

## The Inheritance of Manasseh and Ephraim

Joshua 17:12-18.

Sunday evening, August 22, 2010.

### I. The children of Joseph.

- A. The nation of Israel was divided according to its tribes. Each tribe was named after one of the twelve sons of Jacob, to whom each tribe could trace its ancestry back.
- B. There were some exceptions however. The tribe of Levy did not get a territory in the Promised Land other than a number of Levitical cities dispersed throughout the land. Their inheritance was the service of the Lord's house; first the tabernacle and later the temple. It included all manner of work associated with the sanctuary other than the actual worship service which was reserved to the priests alone, who were of the tribe of Levy, but more specifically of the household of Aaron.
- C. To make up for the loss of one tribal territory the tribe of Joseph was split in two. The two tribes named after Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.
- D. Manasseh and Ephraim were brothers, and they inherited neighboring territories. They seem to have considered themselves brothers and retained a good and close relationship, as we see here where they approach Joshua together about the matter of the space allotted to them.
- E. We should also remember that Joshua himself was a member of the tribe of Ephraim, and given the close relations between the two tribes, this gave the tribes of both Manasseh and Ephraim somewhat of a claim on him and his services. At least this seems to lie behind what takes place in this passage.

### II. We are a great people...

What lies behind these words, or bragging rights?

- A. The sizes of the tribes according to the census of Israel, taken at the beginning and at the end of the wilderness wanderings, and recorded in Numbers 1 and 26, show us that Manasseh was the smallest of all the tribes when they left Egypt, and they stood in sixth place when they entered Canaan. Ephraim stood in tenth place leaving Egypt and in eleventh place entering Canaan. This seems nothing to brag about.
- B. So what is behind these words?  
A few things may be noted:
  1. As a result of their closeness as brothers, and enjoining territories, they may have considered themselves one people and one territory. This would indeed have made them the largest tribe, or people group, in Israel. The question in vs 14 "Why have you given us only one lot and one share to inherit..." seems to point in this direction. In fact Manasseh and Ephraim had both gotten an allotment, and Manasseh a very generous one.
  2. Manasseh could boast of the largest increase of any tribe during the wilderness wanderings. Some 20,500 men were added to their ranks. They by far outperformed Asher, Benjamin, and Issachar which added 11,900, 10,200, and 9,900 respectively.

On the other hand Simeon had lost 37,100 men of her 59,300 during this time, making it by far the smallest tribe at 22,200. It is widely believed that this was the result of the judgment at Baal-Peor, Numbers 25, in which Simeon may have played a key part.

3. Finally Ephraim could boast of being the tribe to which Joshua, as the leader of Israel during this time, did belong. And Manasseh, by virtue of its closeness with Ephraim, could share in something of its glory.

### III. Manasseh could not drive out the Canaanites.

- A. Manasseh and Ephraim come to Joshua to ask for more land, but they have not as yet driven the Canaanites out of their territories. Why not? Some things need to be considered here:
  1. There is no record of them ever attempting to do so; no record of a battle in which they were defeated.
  2. The mentioning of giants and chariots of iron seems to indicate that fear was primarily responsible for their being unable to drive out the Canaanites.
  3. Alongside fear there most likely was a willful forgetfulness and disregard of the Lord's command to drive the Canaanites out of the Land.
  4. That forgetfulness may well have grown out of a certain spiritual laziness and love of ease.
  5. All of this meant an ebbing away of faith from their hearts, and also of zeal toward God and His service.
- B. There seemed to be an easier way out of their space problem than fighting the Canaanites. After all they had a friend in high places; Joshua was one of their own. Surely he could re-draw some boundaries, or call the armies of Israel together to drive the Canaanites out Manasseh and Ephraim's territories.
  1. They had argued that they needed more space because they were such a great people, blessed and multiplied by the Lord.
  2. Joshua will not play favoritism; he preserves his integrity and turns their argument on its head. "Since you are such a great people, go up to the Perizzites and the giants and take their land away from them."
  3. Joshua rebukes their unbelief and weakness of character. He tells them they are a great people and they have great power (for they have the Lord on their side.) Therefore they will drive the Canaanites out and take their land, even though they have chariots and are strong.

#### Application:

The disposition of Manasseh and Ephraim toward Joshua is all too common for the Lord's people of today in relation to our greater Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is far easier for us to go to the Lord, and to ask Him to take our problems away, than it is for us to face the giants in our coasts; to confront them, believing that the Lord will add His blessings to such efforts.

Joshua is wise in how he handles his brothers. He preserves his integrity. He rebukes his brothers where they need it, but he also encourages them in the right way. He enlarges their imagination of what is possible, and seeks to enliven faith and courage in their hearts. So the greater Joshua deals with His people still.