

Joshua 13-19: Dividing Up the Land to Each Tribe

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After all the battles in the southern campaign in Joshua 9-10, and the northern campaign in Joshua 11-12, we find the conclusion, "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel...thus the land had rest from war". How long had it been since the Exodus from Egypt? It took about two years to go past the Red Sea, then to go to Mt. Sinai to get the Law, then to Kadesh Barnea. Then the first generation wandered in the wilderness for 38 more years until they died out. Caleb stated in Joshua 14:7 that he was 40 years old at Kadesh Barnea, so when they crossed the Jordan River he would have been 78. Now in 14:10, Caleb said he was 85, therefore the southern and northern war campaigns of Joshua took 7 years. Now with the land taken in Joshua 13-19, it is time to divide up the land between the tribes of Israel, but wait a minute---HOUSTON WE HAVE A PROBLEM. Even though there were no more Canaanite armies left to fight, and all the major military threats were removed, there was still a whole bunch of scumbag Canaanites in the land (if you doubt the scumbag brand read Leviticus 18:27). Joshua 13:1-7 describes two large swaths of land that remained to be taken. In these chapters about dividing the land we find a repetition of "very much of the land remains to be taken and possessed" (13:1,13; 16:10; 17:12,13). The seeming contradiction between Joshua 11:23 and 13:1 can be explained though not excused. Joshua and his army did take control of the whole land, and he did destroy or capture the key cities, but Israel did not take every city or slay every Canaanite. Joshua's plan was to divide up the land and then command each Israeli tribe to wipe out the leftover Canaanites in their own territory. What should they have done? We have the perfect example of Caleb in Joshua 14 and 15. Joshua apportioned Hebron to Caleb and his family, so Caleb went there and attacked and wiped out the large people known as the Anakim. These sons of Anak were the ones that terrified the spies of Israel back 47 years before when Israel refused to go into the land for fear of them (Nu.13-14). Caleb, being a man of faith, attacked the sons of Anak and wiped them out, but unfortunately most of Israel did not follow his example. Therefore, the "did not destroy" theme is repetitive throughout the allotment process of Joshua 13-19. The consequences of leaving the Canaanites there would be realized a few generations later in the book of Judges. The evil of the Canaanites greatly influenced Israel's 2nd and 3rd generations in a bad way. It would be like buying a house from the Mafia today, but they wouldn't move out, so you just raise your kids in the environment of the Mafia with all the crime, depravity, and violence. Do you think that might be a bad influence on your children?

Why did they fail to obey God to wipe out the evil Canaanites? I can think of many reasons: 1. They had fought a long and tough war and were ready for peace, 2. The remaining battles would be against a large tough foe, so the risks were great. They had a lack of faith and took the easy way, 3. In Joshua 16:10 and 17:13 we read that the Canaanites agreed to become forced laborers. The enticement of free or cheap labor overcame them. In other words, Israel got lazy, fearful, and greedy. The failure of Israel to take all the land speaks to the age-old debate about the interaction of the sovereignty of God vs. the free will of man. Canaan was a free gift of God, yet to occupy it Israel had to obey and cross the river and fight for it.

Genesis 48-49, Jacob's Prophecy

At the end of his life Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, made some amazing predictions about the future inheritances of the descendants of his 12 sons. When Joshua divided up the land 450 some odd years later, it fulfilled everything Jacob had said over 450 years before. In Genesis 48:5, even though the double portion usually went to the oldest son, Jacob gave the double portion to Joseph by adopting his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh and giving them full shares. Reuben was the oldest, but he was given a lesser portion because he happened to sleep with his father Jacob's wife Bilhah. In Genesis 49:4, Reuben was reduced because "you went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it". In Gen. 49:5, Simeon and Levi would not get their own land but be dispersed in various cities because they committed murder back at Shechem (in Genesis 34). All the brothers had some issues, but I'm sure it wasn't their fault (tongue in cheek). In Genesis 49:8-12, Judah got a very favorable blessing that his tribe would be the preeminent tribe, and the kingly line would come from Judah. Of course this was later fulfilled by David (see 2 Samuel). In Genesis 49:13-21, Jacob made some cryptic references about the lesser tribes of Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, and Gad predicting their future. Then in Genesis 49:22, Jacob said that Joseph's son Ephraim would be the most populous tribe, and also an important tribe. When Joshua divided up the land Judah and Ephraim got the most and best land just as Jacob had said over 450 years before. It's almost as if God was sovereignly involved in all this---DUH! It was a foregone conclusion that God was directing the lot draw, and that God revealed all this to Jacob way before.

Joshua 13:8-33, the Transjordan Tribes

In Numbers 32, three tribes of Israel had asked Moses to grant them the land on the east side of the Jordan River. That land was not part of the “promised land” because only everything west of the Jordan was promised to Abraham, but the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh were shepherds of flocks so they asked to stay there. It was good pastureland and seemed vacant for the taking. Moses and Joshua agreed with the provision that the adult men cross the River with Israel and fight against the Canaanites until the land was taken. Was it a wise choice to settle east of the Jordan River—it was by appearance only. There was no natural boundary or barrier to the east, so they were exposed to constant invasion. Every time Israel was invaded, these tribes were attacked first, so their land was always the first land lost. Finally in about 750 BC, the Assyrians attacked them and carried them off to a distant land to be slaves (1 Chronicles 5:26).

Joshua 15, the Allotment of Land for Judah

In Joshua 14, Caleb received his inheritance of Hebron, and he faithfully destroyed the evil Canaanites there. Now in Joshua 15, the tribe of Judah will get their inheritance. Generally the tribes were supposed to be matched with land randomly by drawing lots. I think lots were small flat stones with names on them (archeologists have found many of these). By drawing lots, the tribes were matched with the land, yet the two largest and most important tribes of Judah and Ephraim seem to have gotten a special deal. I think the two largest and best portions of land were carved out for them, and then the two portions were decided by lot. Judah’s land totally fulfilled the prophecy given 450 years before by Jacob in Genesis 49. Judah was surrounded by enemies, just as Jacob had predicted—the Moabites on the east, Edomites on the south, Amalekites on the southwest, and the Philistines on the west. Also Jacob said their land would be suitable for vineyards. Judah’s land extended from the south end of the Dead Sea west to the brook of Egypt. Judah’s northern boundary extended from the north tip of the Dead Sea straight over to the Mediterranean Sea. Joshua 15:63 ends with the sad information that Judah never took Jerusalem from the Jebusites until about 400 years later by David in 2Samuel 5.

Joshua 16, the Allotment for Ephraim

The Patriarch, father of the twelve tribes, and originator of the name Israel was Jacob. Before Jacob died he predicted in Genesis 49:22-26, that the sons of Jacob’s son Joseph would be very fruitful in the sense that their descendants would be numerous. In particular, Jacob gave a lot of print to Ephraim to be a populous and important tribe living in the Hill Country of Israel. Sure enough, in Joshua 16, Ephraim got a special allotment of the best and largest piece of land right in the middle of Israel—from the Jordan River where Jericho had been through the hill country and all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. With this generous allotment you would think Ephraim would be happy, but in Joshua 17:14-18 they asked for more land, but Joshua turned them down. Joshua challenged them to clear more land, and to drive all the Canaanites out to make more room. With this challenge Joshua exposed Ephraim’s real problem—lack of hard work, and lack of obedience. About five hundred years later after King Solomon died, there would be a split in Israel basically between Judah on the south and Ephraim on the north, so these two tribes were preeminent in the history of Israel. It is significant that Ephraim’s southern boundary did not directly abut Judah’s northern boundary but left a sliver of land for the tribe of Benjamin between them (Joshua 18:11). At the end of Joshua 16:10, the author once more sends out the ominous “did not destroy” message. Instead of wiping out the evil influence of the Canaanites, Ephraim made them forced laborers. I’m sure it seemed like a good idea at the time (cheap labor), but historically we know it would have disastrous consequences.

The Second Allotment at the Shiloh Meeting

The first allotment of land was done at Gilgal and apportioned land to Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Joshua then moved the assembly to Shiloh, which became Israel’s religious center and the home of the Tabernacle (remember Solomon didn’t build the Temple in Jerusalem until over 400 years later). It looks like Shiloh was more centrally located and convenient for all the tribes.

Joshua 18-19, The Survey of the Land and Second Allotment

Based on Joshua 18:3, seven tribes had been goofing off and had not surveyed the remaining land so Joshua could apportion it. Therefore Joshua ordered each tribe to send out three men to survey and list the cities and landmarks describing the land. After they brought the information back, the seven tribes cast lots for the land. Benjamin got the land between Judah and Ephraim. Simeon was assimilated into Judah’s territory. Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali all got pieces of land north of

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Ephraim. Dan got a small section next to Benjamin, which they later were unhappy with and moved far north just below Mt. Herman. The last apportionment went to the great man himself—Joshua. Since he was of the tribe of Ephraim, they gave him the city of Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim.

Joshua was a great leader and faithful servant until the very end as proven again by his waiting to receive his inheritance last. Joshua did not quit until his assignment from God was completed. I can't help but remember the Apostle Paul's last letter just before he died, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7)

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