

CHAPTER 18

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The setting up of the tabernacle at Shiloh (v. 1).
- II.** The stirring up of the seven tribes that were yet unsettled to look after their lot, and the putting of them in a method for it, by Joshua (v. 2-7).
- III.** The distributing of the land into seven lots, by certain men employed for that purpose (v. 8, 9).
- IV.** The determining of these seven portions to the seven tribes yet unprovided for by lot (v. 10).
- V.** The particular lot of the tribe of Benjamin, the borders of it (v. 11-20). And the cities contained in it (v. 21-28). The other six tribes we shall find well provided for in the next chapter.

<1681> JOSHUA 18:1

THE TABERNACLE AT SHILOH

In the midst of the story of the dividing of the land comes in this account of the setting up of the tabernacle, which had hitherto continued in its old place in the centre of their camp; but now that three of the four squadrons that used to surround it in the wilderness were broken and diminished, those of Judah, Ephraim, and Reuben, by the removal of those tribes to their respective possessions, and that of Dan only remained entire, it was time to think of removing the tabernacle itself into a city. Many a time the priests and Levites had taken it down, carried it, and set it up again in the wilderness, according to the directions given them (<1045> Numbers 4:5, etc.); but now they must do it for good and all, not one of the stakes thereof must any more be removed, nor any of the cords thereof broken, <2330> Isaiah 33:20. Observe,

I. The place to which the tabernacle was removed, and in which it was set up. It was *Shiloh*, a city in the lot of Ephraim, but lying close upon the lot of Benjamin. Doubtless God himself did some way or other direct them to

this place, for he had promised to *choose the place* where he would make *his name to dwell*, ^{<621>}Deuteronomy 12:11. It is most probable God made known his mind in this matter by the judgment of Urim. This place was pitched upon,

1. Because it was in the heart of the country, nearer the centre than Jerusalem was, and therefore the more convenient for the meeting of all Israel there from the several parts of the country; it had been in the midst of their camp in the wilderness, and therefore must now be in the midst of their nation, as that which sanctified the whole, and was *the glory in the midst of them*. See ^{<945>}Psalm 46:5.

2. Because it was in the lot of that tribe of which Joshua was, who was now their chief magistrate, and it would be both for his honour and convenience and for the advantage of the country to have it near him. The testimony of Israel and the thrones of judgment do well together, ^{<824>}Psalm 122:4, 5.

3. Some think there was an eye to the name of the place, *Shiloh* being the name by which the Messiah was known in dying Jacob's prophecy (^{<190>}Genesis 49:10), which prophecy, no doubt, was well known among the Jews; the setting up of the tabernacle in Shiloh gave them a hint that in that Shiloh whom Jacob spoke of all the ordinances of this worldly sanctuary should have their accomplishment in a greater and more perfect tabernacle, ^{<801>}Hebrews 9:1, 11. And Dr. Lightfoot thinks that the place where the tabernacle was set up was therefore called *Shiloh*, because of the peaceableness of the land at this time; as afterwards in Salem was his temple, which also signifies *peaceable*.

II. The solemn manner of doing it: *The whole congregation assembled together* to attend the solemnity, to do honour to the ark of God, as the token of his presence, and to bid it welcome to its settlement. Every Israelite was interested in it, and therefore all testified their joy and satisfaction upon this occasion. See ^{<1015>}2 Samuel 6:15. It is probable those tribes that were yet encamped when the tabernacle was removed to Shiloh decamped from Gilgal and pitched about Shiloh, for every true Israelite will desire to fix where God's tabernacle fixed. Mention is made, on this occasion, of the land being subdued before them, to intimate that the country, hereabouts at least, being thoroughly reduced, they met with no opposition, nor were they apprehensive of any danger, but thought it time

to make this grateful acknowledgment of God's goodness to them in the constant series of successes with which he had blessed them. It was a good presage of a comfortable settlement to themselves in Canaan, when their first care was to see the ark well settled as soon as they had a safe place ready to settle it in. Here the ark continued about 300 years, till the sins of Eli's house forfeited the ark, lost it and ruined Shiloh, and its ruins were long after made use of as warnings to Jerusalem. *Go, see what I did to Shiloh,* ^{<347D>}Jeremiah 7:12; ^{<478D>}Psalm 78:60.

^{<68D>}JOSHUA 18:2-10

JOSHUA REPROVES THE UNSETTLED TRIBES

Here,

I. Joshua reproves those tribes which were yet unsettled that they did not bestir themselves to gain a settlement in the land which God had given them. Seven tribes were yet unprovided for, though sure of an inheritance, yet uncertain where it should be, and it seems in no great care about it, v. 2. And with them Joshua reasons (v. 3): *How long are you slack?*

1. They were too well pleased with their present condition, liked well enough to live in a body together, the more the merrier, and, like the Babel-builders, had no mind to be scattered abroad and break good company. The spoil of the cities they had taken served them to live plentifully upon for the present, and they banished the thoughts of time to come. Perhaps the tribes of Judah and Joseph, who had already received their inheritance in the countries next adjoining, were generous in entertaining their brethren who were yet unprovided for, so that they went from one good house to another among their friends, with which, instead of grudging that they were postponed, they were so well pleased that they cared not for going to houses of their own.

2. They were slothful and dilatory. It may be they wished the thing done, but had not spirit to stir in it, or move towards the doing of it, though it was so much for their own advantage; like the sluggard, that *hides his hand in his bosom, and it grieves him to bring it to his mouth again*. The countries that remained to be divided lay at a distance, and some parts of them in the hands of the Canaanites. If they go to take possession of them,

the cities must be rebuilt or repaired, they must drive their flocks and herds a great way, and carry their wives and children to strange places, and this will not be done without care and pains, and breaking through some hardships; thus *he that observes the wind shall not sow, and he that regards the clouds shall not reap*, ^{<21104>}Ecclesiastes 11:4. Note, Many are diverted from real duties, and debarred from real comforts, by seeming difficulties. God by his grace has given us a title to a good land, the heavenly Canaan, but we are *slack to take possession*; we enter not into that rest, as we might by faith, and hope, and holy joy; we live not in heaven, as we might by setting our affections on things above and having our conversation there. How long shall it be thus with us? How long shall we thus stand in our own light, and *forsake our own mercies* for lying vanities? Joshua was sensible of the inconveniences of this delay, that, while they neglected to take possession of the land that was conquered, the Canaanites were recovering strength and spirit, and fortifying themselves in the places that were yet in their hands, which would make the total expulsion of them the more difficult. They would lose their advantages by not following their blow; and therefore, *as an eagle stirreth up her nest*, so Joshua stirs them up to take possession of their lot. He is ready to do his part, if they will but do theirs.

II. He puts them in a way to settle themselves.

1. The land that remained must be surveyed, an account taken of the cities, and the territories belonging to them, v. 4. These must be divided into seven equal parts, as near as they could guess at their true value, which they must have an eye to, and not merely to the number of the cities and extent of the country. Judah is fixed on the south and Joseph on the north of Shiloh, to protect the tabernacle (v. 5), and therefore they need not describe their country, but those countries only that were yet undisposed of. He gives a reason (v. 7) why they must divide it into seven parts only, because the Levites were to have no temporal estate (as we say), but their benefices only, which were entailed upon their families: *The priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance*, and a very honourable, comfortable, plentiful inheritance it was. Gad and Reuben, with half of the tribe of Manasseh, were already fixed, and needed not to have any further care taken of them. Now,

(1.) The surveyors were three men out of each of the seven tribes that were to be provided for (v. 4), one-and-twenty in all, who perhaps for greater

expedition, because they had already lost time, divided themselves into three companies, one of each tribe in each company, and took each their district to survey. The matter was thus referred equally, that there might be neither any partiality used in making up the seven lots, nor any shadow of suspicion given, but all might be satisfied that they had right done them.

(2.) The survey was accordingly made, and brought in to Joshua, v. 8, 9. Josephus says it was seven months in the doing. And we must in it observe,

[1.] The faith and courage of the persons employed: abundance of Canaanites remained in the land, and all raging against Israel, *as a bear robbed of her whelps*; the business of these surveyors would soon be known, and what could they expect but to be way-laid, and have their brains knocked out by the fierce observers? But in obedience to Joshua's command, and in dependence upon God's power, they thus put their lives in their hands to serve their country.

[2.] The good providence of God in protecting them from the many deaths they were exposed to, and bringing them all safely again to the host at Shiloh. When we are in the way of our duty we are under the special protection of the Almighty.

2. When it was surveyed, and reduced to seven lots, then Joshua would, by appeal to God, and direction from him, determine which of these lots should belong to each tribe (v. 6): *That I may cast lots for you here at the tabernacle (because it was a sacred transaction) before the Lord our God, to whom each tribe must have an eye, with thankfulness for the conveniences and submission to the inconveniences of their allotment.* What we have in the world we must acknowledge God's property in, and dispose of it as before him, with justice, and charity, and dependence upon Providence. The heavenly Canaan is described to us in a book, the book of the scriptures, and there are in it mansions and portions sufficient for all God's spiritual Israel. Christ is our Joshua that divides it to us. On him we must attend, and to him we must apply for an inheritance with the saints in light. See ~~EBTD~~ John 17:2, 3.

<681> JOSHUA 18:11-28

THE LOT OF BENJAMIN

We have here the lot of the tribe of Benjamin, which Providence cast next to Joseph on the one hand, because Benjamin was own and only brother to Joseph, and was little Benjamin (<6827> Psalm 68:27), that needed the protection of great Joseph, and yet had a better protector, for *the Lord shall cover him all the day long*, <6832> Deuteronomy 33:12. And it was next to Judah on the other hand, that this tribe might hereafter unite with Judah in an adherence to the throne of David and the temple at Jerusalem. Here we have,

1. The exact borders and limits of this tribe, which we need not be exact in the explication of. As it had Judah on the south and Joseph on the north, so it had Jordan on the east and Dan on the west. The western border is said to *compass the corner of the sea southward* (v. 14), whereas no part of the lot of this tribe came near to the great sea. Bishop Patrick thinks the meaning is that it ran along in a parallel line to the great sea, though at a distance. Dr. Fuller suggests that since it is not called *the great sea*, but only *the sea*, which often signifies any lake or mere, it may be meant of the pool of Gibeon, which may be called *a corner* or *canton* of the sea; it is called the *great waters of Gibeon* (<2412> Jeremiah 41:12), and it is compassed by the western border of this tribe.

2. The particular cities in this tribe, not all, but the most considerable. Twenty-six are here named. Jericho is put first, though dismantled, and forbidden to be rebuilt as a city with gates and walls, because it might be built and inhabited as a country village, and so was not useless to this tribe. Gilgal, where Israel first encamped when Saul was made king (<9115> 1 Samuel 11:15), was in this tribe. It was afterwards a very profane place. <3895> Hosea 9:15, *All their wickedness is in Gilgal*. Beth-el was in this tribe, a famous place. Though Benjamin adhered to the house of David, yet Beth-el, it seems, was in the possession of the house of Joseph (<07023> Judges 1:23-25), and there Jeroboam set up one of his calves. In this tribe was Gibeon, where the altar was in the beginning of Solomon's time, <4003> 2 Chronicles 1:3. Gibeah likewise, that infamous place where the Levite's concubine was abused. Mizpeh, and near it Samuel's Ebenezer, and also Anathoth, Jeremiah's city, were in this tribe, as was the northern part of

Jerusalem. Paul was the honour of this tribe (~~5100~~ Romans 11:1;
~~5105~~ Philippians 3:5); but where his land lay we know not: he sought the
better country.