

Day 6 – Feb. 6, 2023

As we hit this summary section of the battles Joshua and the Israelites won, we get an overview of their conquest as well as the boundaries of the land given to the tribes east of the Jordan river. These descriptions may seem needlessly specific to we who are used to reading scripture for the stories and lessons, but they are important historical data for the people of Israel. Since the land was not supposed to leave the tribe it was allotted to, at least not for good, this was an important record of who owned what land. Like much of the book of Numbers, it makes for some dry reading, but holds a lot of historical weight.

In the midst of this data come two interesting groups of people. The first is the “descendants of Anak”, mentioned on p. 19. Why mention this group so specifically? They seem to be set apart, important in these lists of kings. This is because they are extremely important in the history of Israel. They first appear in the book of Numbers as the spies enter the Promised Land the first time, right after the Red Sea incident. These 12 spies check out the Promised Land and return with varying reports. 2 spies, Caleb and Joshua after whom this book is named, report that they should go and conquer the land because God is on their side, so the rest doesn’t matter. But the other 10 report that they should turn tail and run because this land, while lush and fertile, is also hostile and occupied. And the key group they mention as too strong for this fledgling nation to attack are “the descendants of Anak”, fabled to be giant warriors. And so as the Israelites turn away from both the Promised Land and their trust in God, “the descendants of Anak” become a buzzword for their faithless cowardice. No wonder the author points out Joshua’s defeat of this group that caused them to wander for an entire generation in the wilderness. And they will go on to face other descendants of Anak as well, in the person of Goliath.

The other interesting group is the one tribe who will not receive a land-based inheritance. The tribe of Levi is the only one of the twelve tribes who will get no land in this new home. Instead, their inheritance will be to receive the offerings of all the other tribes brought to the Tabernacle/Temple, since the tribe of Levi will all be Temple workers by descent. Are you a Levite? Then you work in the temple, using whatever gifts you have to beautify, administer, clean, repair, or support the worship and sacrifices of the people.

The giant warrior clan and the landless tribe – mentioned seemingly in passing but carrying huge historical value in this narrative. The bible indeed must be read carefully and regularly if we are to find God’s hidden gems like these!