

p 61 WEEK 8: PUTTING DOWN ROOTS, RECEIVING GOD'S INHERITANCE

Joshua 13:1–19:51

The Place of the Passage

Chapter 13 begins a new chapter in Israel's life under Joshua's leadership. This transition can be seen in the appearance of a new word in the story: inheritance. It appeared just once in the first half of the book (Josh. 11:23), but will occur 56 times from chapter 13 on. Though some areas of Canaan remain unconquered, the conquest is over and Israel is ready to settle the land. These chapters record the meticulous, specific, and at times seemingly monotonous division of the land. Nevertheless, there are a number of important insights to gain from these detailed land assignments.

The Big Picture

Through Joshua the Lord divides the land among his people in such a way as to communicate his divine leadership in the process.

p 62 Reflection and Discussion

Read through Joshua 13:1–19:51, then engage with this section of Scripture using the questions below. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 415–424; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Tucked into this catalog of land deeds are a number of valuable insights. To start, list themes in this section that are familiar from the story of Joshua to this point. Then, list themes that are new to this section of the book.

One ominous reality hinted at previously is repeated now in such a way that it cannot be missed (see Josh. 13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12–13). This series of qualifications to an otherwise positive distribution of land indicates a problem in the heart of Israel. What is this refrain, and what was the problem at heart?

Another refrain in this section concerns the tribe of Levi. Five times we read, "To the tribe of Levi alone Moses gave no inheritance." Levi did have an inheritance, but of a different kind. Read 13:14; 13:33; and 18:7. What was this special arrangement intended to teach Israel about her physical inheritance?

p 63 The Levites weren't given land, but rather "cities to dwell in" among the people (14:4). Given the Levites' priestly functions (see Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:8–11), including instruction in the Law, what might we suppose was God's intention in spreading them around?

After the eastern allotments were complete (Josh. 13:1–33), the western allotments began. But first attention must be given to a special case: Caleb. Caleb was one of the original 12 spies, standing alone with Joshua 40 years earlier with confidence in God's provision of the land. He remains confident in God's promises and unwavering in the face of the remaining Canaanite inhabitants (14:12). Three times in this section it is said of Caleb, he "wholly followed the LORD" (14:8, 9, 14). How does Caleb's life teach us to follow the Lord wholly? For help, use the contrast between Caleb and the other spies recorded in Numbers 13:30–31 and 14:21–24.

Judah is first in the distribution and receives a disproportionate amount of land. Why might this be? See Genesis 49:8–12 for a hint.

p 64 In Joshua 19:51 we learn where these allotments took place: "at Shiloh before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting." Combined with the method of casting lots, what do these features of the allotment teach Israel about her life in the land?

Read through the following *Gospel Glimpses, Whole-Bible Connections, and Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these reflections have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

YAHWEH IS OUR INHERITANCE. At one level, the inheritance given to Israel is land, but at another it is the Lord himself. By distributing the land by lot outside the tent of meeting, the Lord conveyed his benevolent presence and rule among them (Josh. 19:51). The Lord's presence is what is good about the land, and this is reinforced by the refrain concerning the Levites: "The LORD God of Israel is their inheritance" (13:33). This is the background to Paul's statement in the New Testament that the Spirit is the "guarantee of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14). Unlike land, our inheritance as Christians is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (1 Pet. 1:4), for Christ brings a new covenant of unending and uninhibited access to God (Heb. 9:15).

FROM WRATH TO WHOLEHEARTED FOLLOWER OF THE LORD. This is the first time Caleb is mentioned in the book, but he's no latecomer to Israel's story. Caleb and Joshua have grown old together and now they bookend the land's distribution. Caleb is mentioned first because Moses promised him a specific place and because he "wholly followed the LORD" (Josh. 14:8, 9, 14). Caleb's faithfulness is compelling: he treasured the Lord's Word, persevered under trial, and maintained courageous and energetic obedience into old age. Interestingly, though,

Caleb's story goes back further than we might think, for Caleb is a Kenizzite (14:6), one of the tribes mentioned in a string of peoples [p 65](#) inhabiting the land when God promised it to Abraham (Gen. 15:18–21). In other words, this wholehearted follower of the Lord who is to receive an inheritance comes from a people originally marked for God's wrath. In like manner the Lord's purpose to bless the nations comes to us, former enemies who receive a blessed inheritance through faith in Christ.

Whole-Bible Connections

TENSION IN THE STORYLINE. In the course of dividing the land, an ominous qualification is offered: "Yet the people of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites, but Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day" (Josh. 13:13; see also 15:63; 16:10; 17:12–13). The story of Joshua is mostly optimistic. But this growing refrain portends a haunting reality: the victory has been sweeping, but what remains could spoil it all (Lev. 18:24–25; 20:1–5). Israel's failure of faith is clear from their trepidation before "all the Canaanites who dwell in the plain [that] have chariots of iron" (17:16). These refrains create tension in the storyline of Joshua, which leads us to Christ, the only answer to human sin.

EPHRAIM, JUDAH, AND GOD'S CHOICE. At the start of chapter 16 you may notice a peculiarity. Joshua 16:4 reads, "The people of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, received their inheritance." Yet in verse 5, Ephraim receives an inheritance first, opposite his birth order. This subtle swapping of order highlights God's sovereign designs in the story of salvation. In Genesis 48, against human convention (and their father Joseph's expectation), Jacob blessed Ephraim with priority over Manasseh (Gen. 48:1–22). Likewise, a generation earlier, Jacob was chosen over Esau, and Isaac over Ishmael the generation before that; so goes much of the story of the Bible. Judah was not the oldest or particularly virtuous, but God chose Judah so that Israel's future ruler would come from his loins (Gen. 49:8–12). So it is witnessed again: salvation—in its planning and accomplishment—is entirely of the Lord.

Theological Soundings

FORETASTE OF THE FUTURE. Every Israelite who made their home in Canaan would eventually die there. Thankfully, however, the land functions as a foretaste of the new creation, the consummation of God's plan. Abraham understood this and "desire[d] a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Heb. 11:16), and Paul, recognizing the global scope of the promise, spoke of Abraham's offspring as "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). Abraham's hope is symbolically described in Revelation 21, where John describes his vision of "a new heaven and a new earth," a place where "the dwelling place of God is with man," [p 66](#) and where "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more" (Rev. 21:1, 3–4). Connecting Joshua's story with this hope, Ezekiel describes this future age with the symbolism of "land" and "inheritance" (Ezek. 47:13–14; compare Josh. 1:6). While Ezekiel and Revelation describe this final state with symbolism, this new creation will be no less physical than Israel's boundaries and towns across Canaan (1 Corinthians 15).

LEVITES AND ISRAEL'S ACCESS TO GOD. Leviticus provides background for the book of Joshua. God set apart the Levites to instruct God's people in his Word and to offer sacrifices for sin on their behalf. This is how Israel may live with God in her midst and yet not die. On the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), the Lord required Israel to approach him through an acceptable priest (Lev. 16:1–11), in an acceptable place (Lev. 16:16–19), with an acceptable sacrifice (vv. 20–22). This is how Israel related to God in the land, but this system could not finally deal with the problem it addressed. Instead, the Levitical priesthood, with its tabernacle and sacrificial system, was preparation for Christ, who would sinlessly enter God's true temple and offer the final sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 7–10). This helps us understand the meaning of the work of Christ.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Joshua 13:1–19:51 for your life. How does this passage lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises? Write down your reflections under the three headings we have considered and on the passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

p 67 3. Theological Soundings

4. Joshua 13:1–19:51

As You Finish This Unit ...

Praise God for the inheritance that is ours in Christ through faith, an eternal and heavenly inheritance that is better than any land. Pray for this hope to strengthen you for wholehearted loyalty to the Lord.