

Joshua 18:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you?

Analysis

Joshua's rebuke addresses Israel's procrastination in possessing their inheritance. The question 'How long are ye slack' (ad-anah atem mitrapim, עַד-אַנְהָ אַתֶּם מִתְרַפִּים) uses a Hebrew verb meaning to be loose, remiss, or negligent. The phrase conveys exasperation—why delay when God has already given the land? The infinitive 'to go to possess' (lalechet lareshet, לָלֶכֶת לָרֶשֶׁת) emphasizes action required; possession demands going and taking, not merely waiting passively. The phrase 'which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you' (asher natan lakhem Yahweh Elohei avoteikhem) uses perfect tense—the gift is already accomplished from God's perspective, yet Israel hesitates to appropriate it. This reveals a recurring biblical tension: God's promises are certain and accomplished in divine decree, yet require human faith-filled action to experience. Seven tribes had not yet received territorial allocations, showing widespread passivity. Their slackness stemmed from various causes: fear of remaining enemies, satisfaction with current situation, or lack of vision for inherited promise. Joshua's rebuke echoes Moses' earlier frustration when Israel refused to enter Canaan (Numbers 13-14). Each generation must actively appropriate God's promises rather than assuming automatic fulfillment.

Historical Context

By this point in Joshua's campaigns, major Canaanite military power was broken, yet significant land remained unconquered and unallocated. Seven tribes—

Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan—had not yet surveyed or received their inheritances. The setting was Shiloh, where the tabernacle had been established (18:1), providing religious centrality for the tribal confederation. Ancient land allocation required careful surveying, boundary establishment, and formal distribution—tasks requiring initiative and organization. Israel's hesitancy may have stemmed from fear of remaining Canaanites, comfort with the status quo after years of warfare, or uncertainty about tribal boundaries and inheritances. Joshua, now elderly, recognized that land distribution must occur before his death to prevent future disputes and maintain tribal structure. The rebuke demonstrates godly leadership confronting passivity and calling God's people to faith-filled action. This incident parallels later moments when Israel needed prophetic confrontation to overcome inertia—Deborah rousing Barak (Judges 4-5), Samuel challenging Saul's disobedience (1 Samuel 15), Nathan confronting David's sin (2 Samuel 12). God's people repeatedly need exhortation to move from promise to possession.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What inheritance or calling has God given you that you're 'slack' to possess due to fear, comfort, or procrastination?
2. How does God's perfect-tense gift ('hath given') challenge you to act in faith before seeing complete fulfillment?
3. What would it look like practically to move from passivity to active appropriation of God's promises in your life?

Interlinear Text

אָ נָה	עַד	יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּנֵי י	אֶל	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	וַיֹּאמֶר
H575	H5704	H3478	H1121	H413	H3091	H559
		of Israel	unto the children		And Joshua	said
אֲשֶׁר	הָאָרֶץ	אֶת	לָךְ שֶׁת	לָבוֹא	מִתְרַפֵּי יָם	אֶתָּה
H834	H776	H853	H3423	H935	H7503	H859
	the land	to possess	to go		How long are ye slack	
אַבְוֹתֵיכֶם:	אֱלֹהֵי י	יְהוָה	לָךְ	נָתַן		
H1	H430	H3068	H0	H5414		
of your fathers	God	which the LORD		hath given		

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 13:4 (Parallel theme): The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Judges 18:9 (Parallel theme): And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.

Proverbs 10:4 (Parallel theme): He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

Proverbs 15:19 (Parallel theme): The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.

Matthew 20:6 (Parallel theme): And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

Zephaniah 3:16 (Parallel theme): In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 (Parallel theme): Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

John 6:27 (References God): Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

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