

Two weeks ago we looked at the inheritance of Judah.

Last week we looked at the inheritance of Joseph.

Tonight I wanted to take a moment drop back a little bit and look at the big picture.

Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan.

But Judah and Joseph received the prime inheritance on the west side.

I'd like you to consider what the LORD had said through their father, Jacob.

Turn back to Genesis 49.

It is useful to go back to Genesis 49 and hear what Jacob said about his sons.

1–Reuben, the firstborn, would be dispossessed.

He had laid with his father's concubine in Genesis 35.

And so Jacob said,

“Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength,
preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence,

because you went up to your father's bed;

then you defiled it – he went up to my couch!” (49:3-4)

Therefore Reuben's inheritance would not be that of the firstborn.

2, 3–But neither does Simeon inherit the portion of the firstborn.

Simeon and Levi had slaughtered the Hivite prince Shechem,
after Shechem had raped Dinah, their sister.

And Jacob now says “cursed be their anger, for it is fierce...

I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.” (49:5-7)

And so now Simeon is given a portion within the boundaries of Judah,
and Levi is scattered among all the tribes.

4–So the position of honor falls to Judah–

Judah, who had offered his life for the life of his brother Benjamin–

and as Jacob declared that he would be praised by his brothers,

“your father's sons shall bow down before you” (49:8).

Jacob already hints at a kingly role for Judah.

5–Of Zebulun, Jacob had said that he would dwell by the sea,

and of all the sons of Israel, only Asher lived closer to Sidon.

6–Issachar received the mountains of Tabor and Moreh –
the Valley of Jezreel is the heart of his territory.
But this is a region where the Canaanites were hard to drive out –
and Jacob had foretold that Issachar would be put to forced labor.

7–Dan bordered on the land of the Philistines.
His father had said that “Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path,
that bites the horse’s heels so that his rider falls backward.” (49:17)

Calling your son a “serpent” may seem odd –
but Jesus spoke of being “wise as serpents, innocent as doves” (Mt 10:16)
The image is of a sneak attack that topples the enemy.

8–Gad was warned that he would be raided–
and sitting on the eastern border of Israel, indeed he was!
But Jacob says that he shall raid at their heels (49:19).

9–Asher’s rich food would be produced in the plains near Tyre,
so it is not surprising that “he shall yield royal delicacies.” (v20)

10–Naphtali’s inheritance in the hills of the north would be full of deer. (v21)

11–Joseph’s blessing is the most reminiscent of the blessing
that Jacob himself had received from his father, Isaac.
And indeed, Joseph receives the double portion,
two allotments—one for Ephraim and one for Manasseh
(indeed, two for Manasseh!)

12–Benjamin, then is honored with a spot between Joseph and Judah
But Jacob’s calls him “a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey
and at evening dividing the spoil.”

As we look at the inheritance of the tribes
don't forget what their ancestor had said about them!

1. The Assembly at Shiloh (18:1-10)
The Tent of Meeting (18:1)

18 Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them.

This is the symbolic midpoint of our text.

Seven tribes have received their inheritance – with seven more to go!
Wait, you might say, but there are only 12 tribes –

how come there are 14 inheritances?!

There were 12 sons of Jacob – each get one inheritance, right?
Except Joseph gets a double portion,
so there are 13 inheritances to be distributed.
Except Levi doesn't get a full portion – but Levi's portion
is the sacrifices (13:14),
or the LORD himself (13:33),
or the levitical cities with their pasturelands (14:4).

So if you look at the previous chapters,
you will see inheritances given for Reuben, Gad, half of Manasseh (that's 3),
Judah, Ephraim, and the other half of Manasseh (that makes 6),
with regular reference to Levi's portion (that's 7).

When you look at the various lists of the tribes of Israel,
there are a total of fourteen names that can be used
(the twelve sons of Jacob, plus Ephraim and Manasseh) –
but different lists will use different combinations
of Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, Simeon, and Levi.

But the point is that here at the middle of the story,
Israel gathers at the tent of meeting at Shiloh.

This is the first reference to Shiloh in the bible.
Shiloh is in the hill country of Ephraim – between Bethel and Shechem.

We are not told why they chose this place –
but in terms of the geography of Israel,
Shiloh is very centrally located,
and it is rather secure.

The Jordan Valley is not – so Gilgal was not a good long-term solution.
Further north – the Valley of Jezreel is not yet secure.
Further west, the coastal plain is filled with strong enemies.

So Shiloh is well-situated – and relatively easy to get to from all over Israel.

But in verse 2 we hear that there were still seven tribes who had not received their inheritance.

The Survey of the Land Ordered (18:2-6)

² *There remained among the people of Israel seven tribes whose inheritance had not yet been apportioned.*

We heard last time that the borders of Ephraim and Manasseh are given

in relation to some of these –
so it's safe to say that the boundaries of the tribal inheritances
were set here in the survey of the land.

And again – there are whole years of discussion and interaction that are not reported!
All we get is this one short snippet!
I could reconstruct the *events* a dozen different ways –
all of which would sound really plausible, because they *are* all plausible.
But the text tells us that some of the tribes were “putting off” taking possession.

Judah and Joseph seem to have been diligent.
The tribes of Joshua (Ephraim) and Caleb (Judah) took the lead in taking possession
of their inheritance.

And so now Joshua says:

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.

It appears that seven of the tribes were content to sit in the Jordan Valley and wait.
They had participated in the joint force that Joshua had led.
But then, while Judah and Joseph took possession of the hill country,
the other seven tribes just sat back and watched.

Do you sometimes feel like life is passing you by?
Do you sometimes feel like other people are going off and doing things –
but you are just sitting there...

Well, Joshua says to you,
“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?”!!

As a human being, you are called to be fruitful and multiply –
fill the earth and subdue it.
Too often we have heard – too often we have said! –
that you should do what you love!
Follow your passion!

If everyone followed their passion, there would be lots of professional athletes,
musicians, artists, and inventors.
There'd be no food – which is probably a good thing,
because there would also be no plumbers to clean the drains!

You are not called to “do what you love” –
you are called to fill the earth and subdue it.
You are called to use your God-given abilities to love and serve those around you!

Some of you should be engineers.
Some of you should go into the trades.
Some of you should teach – others should care for the sick or the elderly.
We need lawyers, counselors, social workers.

This is part of what it means to take possession of your inheritance!
In Christ, it gets even better!
Because what Levi symbolized for Israel,
is what all of us have received in Jesus:

Levi's Inheritance (18:7)

⁷ The Levites have no portion among you, for the priesthood of the LORD is their heritage. And Gad and Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan eastward, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them.”

We've already seen that the LORD himself is the portion of Levi.
In verse 7 we have the fourth description of the inheritance of Levi.
It was the LORD's offerings – the LORD himself –
a handful of cities –
and now the priesthood of the LORD.

Paul tells us in Romans 4 that the promise to Abraham
was that he would inherit the whole earth.
And this is what Jesus has received.
Our earthly, bodily endeavors continue to fulfill the creation mandate –
and they also continue to point us toward the new creation.

And that is why the Levites keep showing up over and over again!
The conquest began with Israel keeping the Passover at the Jordan.
Now, here in the middle, Israel sets up the tent of meeting at Shiloh.

Worship was where we started.
Worship is here at the middle –
and not surprisingly, worship will be at the end of the book of Joshua.

Remember that – as you go about your creational labors –
as you go about the work of the six days of the week –
remember that for you – as for Joshua –
worship remains at the center!

I know that for myself, when I forget this – when I get bogged down –
it's not good for me!

I may be a pastor, but I can turn preaching and teaching into “the thing that I do” –
and I wind up leaving out the *center* of everything (namely, worshiping the Triune God!).

So in the same way that Joshua kept bringing Israel back to worship –
so I would challenge you to return to the LORD!

Yes, we do this every Lord's Day – Sunday morning and Sunday evening –
but if you are like me, one day a week isn't enough!

You need to be alone before God!

You need to be with your household before God – and if you live by yourself,
make sure that you have times during the week where you are connected with others.

The Survey of the Land Completed (18:8-10)

⁸ So the men arose and went, and Joshua charged those who went to write the description of the land, saying, “Go up and down in the land and write a description and return to me. And I will cast lots for you here before the LORD in Shiloh.” ⁹ So the men went and passed up and down in the land and wrote in a book a description of it by towns in seven divisions. Then they came to Joshua to the camp at Shiloh, ¹⁰ and Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD. And there Joshua apportioned the land to the people of Israel, to each his portion.

Verses 8-10 then show the importance of having good surveyors!

If you are going to divide the land well,
then you need to have a good team of surveyors who can draw the maps,
describe the boundaries, and divide the land into roughly equal parts.

I say “roughly equal” because there are a lot of different features.

Water is really important!

You can have a small amount of acreage,

but if it is good soil and you have good water,

you can produce more than in a large dry land!

2. The Western Inheritance, Part 2 (18:11-19:51)

The Inheritance of Benjamin (18:11-28)

¹¹ The lot of the tribe of the people of Benjamin according to its clans came up, and the territory allotted to it fell between the people of Judah and the people of Joseph. ¹² On the north side their boundary began at the Jordan. Then the boundary goes up to the shoulder north of Jericho, then

up through the hill country westward, and it ends at the wilderness of Beth-aven. ¹³ From there the boundary passes along southward in the direction of Luz, to the shoulder of Luz (that is, Bethel), then the boundary goes down to Ataroth-addar, on the mountain that lies south of Lower Beth-horon. ¹⁴ Then the boundary goes in another direction, turning on the western side southward from the mountain that lies to the south, opposite Beth-horon, and it ends at Kiriath-baal (that is, Kiriath-jearim), a city belonging to the people of Judah. This forms the western side. ¹⁵ And the southern side begins at the outskirts of Kiriath-jearim. And the boundary goes from there to Ephron,^[b] to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah. ¹⁶ Then the boundary goes down to the border of the mountain that overlooks the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is at the north end of the Valley of Rephaim. And it then goes down the Valley of Hinnom, south of the shoulder of the Jebusites, and downward to En-rogel. ¹⁷ Then it bends in a northerly direction going on to En-shemesh, and from there goes to Geliloth, which is opposite the ascent of Adummim. Then it goes down to the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben, ¹⁸ and passing on to the north of the shoulder of Beth-arabah^[c] it goes down to the Arabah. ¹⁹ Then the boundary passes on to the north of the shoulder of Beth-hoglah. And the boundary ends at the northern bay of the Salt Sea, at the south end of the Jordan: this is the southern border. ²⁰ The Jordan forms its boundary on the eastern side. This is the inheritance of the people of Benjamin, according to their clans, boundary by boundary all around.

²¹ Now the cities of the tribe of the people of Benjamin according to their clans were Jericho, Beth-hoglah, Emek-keziz, ²² Beth-arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, ²³ Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, ²⁴ Chephar-ammoni, Ophni, Geba—twelve cities with their villages: ²⁵ Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, ²⁶ Mizpeh, Chephirah, Mozah, ²⁷ Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, ²⁸ Zela, Haeleph, Jebus^[d] (that is, Jerusalem), Gibeah^[e] and Kiriath-jearim^[f]—fourteen cities with their villages. This is the inheritance of the people of Benjamin according to its clans.

The first lot fell to Benjamin.

This was a portion of land in between Ephraim and Judah.

You'll note that in verse 28, Jerusalem is said to be in Benjamin!

Why is it always associated with Judah?

Because David took it from the Jebusites
and made it his capital.

The inheritance was laid out by Joshua.

But over time there would be a variety of changes!

(A couple of which we'll see tonight!)

The Inheritance of Simeon (19:1-9)

¹⁹ The second lot came out for Simeon, for the tribe of the people of Simeon, according to their clans, and their inheritance was in the midst of the inheritance of the people of Judah. ² And they had for their inheritance Beersheba, Sheba, Moladah, ³ Hazar-shual, Balah, Ezem, ⁴ Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, ⁵ Ziklag, Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susah, ⁶ Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhem—thirteen cities with their villages; ⁷ Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan—four cities with their villages, ⁸ together with all the villages around these cities as far as Baalath-beer, Ramah of the Negeb. This was the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Simeon according to their clans. ⁹ The

inheritance of the people of Simeon formed part of the territory of the people of Judah. Because the portion of the people of Judah was too large for them, the people of Simeon obtained an inheritance in the midst of their inheritance.

One of those changes is described in our text.

Simeon is absorbed into Judah.

Verse 9 says it bluntly:

“the portion of the people of Judah was too large for them” –

so Simeon went with them and obtained an inheritance in their midst.

And thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Jacob

that Simeon would be scattered among his brothers.

The fates of Simeon and Levi show that you are not doomed by your parent’s mistakes!

Simeon and Levi committed the same crime:

they slaughtered all the men of Shechem

just because the prince of Shechem raped their sister.

(They were right to defend their sister –

they just went overboard in their vengeance –

a classic case of why I say that vengeance is not *bad* –

just that we are *bad* at taking vengeance!)

Jacob had said that both Simeon and Levi would be scattered among their brethren.

But the particular way in which this happens is quite different.

And it has nothing to do with the brothers Simeon and Levi!

It was Levi’s descendants whom God called to the priesthood.

And through the faithfulness of Moses, Aaron, and Phineas,

God confirmed the hereditary priesthood with Levi.

The tribe of Simeon doesn’t end all that badly.

They wind up subsumed into the tribe of Judah!

(There are worse fates!)

There’s not much about Simeon in the rest of the OT.

Judges chapter 1 refers to the same event as Joshua 19,

but then, besides a couple of generic references in the book of Chronicles,

Simeon never appears again!

It appears that they largely intermarried with Judah,

and so quickly lost any distinctive tribal role.

In the north it was different.

The Inheritance of Zebulun (19:10-16)

¹⁰ *The third lot came up for the people of Zebulun, according to their clans. And the territory of*

their inheritance reached as far as Sarid. ¹¹ Then their boundary goes up westward and on to Mareal and touches Dabbesheth, then the brook that is east of Jokneam. ¹² From Sarid it goes in the other direction eastward toward the sunrise to the boundary of Chisloth-tabor. From there it goes to Daberath, then up to Japhia. ¹³ From there it passes along on the east toward the sunrise to Gath-hepher, to Eth-kazin, and going on to Rimmon it bends toward Neah, ¹⁴ then on the north the boundary turns about to Hannathon, and it ends at the Valley of Iphtahel; ¹⁵ and Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem—twelve cities with their villages. ¹⁶ This is the inheritance of the people of Zebulun, according to their clans—these cities with their villages.

Zebulun has a small inheritance of 12 cities just north of Issachar.

The Inheritance of Issachar (19:17-23)

¹⁷ The fourth lot came out for Issachar, for the people of Issachar, according to their clans. ¹⁸ Their territory included Jezreel, Chesulloth, Shunem, ¹⁹ Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath, ²⁰ Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, ²¹ Remeth, En-gannim, En-haddah, Beth-pazzez. ²² The boundary also touches Tabor, Shahazumah, and Beth-shemesh, and its boundary ends at the Jordan—sixteen cities with their villages. ²³ This is the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Issachar, according to their clans—the cities with their villages.

Issachar has 16 cities, centered along the primary trade route –
and some key valleys, which would be hard to defend!

The Inheritance of Asher (19:24-31)

²⁴ The fifth lot came out for the tribe of the people of Asher according to their clans. ²⁵ Their territory included Helkath, Hali, Beten, Achshaph, ²⁶ Allammelech, Amad, and Mishal. On the west it touches Carmel and Shihor-libnath, ²⁷ then it turns eastward, it goes to Beth-dagon, and touches Zebulun and the Valley of Iphtahel northward to Beth-emek and Neiel. Then it continues in the north to Cabul, ²⁸ Ebron, Rehob, Hammon, Kanah, as far as Sidon the Great. ²⁹ Then the boundary turns to Ramah, reaching to the fortified city of Tyre. Then the boundary turns to Hosah, and it ends at the sea; Mahalab,^[g] Achzib, ³⁰ Ummah, Aphek and Rehob—twenty-two cities with their villages. ³¹ This is the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Asher according to their clans—these cities with their villages.

Asher gets the coastal plain north of Mt. Carmel, all the way to Tyre and Sidon.

Asher never did conquer Tyre and Sidon.

Hiram, the King of Tyre, wound up making an alliance with David –

but the Phoenicians remained the dominant power along the northern coast.

The Inheritance of Naphtali (19:32-39)

³² The sixth lot came out for the people of Naphtali, for the people of Naphtali, according to their clans. ³³ And their boundary ran from Heleph, from the oak in Zaanannim, and Adami-nekeb, and Jabneel, as far as Lakkum, and it ended at the Jordan. ³⁴ Then the boundary turns westward to Aznoth-tabor and goes from there to Hukkok, touching Zebulun at the south and Asher on the west and Judah on the east at the Jordan. ³⁵ The fortified cities are Ziddim, Zer, Hammath,

Rakkath, Chinnereth, ³⁶ Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, ³⁷ Kedesh, Edrei, En-hazor, ³⁸ Yiron, Migdal-el, Horem, Beth-anath, and Beth-shemesh—nineteen cities with their villages. ³⁹ This is the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Naphtali according to their clans—the cities with their villages.

Naphtali receives 19 fortified cities in the north – beyond the Sea of Galilee.

The Inheritance of Dan (19:40-48)

⁴⁰ The seventh lot came out for the tribe of the people of Dan, according to their clans. ⁴¹ And the territory of its inheritance included Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir-shemesh, ⁴² Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, ⁴³ Elon, Timnah, Ekron, ⁴⁴ Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, ⁴⁵ Jehud, Bene-berak, Gath-rimmon, ⁴⁶ and Me-jarkon and Rakkon with the territory over against Joppa. ⁴⁷ When the territory of the people of Dan was lost to them, the people of Dan went up and fought against Leshem, and after capturing it and striking it with the sword they took possession of it and settled in it, calling Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor. ⁴⁸ This is the inheritance of the tribe of the people of Dan, according to their clans—these cities with their villages.

Dan receives a portion of land that sounded like it belonged to Ephraim in the previous section.

And it may be that Ephraim had claimed it in the first allotment.

But as with Simeon in the midst of Judah,
so also when the seven portions are divided,
a chunk of Ephraim is allotted to Dan.

So Dan's original territory was in the west – in what would soon be Philistine territory.

Samson – whose story is told in the book of Judges –
was from the tribe of Dan.

We hear a lot in the story of Samson about the cities of Timnah, Ekron,
Zorah and Eshtaol.

But after the death of Samson – it became clear to the people of Dan

that they could not compete with the Philistines,

and so the story is told in Judges 17-18,

of how the people of Dan migrated to the far north –
where they found a quiet valley that they could possess.

And so the people of Dan did not take possession of the land that God promised.

They did what was right in their own eyes and carved out a portion for themselves
from the territory of Naphtali and Manasseh.

It is not clear in Joshua or in Judges,

that our authors have much of an opinion on the wisdom of this.

Our tendency is to think that they should have stayed!

This is the land that God gave you!!

And certainly there is something to be said for that!!

Joshua opened chapter 18 by saying “how long will you sit on your duff?!”
Take possession of your inheritance!!

But let’s be careful not to go beyond what God himself has said!!
Plainly the division of the land was overseen by God himself.
Joshua and Eleazar the priest are dividing the land in the way that God commanded.
Therefore the result is the providence of God.

But when Dan realizes that they cannot hold their inheritance against the Philistines,
and even the mighty Samson cannot protect them forever! –
what should they do?

The story in Judges 17-18 clearly shows that Dan is *not* a reliable guide to action,
but in the midst of all the failings and foibles of his people,
God continues to work and to do for our salvation!

Indeed, God uses all twelve tribes to accomplish his purposes.

On the other hand, it should be clear by now that Judah and Joseph and Levi
all have very important roles to play *because of the faithfulness*
of Caleb and Joshua and Moses.

I look at my own life and I can clearly see how much more I *could have done*
if I used my time more wisely.

The seven tribes that sat twiddling their thumbs at the Jordan River
undoubtedly would have accomplished greater things
if they had done what they were called to do –
when they were called to do it!

But by waiting, they allowed the Canaanites to regroup.
And so now the job will be more difficult!

Now, notice that in all of these cases, there is no mention of failure to drive out the Canaanites.
Why?

18:3

They hadn’t taken possession of it yet.
These are “theoretical” distributions.

The remnant of the Canaanites still dwells there
and these tribes are commanded to go, drive out the Canaanites,
and take possession of the land.

If you refrain from doing what God calls you to do,

it's not that it will ever be “too late” –
it just means that it will be more difficult when you get around to it...

The Inheritance of Joshua (19:49-50)

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-erah in the hill country of Ephraim. And he rebuilt the city and settled in it.

Finally, the people of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun.
He was from Ephraim – and so they gave him a city in the hill country of Ephraim.

Joshua is the faithful covenant mediator.
Unlike Moses, the mediator of the law, who died in the wilderness
as a sign that the law cannot bring you into the land,
Joshua receives a portion of the inheritance.

Joshua has caused Israel to inherit the land.

Conclusion (19:51)

⁵¹ These are the inheritances that Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the people of Israel distributed by lot at Shiloh before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. So they finished dividing the land.

Back in 14:1 we heard that Joshua and Eleazar the priest were the ones apportioning the land.
Now in 19:51 we have the conclusion of the matter:
the western inheritance has been concluded.
Israel has divided the land in the manner prescribed by God.

Our inheritance divided by our faithful covenant mediator and priest!
Ephesians 1:3-14

The new Joshua has entered his rest.
And in him we have obtained an inheritance.
It has been apportioned for us in him.
But we have not yet acquired possession of it.

So let us be diligent in laying hold of that for which Christ has laid of us!