

Message #25

Joshua 13:7-33

We come now to a section in the book of Joshua which features the division of the land. It may appear to be dry and uninteresting, but the truth is it is inspired by God and important to us. Certain points can help us see the value of a passage like this:

- 1) Whatever is in a Biblical text, whether easy or difficult, is divinely inspired and intended for our edification. We can be built up and strengthened in the faith by everything in the Bible. Paul said “all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable” (II Tim.3:16)
- 2) These chapters demonstrate that God is faithful to fulfill His Word precisely. This is an important point for God’s people to know about God. What God promised years before was precisely and literally fulfilled.
- 3) There are always great lessons to learn by carefully examining any passage.

Now the wonderful point of this section is:

WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE HAVE FAITHFULLY OBEYED GOD’S WORD AND HAVE FOUGHT A GOOD WAR OVER A PERIOD OF TIME, GOD WILL GIVE MANY WONDERFUL BLESSINGS AND WILL LET HIS PEOPLE ENJOY THEM.

God does not ever forget His Word. God does not ever forget any of His promises. God’s Word is not like that of a fickle human. When God makes a promise, even if the fulfillment takes time, He does fulfill it precisely and that is clear from this text.

Now in these verses there are two major historical observations to see:

HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #1 – Joshua was instructed by God to distribute the land.
13:7

When you come to **verse 7**, in effect, God is telling Joshua, “Your war days are primarily over.” We know from the first six verses that there was more land yet to take. However, Joshua’s days of fighting were over and the work that God had called him to do was done. Others would have to pick up where Joshua left off and God would work through other faithful men as He did with Joshua.

God’s work is never limited to one individual, no matter how spiritual or powerful the individual. Joshua had waged a tremendous war for God and now it was time for him to rest and enjoy some life for a while. Others should have been stimulated and motivated by just watching this faithful man of God to keep at their task and keep focused on taking the Promised Land. Joshua did not work himself out of a job; he kept faithful to do his job until the end of his life.

Joshua did not abandon Israel, but God was changing the emphasis of his ministry from warfare in the land to division of the land. The people of Israel should have realized the years of having this faithful leader of God were numbered. He would not be around much longer and they would need to keep moving forward to accomplish the task.

When it comes time for a faithful leader to leave, God's people should not fall apart. They should realize what a blessing it was to have a leader that was focused on God's Word and obeying it. They should gird up their own minds and live lives and pursue the same objectives. I am certain that when Moses died, the people thought there will never be another great leader and then God raised up Joshua.

It was now nearing time for his departure and if God's people stayed focused, God would bless them if they maintained their focus. God does not judge us by our success; He judges us by our faithfulness.

HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #2 – Joshua distributes land beyond the Jordan. **13:8-33**

The distribution of land begins with a description of land allotted to the Reubenites, Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh (**verse 8**). This makes the twelve-tribe record complete. Joshua was merely confirming what Moses had assigned earlier to these 2 ½ tribes (Num. 32:5, 20-22, **33**).

Now in these verses there are five distributions of land:

Land Distribution #1 - A description of all the land on the east side of the Jordan. **13:8-13**

Now we may observe that twice in **verse 8** Moses is named. What this means is that these tribes received their inheritance from Moses. Joshua was simply officially following through on what Moses had said, which obviously was sanctioned by God.

We may recall that when the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh saw that the land on the other side of the Jordan was plush and rich for grazing their huge herds of cattle, they wanted that land (Num. 32:1-5). Their initial motive was self-gratification.

Moses first refused to let them have this because he did not think it would be fair that all the other tribes would have to fight for their land (Num. 32:6-15). The tribes responded by saying that they would build sheepfolds for livestock and they would go and fight for Israel and help them take the rest of the land (Num. 32:16-19). So Moses said if they would do that, then they could go back across the Jordan to that land; but if they didn't do that, their sin would find them out and they would be destroyed (Num. 32:20-27). These tribes followed through on what they promised and now it was time for them to reap. **Following through with commitments is very God-honoring and it can cause one to reap great results.**

According to **verse 9**, the land is described as being land from Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of the Arnon, which forms the southern boundary of the Transjordan land (12:2).

South of Arnon was the country of Moab. Half-way out in the valley was another city, which became a boundary line. It included all of the plain of Medeba as far as Dibon. Medeba is an elevated plateau between Arnon in the south and Hesbon in the north, which is 2000-2400 feet high. Dibon, which is modern day Dhiban, is on the north side of the Arnon Valley.

Verse 10 informs us that “all” the cities of Sihon, who was the King of the Amorites, was included to the border of the sons of Ammon.

According to **verses 11-13**, when you get to Gilead the land turns north. The territory of the Geshurites was northeast of the Sea of Galilee and the Maacathites is further north. Bashan was fertile land of the north which offered good opportunity for agricultural development. Moses had been responsible for destroying the Rephaim and for cleaning out much of this land. The Rephaim mentioned in **verse 12** were apparently an extremely tall ethnic group of people (Deut. 2:10-11, 20; 3:11). But notice carefully in **verse 13**, there were still some who were living when Joshua was written, who were original inhabitants who had not been destroyed.

We don't know where some of these places are today; but they did know them in Joshua's day and these are precise boundaries. Today these lands are Arab controlled. They are the lands of modern day Jordan and Syria. Much has changed since the days of Joshua and Israel's faithfulness to God.

By the way, I Chronicles 5:25-26 reveals that these were the first to fall into idolatry and the first to be taken captive by Assyria. **What is promised in verse 6 is God's faithfulness; but what is revealed in verse 13 is Israel's failure.**

Here is a tremendous lesson for us to learn. God wants us to know and obey His Word. There are times when we don't do that; there are times when we fail. If perfect obedience were dependent on us, none measure up. However, perfect obedience is not possible for us and God is the One who gives the victory. What God expects from us is that we fight a good fight against our enemies; but we will never get them all.

Land Distribution #2 - A description of the land of the Levites. 13:14

Levi's inheritance consisted of the offerings by fire. Levi did not receive specific territory like the other tribes. Why? The answer is found in Deuteronomy 10:8-9. They were called to a life of ministry. They were to minister the Word; they were to minister in worship and they were to be a witness for the Lord.

What God gave them were 48 towns with pasture land for their flocks and herds (Josh. 14:4; 21:41). This is what Moses prescribed (35:1-5). Those who handled God's Word and worship were adequately provided for by God, by Moses and by Joshua.

From Numbers 18:21-32, we know that the Levites were to take some of the offerings for their own needs. All of their needs were met including retirement place and provisions.

Joshua is operating here in perfect harmony with this principle. He is following God's Word and making certain that the Levites were cared for.

This principle is the same in the N.T. God honors people who take care of those who minister. God blesses a church that does what it can so that the minister does not have to concern himself with material things; but can stay focused on caring for and feeding a flock.

Land Distribution #3 - A description of the land of the Reubenites. **13:15-23**

Reuben's allotment is made according to their families. Reuben was one of the sons of Leah, Jacob's first wife (Gen. 29:32). He lost his preeminence because of immorality he committed with his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4).

Reuben's territory lay in the southern part of the Israel Transjordan land. Most of the towns listed in these verses lay on a line from Aroer to Hesbon. Reuben's allotment was the territory previously occupied by Moab, east of the Dead Sea.

Notice **verse 22**, the sons of Israel had killed Balaam the son of Beor, the diviner, and this land was given to Reuben.

God delights in taking things once that were dedicated to Satan and making them his property. He did in the inheritance to Reuben. One commentator said, "There is no citadel like a fortress won from the enemy."

Land Distribution #4 - A description of the land of Gad. **13:24-28**

Gad's territory is that which sits east of the Jordan, north of the land given to Reuben and south of the land given to the half-tribe of Manasseh. Notice **verse 24**, the stress is on Mosaic distribution. Simply stated, Gad would get this land because Moses had said so. Gad was the son of Jacob by Zilpah, Leah's maidservant (Gen. 30:10-11). Prophetically speaking, Gad will receive the southernmost zone of the Promised Land (Ezek. 48:27-28).

When we read **verse 25**, it is clear that Gad's territory comprised almost the entire Jordan Valley east of the river. This massive territory was the inheritance given to Gad.

Land Distribution #5 - A description of the land of Manasseh. **13:30-33**

The half-tribe of Manasseh received the rich land of Bashan east of the Sea of Chinnereth or Sea of Galilee. Manasseh's inheritance included "all" of the towns or tent villages of Jair, which comprise 60 cities.

Now we may notice that **verse 33** again brings up the tribe of Levi. Why? Because the Levites were critically needed on both sides of the Jordan.

If the people of Israel were to continue to worship God in a blessed way, they needed the Levites. They were given great privilege of ministering God's Word.

The Levites were responsible to carry out the ministry of God. They did not possess a specific territory, but they were needed in every territory. God's worship must go forward because obedience to the Word of God is a critical key to great blessings.

The one thing that God's people must have for survival is an accurate understanding of God's Word. Jesus said man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. An accurate understanding of God's Word is needed for our very existence.

Practical Lessons:

- 1. No servant of God can do it all or accomplish it all.**
- 2. God does give His people blessings even when they have not had total victory over everything.**
- 3. People who follow through on their commitments will be rewarded.**
- 4. You don't have to have an impressive pedigree to receive an impressive inheritance.**