

Explore the Bible: Settled

December 14, 2016

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 1 focuses on Joshua 22:1-8.*

Sometimes, the hardest thing to do is to keep going in what we believe to be the right direction when there is no immediate evidence what we are doing eventually will be worth the cost. But followers of Jesus come from a long line of people who knew how to keep walking toward their God-given call, even when it would appear otherwise.

For Christmas this past year, I told my wife all I really wanted was one of those DNA tests that reveal one's human heritage. From what I know, my maternal ancestry is found in the English people, and my paternal ancestry is rooted in either the Swiss or German people. I'd like to know.

Not too long ago, the cost of such a test was prohibitive. Now, the process has been so refined, the most common of people can afford it if they choose. Maybe there's a slim chance that knowing my biological roots will help me know and understand myself a little better.

Lessons from the Comanche

In 2011, S.C. Gwynne wrote *Empire of the Summer Moon*. It's the history of the Comanche people of the great Southwest, from their origin in crossing the Bering Strait until modern times.

The Comanche were some of the most brutal fighters known to man. They were so ruthless, though they never numbered more than about 20,000, they ruled the Plains in an area roughly the size of the Louisiana Purchase. Even the Apache gave the Comanche wide berth. White men who dared travel into their world, bordered on the east by modern Fort Worth, often did not live to tell about it.

In 1933, an elderly Comanche was asked about the faith of the Comanche. He responded they never thought a great deal about it. They simply knew they were here, and that was all they needed to know. The Comanche believed themselves the prominent race of humanity in their day. Therefore, they expected others to respond accordingly or risk a fate worse than most modern people can imagine.

In reading Gwynne's work, it's possible to see parallels between the ancient Comanche and modern purveyors of terror. The Comanche lived the way they did toward others because they had no real sense of their source in the one and true living God.

Understanding heritage

When we don't know our heritage, where we've come from, it's all but impossible to gauge with any sense of accuracy where our lives should be headed. It could be argued that our source is also our destiny. Only when we understand our faith history can we fully appreciate our responsibility to live our faith now.

It's not easy, with a New Testament mindset, to reach back into Joshua's account and understand it completely. Those of us reading these words live in a day and time so removed by oceans of time and space, the ancient world seems to have little relevance.

However, one of the most important of reasons for revisiting these accounts is because, in reading them, we rediscover our ancient, spiritual heritage.

Entering the Promised Land

In these few short verses, Joshua finally has led this diverse group of peoples into the "Promised Land." It is called such because it was the land "promised" by God to God's people.

The promise came with an understanding that, while God had promised the land to God's people, they finally would discover the promise's fulfillment only by remaining faithful to the call of God.

The greater part of this text is given over to Joshua blessing the people for paying the price in time and energy to finally experience the blessing of God. Had they stayed in the wilderness, they would have missed the blessing altogether.

There is the potential for misapplying the meaning of this text. God is not a short-order cook. We don't simply look down the menu until we find what we want and demand that God deliver on our wishes. Our God is not a "name-it-and-claim-it" God.

Our God is a God true to God's promise. When we are faithful to God we can trust, even though it may not seem possible now, God will deliver in time what has been guaranteed.

Faithful in times of uncertainty

Around us in this world today, there is much confusion and violence and wickedness. Many of us find ourselves wondering how we should live with so much uncertainty.

This passage offers multiple suggestions. For one, we can remain faithful to the call of God in Christ. Our spiritual roots, where we came from, are found in a people who, through much uncertainty, stayed the course. They had been "careful to keep the charge of the Lord (their) God" (verse 3).

Second, these people had been faithful in community. No one person can discern the ways of God for all of God's people. As we stay faithful to God in community, we can work together to seek clarification of God's call and hold one another accountable to the truth.

This kind of faithfulness in community is the root of our spiritual genetics, if you will. It is of these people that we are born. In seeking to understand them, we grow closer to understanding what God expects of us.

Studying our spiritual heritage we understand, all these centuries later, our charge is to “love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to keep his commandments, and to hold fast to him, and to serve him with all (our) heart and with all (our) soul” (verse 5).

Glen Schmucker is a hospice and pediatric hospital chaplain in Fort Worth.