

This whole time of battle in obtaining the land of Canaan took seven years. Joshua and Israel were faithful. They were constant. They were not deterred over that great length of time. They were not disheartened when they faced the temporary failure at Ai. Patience and fortitude, courage (be strong and of good courage, the very words which were part of the commission of Joshua) characterized not only him but all of Israel. This must be so for us. Look at how verse 23 ends. No matter how unpleasant spiritual warfare may be, a joyful expectation awaits us, that is, the land rests from war.

So we labor, fighting, fighting for the glory of God, fighting against sin, especially within ourselves, fighting to defeat the enemies of our God without compromise, faithful to Him, Who is our God and our Savior. What a solid foundation on which to stand! God is our hope, God is our strength! What are forces mightier and stronger than we? What does it mean if our enemy has greater number than we? We have God on our side. How hopeless is the case of those who do not have God, who are the objects of His wrath! But, how sure can it be for those who walk in His confidence! People of God, walk in that confidence, fight in that assurance! The victory is promised to us before we fight, so let us fight with confidence!

Let us pray.

Our Father, we are weak. We admit it. We become discouraged; we let our hands hang down to our knees. But Thou art our strength. Encourage us, keep us faithful, help us to walk in the consciousness of Thee our God and of all of Thy promises. Then may we look at any difficulty and every foe and see how small and insignificant they are in comparison to Thee. Strengthen Thou our faith by Thy promises. Forgive the sins that we have committed in speaking and bearing this Thy Word. Forgive our sins, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

September 28, 1986 *Responsibility Toward the Remaining Canaanites*
No. 2287 *Rev. Ron Van Overloop*

It is good that we be reminded periodically of just how many blessings God has given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is good to consider some of the depths of the riches of His grace and of the greatness of His love. This is good, I say, because otherwise we become lethargic in our pursuit of those blessings of God. We become lethargic in our fighting against the sins that would keep us from being able to enjoy those blessings.

In Joshua 13 the chief thought is the Word of God coming to Joshua concerning the responsibilities of the children of Israel toward the Canaanites who remained yet in that land. There are other items mentioned in Joshua 13: the responsibility of Joshua to divide the land among the nine and one-half tribes that remained; the reference to and description of the portion that Moses had given to the two and one-half tribes which remained on the other side of Jordan; and the double reference to the fact that no geographic inheritance was to be given to Levi. All of that, however, is submissive to the key idea that the children of Israel and Joshua faced a great responsibility toward those Canaanites that yet remained. It seems that the standing armies which were existent within the land of Canaan had at this point been all destroyed. The chief cities had been conquered. The smaller villages and the other people who were not in the army of their land yet remained there. That was the problem.

It is rather interesting that the chapter begins with the note that Joshua was old and stricken in years. Yet, God says to him that although he is old and stricken in years, there remaineth very much land to be possessed. Then God goes on to delineate the land that yet remained. He marks out the borders which were to be the extension of the land of Canaan. Now, the question should arise in our minds, why does God approach Joshua with words concerning Joshua's age and feebleness while at the same time giving to Joshua and the children of Israel the command to divide the land?

First, let us note that Joshua's role as leader over the children of Israel in the five to seven years that they were entering into and conquering the major portions of the land of Canaan had apparently taken a very strenuous toll on Joshua. We can well estimate his age at approximately 85. Although he is not going to die until he is 110, yet at this age the years and the responsibilities have taken their toll upon him. God notes that fact even while He places before him new responsibilities.

We can learn that our God, even when He gives us responsibilities to obey Him in all of His law, is very mindful of our weaknesses. God knows our infirmities. He might know that we are unfit to complete such a strenuous task, but that does not mean our responsibilities are over. He gives us other responsibilities. He may take us from the front line. Though we be placed in less important roles, that is, less in the eyes of men, yet when God gives us a responsibility it is no less important. We still have a calling, we still have responsibilities, we still are answerable to God.

There are men who have been for most of their lives active in the ministry of the Word or have taken important places in the leadership of God's people as elders or deacons in the church. When they grow older, they no longer are as active or on the forefront. That does not mean they are no longer important. They still have responsibilities. Chief, it seems to me, is that of prayer. Now they have time to pray. Now they have the experience and the wisdom with which to pray. They must pray for all of those who are so active and busy in the work that they themselves once did. That is one reason, I believe, why God notes Joshua's age and feebleness.

Also God notes this for Joshua's sake and for our sake so that we remember that Joshua, though he is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, is just that — a type. Therefore he has many limitations. He is not the reality. He is not the Savior Jesus Christ. He is Joshua of the old dispensation. So Joshua must be put into the proper place of being a type, a glorious example of the Lord Jesus Christ, but still a type.

God gives to Joshua here not the responsibility to fight and to conquer, but to divide the land of Canaan among the nine and one-half tribes.

It is principally to be his duty. He is to be assisted by Eleazar the priest. Also, there is to be a committee of observers made up of the chief men of each of the tribes. But Joshua is the one who is given in this chapter the ultimate responsibility. That is fitting. He is the one who is clothed with divine authority as Israel's head. He is the best fitted, therefore, for this job. He is the one who has the confidence of all the members of the congregation. Someone else would not have the confidence of the congregation that he would be doing it right and fair. After all, Joshua is the one whose voice the sun and the moon obeyed. When he makes the decision, each of the tribes and each of the families among the tribes of the children of Israel are not going to challenge his voice. So Joshua is given this responsibility of dividing the land.

In verses 2-6 God lists some of the remote regions of the land of Canaan that were still occupied by the heathen. God does that purposefully because He wants to inform the people and also to stir them up. He wants them to be aware of the extent of the land that they were to be given. He did not want them ignorant of how great His blessings to them were. It is probable that some of the children of Israel were ignorant of the extent of the land. God through Joshua acquaints them of all that remains so that they might be affected, first of all, by the extent of the goodness of God. What an extensive portion of land is given to them! How great is God's love to them, and therefore how ready they must be to love and obey a God who gives them so great a blessing! Also, God sets this before them so that they can be jealous of those who are in the land that will belong to them or that really in principle is theirs. Then they will seek to obtain that rightful inheritance and their attitude toward the inhabitants of their land would not be one of making agreements.

The children of Israel are urged to keep the posture of war. They must keep a fighting spirit and not take their ease or become lethargic and satisfied with what they have. That is the lesson that God gives to us too. That was my point in the introduction. It is good that God sets before us through the preaching of the Word some of the glories of the heavenly inheritance that are ours. It is good that God sets before us the perfection of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, what it means to be like unto Him in all things. It is good that God sets before us how great and exten-

sive His blessings can be to us so that we don't become lethargic, so that we never become self-satisfied as churches, as individuals, as congregations and as families.

We are encouraged to keep up the fight. We must realize that as long as we are in this life we must keep a fighting posture, no matter how weary we may become in fighting against sin and fighting against the old man that yet remains within us. God has saved unto Himself this soul and this body, and none of it may I compromise. None of it may I give over to my old man or to the Devil or to the world. The whole of it I must strive to give to the glory of my God because Christ purchased it with His precious blood. The whole of it is to be saved. This body is to be renewed. I am not to be given a different body. This body will be recreated, renewed, and regenerated. Paul, at the close of his life, still has to say that he is pressing toward the mark of the prize of the high calling.

Though we may count many, many blessings (and it is proper for us to take opportunities to do that and to look at how extensively God has blessed to this point), yet we should look ahead. We should look at the extent of the blessings of God that are yet there for us, so that we do not become content and self-satisfied and therefore lethargic. We must not become proud of what we have, but rather we must be humbled and prompted to more definite and urgent prayer and effort to obtain the blessings which are ours, obtained for us so graciously and wonderfully by our Lord Jesus Christ.

God points out here in Joshua 13 that all the inhabitants of this land "will I drive out from before the children of Israel." Notice, God does not say He will drive them out from before Joshua, but from before the children of Israel. God is going to raise up others after Joshua. Joshua was important, but he was but a man and a type. When he falls away, God uses others. God used Moses, but then God drew his life to an end and used Joshua. Now Joshua's life draws to an end. God uses a Luther, but his life too has limits. He uses a Calvin, a Bucer, a Bullinger, a Cranmer, a Dabney, a Hoeksema. He uses many men, but they are just men used by

the sovereign God to carry out His purposes. That is all they are. They are not gods. They are not supermen. Oh, they are blessed richly, but they have limits and extents so that God may be seen to be God. He is the Giver. Canaan is not a gift of Joshua, but Canaan is a gift of God. I will drive them out from before the children of Israel; I will give the land of Canaan. God fought for them. The victories were God's and His alone. But, Israel has to fight and must subdue its foes.

How beautifully the divine and the human are placed side by side. We might sit in our proverbial living room having our Sunday evening discussions and getting ourselves so terribly tied up in knots in trying to sort divine sovereignty and human responsibility. But Scripture never has a problem. God sets them side by side, maintaining both in perfect harmony. God promises to give them the land and to drive out from before them these heathen; but that kind of promise of God anticipates that Israel is going to pick up the sword, gather themselves into an army, and strive to root out these Canaanites. If they would not pick up swords, enter into the army, and strive to drive out those Canaanites, the Canaanites would remain there. Israel would then have only themselves to blame, not God.

God orders everything so that there is a sowing before there is a reaping. God so uses everything so that there is a cross before there is a crown. God is sovereign, but He deals with us as rational creatures. He uses our responsibilities. God's grace in Christ's merits are always evident. They are chief, they are never to be forgotten, they are foremost. But that does not exclude necessary means. The author to the Hebrews in verse 1 of chapter 4 speaks of a rest that is a gift, but in verse 11 he says, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest." There is no disharmony, but perfect harmony between those two.

We too must use means. God does not simply zap us into heaven. He uses the means of grace, the preaching of the Word. But just sitting under the preaching and performing religiosity does not accomplish our salvation. We must prepare ourselves to sit under that preaching. We must be ready to hear the very Word of God. That is the way it is not only with the children of Israel and their inheritance of the land of Canaan, but also with us. There is wholly divine grace, wholly Christ-purchased, but it is not actually entered into consciously without much effort on the part of the heirs of the promise. So easy it is to err in attributing either too much

or too little to the creature. We must always cleave to the Scriptures, to the Scriptures as a whole, so that we are preserved from falling into grievous error on either side of giving too much to man or too little.

The believer has nothing spiritually good but what God has given to him. Man, even the believer, does not cooperate at all in his election, in his redemption, or in his regeneration. That inability on the part of the one who is to be saved to perform election, redemption, or regeneration does not mean that the regenerated soul is passive, nor does it mean that that regenerated soul is now self-sufficient. He is but an agent, a moral agent, an active agent to whom grace is always given.

The Christian is engaged in conflict. There is a world to be overcome, a devil to be resisted, and a salvation to be worked out. (All of these are Scriptural phrases.) A means of grace is provided graciously to us, and we are responsible to use those means of grace. The preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline — those are the means of grace. They are provided, and we must use them. Even those, however, of ourselves cannot do anything. The means of grace in themselves do not accomplish a single thing. We, with all of our efforts, cannot do or accomplish anything.

But we can do all things through Christ. A seeming paradox, isn't it? Yet there is beautiful harmony when the emphasis is in Christ. When, looking at that love that God gave for us in Christ and that Christ gave for us in the cross, the child of God fittingly responds with love for that God and that Christ. This is not a question of how we are going to work out this doctrinal problem of human responsibility and divine sovereignty. We, as individual children of God in love to God for all that He has done for us and with love for the God Who loved us first, give our all and fight the good fight of faith. Thus we enter into the experience and into the enjoyment, the conscious enjoyment, of our eternal inheritance. Woe unto us if we do not.

In this 13th chapter of the book of Joshua, there is a reference to Balaam, said to be a prophet of God, but really a false prophet. Balaam was called by Balak the king of Moab to curse the children of Israel. II Peter 2 tells us that Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness. He loved the money, the honor and the glory that he could get from King Balak of Moab. He seeks to overcome the will of God. He tries to curse, but God

puts words of blessing in his mouth. When he fails to be able to curse them, Balaam devises for Balak a method of bringing Israel to ruin. Numbers 31:8, 16 tells us that,

King Balak receives the advice of this wicked, false prophet, this compromiser, this man who said he was a child of God but was not, this man who gave himself not to the fight of sin but to the pursuit of it, this man who became lethargic in his supposed spirituality and fell far, far into sin. Balaam devised the method of ruin and advised the king of Moab to send his beautiful girls and his handsome men to mix and mingle with the children of Israel, to get them involved in mixed marriages, and thus through the mixed marriages to bring them to the idols of Moab, knowing that then God would punish Israel.

God intervened. What Balak tried to do, God would not allow. So we read in Psalm 106:28-29 that when the children of Israel joined themselves with Baalpeor and ate the sacrifices of the dead and provoked God to anger with their inventions, the plague broke out upon them. Then God sent Phinehas to stand up and execute judgment so that the plague was stopped. Here in Joshua 13 God placed the warning of Balaam at the right spot. When we become lethargic, God warns us of Balaam. What happened to Balaam? When he linked himself with the Moabites, verse 22 tells us he was slain with the Moabites by the children of Israel. He joined with the Moabites and he died with them. That is the doom of the double-hearted. That is the doom of those who are in bondage to covetousness. That is the doom of those who try to serve God and Balaam. Be warned, and learn. Learn not to become lethargic and self-satisfied, not to become proud, but humbly to seek and to pursue the full extent of all of the blessings which are ours in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Our Father, show to us all of the blessings. Make us active under the preaching of Thy Word so that we may see how great the blessings are that Thou hast in store for us. May those be the incentives for us to strive to remember we still have on battle gear. May we not grow weary of fighting, but may we labor yet, fighting the good fight of faith until the Lord Jesus Christ takes us individually home or comes to end this world. Praise be to Thee, our Father. All glory is Thine. Amen.