



Joshua - Chapter Thirteen

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

Before beginning to describe the tribal allocations west of the Jordan in Chapter 14, the text stresses that, although Israel has gained the upper hand, there remains much land to possess, particularly along the coast and in the far north (vv.1-7). A rehearsal of what was allocated east of the Jordan under Moses (vv.8-33) sets the stage for what follows, as does the ominous notice that the eastern tribes have failed to drive out some of their enemies, leaving them to dwell in the midst of Israel 'to this day (v.13).

III Joshua 13:1-21:45 - Dividing the Land

As with the first two sections, this third major section in Joshua begins with a divine initiative. The Lord instructs Joshua regarding the division and allocation of the land. Packed with geographical details often lost on modern readers, the boundary descriptions and town lists that characterise this section were doubtless of great interest to ancient Israelites inheriting their allocations in the land. Over time, the tribal allocations presented here undoubtedly became the basis for administrative documents, and these would have been subject to updating as new towns or villages were founded. Despite its historical-geographical content, this lengthy section shows careful literary shaping.

III.a Joshua 13:1-33 - It's yours, now take it!

Refer to the chapter summary above.

III.a.i Joshua 13:1-7 - The Parts of Canaan Still Unconquered

God graciously recognises that Joshua is aging. Although there is still much land that has not yet been conquered, God instructs Joshua to allocate the land to the nine and a half tribes as their allocation. God will still keep his promise to drive out the remaining inhabitants from the unconquered parts of the land.

¹ Now Joshua was old and advanced in years; and the Lord said to him, 'You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land still remains to be possessed.'

Joshua 13:1

The second half of the Book of Joshua begins much like the first, with both the narrator and the Lord stating the status of Israel's key leader. In Joshua 1:1 they announced that Moses was dead, and now they describe Joshua as old and advanced in years; his death is later recorded in Joshua 24:29.

By this point in the narrative, the subjugation phase of the conquest is largely completed; refer to the summaries in Joshua 10:40-43 and 11:16-23. However, the territories west of the Jordan must yet be allocated and occupied. In other words, much of the land still remains to be possessed. Joshua may be old but he still has work to do!

² This is the land that still remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all those of the Geshurites ³ (from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northwards to the boundary of Ekron, it is reckoned as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim ⁴ in the south; all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites, ⁵ and the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, towards the east, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath, ⁶ all the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, even all the Sidonians. I will myself drive them out from before the Israelites; 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 the half-tribe of Manasseh.'

Joshua 13:2-7

I will myself drive them out from before the Israelites; only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance. The boundary between the subjugation phase of the conquest and the allocation phase cannot be sharply drawn. Verses 1-7 speak of enemies whose land Israel has yet to possess (v.1). The Lord pledges to continue to drive them out, literally dispossess, relating the statement to the word possess in v.1, and instructs Joshua to go ahead and allot the land to Israel beforehand.

Each tribe was responsible for possessing their own land completely. The concept of personal responsibility and initiative is something that God seems to

hold high in his list of priorities for his people. Not only because that is how things get done, but also because that is how people are blessed in service. Believers are blessed by personally taking responsibility and initiative in trusting God to do what he has called them to do.

III.a.ii Joshua 13:8-14 - The Territory East of the Jordan

Moses had already agreed to give the Transjordan lands to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh. These verses list the land boundaries that mark out this allocation. They also make reference to the peoples that the Israelites had failed to remove from the land and the fact that the tribe of Levi would not be receiving any land allocation as their inheritance was to serve the Lord in perpetuity.



The Tribal Allocation of Land

During the conquest of Canaan, Joshua allocated the land to the tribes of Israel. These boundaries, however, do not necessarily reflect the land each tribe actually inhabited by the end of the conquest. Several tribes, such as Dan, were unable to drive out the Canaanites that lived in much of their allotted territory, while other tribes controlled portions of land that were not originally allocated to them.

⁸ With the other half-tribe of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites received their inheritance, which Moses gave them, beyond the Jordan eastwards, as Moses the servant of the Lord gave them: ⁹ from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, and the town that is in the middle of the valley, and all the tableland from Medeba as far as Dibon; ¹⁰ and all the cities of King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, as far as the boundary of the Ammonites; ¹¹ and Gilead, and the region of the Geshurites and Maacathites, and all Mount Hermon, and all Bashan to Salecah; ¹² all the kingdom of Og in Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei (he alone was left of the survivors of the Rephaim); these Moses had defeated and driven out. ¹³ Yet the Israelites did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites; but Geshur and Maacath live within Israel to this day.

Joshua 13:8-13

It is Moses who first mentions the inheritance given to these tribes in Transjordan. This was the land of king Sihon of the Amorites and king Og of Bashan. Refer to Numbers 32:33-42 and Deuteronomy 3:8-17.

The Geshurites and Maacathites. Geshur and Maacath were two small kingdoms north and east of the Sea of Galilee. The Israelites were instructed by God to ensure all the local inhabitants were purged from the land to avoid becoming drawn into their pagan idolatry, yet they did not drive them out. This Geshur is not to be confused with the Geshur mentioned in v.2, which lay far to the south on the Philistine coast.

Geshur and Maacath live within Israel to this day. David later married a princess from Geshur, and his son Absalom was born of her (2 Samuel 3:3). Absalom returned to Geshur and used it as a place to plot against his father David (2 Samuel 13:37-38, 14:23, and 14:32). The Maacathites may have come from the Maacah mentioned in Genesis 22:24, who was a nephew of Abraham. Later, when Sheba rebelled against David, he fled and may have taken refuge in one of the cities of the Maacathites (2 Samuel 20:14-15).

Later on the narrator makes the comment that Judah could not drive out the people from Jerusalem that raises a couple of questions. Refer to the comments made on Joshua 15:63.

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 them.

Joshua 13:14

The notice that the tribe of Levi receives no inheritance, which is repeated in v.33, explained in Joshua 14:3-4, and recalled in 18:7 in the midst of the allocation listings. This anticipates the designation of Levitical cities in Joshua Chapter 21, Deuteronomy 10:9; refer also to the comment made on Numbers 18:21-24.

The offerings by fire to the Lord God of Israel are their inheritance. Instead, the Levites had as their inheritance the offerings that Israel would bring to the Lord. These were their ‘financial security’ in Israel.

III.a.iii Joshua 13:15-23 - The Territory of Reuben

The first allocation described for Transjordan is that given to the tribe of Reuben.

¹⁵ Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe of the Reubenites according to their clans. ¹⁶ Their territory was from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, and the town that is in the middle of the valley, and all the tableland by Medeba; ¹⁷ with Heshbon, and all its towns that are in the tableland; Dibon, and Bamoth-baal, and Beth-baal-meon, ¹⁸ and Jahaz, and Kedemoth, and Mephaath, ¹⁹ and Kiriathaim, and Sibmah, and Zereth-shahar on the hill of the valley, ²⁰ and Beth-peor, and the slopes of Pisgah, and Beth-jeshimoth, ²¹ that is, all the towns of the tableland, and all the kingdom of King Sihon of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses defeated with the leaders of Midian, Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, as princes of Sihon, who lived in the land. ²² Along with the rest of those they put to death, the Israelites also put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practised divination. ²³ And the border of the Reubenites was the Jordan and its banks. This was the inheritance of the Reubenites according to their families, with their towns and villages.

Joshua 13:15-23

Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe of the Reubenites. This is the format given at the beginning of each allocation section and is a reminder that the land in Transjordan was divided during the time of Moses. Reuben had the southernmost portion of the land.

The account of Balaam son of Beor is told in Numbers Chapters 22-24, and his death is mentioned in Numbers 31:8.

III.a.iv Joshua 13:24-28 - The Territory of Gad

The second allocation described for Transjordan is that given to the tribe of Gad.

²⁴ Moses gave an inheritance also to the tribe of the Gadites, according to their families. ²⁵ Their territory was Jazer, and all the towns of Gilead, and half the land of the Ammonites, to Aroer, which is east of Rabbah, ²⁶ and from Heshbon to Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim to the territory of Debir, ²⁷ and in the valley Beth-haram, Beth-nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of King Sihon of Heshbon, the Jordan and its banks, as far as the lower end of the Sea of Chinnereth, eastwards beyond the Jordan. ²⁸ This is the inheritance of the Gadites according to their clans, with their towns and villages.

Joshua 13:24-28

Moses allocated Gad the central section of Transjordan.

III.a.v. Joshua 13:29-33 - The Territory of the Half-Tribe of Manasseh

The third allocation described for Transjordan is that given to the half tribe of Manasseh.

²⁹ Moses gave an inheritance to the half-tribe of Manasseh; it was allotted to the half-tribe of the Manassites according to their families. ³⁰ Their territory extended from Mahanaim, through all Bashan, the whole kingdom of King Og of Bashan, and all the settlements of Jair, which are in Bashan, sixty towns, ³¹ and half of Gilead, and Ashtaroth, and Edrei, the towns of the kingdom of Og in Bashan; these were allotted to the people of Machir son of Manasseh according to their clans – for half the Machirites.

Joshua 13:29-31

Moses allocated the half tribe of Manasseh the northern section of Transjordan.

³² These are the inheritances that Moses distributed in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan east of Jericho. ³³ But to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance; the Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, as he said to them.

Joshua 13:32-33

The Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, as he said to them. In v.14, the narrator states that the Levites had no land for an inheritance, but instead had the sacrifices Israel brought to God. They also received a greater inheritance than that - God himself: <<*This shall be their inheritance: I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no holding in Israel; I am their holding*>> (Ezekiel 44:28).

In this sense, if there is any tribe that Christians are spiritually connected to, it is the tribe of Levi. They also are called priests: <<*Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*>> (1 Peter 2:5), and have a special inheritance in God: <<*In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory*>> (Ephesians 1:11-12), <<*May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light*>> (Colossians 1:11-12), and: <<*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*>> (1 Peter 1:3-5).