

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 17

Joshua 13-19 Land Distribution

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 17, Joshua 13-19, Land Distribution.

Greetings again. In this segment, we're going to be looking now at the next major section of the book of Joshua, which is the distribution of the land to the tribes. In the big section is chapters 13 to 21, and I've called that in my outline that you have, you should have access to, inheriting the land. This is where they're now finally, the battles are done, Joshua and the leaders are distributing the land to the tribes, and everybody gets their piece of the land, and that's what we're going to be focusing on next.

Within that 13 to 21 segment there's a chunk that deals with the actual distribution of the land to the main tribes, 13 to 19, then you have a chapter about specific kinds of cities in that land, the cities of refuge, chapter 20, and the cities of the Levites, which is different, in 21. So, we'll look at those separately, but right now we'll be looking at 13 to 21, the major distribution of the land. The first thing to say is that this part of the book is much more difficult to read, to work through.

The storyline, like them or not, whether you're grossed out by them or not, it's easy at least to follow the storyline of chapters 1 to 11. Chapter 12 is just the list, but chapter 13 now starts with this almost mind-numbing, impenetrable listing of peoples, or cities and borders, and all that. If you look at commentaries on the Book of Joshua, typically they're very robust, and a lot of pages devoted to the first 11 chapters, tend to get very thin, and not very detailed in these last chapters.

As a commentator who worked my way through all that and had to write about that as well, I understood the pain of trying to write something interesting about all these things. I think I did a little bit more robust treatment than some commentators did. But anyway, I'm not so much interested in navigating all the ins and outs of them.

We'll just point out maybe, to begin with that chapter 13, the first six verses, first seven verses are kind of an introduction to things. It says, chapter 13, verse 1, Joshua's old in advance in years, and God says to him, you're old in advance in years. This is probably by the end, closer to the 25 years of the book.

At the end of verse 1, God says to Joshua, that there remains yet very much land left to possess. So again, the pictures that we've seen in earlier chapters, it feels like an instantaneous kind of wiping out of everybody, taking everything all at once. Here, we don't see that in the same way.

We had the earlier reference to Joshua waged war against the land of the Canaanites for many years, for a long time. So, in verse 2, this is the land that yet remains, and then there are three or four verses that tell about all the lands that have not been taken, not been conquered. So again, we go back to chapter 10, verses 40 to 42, chapter 11, verses 16 to 23, where the summarizing statements are that they took everything and nobody was left breathing, have to be taken in this light that, oh, we find now that there's still more land to be taken.

So, those are kind of generalizing, summarizing statements, but there's a different picture here in chapter 13, verses 2 to 6. The rest of chapter 13 deals with the land of the tribes that were east of the Jordan, who had gotten their inheritance from Moses, and they're the ones that Joshua addressed in chapter 1. They wanted to settle east, but Joshua extracted the promise from them. Moses had extracted the promise originally. They should follow their brethren to the west and conquer the nations, and then they could go back, and settle there.

Starting in 14, 14 to 19, we have all the tribes that settled west of the Jordan in the new territory. But before we get there, look at the end of chapter 13, and the Levites, of course, were a special case. Levi was one of the sons of Jacob, way back when, the third son of Jacob.

In the time of Moses, the tribe of the Levites helped, and aided Moses when Aaron and the people had turned away from God, built this golden calf, and the Levites stepped up and helped Moses discipline those that were there. So, God had given a special gift to the Levites, that they would have a special commission from him. It was from the tribe of Levi that the priests came.

All priests, all legitimate priests, put it that way, all legitimate priests were Levites. Not all Levites were priests. So, there's a set and a subset.

The Levites who were not priests were the ones who helped the priests in their duties of setting up and tearing down the Tabernacle, and the journey through the wilderness, carrying the ark on the poles that they were supposed to carry, helping with the sacrifices, helping clean up, and all of those kinds of duties. Those are some of the things the priests, and the Levites did. So, look at the end of chapter 13.

The final verse tells us, to the tribe of Levi, and the context here is God is giving these things to Reuben, Gad, the half-tribe of Manasseh, and all the other tribes later, but to the tribe of Levi, the text tells us, Moses gave no inheritance, no land inheritance. Namely, why? It's because the Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, just as he said to them. So, that might sound like they got cheated out of something.

They did get cheated out of territory, but the gift was a special access to God and a special relationship with God that did not exist with the other tribes. They, God himself, was their inheritance. While we're at it, we'll just mention a couple of other things.

Earlier in the chapter, chapter 13, in verse 14, it says something similar. It says, that to the tribe of Levi alone, Moses gave no inheritance. In this case, it says it's the offerings by fire to the Lord God of Israel are their inheritance, just as he told them.

So, at the end of the chapter, it says that the Lord God himself is their inheritance. Here, the privilege of offering the offerings is the inheritance. Then we have one more perspective on this, chapter 18.

While we're at it, let's look at that text. Chapter 18, verse 7, tells us one more thing about the Levites. It says, the Levites have no portion among you, 18 verse 7, the Levites have no portion among you for the priesthood of the Lord is their heritage.

So, the privilege of being priests to God is sufficient for them. I think that's a rich picture. We, obviously, in the 21st century, certainly in America and the western countries, think of possessions as a big thing, and we're obsessed with materialism, unfortunately, too much.

Here, they're not going to get possessions. They're not going to get land territory, but they're going to get something much richer, a relationship with God. And whenever I think of this, I'm always convicted because I would hope I would be satisfied with that rather than, well, why didn't I get mine, so to speak.

We do find later, in chapter 21, that the Levites did get cities. They had 48 cities scattered throughout the territories, but they didn't get expanses of adjoining lands. So, that's a special place for the Levites.

So, back to chapter 14. We have Caleb asking to inherit his land at the end of the chapter. Then we have chapter 15 is the longest chapter in this section, which is the chapter of the distribution for Judah.

And there are more than 100 cities, 120 roughly, mentioned here, two-thirds of which, don't occur anywhere else in the Bible. So, we don't know the names and locations of these cities. And so, what's the purpose of this? Well, I think part of the purpose is to remind us that Judah, from the beginning, received one of the greatest blessings from his father Jacob in Genesis 49.

We discussed that in the segment where we talked about the Abrahamic covenant. Later in Israel's history, the tribe of Judah and ultimately the nation of Judah, when the kingdom split, were the vehicles by which God continued the promises to David

about a king of his being on the throne. So, the tribe of Judah occupied a clearly, a very privileged place throughout Israel's history.

And that's confirmed even by this extensive treatment devoted to it, that the author includes many more cities at much more length than we see for the other cities. Now, there are lists and there are lists. For example, in chapter 15, we have verses 1 to 12, and we have what's called a boundary list.

It tells us where the line goes where the line turns and what the boundaries of Judah are. And interestingly, there's a series of about nine different verbs in Hebrew that are used here and elsewhere in these boundary lists. And let me just find some for you.

In verse 1, it says, the allotment for the tribe of Judah, people of Judah according to their kinds, reached southward. That's one verb in Hebrew. In verse 2, their south boundary ran from the end.

So, running is another one. Verse 3, it goes out southward. That's another verb.

There are seven different verbs there. Each of them has its own little nuance there. And to me, it reminds me that the author is trying to bring alive the boundaries, to make them real to the reader.

And imagining your mind, I almost imagine that little game that in my childhood growing up, I think it's still around, called etch-a-sketch. It's a little blackboard with little knobs. And as you turn these knobs, the little line kind of goes along this way and that way.

And it's almost as if we're reading in real-time, the boundary going up and around. And we follow that. And the author's trying to bring that alive.

Starting after this, that takes us down to verse 12. But then after this is what we would call a city list. And the list of the cities now starts in verse 13 to the end of the chapter.

And now here's all the different cities and the different parts of the tribe. And so, throughout these land distribution chapters, the inheriting part of the book, 13 to 19, we have their lists and their lists. There are boundary lists, there are city lists, and sometimes they're combined.

They get very detailed, of course, and they get lost in them sometimes. But now, so Judah's the main tribe there. Chapters 16 and 17, we have the allotments for Ephraim and Manasseh.

Now, Ephraim and Manasseh were, with Aquin, they were sons of Joseph. So, Jacob had 12 sons. But if you remember in Genesis chapter 48, he gives a blessing.

But Joseph gives a blessing to his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. And so, the inheritance for Joseph is split into two. So, in a sense, instead of 12 tribes, we have this 13.

And there's Manasseh's itself split into two. There's Eastern Manasseh and Western Manasseh. So, there are 14 segments for the 12 tribes.

But just as Judah was the most prominent tribe in the south and recipient of the most prominent blessing in Genesis 49, Joseph also received a prominent blessing in Genesis 49. He is the hero of the last third of the book of Genesis. So, his descendants become the most significant tribes in the northern part of the land.

And so, the tribe of Ephraim is in the center of the land. Manasseh's also there and also east of Jordan. And so, they're the most important tribes in later history in the north.

And so, when the kingdom is divided, Ephraim and Manasseh are the most significant parts of the northern kingdom. And that's why they received the prominent blessings that you see here in these two chapters. One of the really significant sections here is in chapter 17, verses three to six.

It's a little story about the daughters of a man named Zelophehad. And as it turns out, we learn their story in some detail in the book of Numbers, chapter 27, where Zelophehad is a man that had five daughters, but no sons. And so, his daughters went to Moses and asked that they would be able to inherit the land due to them, even though there were no sons.

Normally, the inheritance would go through the sons. Moses and the Lord sanctioned this and said, yes, we need to do that. So, this shows the fulfillment of that.

If you go back and read Numbers, chapter 27, the first 11 verses tell that story. So, here, chapter 17, verses three and following, it kind of recaps that. Zelophehad, the son of Ephraim, et cetera, had no sons, but only daughters.

And verse four, they approached Elisha, the priest, and Joshua, the son of Nun, and said, the Lord commanded Moses to give us this. And so, it goes, and you see that that was fulfilled to them. So, this idea of a promise-keeping God that we mentioned is one of the big themes is certainly fulfilled here.

So, I think it's interesting. We have some story. We have the big picture stories of the allotments to the various tribes, but then we have individual stories of the allotments

of Caleb and the daughters of Zelophehad and others along the way through these big chapters that show that God's interest is not only on the big picture, just the tribes in general, but also individuals.

And God's concern is for both, for all peoples, but also individuals as individuals. Chapter 18, I'm sorry, I will just say a word here. It's kind of humorous.

In chapter 17, verses 14 and following, the last part of chapter 17, we have the people of Joseph, from Ephraim and Manasseh, presumably. They've come and they kind of are begrudging, which is an interesting contrast with this story of the daughters of Zelophehad, who, it's a beautiful, sweet story. And yet, the descendants of Joseph in chapter 17, verses 14 and following, they come and kind of begrudgingly say to Joshua, look, you've only given us one lot, one portion.

I'm a numerous people. We deserve more. We want more.

We need what's due to us. And verse 18, I'm sorry, verse 16, the people of Joseph said, the hill country is not enough for us. We need more.

We need more living space. And so I always chuckle at this because Joshua's response is in verses 17 and 18, you're strong people. You're big boys and girls.

Go take it. That's essentially my paraphrase of what he says. Verse 17, you are numerous people, have great power.

You should not have one allotment only, but the hill country should be yours, though it is a forest. You shall clear it, possess it, and you have to go fight the Canaanites and do it. So, there was a sense of making them take responsibility for that.

Chapter 18, the first 10 verses, kind of a preface, verses 11 and following kind of show bang, bang, bang, bang, the last seven tribes in very quick succession, chapters 18 and 19. But chapter 18, verses 1 to 10 are kind of an interlude where they meet at another place, not Gilgal, but at Shiloh, not that far away. They set up the tent of meeting there.

And essentially here, they are sending out groups of surveyors. They're sending them out to sort of make a map. And they are to describe the land as seven divisions or six.

Verse 4 says, provide three men from each tribe. I will send them out that they may sit up and down the land. They shall write down a description of it with a view to their inheritances.

So, Joshua is sending out people to make a map of the land. And they wrote this down, verse 9. And they came back. And then as a result, Joshua cast lots for them in verse 10 in Shiloh, and they apportioned the land to the rest of the rest of the tribes.

So that's the backdrop to the rest of chapters 18 and 19. We'll finish up this section by looking at the final inheritance for Joshua, which is at the end of chapter 19, starting in verse 49. So again, zooming in from the big picture, overall, giving the tribes, comes into one individual, the inheritance for Joshua, chapter 19, verses 49 and following.

So, by the command of the Lord, verse 50, they gave him the city that he asked for, Timnath-Sedon, in the hill country of Ephraim. He rebuilt the city, and settled there. And verse 51, these are the inheritance that Eliezer, the priest, and Joshua, the son of Nun, and the heads of the father's houses, distributed it by lot at Shiloh before the Lord at the entrance to attend a meeting.

They finished dividing there the land. So that final verse is a wrap-up of the whole thing, chapters 13 and 19. It's all done decently in an order.

Notice how Joshua is referred to. First of all, notice how Eliezer, the priest, is mentioned first. So, the religious authority, the religious sanction is part of this distribution of the land.

It's not just a geographical land grab, but it's a gift from God as their inheritance. Notice how Joshua is referred to. He's called the son of Nun.

Joshua is called the son of Nun 10 times in the book. And in most cases, it's sort of like presenting him in a formal way. He's called just Joshua many times, of course, but it's sort of like my mother when I was a kid.

If I heard my full name, David Morris Howard Jr., that caught my attention, and there's something coming here. Joshua, son of Nun, that's sort of giving his first name and his last name and saying, this is the man in charge. So, Eliezer and Joshua are the ones doing this.

It's under their authority, and it's done before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting at Shiloh. And so, all the land is now given to God's people as a fulfillment of the promises hundreds of years earlier to Abraham. And the land has been pacified, seemingly, and here they are, finished dividing the land.

When I just said seemingly, it just reminded me that I needed to mention something that I referred to along the way, different places. But let's just look at a couple of the places where it tells us that this tribe or that tribe was not able to drive out the people from their territory. So right away, off the bat, the most prominent tribe,

Judah, chapter 15, the final verse of that chapter says, in spite of all those dozens and dozens of cities, chapter 15, verse 63, that the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the people of Judah could not drive out.

So, the Jebusites dwell with the people of Judah at Jerusalem to this day. Now that might help us even in dating the writing of the book because we learn later in the book of Samuel that David did conquer the city of the Jebusites. It was called Jebus at the time.

It became Jerusalem, the city of David. And they were no longer there among the Israelites after David's time. So, when the book of Joshua tells us the Jebusites are living there until this day, would appear that the book, this is a reference before the time of David.

So, we don't know exactly when, but it would be within the next few hundred years, not many hundreds of years later. So that's the kind of statement we find, and that's to their shame that they were not able to drive out the inhabitants and a number of other references like that as well. We find that in the book of Judges when you've turned to that, the same thing happens.

So the land is pacified, sort of. That's the big picture. The overwhelming picture of Joshua is the picture of rest, and I think that's a valid and accurate picture.

But there are these little ticking time bombs that are going to come off when we move into the book of Judges and see that the Israelites did not really finish the task the way they should have. There are serious consequences because of it.

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