

Receiving the Inheritance

Joshua 13

The book of Joshua divides into two sections consisting of conquest (chapters 1-12) and division (chapters 13-24). Most of the second half details the geographic destinations of the tribes of Israel, a record of their inheritance. We learn about the places given to the tribes and the greater inheritance given to God's people in Jesus Christ.

Summary of the Text

Joshua is old but much land remains to be possessed, including the land of the Philistines and Geshurites, a corridor in the southwest of Canaan stretching nearly fifty miles north of Damascus (vv. 1-6). The Lord would drive them out so Josh is to divide the land to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh (vv. 6-7). The other half of Manasseh along with Reuben and Gad received their inheritance east of the Jordan where Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan had ruled (vv. 8-12). Nevertheless, Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or Maachathites who remained until this day (v. 13). The tribe of Levi receives no inheritance other than the sacrifices made by fire to the Lord God of Israel (v. 14). The inheritance of Reuben consists of Areor, the plain of Medeba, Heshbon and the cities of the plain, all the cities of Sihon and the princes of Midian whom Moses struck down (vv. 15-21). Israel also killed Balaam the soothsayer who tried to curse Israel (v. 22). The territory of Gad is north of Reuben (vv. 24-28), and then Manasseh north of that (vv. 29-31). Moses distributed these in the plains of Moab. Levi has no land inheritance, but the Lord their God was their inheritance (vv. 32-33).

A Faithful Leader to the End

Joshua's age is presented as a reason for taking action now (vv. 1-2). Rather than shrinking from the critical task before him, he must execute the distribution of land. The Philistine corridor was about fifty miles wide and resided on Israel's border, sitting there in such a way that it was possible for them not to conquer it. The Lord wants the tribes to both receive their inheritance but also to follow up and finish the conquest (vv. 6-7). Joshua can't simply rest on his laurels even though he has a lot of land to rest in—literally the promised land of milk and honey. There is still “very much land yet to be possessed” and so the next generation, who will be tasked to take up the mantle of leadership, needs to witness Joshua finishing strong (v. 1). With the bulk of exciting conquests behind him, the mop up, not to mention administrative and exhortational work, might seem unimportant. But it's important and Joshua isn't done. Paul tells the Philippians: “Not that I have already attained [the resurrection], or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:12-14). The prize comes after this life which normally follows old age. Old age need not come with cynicism or compromise, but rather completion: “The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head” (Prov. 20:29). The wisdom and drive of elderly saints crowns the church and the kingdom.

An Encouraging Promise & Fateful Compromise

In completing the mission Joshua and Israel must rely on the Lord's promise: “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” (v. 6). The Lord would be with them now just as He was at the beginning, and so rather than depend on horses and chariots, they must rely on Him to go before them. The mention of Og, Sihon, and Balaam points out that they already overcame kings, giants, and powerful false spiritual leaders (vv. 10, 12, 22). In other words, your

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fathers have been here and done that, and so can you. Unfortunately, “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” (v. 13). Geshur is located northeast of the Sea of Galilee and Maacah north of it, and this statement about the failure to drive people out will recur in Joshua and Judges. Why will the chaos of idolatry run wild in Israel? Because they could have relied on the Lord but didn’t. Many Christians make wonderful professions, faithfully fight in big battles, persevere through trying circumstances, but then make fateful compromises. Sanctification is the process of growing in holiness by the work of the Holy Spirit, and it must be pursued: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13). The time will come when Joshua isn’t there, when someone you have relied on or learned from has moved on, and the temptation to compromise will present itself. Jesus warns the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees which is hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1). The effect of leaven is hard if not impossible to see in a photograph. Is the dough rising? But over time it’s unmistakable. The Geshurites worship false gods, and you can’t honor Mammon and Yahweh (cf. Col. 3:5). What seems like nothing grows into something ugly.

A Sure Inheritance

Israel receives a glorious inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey. Sometimes Christians “spiritualize” away all the earthy promises of Scripture, but Jesus didn’t. He didn’t say the earth doesn’t matter, but “Blessed are meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Christian kids should honor their parents “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:3). This is the language of conquest. After Jesus’ resurrection, the Father didn’t divide the land of Israel to the church, but established a kingdom that “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Eph. 1:10). Like the tribe of Levi who inherited no land but the sacrificial offerings of the Lord and the Lord Himself (vv. 14, 32), we are not concerned with titled property which does not go with us (1 Tim. 6:7). But we are interested in our inheritance in Christ, the possessor of heaven and earth: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:11-12). If God has given you Jesus Christ, and Jesus owns everything—the new heavens and the new earth—what will you not inherit? This is one of the things Holy Spirit does, preserving and preparing us for this: He “is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:14). Christ purchased you, and when you are fully His—risen from the dead—so He will be fully yours.