

United Division

Joshua 13-19

Introduction: Sections like this are difficult, and there is no way to spin it another way. It is hard to picture, hard to wrestle with the names of places, and hard to understand how this connects with life today, at all. These tend to be sections that we skip in our reading, blow through in our thinking, and wish they would somehow go away. Yet, we are compelled that when God gave us His Word, He didn't waste ink or space. There are parts of scripture that are more directly applicable, but all of Scripture is useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). So it is with both faith and confidence that when we dig into Scripture we will mine the gold to be had. This section is a detailed account of the division of the land of Canaan between the 12 tribes of Israel.

Seven chapters strong, this is the halfway point of the book, yet these events are covered quickly, where the first seven covered a few events in depth. Here is why this section is so important:

- **God cares about the details - real time, real places, real events** - God promised this land to Abraham hundreds of years before and though this section seems foreign to us (especially those who have not been to the land or are geographically adverse), this was a pinnacle event for the people of Israel. This was Christmas, anniversary, and birthday presents for life wrapped up in one event. And God did not skimp on the details. He laid out exactly what had been promised and now was to be realized. God cares about the big picture of life, but He also cares about the little things (since He knows the number of hairs on your head (Matt. 10:30). We can cast our cares on God with the big stuff, but He also knows, cares for, and is involved in the smallest detail.
- **God keeps His promises** - I don't think this can ever be emphasized enough. When God says it, it will happen. This does not mean it comes out the way we want it, dream it, or think of it. It certainly did not turn out that way for Israel, but God is changeless and CANNOT go back on His Word. We can entrust our life, our family, our future to Him, knowing that the One who cared for the birds of the field and the flowers on the hills cares for us. This section that seems so boring or disconnected to us SCREAMS of God's faithfulness, and thus we all celebrate that in our own life. This also means we do not hope for things God never promised. He never promised ease, comfort, or our timing of things in this life. We should not bank on things that He has not given.
- **We have individual work to do together** - This is a great picture or example or illustration of how we are to work. There was an overall goal for the whole nation, but each individual tribe and each individual person needed to faithfully do their part. This was **united division**, celebrating the diversity of the God's people who were each given a task that varied in breadth, but each was equally important. This is a great reminder that our life together must be marked by **faithfulness before we can be marked with greatness**.

I. **Dividing based on promises of Genealogy**

In order to understand the big picture as well as the detail of Joshua 13-19, we must understand the background that came before. This section is a culmination of promises, choices, and action. Before we take a look at 12 tribes, we need to go back and remember where these came from:

see chart:

We need to start back in Genesis 12 when God called Abraham to leave his home and travel to a land he had never seen nor been to. Abraham believed God, and became the Father of a great nation, was

promised a great land, and from his seed the nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham was old and still did not have an offspring, but God provided **Isaac** as a son in his old age. Isaac married Rebekah and she gave birth to **Esau and Jacob**, with the promise of the future going through Jacob (Gen. 25:23; Rom. 9:6-13). **Jacob's** name was changed to **Israel** (Gen 35:11). He had children with 4 different women, starting with Leah, whom he was tricked into marrying by his uncle. Leah gave birth to his first 4 sons: **Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah**. Though Jacob truly loved Rachel, God did not open her womb until Jacob 6 other sons by two maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah, which produced **Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher**. Then God gave Leah 2 more sons, **Issachar and Zebulun**, before blessing Rachel with the last of the 12, in **Joseph and Benjamin**.

A. Prophetic word from Jacob (Gen. 49)

There is important information given by Jacob before his death back in Genesis 49. In fact, we cannot understand the division of the land without understanding the prophecy given by Jacob. We must remember that in this culture, the first born son received the birth right, the main inheritance, and the rest of the inheritance was given successively down the line. This would have set up Reuben to be the lead dog of the family, but all he got out of the deal was a small portion of the land and a sandwich. Here are a few highlights from Jacob:

- **Rueben** - He was strong and powerful, but Jacob said he was as unstable as water (or literally, as boiling water). In a disturbing scene in Genesis 35:22, Rueben slept with his father's concubine Bilhah while his father was still alive. This information travelled back to Jacob, and though he did not levy consequences immediately, Reuben was passed over for the birthright, and it was given to Joseph's sons instead (1 Chronicles 5:1-3)
- **Simeon & Levi** - Following Rueben's footsteps of "making father proud", Genesis 34 records how Simeon and Levi avenged their sister Dinah, who was raped by a man named Shechem. Shechem wanted to marry Dinah, and was willing to do anything required. Simeon and Levi hatched a plot to have all the Hivite males go through the process of circumcision, and while they were recovering, the two brothers came in with swords and killed them all. Jacob rebuked the sons and said they brought trouble on the family and made him stink to the rest of the inhabitants of the land (Genesis 34:30). Because of this, Jacob prophesied that the two brothers tribes would be scattered and divided, instead of having a place of prominence.
- **Judah** - As is the case so often, the best then came down to the fourth child (all you forth kids out there know what I'm talking about). Judah received the blessing of having the Kingly line continue on through him. In Genesis 49:10, Judah was told that the scepter should not depart from him, and this played out as King David was a descendant of Judah, but the line did not stop there. We saw a few weeks ago that King Jesus is referred to as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David. We learn about God's promises and the future coming King from this genealogy, and how God is faithful to keep His promises.

Lesson Learned: Even though God kept His promise, there are consequences to disobedience. The descendants of Jacob received inheritance, but it came at great cost because of their sin. The sin of a true believer in Jesus Christ does not forfeit salvation, but it absolutely yields consequences, and often those are felt throughout a lifetime.

B. Prophetic word from Moses (Deut. 33)

Moses reiterated and expanded on some of the prophecies of Jacob as he faced death, which were taken as normative by the people at the time of Joshua.

- **Rueben** - though he committed a heinous act, Moses called for him to live but also that his inheritance, or men, would be small (33:5)
- **Benjamin** - Benjamin would have a special and beloved place in the land (33:12). Benjamin was one of the last holdouts in all of the tribes before it fell with Judah in 586 B.C.
- **The Sons of Joseph** - Ephraim and Manasseh were going to be given a substantial and influential portion of the land. This was the birthright lost by Rueben and given to Joseph's sons (1 Chron. 5:2).
- **Levi** - Levi would be scattered, but they had also proven to be loyal to the Lord (see Exodus 32:26-29). They would become the priesthood among Israel, and thus have a favored position among the people. **Joshua 13:33** says, "*But to the tribe of Levi, Moses gave no inheritance; the Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, just as he said to them.*"

Lesson Learned: There was an early acceptance of the book of Moses as canonical. "*The Levites did not receive any land because Moses had said so, and Moses said so because the Lord God of Israel said so. Thus Joshua 13 also emphasizes that the Pentateuch was already completely normative. It was the Word of God to these people.*"¹

II. Dividing based on promises of Geography

Joshua 13:6b-7 "I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel. **Only allot the land** to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you.⁷ Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh."

See Map

A. First Stage – East (13) – Reuben, Gad, and the ½ Tribe of Manassah

Joshua 13:8 With the **other half of the tribe of Manasseh the Reubenites and the Gadites** received their inheritance, which Moses gave them, beyond the Jordan eastward, as Moses the servant of the LORD gave them:

Joshua 13:14 To the tribe of **Levi alone** Moses gave no inheritance. The offerings by fire to the LORD God of Israel are their inheritance, as he said to him.

Notice: These two and half tribes conquered the land promised to them during the time of Moses. This means all of Israel helped conquer the Amorites and Ammonites. It is going to be important for the future of the book to understand that the fighting men of these tribes were to leave their families and fight with their brothers on the West side of the Jordan River. This will help us understand the events of Joshua 22, so file this away.

B. Second Stage – North/South (14-17) – Judah, Ephraim, and Manassah

Joshua 14:2 Their **inheritance was by lot**, just as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses for the nine and one-half tribes.

Joshua 14:4-5 For the people of Joseph were two tribes, **Manasseh and Ephraim**. And no portion was given to the Levites in the land, but only cities to dwell in, with their pasturelands for their livestock and their substance.⁵ The people of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses; they allotted the land.

¹ Francis Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, p. 172.

Joshua 15:1 The allotment for the tribe of the people of **Judah** according to their clans reached **southward** to the boundary of Edom, to the wilderness of Zin at the farthest south.

Joshua 16:4 The people of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, received their inheritance.

The second stage had everything to do with birthright and strategy. Judah and the sons of Joseph are represented in this division. These each held strategic placements in the land, both south and north. Judah's land included Jerusalem, which would not be conquered until the time of David. Ephraim and Manasseh controlled the strategic central portion of the land at its widest parts.

C. Third Stage – Rest of the West (18-19) – Naphtali, Issachar, Benjamin, Simeon, Asher, Zebulun, Dan

Joshua 18:2-6 There remained among the people of Israel **seven tribes** whose inheritance had not yet been apportioned.³ So Joshua said to the people of Israel, "How long will you put off going in to take possession of the land, which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?"⁴ Provide three men from each tribe, and I will send them out that they may set out and go up and down the land. They shall write a description of it with a view to their inheritances, and then come to me.⁵ They shall divide it into seven portions. Judah shall continue in his territory on the south, and the house of Joseph shall continue in their territory on the north.⁶ And you shall describe the land in seven divisions and bring the description here to me. **And I will cast lots for you here before the LORD our God.**

Finally, notice that the rest were dispersed throughout the land. Most were not large swaths, but there are a few items to note. **Benjamin** was given close proximity to Judah, and it overlapped at Jerusalem, the center of worship and political power during the height of Israel's united monarchy. Also, notice that **Simeon** was given land, but it was enveloped land within Judah. This was the physical consequence of earlier sin.

Lesson Learned: The land was divided up primarily by the use of *lots* (this was a way of determining God's will, most likely by putting round pebbles into the priests ephod and reaching blindly in and reaching out a pebble – called the Urim and Thummim – to determine if the answer was 'yes' or 'no'). This meant that God had His direct hand on the division of the land. There was no mistakes nor coincidences.

III. Dividing gives us promises of lessons learned

A. Faithfulness is defined by how we start AND Finish

- As seen in the life & request of Caleb

Joshua 14:9-12 And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, **because you have wholly followed the LORD my God.**'¹⁰ And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the LORD spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. And now, behold, I am this **day eighty-five years old.**¹¹ I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming.¹² So **now give me this hill country of which the LORD spoke on that day,** for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the LORD said."

- **As seen in the life and work of Joshua**

Joshua 19:49 When they had finished distributing the several territories of the land as inheritances, the people of Israel gave an inheritance among them to Joshua the son of Nun.⁵⁰ By command of the LORD they gave him the city that he asked, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim. And he rebuilt the city and settled in it.

Faithfulness before greatness. Faithfulness early and often breeds faithfulness later. Joshua and Caleb both were committed to the Lord early, even when everyone around them were fearful and disobedient (Numbers 13). These men would spend most of their lives leading, waiting, and fighting for land that they would only possess for the twilight years of their life (Joshua lived until he was 110). Yet, we learn from these great men that faithfulness does not have a timeline or retirement age. They were still working hard until the end. In Caleb's case, he asked for a city that was possessed by giants. Caleb, even in his old age was willing to take this on.

This illustrates the need for all of us to "*wholly follow the Lord*". Each of these men exemplified this, and because of this, God did great things in and through them, leaving a legacy behind them. So two sides of this coin: *young folks* need to establish faithfulness in wholly following the Lord now, standing against the nominal living of those around you and putting yourself to have God work through you. Youth wants to do great things, but they don't want to work that hard or that long for it. *Those who are older* need to emulate the faithful work of Joshua and Caleb. There was no quit in these men. They did not view the end of their life as the end of work, but merely a change in work. In fact, what they provided the younger men in Israel was an example to follow. This is what we continually need in this church, and in every church.

B. Leadership is defined by the ability to relinquish leadership

Though Joshua never quit, he did change. Joshua led the people directly for seven years of fighting, but there was a time that he relinquished that role to the rest of the leaders of Israel. It was up to the other leaders to carry the torch, to continue on, and to finish the job. This is our ongoing challenge. I've been asked how the transition has gone in our church (since John and I transitioned a little over 2 years ago). I usually answer, "which one?" We are continually involved in reproducing, training, releasing, sending, and doing it all over again. We must get used to this, or the temptation is that the work stops with us. You and I are called here to be faithful for a time, but our goal is to have others follow after us to continue on, which means that we are constantly looking to give things away, even, as we will see, if they are not done as well as we could do them.

C. Promises must be possessed to be realized

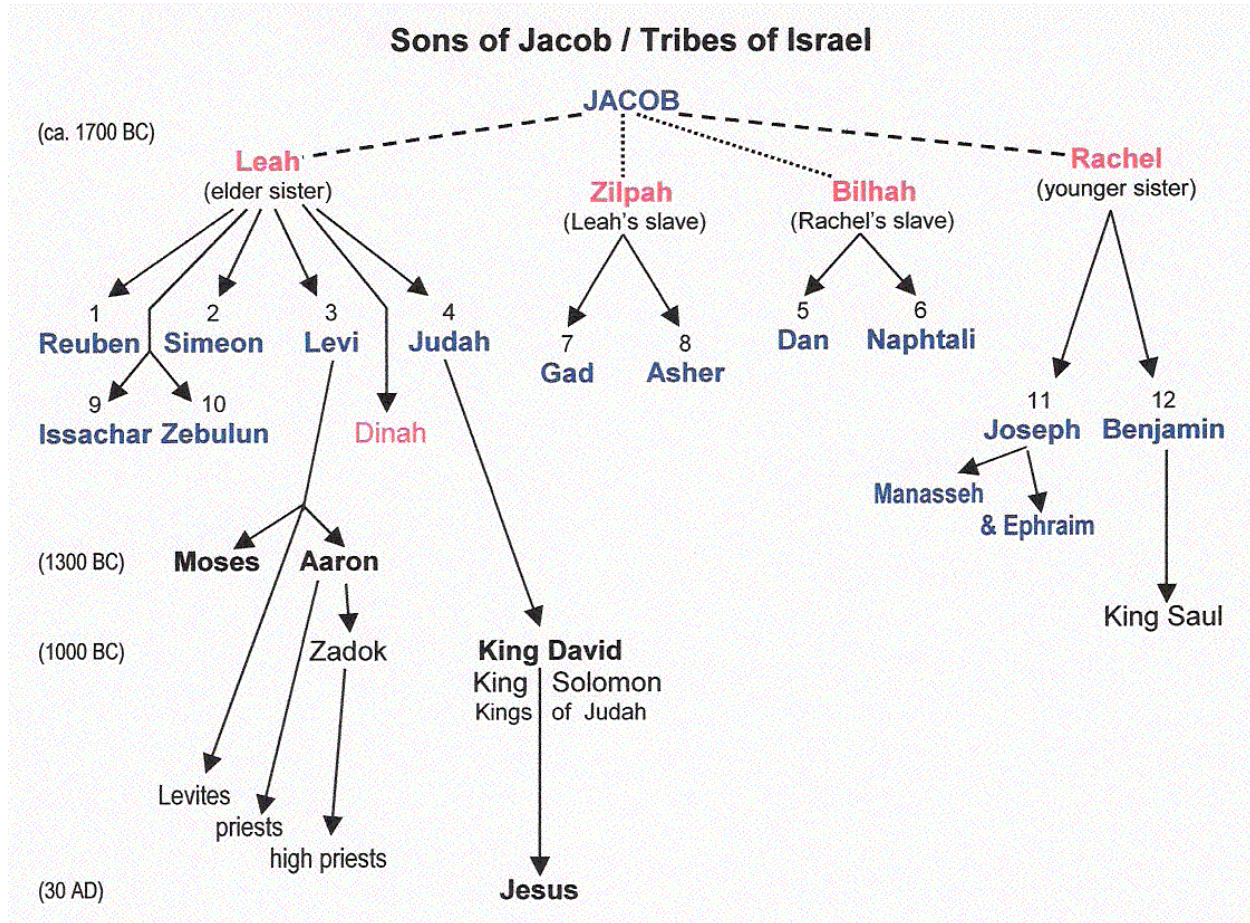
God clearly gave promises that were true and sure. Yet His promises are never given for us to go home and put those promises under our pillow at night and hope there is something realized in the morning. His promises are given to be possessed, to be worked out, to be put into practice. For the people of Israel, to the degree that they did this is the degree of long term success their tribe and all of Israel had. Unfortunately, there were numerous cases where they were unable to drive out the people of Canaan from among them. (See: Joshua 13:13, 15:63; 16:10; 17:12; 19:47). This inability meant that would cause a thorn not only in the individual tribes that could not finish the job, but for Israel as a whole (read Judges 1 for a broader list of failing to drive out inhabitants).

There are **2 main areas** that we need to possess what we've been promised. The first is what we've talked about the last few weeks but is good to remember: Revelation 5 gives a picture of the nations worshipping together. This is a glimpse of the future that colors our present. God called us to make disciples of all nations, and then shows us that it actually happens. Now we need to take hold of that promise.

Second, 1 Timothy 6:12 says, "*Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*" TAKE HOLD! POSSESS! Grab hold of the future hope that is a present reality. This takes place on an individual level but absolutely affects the whole family. Salvation has freed us up to live differently because we live by faith. But **like many in Israel, we often leave parts out**. We are satisfied with some victories but leave other parts of our life unaltered. The gospel of Jesus Christ radically transforms us from the inside out so that we can LIVE by faith, living out all the promises that God made to us.

Concluding Questions & Thoughts:

- Why should we be excited about sections of Scripture like this list of land divisions? What insight into the nature and care of God do we glean from this?
- In what areas of your life in terms of faithfulness need to change? What areas have become slack over time? What things in your life hinder you from being faithful in the most important things?
- Are there areas of life that you have not yielded completely to Christ? Have you been picking and choosing to yield those things that make sense to you or that you like, but not the areas that do not?
- How can we encourage younger people in our church toward faithfulness? Are we setting a good example? What does it look like to hand over leadership? What does it NOT look like?





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- I. Dividing based on promises of Genealogy
 - a. Prophetic word from _____ (Gen. 49)
 - b. Prophetic word from _____ (Deut. 33)

- II. Dividing based on promises of Geography
 - a. A. First Stage - _____
 - b. Second Stage - _____
 - c. Third Stage - _____

- III. Dividing gives us promises of lessons learned
 - a. Faithfulness is defined by how we _____
 - b. Leadership is defined by the ability to _____
 - c. Promises must be _____ to be realized