

The Division of the Land on the East Side of the Jordan River

Joshua 13

Joshua 13 - *“Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the LORD said to him: “You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed. ² This is the land that yet remains: all the territory of the Philistines and all that of the Geshurites, ³ from Sihor, which is east of Egypt, as far as the border of Ekron northward (which is counted as Canaanite); the five lords of the Philistines—the Gazites, the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites; ⁴ from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians as far as Aphek, to the border of the Amorites; ⁵ the land of the Gebalites and all Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon as far as the entrance to Hamath; ⁶ all the inhabitants of the mountains from Lebanon as far as the Brook Misrephoth, and all the Sidonians—they I will drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide it by lot to Israel as an inheritance, as I have commanded you. ⁷ Now therefore, divide this land as an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh.”*

⁸ *With the other half-tribe the Reubenites and the Gadites received their inheritance, which Moses had given them, beyond the Jordan eastward, as Moses the servant of the LORD had given them: ⁹ from Aroer which is on the bank of the River Arnon, and the town that is in the midst of the ravine, and all the plain of Medeba as far as Dibon; ¹⁰ all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, as far as the border of the children of Ammon; ¹¹ Gilead, and the border of the Geshurites and Maachathites, all Mount Hermon, and all Bashan as far as Salcah; ¹² all the kingdom of Og in Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and Edrei, who remained of the remnant of the giants; for Moses had defeated and cast out these.*

¹³ *Nevertheless the children of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maachathites, but the Geshurites and the Maachathites dwell among the Israelites until this day. ¹⁴ Only to the tribe of Levi he had given no inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance, as He said to them. ¹⁵ And Moses had given to the tribe of the children of Reuben an inheritance according to their families. ¹⁶ Their territory was from Aroer, which is on the bank of the River Arnon, and the city that is in the midst of the ravine, and all the plain by Medeba; ¹⁷ Heshbon and all its cities that are in the plain: Dibon, Bamoth Baal, Beth Baal Meon, ¹⁸ Jahaza, Kedemoth, Mephaath, ¹⁹ Kirjathaim, Sibmah, Zereth Shajar on the mountain of the valley, ²⁰ Beth Peor, the slopes of Pisgah, and Beth Jeshimoth— ²¹ all the cities of the plain and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses had struck with the princes of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, who were princes of Sihon dwelling in the country. ²² The children of Israel also killed with the sword Balaam the son of Beor, the soothsayer, among those who were killed by them. ²³ And the*

border of the children of Reuben was the bank of the Jordan. This was the inheritance of the children of Reuben according to their families, the cities and their villages.

²⁴ Moses also had given an inheritance to the tribe of Gad, to the children of Gad according to their families. ²⁵ Their territory was Jazer, and all the cities of Gilead, and half the land of the Ammonites as far as Aroer, which is before Rabbah, ²⁶ and from Heshbon to Ramath Mizpah and Betonim, and from Mahanaim to the border of Debir, ²⁷ and in the valley Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of Sihon king of Heshbon, with the Jordan as its border, as far as the edge of the Sea of Chinnereth, on the other side of the Jordan eastward. ²⁸ This is the inheritance of the children of Gad according to their families, the cities and their villages.

²⁹ Moses also had given an inheritance to half the tribe of Manasseh; it was for half the tribe of the children of Manasseh according to their families: ³⁰ Their territory was from Mahanaim, all Bashan, all the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, and all the towns of Jair which are in Bashan, sixty cities; ³¹ half of Gilead, and Ashtaroth and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan, were for the children of Machir the son of Manasseh, for half of the children of Machir according to their families.

³² These are the areas, which Moses had distributed as an inheritance in the plains of Moab on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward. ³³ But to the tribe of Levi Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD God of Israel was their inheritance, as He had said to them.”

Background Notes

Joshua 13 is the beginning of the second half of the book of Joshua. The first half of the book gives the account of the conquest of the Land. The second half of the book concerns the division and the settling of the Land by the twelve tribes.

I love the way the chapter starts out, don't you? Verse 1: “*Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the LORD said to him: “You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed.”* I wonder if Joshua thought, “Lord, why did you have to remind me of that fact?” How old do you think Joshua was at this point? He was in his nineties for sure – maybe even one hundred.

The point here is that even though Joshua had done a great job and the seven years of conquest was over, a lot of territory still had to be possessed. As the Land was divided and settled by the twelve tribes, the rest of the enemies in the land were to be eliminated. Unfortunately the Israelites never completed the job. For example, in verse 2 we read of the Philistines. It's the only mention of the Philistines in the book of Joshua. If only the tribes had finished conquering the Philistines! Think of all the conflict that could have been avoided in Israel's history as a nation if the Philistines had been eliminated right here in the beginning!

From verse 8 to the end of the chapter, we have the division of the Land on the east side of the Jordan River. It was divided between 2 ½ of the 12 tribes: Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh. What were they doing over there? Do you remember that the 2 ½ tribes had asked Moses if they could settle on the east side of the Jordan (Numbers 32)?

The Lord had granted their request, even though He preferred that all of the tribes settle on the west side of the Jordan River.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Believers must possess their inheritance.

In Joshua 1:3 God had said to Joshua: *“Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.”* And in verse 6: *“Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.”* Now in Joshua 13:7, God said to Joshua, *“Now therefore, divide this land as an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh.”*

So God gave the Land to Israel. It was their inheritance from God Himself, but now Israel had to take possession of that inheritance. Although they were now in the Land of their inheritance, they were not really possessing it until they were settled in it and enjoying its blessings.

In the same way, God has given us an inheritance of spiritual blessings, but we must possess our inheritance. We don't have to wait until we get to heaven for this inheritance -- it's ours now! When we become Christians this inheritance is given to us, but now we must claim our inheritance. We must take possession of our spiritual blessings and live in the good of God's promises.

Let's take some examples: Christians who are afraid to die have not really claimed their eternal security in Christ. Christians who are worried about their future have not really appropriated the rest of soul that's available in Christ. Christians who are always complaining and discontented have not really claimed and experienced the joy and peace of the land. Christians who can never get along with their brothers or sisters in the Lord have not really possessed the overwhelming love that is part of our inheritance. Have you claimed and appropriated and experienced all these spiritual blessings? They are ours in Christ. This is our inheritance -- but believers must possess their inheritance!

2. Believers must dispossess their inheritance.

That seems to contradict doctrinal point #1, but it's really doesn't. Before Israel could fully possess their inheritance, they had to fully dispossess the enemy forces in the Land. The conquest was over, but many pockets of enemy resistance still remained.

But the Lord had promised full victory! Verse 6: *“all the inhabitants of the mountains from Lebanon as far as the Brook Misrephoth, and all the Sidonians—them I will drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide it by lot to Israel as an inheritance, as I have commanded you.”*

Here's the spiritual lesson for us: the enemy doesn't give up easily, but the enemy will be dispossessed from our spiritual possession as we look to the Lord and follow the principles of victory that God has laid down in His Word. Many of the principles for victory are right here in the book of Joshua.

God promises victory – little by little. As we follow the Lord and mature in the faith, we will have victory over sin and temptation, and we will be strengthened to move out and reclaim territory that's still in enemy hands. This applies to things like our priorities and our worldviews, for example, where Satan loves to have control. It also applies to our Christian service as well. There is a lot of land where the enemy needs to be dispossessed. Yes, it involves spiritual warfare, but God promises victory. Before we can possess the Land, the enemy must be dispossessed!

Practical Application

Let's live more like the Levites!

Verse 14: *“Only to the tribe of Levi he had given no inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance, as He said to them.”* And verse 33: *“But to the tribe of Levi Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD God of Israel was their inheritance...”* The tribe of Levi didn't get a portion of the land as their inheritance. It sounds like the Levites got the short end of the stick, doesn't it? They did receive 48 cities to live in, but there was no large tract of land for the Levites.

That may sound like a raw deal, but it was really a good deal. Because the Levites had no tribal territory, they were not as occupied with material things like houses and property and owning large flocks and herds as the other tribes were. The Levites were more streamlined in their lifestyle. They were occupied with serving the Lord and His people. As a result, they were closer to the Lord; the Lord was their inheritance.

The application is obvious, right? We need to be occupied more with serving the Lord and His people and less occupied with material things. You can't take it with you, folks! The Lord is our inheritance.

Can we join with David in Psalm 16:5-6, *“O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance.”* The apostle Paul said that his goal in life was *“that I may know Him...”* (Philippians 3:10). Is that our goal? Let's live more like the Levites!