

Joshua 21:1-42 | Ted Tash

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[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. See everybody, but for someone who's been traveling out of town for the last four or five months, that is especially true.

I promise you that. It is nice to see everyone. Honestly, I've told a few folks this, it has been nice, the whole coronavirus thing. I haven't died, and we got to go to Bethel even though we were out of town via Zoom.

So that was nice for us. But if you will turn to Joshua chapter 21, that's where we're going to be today. I do want to lead with a joke. This is a Baptist joke, and I'm not offending any Baptists. It's just a joke, people, so calm down. I want to lead with this, and then we'll get into Joshua. So there's four Baptist preachers at this Baptist church, and they get together one night, and they say, you know, we're always telling the congregation they need to confess their sins.

I thought it might be nice just the four of us, you know, as pastors, to sit down and maybe confess a few sins. What do you think? And they all agree. So the first pastor says, you know, I'll start.

[1:17] He said, you know, Wednesday night we have the Bible study, and after the Bible study I go home and I like to drink a gin martini. He said, I know it's a sin, but it relaxes me, it calms the nerves, and to be honest, I like the taste of a gin martini.

The second pastor says, well, thank you, brother. Thank you for sharing that to me. He said, Wednesday night after the Bible study I like to go home and I like to smoke a cigar. He said, it relaxes me, calms the nerves, and matter of fact, I like the taste of a cigar.

The third pastor said, wow, I appreciate your honesty. I'd like to confess Wednesday night after the Bible study I like to go down to the casino and I like to play blackjack. He said, I know it's gambling, it's wrong, but it relaxes me, calms the nerves.

As a matter of fact, I like playing blackjack. And the fourth pastor comes and shakes his head. He said, you know, I've been in the ministry for a long time and never have I heard of a Baptist minister drinking and smoking and gambling.

He said, but I have to confess, I love to gossip and I can't wait for the Wednesday night Bible study. There you go. I've been sitting on that joke since February and I get to tell it now.

[2:31] So anyway, okay. So we're going to continue in Joshua 21. We've been marching through Joshua. We're almost to the end. There's only 24 chapters in Joshua.

So we got, you know, just a couple more to go. This is an interesting passage. Really, I have the first 42 verses, so 1 through 42.

And this is a chapter where it's kind of like a record-keeping chapter, if you will. There's these 48 cities that the Levites get.

You know, you have the 12 tribes of Israel. They all got a portion of the land, each tribe did, except for the Levites. They were kind of dispersed throughout the land. And it works out logistically pretty well.

You know, the Levites had to perform the priestly duties. And so if the Levites, let's say, they had a portion of the land, just one portion, you know, up in the corner of the promised land. Well, if somebody down here needed a sacrifice, you know, logistically, it doesn't work for the Levites just to have one set portion.

[3:36] So they're kind of dispersed throughout the land. And so we're going to talk about that today. But the majority of this chapter, you know, verses 4 through 42, is basically just a record of that.

That this tribe and this family gave so many pieces of land. This tribe and this family gave so many pieces of land. And so instead of getting bogged down with all that, we'll just kind of pull some of the

highlights.

And I have three truths or three points I think we should be able to pull from this chapter. But basically, that's what this chapter is about, is there were 48 cities throughout, and that's important, scattered throughout the land that the Levites got as their portion, if you will, of the inheritance. So with that in mind, let's pray real quick, and then we'll read the first three or so verses. So Father God, thank you for the day. Thank you we could be here together. We mean that more now than probably ever before.

God, we really appreciate the opportunity to meet together in a building safely and with one another. And thank you for your word. I pray that we would learn something from it today. In Jesus' name. So let's read the first three verses here, and then we'll kind of dive in.

[4 : 49] So Joshua chapter 21, verses 1 through 3. It says, Then you see a colon, and then, like I said, verses 4 through 42 basically says, This family gave so many pieces of land.

This family gave so many pieces of land. And the idea is that throughout the whole promised land, there wasn't one spot where all the Levites were. They were scattered throughout. They were dispersed, if you will, throughout the entire portion.

So this is kind of an interesting piece here, these 48 cities that the Levites inherit. And this actually fulfills some earlier prophecies.

So you don't have to turn to this one, but let me just read to you from the book of Numbers, chapter 35. You don't need to turn to this one. But Numbers 35, 1 through 3, this is sort of the prophecy or the commandment that is fulfilled here.

Verse 1, it says, And then it goes on and gives some specifics, you know, measure this many cubits and all that.

[6 : 45] But the idea is that this land was to be a blessing for the Levites. This was for them to be a place as priests and as ministers of the Lord to dwell in, and then common land for their animals to dwell in, their herds, their flocks, etc.

So this land was to be given, provided from the children of Israel to the Levites, to the priests, as a blessing to them, a place for them to live, a place for their herds to live.

So remember that, that this was given as a blessing to the Levites. Now, if you will turn to Genesis 49, there's one other sort of fulfillment that we're seeing here in Joshua 21.

And if you'll turn to Genesis 49, I actually want to read for a second from a different passage in Genesis. I know this is a lot of scripture coming at you.

So you stay in Genesis 49. Let me read real quick from Genesis 34. Basically, the story here in Genesis 34 is you have Jacob, right, who had the 12 sons, which became the 12 tribes.

[7 : 59] He had this daughter named Dinah. She went out into the land, and there was this guy named Shechem, who basically laid with her without her consent.

He took her, and it says lay with her and violated her. And this guy, Shechem, who did this thing to Jacob's daughter, Dinah, which would be like Levi and all the other kids' sister, Shechem then was very strongly attracted to Dinah, wanted to marry her, and he basically goes to Jacob and says, whatever you want, I'll give you.

Whatever dowry you want, whatever you want us to do, give me your daughter. I want Dinah for marriage. And so Levi and Simeon go, and in verse 14 of Genesis 34, they say this.

They say, we cannot do this thing to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a reproach to us. But on this condition, we will consent to you. If you will become as we are, if every male of you is circumcised, then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.

And so you have the situation. Shechem basically rapes Dinah, which is Levi's sister, Jacob's daughter, and then asks for her hand in marriage.

[9 : 29] And Levi and the other brothers say, we'll allow it only if you get circumcised. And so the guys, they go, they circumcise themselves, all the males. And this is where the twist comes in.

Verse 25, again, you don't need to be there, but verse 25, it says, Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, and that's after circumcision, that the two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. They killed Shechem, they killed his dad, they killed them all. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. They took their sheep, their oxen, their donkeys, everything that was in the city and in the field, and all their wealth.

And so, not only did they kill them, not only did they take all their stuff, but they made them circumcise themselves beforehand, so that for the last three days of their life, they were in just tremendous pain. I mean, it's a dirty trick.

It's a dirty trick that they played on Shechem and his family. So then you get to Genesis 49, and this is now the end of Jacob's life. And he sort of gathers all his sons, which, you know, go on to become the 12 tribes of Israel.

[10:39] And he sort of gives, like, his final blessing, his final benediction, if you will, to his kids. And so you get to Simeon and Levi, who are kind of the ringleaders here of the whole situation with Shechem.

And in verse 5 of Genesis 49, it says this. It says, And then here's where this relates to us in Joshua.

I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel. So Jacob here basically leaves Levi and Simeon out of the inheritance.

I mean, that's essentially what he says. He says, they're not going to get a portion. I'm going to scatter them. I'm going to divide them. And it's interesting, the Simeon knights, I guess, the tribe of Simeon, have basically been swallowed up by the time you get to Joshua.

And then the Levites, as we've seen, they get scattered. They get dispersed, divided up. So we see, you know, this was 500 years before Joshua was written.

[12:03] You know, Jacob and his family, they go to Egypt. They get stuck in Egypt for 400 years in captivity. Moses comes. They walk around the wilderness for 40 years. So you're looking at, like, 500 years has passed between Genesis 49, where he curses them and divides them up and says they're going to be scattered.

In Joshua 21, where he says, look, you don't have a portion. You're going to be scattered in these 48 cities throughout the whole land.

And so we see that these 48 cities are a result of a blessing, that they're given out of generosity as a place for them to dwell, as a place for them to keep their herds, their cattle.

But it's also given sort of out of a curse. Their anger was cursed, and therefore they missed out on having their own portion. They had to be divided and scattered. And so I think the two things we can pull from this is that God is a God of blessing.

God is a God who acts mercifully and deals mercifully. But God is also a God of cursing, and he will execute justice. And there was sin that was committed by Levi, and that filed them for 500 years until this scattering.

[13:16] And so I would say that that holds true today. God is a God of blessing, willing to show mercy. You know, no greater picture of that than the cross. You know, that's the ultimate offer of mercy.

But he's also a God of cursing. He's a God of justice. And if salvation is rejected, there's going to be justice in the form of eternal separation from God.

And so I think those two truths we can pull out of this. The third truth, and we're going to look at this next week a little bit too, is that God keeps his promises.

You know, 500 years earlier, it said, you're going to be scattered in the land. And what happens? They're scattered in the land. Back before they had even crossed over into Jericho, God said, you're going to give them this portion of land.

And what happens? They got this portion of land. So the Lord keeps his promises. Next week, and I'm stealing from Tom a little bit here, but the last verse of Joshua 21, verse 45, says this.

[14:20] It says, not a word, not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Not a word failed. Not one word. It all came to pass. So the Lord keeps his promises, right? I mean, the Lord keeps his word. And I think the application of that point is that we need to know what's in his word, right?

I mean, how can you stand on the promises of God if you don't know what they are? So God is a God of blessing. God is a God of justice.

And the Lord keeps his word. And that's true today. Not one word didn't come to pass. It all came to pass. So those are kind of the first three points I want to bring up.

There's two more, and they're actually going to come from the New Testament. If you look at any commentary on Joshua 21, almost all the commentators will bring up this idea that comes about in

the New Testament.

[15:23] And it's where the Lord Jesus, in Luke chapter 10, says that the laborer is worthy of his wages. And the idea is that if someone is doing the Lord's work, it's okay for them to be financially supported.

The laborer, in that sense, someone who's doing labor full-time for the Lord, it's okay to financially compensate them. The laborer is worthy of his wages. And so any commentary you look at, all the ones I looked at brought that up in regards to Joshua 21.

The Levites were the priests. They were the ones that were basically being the intercessor between the Israelites and God. And so therefore, the Israelites gave them their portion of the land and the cities and the common land because the laborer is worthy of his wages.

I think the principle fits. I really think that they gave them the land in Joshua because of the two examples I gave you in Numbers and in Genesis. But the principle fits. And I think if you're going to look at this passage as a New Testament church, it's important to see what the New Testament principle is.

I think we can agree on that. So, if you will, turn with me. And this is where we'll spend the rest of our time to 1 Corinthians. And it's 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

[16:45] And there's a couple places in the Gospels where Jesus himself talks about this idea that the laborer is worthy of his wages. But I think 1 Corinthians 9 is where you see Paul, where we get a lot of our guidance as a New Testament church from.

This is really where he goes into the most detail about it. And I'll say this. This is tricky. You know, this is tricky in two regards. One, the passage itself is tricky.

And we'll talk about that. But two, it's tricky. Anytime you talk about money, it gets tricky, right? You know, nobody wants to talk about what their salary is. You know, it's just that kind of taboo subject. So, I know that this is a tricky topic.

But it's important to look at. But like I said, also, this is a tricky passage in Corinthians. And I'll say this up front. Because Paul spends the first 15 or so verses basically stating the case of why the laborer is worthy of his wages.

Or why the person who lives and works for the Lord, why it is okay for them to be financially compensated for that work. But then he spends the next three, you know, 16 to 18, giving three or four reasons why, even though he has that right as a full-time minister of the Lord, and he did not exercise that right.

[18:09] If you recall, Paul, you know, made tents. He was a tent maker and continued to do that throughout his ministry. So, it's a tricky passage because he says, you know, this is why you should pay me. But then he says, but I don't want it.

You don't have to pay me. So, it's kind of a confusing chapter. But we'll get through it. So, the first thing we've got to know is that Paul had some critics.

And the critics basically were attacking Paul and accusing him of not even being an apostle. That perhaps his apostleship was phony. And the big sticking point that his critics would use is that, well, he's still working.

He's still making tents, still making money. Whereas none of the other apostles are doing that. They're just living purely off of their ministry. And so, since Paul is still working in occupation, therefore, he is not an apostle.

So, he starts verses 1 through 3, 1 to 2, defending his apostleship. And so, this is what he says. 1 Corinthians 9, verse 1 says, Am I not an apostle?

[19:13] Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you.

For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. So, he gives two attributes or two reasons why he's an apostle.

He saw the resurrected Lord, right, on the road to Damascus. Peter and the other ones, James and John and Jude and all those guys, they saw the resurrected Lord when he was on earth, before the ascension. Paul saw him afterwards on the road to Damascus.

But he saw the resurrected Lord. So, that's the first thing. He says, have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? So, he saw the Lord resurrected. That's the first reason he's an apostle. Second reason, the Corinthian church is proof of it.

It's the fruit of his labor. He says, you are the seal or you are the proof of my apostleship. Others could doubt me, but surely not you, Corinthians, right? I mean, you are the proof.

[20 : 08] You are the seal of my apostleship. So, he defends his apostleship off the bat. And then, he begins listing about five reasons why a full-time minister or an apostle like this has the right to be paid or be financially remunerated, whatever way, for his work.

And he starts this in verse 3. He says, my defense to those who examine me is this. Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? He says, look, Barnabas and I, we're the only ones that are still holding a job. All the other apostles are working full-time.

So, he appeals to his apostleship. He says, look, as an apostle, I have the right to this money.

Then, he appeals to human affairs. Verse 7, he says, who goes to war at his own expense?

Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? And he gives these human examples, these workplace almost examples of human affairs.

[21 : 25] He says, look, anybody that plants a vineyard, everything wants to kill a grape. I mean, grapes have fungus, they have rot, they have birds, they have bugs. Everything is trying to kill a grape. Like, vineyard is the toughest thing to grow.

No one's going to go through all that work, all that toil, all those blood, sweat, and tears, and then not enjoy the fruit of the work. You know, he mentions the flock. He says, who would tend the flock and not drink of the milk?

Why would you deal with all the work that goes into tending the flock, especially back then before you have a tractor or, you know, any other help? Why would you go through all that work and not enjoy the reward, the milk that comes from the flock?

So he appeals first to his apostleship and second to human affairs. And then he goes to the law.

Verse 8, do I say these things as a mere man or does not the law say the same also?

For it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. Is it oxen that God is concerned about or does he say it for our sakes?

[22 : 27] For our sakes, no doubt this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. So he brings up this idea that you should not, that's in the law.

It says you should not muzzle an ox while he treads out the grain. You know, basically they would have, I don't really understand it all that well, but you'd have the stalks, which are worthless, and then you'd have the grain at the head of the stalk.

And you would get an ox to come and basically just step on it, mash it all up, and the head, the grain, which you wanted to keep, would fall out and the stalks would be left behind.

You could rake those up, get them out of the way, and then you'd have the good grain. And the idea is if you put a muzzle on the ox while he's doing that, then his mouth is closed.

He can't partake of the grain. He's doing all this work for no reward. There's nothing to be gained for him. And so he says don't put a muzzle on him. While he's doing all this work for you, at least let him eat some of the grain.

[23 : 28] You know, let him get in on the goods here. And then he says, well, is God concerned about oxen? No, he's concerned about us. He's concerned about humans. He says it all together for our sakes, that he who plows should plow in hope, or should plow in work with anticipation.

So he appeals to his apostleship, appeals to human affairs, appeals to the law of Moses. Then he flat out just says it in verse 11, just a direct appeal.

He says, if we have sown spiritual things, is it a great thing or is it a big deal if we reap your material things? If we've sown spiritually, can't we reap materially?

And so he goes from a direct appeal then to quoting the Lord Jesus himself in verse 14, where he says, even so the Lord commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

So he has kind of five appeals there. His apostleship, human affairs, the law of Moses, a direct appeal, and then the Lord Jesus himself. He says, you know, those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

[24 : 35] But then Paul goes on in the last three verses to give some reasons why, even though he has a right to financial compensation, or has a right to a material blessing for his spiritual work, he

refuses that right.

And I think for time's sake we'll skip that, but I'll just give you the highlights. Basically, verse 18, he says, what is my reward?

My reward is that when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel. He says, it's my privilege, it's my boasting, it's my reward that I preach freely.

I preach without charge. And I think that should be the goal for us, too. It's to preach without charge and let our reward be an eternal reward.

He also mentions that he was given a stewardship, or he was given basically a charge or a command directly from the Lord to preach the gospel, to spread the gospel, you know, to the Gentiles.

[25 : 49] And so he basically says, well, you don't reward a servant for being a servant. That's just what they do. That's just, they serve. And he said, that's kind of my stewardship. The Lord told me to preach, therefore I'm going to preach.

You don't have to pay me. So those are kind of two of the reasons there. But the two points that I think we should take from this is that Paul, and I would say those who make their living in the church or in ministry, full-time ministry, have every right to be rewarded.

Paul had a right to be rewarded. I'm talking materially, financially. I think about those that do full-time camp work. You know, like for us here at Bethel, we have Noah and Lacey.

We have Daniel over in the Philippines. We support those people. And I think we'd all agree that that is an appropriate thing to do. Uncle Bill, you know, he works at camp full-time. So those people that do that have the right, and Paul had the right to financial reward.

The second point is the flip side. Those people, and for those of us here, also have the right to donate their time, to do so without compensation, to refuse compensation, and just let their reward be eternal.

[27 : 04] So they have the right. They don't have to exercise the right. I think those are the two things that take away here. So that's Joshua 21, 1 through 42. If you want to go read who gave what portions of their cities and how many cubits and how many this and that, you may.

Do you have that video, Brad? Pulled up. So this is totally unrelated to the message. I just thought it was really good. It's like a two-minute video. Many of you know Ravi Zacharias, who was a really good preacher and Bible teacher, passed away from cancer about a week or so ago.

And there was a video that was floating around Twitter. It's kind of like a two-minute highlight reel. It's like three different messages he had kind of compiled together. And it's really good, just really encouraging.

It encourages you to know the Lord, know his word, and walk in it and walk with him. And so I'll pray real quick, then we can watch this and sing. So I felt like I just thank you for this day again.

Thank you for your word. Thank you that you've shown us, God, that you keep your promises. Lord, we think about our land right now, this country, certainly uncertain times.

[28 : 16] But, Lord, we know you don't change. You're the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And we thank you that we have that solid ground to stand on. We pray that as we go out this week, we would be ministers of your word, Lord, in doing so freely with our hope fixed on eternity.

And we just pray all this in Jesus' name. And we have... Amen. Amen.