

Joshua 17:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto?

Analysis

The sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) complain about their territorial allocation, revealing entitlement and presumption. The phrase 'why hast thou given me but one lot' uses the singular despite two tribes, perhaps indicating unified complaint or Ephraim's dominance. Their self-assessment 'I am a great people' (am-rav anoki, אֶמְרָכָב אָנוֹכִי) expresses prideful self-importance. The claim 'forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto' (ad-asher ad-ko berachani Yahweh) correctly attributes growth to divine blessing yet wrongly assumes blessing entitles them to more territory without effort. This complaint contrasts sharply with Caleb's faith—he requested difficult territory and conquered it (14:12), while Joseph's descendants want more land without additional conquest. The complaint reveals several spiritual failures: ingratitude for God's provision, unwillingness to work for what they receive, and presumption that blessing removes the need for faith and effort. Reformed theology recognizes this pattern: God's gracious blessings should produce humble gratitude and diligent stewardship, not entitlement and complaint. Their attitude foreshadows Ephraim's later tribal pride and rebellion contributing to the northern kingdom's formation and eventual judgment.

Historical Context

Ephraim and Manasseh, sons of Joseph, became separate tribes after Jacob adopted them (Genesis 48), making Joseph's descendants a double portion fulfilling firstborn rights transferred from Reuben. By Joshua's time, these tribes were numerous and powerful, fulfilling Jacob's prophecy (Genesis 48:19) that Manasseh would be great but Ephraim greater. Their territory in the central highlands included fertile valleys and strategic locations, yet also required clearing forests and fighting remaining Canaanites. The complaint about land allocation occurred during the distribution at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1), after initial territories were assigned to Judah, Ephraim, and western Manasseh. Archaeological evidence suggests the central highlands required significant agricultural development through terracing and forest clearing, explaining why fertile land wasn't immediately usable. Ancient Near Eastern land distribution typically favored powerful clans, but Israel's system balanced population size with geographic realities and divine allotment. The Joseph tribes' complaint demonstrates the tension between human ambition and divine sovereignty in land distribution.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the Joseph tribes' complaint challenge you to examine areas where you feel entitled to God's blessings without corresponding faithfulness and effort?
2. What does Joshua's response teach about the balance between trusting God's provision and taking responsible action to develop what He gives?
3. In what ways do you tend toward Ephraim's prideful entitlement rather than Caleb's humble courage?

Interlinear Text

יִדְבַּר	בָּנִים	יְוָשָׁעַ	אֶת	לְאָמֵן	מְדֹ羞
spake	And the children	of Joseph	H854	unto Joshua	saying
H1696	H1121	H3130		H3091	H4069
נָתַתְּתָה	לְנָתָלְתָה	גָּוֹתֶל	אֲחָד	וְאַחֲרֵי	תִּאָתֶר
Why hast thou given	to inherit	lot	and one	portion	and one
H5414	H5159	H1486	H259	H2256	H259
עָם	בָּנִים	עַד	אֲשֶׁר	עַד	כֵּן
people	seeing I am a great	forasmuch as	H834	forasmuch as	me hitherto
H5971	H7227	H5704		H5704	H3541
בָּרוּךְ	בָּרוּךְ				
hath blessed	the LORD				
H1288	H3068				

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 48:19 (Parallel theme): And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.

Genesis 48:22 (Parallel theme): Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.