon ⁶ and continued to the Mediterranean Sea. From Mikmethath on the north it curved eastward to Taanath Shiloh, passing by it to Janoah on the east. ⁷ Then it went down from Janoah to Ataroth and Naarah, touched Jericho and came out at the Jordan. ⁸ From Tappuah the border went west to the Kanah Ravine and ended at the Mediterranean Sea. This was the inheritance of the tribe of the Ephraimites, according to its clans. ⁹ It also included all the towns and their villages that were set aside for the Ephraimites within the inheritance of the Manassites.

¹⁰ They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labour.

Joshua 17:3-6

³ Now Zelophehad son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons but only daughters, whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah. ⁴ They went to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders and said, “The Lord commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our relatives.” So Joshua gave them an inheritance along with the brothers of their father, according to the Lord’s command. ⁵ Manasseh’s share consisted of ten tracts of land besides Gilead and Bashan east of the Jordan, ⁶ because the daughters of the tribe of Manasseh received an inheritance among the sons. The land of Gilead belonged to the rest of the descendants of Manasseh.

Joshua 17:12-18

¹² Yet the Manassites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region. ¹³ However, when the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labour but did not drive them out completely.

¹⁴ The people of Joseph said to Joshua, “Why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance? We are a numerous people, and the Lord has blessed us abundantly.”

¹⁵ “If you are so numerous,” Joshua answered, “and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites.”

¹⁶ The people of Joseph replied, “The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the plain have chariots fitted with iron, both those in Beth Shan and its settlements and those in the Valley of Jezreel.”

¹⁷ But Joshua said to the tribes of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh—“You are numerous and very powerful. You will have not only one allotment ¹⁸ but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours; though the Canaanites have chariots fitted with iron and though they are strong, you can drive them out.”

Luke 9:62

⁶² Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

Philippians 3:12-13

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...

There are **Bibles** in front of you

And a sermon **outline**

I encourage to have your **Bibles opened** up at **Joshua chapter 15 through to the end of chapter 17...**

Introduction/Trends

Every generation has its trends.

[Slide-Trends]

Today we see trends like...

- **AI (Artificial Intelligence)**
- **Social Media Influencers**
- **Affiliate Marketing** - where marketing people, known as affiliates, promote a merchant's products or services and earn commission
- And **Platinum Rule** - one I came across this week

None of these trends are automatically good or bad.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) – is computer technology that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence and can be a useful tool to obtain information and save people time by doing tasks for them – but it can also be

used to deceive people, it can give wrong information – and could perform unethical tasks – and even do people out of their jobs!

Social Media Influencers can point people towards truth and improving their lifestyle or they can point people towards unethical lifestyle choices or towards selfishness and over indulgence.

With **Affiliate Marketing** – Marketing people can point people towards honest business ventures or towards greed - and they can even scam people out of their money!

And the **Platinum Rule** it is a modern-day replacement to Jesus' Golden Rule. Jesus' Golden Rule is “*do unto others as you would have them do to you*” (Matthew 7:12) whereas the Platinum Rule says “*treat others as they want to be treated*”. This might sound attractive but people might want to be treated in ways that do not line up with God's Word – such as they want approval for their lifestyle choices that disobey God's Word – they might want help with choices that would cause them physical, emotional or spiritual harm!

The real issue isn't the trend itself.

[Slide-Issue]

The real issue is this: ***Does the trend conform to God's will, or does the trend pull people away from obedience to God?***

Obedience has ALWAYS been the issue for God's people throughout the Bible!

Context

[Slide-Context]

When we come to **Joshua 15–17**, the 12 tribes of Israel appear to be enjoying great success.

In Chapter 15 we see the land allotted to the tribe of **Judah**.

Judah is the first tribe west of the Jordan to receive its allotted territory because of its prominence among the other tribes and because the promised Messiah, Jesus, - **the Lion of Judah** - would eventually come through the tribe of Judah.

In Chapter 16 & 17 we see the land allotted to the tribes of Joseph's sons – **Ephraim and Manasseh**.

All the place names in chapters 15-17 might seem tedious to us, but it certainly was not tedious to those who possessed this land (David Guzik)

The land is being divided.

God's promises are being fulfilled.

But beneath the surface **we begin to notice some tragic trends**.

Again and again we read that **God's people did not completely drive out the inhabitants of the land**.

It seemed like a small compromise at the time, but those compromises would have devastating consequences for generations to come.

[Slide-obedience]

God's people drift into compromise when they settle for less than wholehearted obedience.

Our **1st point** – “**Don't compromise – by settling instead of conquering**”

[Slide-1st point - 3 statements]

Don't Compromise – by Settling Instead of Conquering (Joshua 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13)

In Chapters 15, 16 and 17 – **we have three almost identical statements.**

- 1st - *Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem...* (15:63). In fact the Jebusites kept living in Jerusalem until King David finally captured Jerusalem centuries later (300-400 years) (2 Samuel 5:6-10)
- 2nd - *They [Ephraim] did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer...* (16:10).
- 3rd - *The Manassites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region. However, when the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labour but did not drive them out completely.* (17:12-13).

Notice the **progression**.

Tribe of Judah

"Could not."

The city of Jerusalem was fortified and looked too difficult to capture!

Tribe of Ephraim

"Did not."

Now inability becomes unwillingness.

Tribe of Manasseh

"They were not able to because the Canaanites were determined." So instead of driving out the Canaanites they used them as forced labour.

Now - compromise has become a choice.

This becomes one of the great tragedies in the next book of the Bible – the Book of Judges!

Where - instead of removing the idolatry and worship of false gods - Israel lives beside it and with it – and even joins in with the idolatry and worship of false gods!

Instead of influencing the nations around them - the nations influence Israel!

[Slide-compromise]

Small compromises rarely stay small!

Application

For us...

[Slide-Application]

Christians don't abandon Jesus overnight – it just creeps up....

- **Our prayer life fades slowly...** We move from regularly enjoying fellowship with God to only praying when we want something.

Praising God becomes rare. Confessing to God disappears. Thanking God is forgotten. Eventually we conclude, "***Prayer doesn't really make much difference, what's the point?***" and we stop praying altogether

- **Our Bible reading declines** – It moves from daily to occasional; from occasional to optional; and then disappears altogether.
- **Our commitment to gathering with God's people weakens.** Weekly worship becomes occasional, then limited to Easter and Christmas, and finally - not at all.
- **Our attitude to sin changes.** What once troubled our conscience becomes acceptable. We justify it by saying, "***Everyone does it.***" Little by little, we stop resisting the very things God calls us to leave behind.
- **Godly influences fade. The company we keep changes.** We spend less time with Christians who encourage us to follow Jesus and more time with people who don't. Slowly their priorities become our priorities, and without realizing it, we're drifting away from Jesus. ***Bad company corrupts good character*** (1 Corinthians 15:33)

That is how compromise works. It doesn't happen all at once. It creeps in quietly, one small step at a time, until what was once unthinkable becomes normal!

Joshua 15-17 teaches us **partial obedience is still disobedience**

We must continually press on - in faith and obedience!

(pause)

[Slide-2nd point]

2nd point – **Choosing Comfort instead of Faith** – that's Joshua 17:14-18

Choosing Comfort Instead of Faith (Joshua 17:14-18)

Joseph's descendants complain to Joshua – v14 - "*We are a numerous people, and the Lord has blessed us abundantly*"

In other words, '*we're special – we're entitled!*'

Joshua's answer is essentially (v15): "*If you're so numerous—and the hill country is too small; then clear the forest; and take the land!*"

But they come back with – v16 – "*We want more land...*"

Being entitled – they want more land - without any effort!

And they are afraid of the Canaanites with their iron chariots!

But - vv17-18 - Joshua refuses to reward their complaining. Instead, he reminds them that if they really are a great people, then they should trust God's promise, clear the forests, and drive out the Canaanites—even though the Canaanites have iron chariots.

What's required of Joseph's descendants is for them to believe in God's promise from when they first entered the Promised Land – when God said that He would give them the land and He would go before them and that the battle belonged to Him!

Faith requires action – and that means work is required!

God had given them the land.

But - they still had to possess it!

They need to keep going forward trusting in God!

In our NT reading from Luke 9:62

[Slide-Luke 9:62]

Jesus says to His disciples – and to us: "***No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom.***"

Jesus' disciples – including us – must not keep looking over their shoulder.

They keep moving forward in faith...

You can't drive a car forward whilst looking in the rearview mirror!

Application

For us - we can be the same as Joseph's descendants...

[Slide-Application]

- Sometimes we want - **victory without a battle**
- Sometimes we want - **spiritual maturity without discipline**
- Sometimes we want - **a godly character without any trials**
- Sometimes we want - **patience without ever having to wait**
- Sometimes we want – **God's blessing without being obedient**
- Sometimes we want – **comfort without having faith in a God who will bring us through any discomfort we face!**

God grows us through our faithful perseverance!

(pause)

3rd Point – God wants wholehearted faith not half-hearted living – that's

Joshua 15:13-19 and 17:3-6

[Slide-3rd point]

God Wants Wholehearted Faith not Half-hearted Living (Joshua 15:13-19; 17:3-6)

Caleb interrupts these sad tragic trends.

At 85 years old Caleb still wants the hill country of Hebron – the inheritance that was promised to him (v13)

Caleb wants the very place that is filled with giants – three Anakites called Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai, the sons of Anak (v14)

Caleb asks for the most difficult assignment – and v16 – he offers his daughter

Aksah in marriage to the man who captures the hill city of Kiriath Sepher.

And up steps Caleb's nephew – **Othniel** – v17 – to accept the challenge.

Othniel later becomes the **first Judge of Israel** (Judges 3)

And notice - **Caleb's daughter Aksah** has that same wholehearted faith as her father

Vv18-19 – One day, Aksah asks boldly for springs of water because the dry land she has been given in the Negev desert region is useless without water!

Aksah is asking for resources to make her inheritance fruitful, whereas Joseph's descendants are asking for a different or larger inheritance because they don't want the hard work of taking possession of what God has already given them.

You see - Caleb's family isn't passive. They gratefully receive what God has given and seek to make the most of it. They believe God's promises and press on in faith.

Caleb's wholehearted faith has influenced the next generation!

Caleb is not the only example of wholehearted faith in these chapters.

In Joshua 17:3-6 we meet the **daughters of Zelophehad**—Malah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah.

Zelophehad - their father - had died without any sons, but years earlier God had declared through Moses that these daughters were to receive an inheritance among their father's clan (Numbers 27).

The daughters remembered God's promise.

They believed God's promise.

And now they came to Joshua to claim God's promise.

They weren't being greedy.

They were simply saying, "***God promised us an inheritance, and we trust Him to keep His word.***"

While others were settling for less than God had promised, these women were confidently asking for exactly what God had promised.

Notice the similarities here.

Caleb courageously fights for God's promises.

Aksah boldly asks for what she needs to enjoy God's blessing.

And the daughters of Zelophehad confidently claim the inheritance God had already promised.

Wholehearted faith doesn't sit back—it believes God's Word and acts upon it.

Whereas...

Compare Caleb and his family and the daughters of Zelophehad...

With the rest of the tribe of **Judah** who compromise and settle in the land instead of completely conquering it!

And compare the tribes of **Ephraim and Manasseh** who choose comfort instead of faith!

Caleb and his family and the daughters of Zelophehad - keep trusting in God's promises and acting on them – whereas – those three tribes begin settling and remain inactive.

Just as Caleb and the daughters of Zelophehad kept their eyes on the inheritance God had promised, we as Christians - must keep pressing on because we have an even greater inheritance kept in heaven through Jesus!

In our 2nd NT reading from Philippians 3:12-13

The Apostle Paul sounds very much like Caleb.

Paul says – v12 - "*I press on...*"

And v13 "*I forget what is behind and straining forward to what is ahead...*"

[Slide-Pressing On]

What lies ahead for Caleb is his land inheritance

What lies ahead for Paul is his heavenly inheritance

Neither Caleb nor Paul believed they had arrived.

Both kept pursuing God's promises.

The Christian life is never about coasting - It is about pressing on to the end.

Conclusion

[Slide-Conclusion]

Joshua 15–17 asks: What trend are we setting?

Are we people who:

- settle?

- complain?
- compromise?

Or are we people who:

- trust God?
- Persevere in obedience?
- press on in faith?

The tragedy wasn't the strength of the Canaanites.

The tragedy was that God's people became satisfied with partial obedience.

They settled for less than God had promised.

They tolerated what God had commanded them to drive out.

They stopped pressing forward.

Whereas...

Caleb didn't.

Caleb's daughter Aksah didn't.

The daughters of Zelophehad didn't.

Paul didn't.

And by God's grace, neither should we.

[Slide-Refuse Trends]

So let us refuse the tragic trends of – compromise and disobedience in the Old Testament

Let's refuse these modern tragic trends

- Instead of relying on **Artificial Intelligence**, let's first seek the true wisdom of **God in his Word**.
- Instead of being **Social Media Influencers** – let's be **Jesus Influencers**

- Instead of **Affiliate Marketers** – let's be **Evangelists** – sharing the Good News of Jesus – that His death brings forgiveness – that is resurrection brings eternal life – to all who repent and believe!
- And instead of the **Platinum Rule** – let's stick to Jesus' **Golden Rule** – and **do to others what you would have them do to you!**

Joshua 15–17 reminds us that the Christian life isn't about settling. It's about pressing on.

So let us keep trusting Christ, keep obeying Christ, and keep pressing on until the day we receive the inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

[Slide-Philippians 3:12-14]

Let me finish with Paul's Words from Philippians 3:12-14

"Not that I have already obtained all this... but I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Let's pray... Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness in keeping every promise You make. Thank You for giving us an even greater inheritance through Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Forgive us for the times we have settled for partial obedience, made excuses, or allowed the influences of the world to shape us more than Your Word. Give us hearts like Caleb—hearts that follow You wholeheartedly and trust Your promises. By Your Holy Spirit, help us to press on in following Jesus each day, not looking back, but fixing our eyes on Him. May our lives encourage the next generation to love You, obey You, and remain faithful until the day we receive our full inheritance in Your eternal kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.