

Last time we looked at the inheritance of Judah – and that of the eastern tribes.

Tonight we just look at the tribe of Joseph.

Since we covered three chapters last time, we went rather quickly,
so I wanted to drop back a little bit tonight and look at the big picture.

Chapters 13-19 are the explanation of the division of the land.

Chapter 13 details the eastern inheritance of Reuben, Gad, and ½ of Manasseh.

Chapters 14-15 lays out the inheritance of Judah.

Chapters 16-17 focus on Joseph.

Then chapters 18-19 relate the story of the inheritance of the rest of the tribes.

The word translated “inheritance” is used 50 times in the book of Joshua –
44 of those occur in chapters 13-19.

Have you ever wondered why Judah and Joseph receive all the conquered land?

(If you look at chapter 18, verse 3, Joshua asks the other seven tribes,
“How long will you put off going in to take possession of the land...?”)

I used to wonder about that when I would pour over maps in my youth.

But when you read more carefully, you discover that there was really *no* conquered land!

The combined forces of the twelve tribes only operated under Joshua for a few years
to overthrow the military power of Canaan.

That initial operation succeeded in overthrowing 31 kings as we saw in chapters 10-12.

But at the end of that campaign, the only place on the western side of the Jordan
where the people of Israel lived
was the camp at Gilgal.

Most of the kings of Canaan are dead.

A large number of the warriors were killed.

But only a relatively small percentage of the Canaanites themselves were dead.

Cities that were captured – were then left empty,
while the army moved on to the next place.

So, probably within a few days, those who had fled would return –
hoping that Israel wouldn’t come back...

There is still a lot of hard fighting ahead in order for Israel to take possession of their inheritance.
Whosoever wishes to take possession of their inheritance may do so!

It's a classic case of predestination and free will!
Only God can save.
Only Joshua can cause Israel to inherit!

But if *you* don't believe, then *you* won't be saved!
Each tribe has to believe God's promises and go forth and take possession of the land.

We saw last time that Judah was led by Caleb the Kenizzite
(and the Kenizzites were one of the condemned peoples, according to Genesis 15).

But Caleb believed God – as he had when he and Joshua were two of the spies sent by Moses –
and so Caleb led Judah to take possession of their inheritance
(at least the hill country and the Negeb –
the Egyptians still had too much power in the coastal plain –
and the Philistines were starting to settle there...)

We keep seeing that Jesus is our Joshua.
He is the one who fought the great battle and defeated the devil –
Jesus has set us free from bondage to sin and death.
But that doesn't mean that the war is over!

Jesus himself promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church.
That means that the battle is still going on!

Jesus is the great Joshua who causes us to inherit the land –
but *we* still have to believe his promises – and walk forward in faith,
and take possession of the land!

The apostle Peter, in his first epistle, opens by describing us as “elect exiles of the dispersion.”
Peter understands us to be elect – chosen in Christ, just as Israel was the “chosen people.”
But he also understands us to be “exiles” – reminding us of the Babylonian captivity.
And yet we are also “of the dispersion” –
a dispersed people who are scattered abroad –
like the book of Esther,
we are not focused on going back to the earthly Jerusalem!

Peter is using familiar terms from the OT –
and helping us think about how we connect to the OT story.

1 Peter 1:4 speaks of how we have been born again to a living hope
“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,
kept in heaven for you who by God's power

are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Israel received a perishable inheritance from Joshua.
We receive an imperishable inheritance from Jesus.

So we should expect to see some connection between Israel’s and our own!

1. The Inheritance of Joseph (16:1-4)

The allotment of the people of Joseph went from the Jordan by Jericho, east of the waters of Jericho, into the wilderness, going up from Jericho into the hill country to Bethel. ² Then going from Bethel to Luz, it passes along to Ataroth, the territory of the Archites. ³ Then it goes down westward to the territory of the Japhletites, as far as the territory of Lower Beth-horon, then to Gezer, and it ends at the sea.

The opening description of the inheritance of Joseph
starts with a combined account of their territory.

But it also leaves a gap – later filled by Benjamin –
which suggests that the text may not be strictly chronological.
The order of describing the inheritances may have as much to do
with saying something about Judah and Joseph!

Why does Judah go first?

You could say “birth order”!

Reuben had been removed from his status as firstborn
because he had slept with his father’s concubine.

Simeon and Levi had been demoted because they slaughtered the Shechemites
after the rape of their sister, Dinah.

Both Simeon and Levi will be scattered among their brothers –
although Levi’s scattering becomes an honor through their priestly role.

So Judah goes first in birth order.

But Judah does not receive the double portion of the firstborn!

That honor is given to Joseph.

Joseph was the firstborn son of Rachel – Jacob’s beloved wife –
and Jacob had adopted Joseph’s two sons as his own,
so that they might receive the double portion.

⁴ *The people of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, received their inheritance.*

Half of Manasseh had stayed on the other side of the Jordan,
but the rest of Manasseh, and all of Ephraim, now receive their inheritance.

Verses 5-10 describe the inheritance of Ephraim:

2. The Inheritance of Ephraim (16:5-10)

⁵ *The territory of the people of Ephraim by their clans was as follows: the boundary of their inheritance on the east was Ataroth-addar as far as Upper Beth-horon, ⁶ and the boundary goes from there to the sea. On the north is Michmethath. Then on the east the boundary turns around toward Taanath-shiloh and passes along beyond it on the east to Janoah, ⁷ then it goes down from Janoah to Ataroth and to Naarah, and touches Jericho, ending at the Jordan. ⁸ From Tappuah the boundary goes westward to the brook Kanah and ends at the sea. Such is the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Ephraim by their clans, ⁹ together with the towns that were set apart for the people of Ephraim within the inheritance of the Manassites, all those towns with their villages.*

Ephraim, we are told, extends from Jericho and the Jordan River (v7) westward to Sea (v8).

The handout maps show Ephraim as land-locked –
since the later divisions of the land seem to cut into the territory of Ephraim.

Verse 10 points out that Ephraim:

¹⁰ *However, they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites have lived in the midst of Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor.*

This is a common refrain both here in Joshua and also in the book of Judges.

Rather than driving the Canaanites out, they simply put them to forced labor.

In other words, they didn't believe God's promises –
and they didn't take God's warning seriously!

God had said that if they let the Canaanites stay,
the Canaanites would become a snare,
leading them away from worshipping the LORD alone.

As we've seen, if a Canaanite repented and believed in Yahweh,
then that Canaanite is no longer a Canaanite.

But Israel was called to bring God's eschatological judgment upon Canaan.

This is the last day.

Final judgment is being rendered upon Canaan.

Those who believe God and follow him will live.

Those who reject God and rebel against him will die.

Instead, Israel takes a halfway approach.

Some of those who reject God and rebel against him may live!

That may sound merciful at first –
but it's not.

If Israel allows the Canaanites to live in their rebellion,

then not only will the Canaanites continue to bring judgment upon themselves,
but they will also bring judgment upon Israel.

In the New Testament, our weapons are spiritual.

Excommunication serves as the spiritual death penalty –
the last resort when a person refuses to believe God and walk in his ways.

Many churches have abandoned the idea of discipline.

But as we saw in the case of Achan –
if the church refuses to discipline the one who rebels,
then the church will suffer for it!

When Israel was faithful – blessing came to the people of God.

When Israel was unfaithful – God’s curse came against them.

But God was patient.

He did not bring immediate judgement against them!
He did not deal with them as they deserved –
but he was patient with them and called them back time and again!

Even so – when we, as elders, deal with people who are straying,
we seek to be patient.

And if there is any hint of repentance, we seek to work with them.

In chapter 17, we then turn to the inheritance of Manasseh –
and particularly the western half of Manasseh.

Machir – the eldest of the sons of Manasseh – received a portion in Gilead and Bashan,
but the rest of Manasseh settles in the northern part of the hill country,
between Shechem and Jezreel.

3. The Inheritance of Manasseh (17:1-13)

17 Then allotment was made to the people of Manasseh, for he was the firstborn of Joseph. To Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, were allotted Gilead and Bashan, because he was a man of war. ² And allotments were made to the rest of the people of Manasseh by their clans, Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hopher, and Shemida. These were the male descendants of Manasseh the son of Joseph, by their clans.

Verses 1-2 focus on the *sons* of Manasseh,

but verse 3 introduces the problem of what happens when a man has no sons!

³ *Now Zelophehad the son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, had no sons, but only daughters, and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. ⁴ They approached Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the*

leaders and said, "The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance along with our brothers." So according to the mouth of the LORD he gave them an inheritance among the brothers of their father. ⁵ Thus there fell to Manasseh ten portions, besides the land of Gilead and Bashan, which is on the other side of the Jordan, ⁶ because the daughters of Manasseh received an inheritance along with his sons. The land of Gilead was allotted to the rest of the people of Manasseh.

In Numbers 26:29, we are told that Zelophehad's daughters were to inherit, in order to make sure that no family was omitted from the inheritance.

But then in Numbers 36, the story is told of how the tribe of Manasseh came to Moses and brought a complaint that if the daughters of Zelophehad married outside the tribe, then their land would be alienated from Manasseh.

This resulted in Moses' decree that the daughters of Zelophehad should only marry within the tribe of Manasseh, so that the land would not be alienated from the tribe.

Now the daughters of Zelophehad receive portions along with their cousins. (And since they were required to marry within the tribe, the effect would have been quite salutary for their cousins!)

Manasseh certainly has the largest inheritance of any of the tribes (one estimate suggests that Manasseh's inheritance was more than twice the size of Judah)

Verses 7-11 describe the boundaries of Manasseh:

⁷ The territory of Manasseh reached from Asher to Michmethath, which is east of Shechem. Then the boundary goes along southward to the inhabitants of En-tappuah. ⁸ The land of Tappuah belonged to Manasseh, but the town of Tappuah on the boundary of Manasseh belonged to the people of Ephraim. ⁹ Then the boundary went down to the brook Kanah. These cities, to the south of the brook, among the cities of Manasseh, belong to Ephraim. Then the boundary of Manasseh goes on the north side of the brook and ends at the sea, ¹⁰ the land to the south being Ephraim's and that to the north being Manasseh's, with the sea forming its boundary. On the north Asher is reached, and on the east Issachar. ¹¹ Also in Issachar and in Asher Manasseh had Beth-shean and its villages, and Ibleam and its villages, and the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, and the inhabitants of En-dor and its villages, and the inhabitants of Taanach and its villages, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; the third is Naphath.

Notice that the description already assumes the tribal boundaries of Asher and Issachar. This strongly supports the idea that Joseph is being singled out for special attention due to the double portion that given to Joseph.

It's also worth saying that Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim –
and so we should not be surprised that the tribes that had the two faithful spies
also turned out to be the leading parties in the conquest of the land.

But the list of cities in verse 11 is given to show that Manasseh also fell short:

¹² Yet the people of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. ¹³ Now when the people of Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.

Again, even in the midst of the most faithful generation ever,
the one generation that *obeyed* better than any other! –
they did not do what God said.

Paul will build on this motif when he says in Romans 3,
“no one is righteous, no not one!”

4. The Complaint of Joseph (17:14-18)

In verse 14, we hear a complaint from Joseph:

¹⁴ Then the people of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, “Why have you given me but one lot and one portion as an inheritance, although I am a numerous people, since all along the LORD has blessed me?”

This might sound puzzling at first –
especially when you see how Manasseh has twice as much territory as anyone else!
One thing to keep in mind is that we only have a tiny snippet of information.
The book of Joshua is written down at the *end* of the process.
The events took place years – perhaps decades –
maybe even centuries before they reached the form that we have them in!

The historian in me wants to speculate on a dozen different reconstructions
of what might lie behind the text!!

But what God has given us is the text!
Joseph's complaint is that they don't have enough space for their people!

And the text clearly shows that this is a proper complaint –
this is not grumbling – this is not murmuring against Joshua.
They have seen a problem – and they are trying to find a solution
by going to the proper authority and requesting him to deal with it!

Just this week, I received a complaint from a young person.

I realized that she was right and that we needed to do something about it!

Complaints are a good thing!

If you are a manager, you *want* good complainers –
because good complainers notice when things are not going well,
and they bring their concerns to the right people
and seek to fix the problem!

That's why we have a whole chapter in our Book of Church Order on complaints!

So, parents, teach your children to be good complainers!

(And then take them seriously when they bring complaints to you!)

But Joshua disagrees with their complaint.

¹⁵ And Joshua said to them, "If you are a numerous people, go up by yourselves to the forest, and there clear ground for yourselves in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you."

Joshua's reply is that there is plenty of land –
perhaps it is not inhabited yet (the forest) – but it is still yours!
Take possession of it – clear the ground – and clear out the Perizzites and the Rephaim!

(Incidentally, it is right around this time that there is archeological evidence
for a number of new settlements in the hill country...)

¹⁶ The people of Joseph said, "The hill country is not enough for us. Yet all the Canaanites who dwell in the plain have chariots of iron, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel."

The geographical term "hill country of Ephraim" refers to the center of the land –
the hilly region in between the Jordan River and the coastal plain.
The Valley of Jezreel and the Jordan Valley (around Beth-shean)
were still strongholds of Canaanite power.

They had chariots of iron!

Chariots could mow down infantry –
and so the light-clad Israelites had no chance in the valleys!

But Joshua was unmoved:

¹⁷ Then Joshua said to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, "You are a numerous people and have great power. You shall not have one allotment only, ¹⁸ but the hill country shall be yours, for though it is a forest, you shall clear it and possess it to its farthest borders. For you

shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong.”

It may seem as though Joshua is commanding the impossible!
Certainly to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh it felt impossible!

But Joshua remembers what God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
He commands the impossible because he knows that God is faithful!

So how should you respond when your complaint has been denied?

I like the way that Benedict of Nursia handles this in the Rule of St. Benedict.
Benedict says that if your superior commands an impossible task,
you should receive the order with all meekness and obedience –
and try to do it.

If however, you see that the task is altogether beyond your strength,
“quietly and seasonably submit the reasons for your inability to your Superior,
without pride, protest, or dissent.”

In other words, bring a respectful complaint!

What do you do if he denies your complaint?
“If the Superior still insists on his command,
let the Brother be convinced that so it is good for him;
and let him obey from love, relying on the help of God.” (Rule, 68)

Benedict is essentially expounding what Joshua says here to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.
You may think that it is impossible.
But this is what God calls you to do!

We need to have the humility to submit in the Lord
to those whom he has placed over us.

There was once a pastor who had received some advice from his presbytery.
The following Sunday he stood in the pulpit and said,
“You know, sometimes when you get bad advice,
you just need to ignore it.”
Only a few people in the room realized what he was saying.
Most of the congregation didn’t know what the presbytery had said.

Submission to authority doesn’t come easily.
But it’s really important!!

Often, our spiritual vision is weak.

And our problem is that we don't see clearly where our blind spots are!
If you saw clearly – it wouldn't be a blind spot!!

I have recently been told that I am rather “non-directive” in my counsel.
I rarely tell people “this is what you *must* do.”
Part of this is because I take very seriously my calling as God's messenger.
If God hasn't said it, then I shouldn't say it!

Pastors can very easily fall into the trap of substituting personal opinion
for the will of God.
But if I command you to follow my personal opinion,
well, let's just say that God does not take kindly to that!

At the same time, I know that *sometimes* the problem is that I am just a chicken.
Sometimes I know very well what God requires – but I don't say it.
I am working on repenting of that.
(and yes, “working on repenting” is a good way to say it –
since repentance unto life includes,
“with a full purpose of *and endeavor after* new obedience”!)

I want to close by calling you to see the glory of the inheritance that Joshua points us to.

Paul speaks in Ephesians 1:11 that in Christ we have obtained an inheritance,
“having been predestined according to the purpose
of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,
so that we who were the first to hope in Christ
might be to the praise of his glory.
In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation,
and believed in him,
were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,
who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,
to the praise of his glory.”

Jesus Christ is our great Joshua.
In him we have obtained an inheritance.
But we have not yet acquired possession of it.

Like Ephraim and Manasseh we are called to spiritual warfare
(remember that Ephesians 6 is the conclusion to Ephesians 1!).
But unlike Ephraim and Manasseh,
we have received the Holy Spirit.
God has sealed us with his own Spirit –
the uncreated grace that is God himself!