

Joshua 13:1-33

The Unfinished Conquest and the Division of the Land

From chapters 13 to 22, the Book of Joshua provides a detailed account of how the Promised Land and would be divided up among the tribes.

These ten chapters of Joshua are devoted to a detailed description of the country itself. Not only are its general features and boundaries carefully laid down, but the names and locations of its towns and villages enumerated with a precision of geographical terms.

This literal description of the Rest promised to Israel by God invites a spiritual examination of what that Promised Rest means for believers today.

David explained that the wilderness generation died out and was not permitted to enter the Promised Land because they didn't "hear" His voice:

- **Psalms 95:7-8,11** - "...Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness... Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest."

The implication is that "today" if we hear (and obey) his voice we can enter into the rest by faith. That "today" is always present.

- **Hebrews 4:8** - "For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day."

i.e. Joshua failed to complete his assignment. Because the type is only a shadow of the real thing.

And it is the "real" Rest we are interested in.

We can go back to the Garden of Eden in Genesis. Adam and Eve were assigned to "dress and keep" the garden. But they accomplished it without "the sweat of the brow," because they were not self-conscious. It just flowed. They were naked, but they did not "feel" exposed because they were clothed in the love and acceptance of God. But once stripped of that comfort by their sin, they began to look for covering. That is a picture of our common human condition. Restlessness is what causes us to labor and strive, worry and grasp and scramble for accomplishments to define who we are, and for fig leaves to hide our emptiness.

Ever since we humans lost our inheritance in the Garden, we've been looking for a home, a resting place.

Spiritual rest is knowing Christ's love and acceptance of us, His protection and continual sustenance. Everybody is searching for meaning to life, and Christ provides that.

But most importantly, the cross of Christ assures us of eternal life in Him, forgiveness of sin, the comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and fellowship among the members of his church.

It means we have a home.

- **Matthew 11:28-30** - "Come unto me, you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

What is the Rest?

- **Joshua 1:13** - "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land."

"rest" = *nûwach* - a respite, a place to catch your breath.

A place to dwell and reside, to settle down, a place to "cease," to give and receive comfort, quietness. One form of the word indicates a place left empty or made empty (from a believer's point of view, a place "empty of self.>").

Rest also implies freedom, the opposite of slavery - just as the Promised Land was in stark contrast to Egypt.

- **Deuteronomy 6:10-12** - "And when the LORD your God brings you into the land He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that He would give you — a land with great and splendid cities that you did not build, with houses full of every good thing with which you did not fill them, with wells that you did not dig, and with vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant— and when you eat and are satisfied, be careful not to forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery..."

i.e. Salvation, forgiveness and the Rest are given without our labor or work, only our repentance.

Spiritually this is accomplished in us when we go to the cross and accept our death.

- **Romans 6:6-7, 17-18** - "...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin... But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

We're "slaves of righteousness" and yet, where the Spirit is, there is liberty. It is a

paradox, like the command to "labor to enter into the rest" (**Hebrews 4:11**).

Jesus also fulfilled the Sabbath rest, in the grave before His resurrection.

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), question 103, speaks of this eternal Sabbath when commenting on the seventh commandment. The last part says, "that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, allow the Lord to work in me by His Spirit, and thus begin in this life the everlasting sabbath."

- **Jeremiah 25:5** - "Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers forever and ever."

Joshua not only failed to completely conquer the land, but that land was taken from the Jews whenever they rebelled against God.

Jeremiah talks about a land given "forever and ever" - different than the literal land in the Middle East. He's talking about our spiritual Rest in Christ.

Joshua 13:1 - "Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed."

This was a point in Joshua's life in which he could either despair or receive invigoration from God's command. (Those of us who are also "old and stricken with age" must face this same choice).

He had been fighting the Canaanites for years, but so much was left undone!

The conquest of the land took seven years, according to Jewish tradition, and the division of the land - which begins here - took another seven years.

The next six verses list all the peoples and areas that Joshua failed to conquer.

But despite appearances, God directs Joshua to divide and grant the inheritance to each tribe as if it all were already in their hands! This would be an act of faith. God's reality trumps the reality our senses tell us. He has "given it into our hand."

Joshua 13:6-7 - "...only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee. Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes, and the half tribe of Manasseh."

Divided Equally or by Lot?

In **Numbers 26:53-54**, after a census was taken on the Plains of Moab, the land was said to be "apportioned as shares, according to the listed names. With larger groups increase the share, with smaller groups reduce the share. Each is to be assigned its

portion according to its enrollment." This method ensures that every male over the age of twenty receives an equal share in the land.

The next verses, however, describe a different method, division by lot:

- **Numbers 26:55-56** - "The land, however, is to be apportioned by lot; and the allotment shall be made according to the names of their ancestral tribes. Each portion shall be assigned by lot, whether for larger or smaller tribe."

Rashi (1040-1105), suggests that the portions were of unequal sizes, determined by calculating population needs, and that the lottery was a ritual performance by the high priest to involve God and its results were in accordance with the size of the tribes.

Taking the opposite approach, Ramban (1194-1270) believes that each tribe would receive the same size plot, determined exclusively by the lot. The passage about population simply refers to division among clans *within* the tribal lot.

There are scholarly arguments that the "by lot" method was added later to cover problems in the return from exile in Babylon, which you can read here:
<https://www.thetorah.com/article/apportioning-the-land-by-lot-and-by-population>

Jewish tradition, finding offense in this kind of allotment, declared that the land was really divided under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the lot being merely the visible means of confirming the division for the people (Sifre, Num. 132; B. B. 122a).

Recall that lots were cast to determine the scapegoat on Yom Kippur. And at the cross, "The wicked part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (**Psalm 22:19; comp. Matthew 27:35; John 19:24**)
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10123-lots>

Dividing the land "by lot" here is interpreted by many Sages as referring to the use of the Urim and Thummim on the High Priest's breastplate.

But there is a spiritual lesson here.

The "size" method reflects concern for fairness, social justice and an egalitarian society implied in the Noachide laws and natural law in general, and does not involve an appeal for guidance from God. Apportioning by lot emphasizes the centrality of God in the decision, but opens the possibility of an "unfair" distribution.

We know two different realities are being discussed here in Joshua concerning the Promised Land and its meaning - the literal and the spiritual.

The spiritual inheritance we receive is dependent on how much we choose to claim and "take" in the spiritual warfare we've been discussing. We must "show up" and confront the enemies holding the inheritance promised to us.

One example is the descendents of Machir, son of Manasseh, who alone conquered part of the trans-jordan and were given that portion by Moses.

Another is Caleb, who claimed his portion - "give me this mountain" - in Hebron according to an earlier promise to him by Moses (**Joshua 14:12-23**)

The daughters of Zelophehad were bold in arguing for their inheritance previously (**Numbers 27**).

But how much we receive is also exclusively up to God and His sovereign will. Our "works" - no matter if we are striving and battling for the right cause - do not automatically determine the boundaries of our spiritual inheritance. The strength of my determination and the resources I employ all have their source in God. He may give you more than He gives me - for reasons that can't be known in this life.

i.e. it's not all about "name it and claim it."

Under the Law, the determination of the priest was the final word - whether in assessing first fruit offerings or interpreting the result of casting lots. Christ is our high priest, and His determination is the last word.

How wide our inheritance is determined by God. But we are in danger of losing it when we succumb to self-seeking.

Reuben, Gad, Manasseh

Joshua 13:15-32 - A Description of the inheritance of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh

Why did Reuben and Gad request this land on the east side of Jordan? And why did Manasseh join this settlement, and why only part of the tribe?

<https://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/matot/ely.html>

Jacob had four wives and four firstborn sons. According to the halakhah, a father can only give one son the birthright insofar as inheritance is concerned, but each mother has a firstborn son regarding redemption - see **Exodus 13:13-15, Numbers 18:15-16** (Mishna Bekhorot 8, 1). Reuben, Joseph, Gad, and Dan were firstborns, and in the wilderness there were four camps

Reuben, Leah's firstborn, was the head of his camp. Judah, who was destined for the crown, was the head of the camp which included the other brothers born to his mother. Ephraim headed the camp comprised of Rachel's sons, after Joseph was awarded the birthright and split into two tribes (**Genesis 48:8; I Chronicles 8:1**). Note that in this matter, Ephraim, the younger brother, preceded Manasseh (**Genesis 48:15, 19-20**). Also Dan, Bilhah's firstborn, headed a camp. But Gad, Zilpah's firstborn, did not head a

camp, and Zilpah's sons were divided among the camps of Reuben and Dan.

Encamping next to the tribe of Reuben were the Levites, sons of Kohath. Due to this proximity--"Woe to the wicked man, woe to his neighbor"-- Korah, who was of the Kohath family, was joined in rebellion by Reuben's sons, Dathan and Abiram (**Numbers 16:1**). Why? Two tribes here felt disadvantaged: Reuben, who had lost the right of firstborn, and Gad, who did not head a camp nor dwell in the same camp with his brother Naphtali. Therefore these tribes came before Moses, petitioning to settle in the Transjordan as compensation for having been slighted. Moses granted their request, but added to them part of the tribe of Manasseh, who also had been shortchanged as firstborn but had not demanded anything on that account. The tribe of Manasseh did not forfeit its inheritance in the land of Israel, inheriting a full allotment there, because 90% of them had crossed the Jordan River. In addition they received part of the land in the Transjordan.

The Gadites and Reubenites were not after wealth, nor were they afraid to participate in the conquest of the land; rather, they were demanding redress of their wounded honor.

The Transjordan was settled by Machir and Jair, sons of Manasseh (**Deuteronomy 3:14-15**), while Manasseh's portion west of the Jordan was allotted to the great-grandsons of Joshua and the daughters of Zelophehad (see Mishna Bava Batra 8, 3). In Abarbanel's opinion, the land of Sihon and Og was too large for the Gadites and Reubenites, and therefore Moses added half of Manasseh; in Nahmanides' opinion, only the families of Machir and Jair wished to separate from the rest of the people and the tribes and to remain in Transjordan.

Manasseh and Benjamin's Cup

The Midrash presents the division of Manasseh's inheritance as a punishment for the incident involving Joseph's meeting with his brothers, after he hears them discussing their guilt over throwing him in the pit and selling him.

Remember that the tribe of Joseph was divided between his sons as the tribe of Ephraim and the tribe of Manasseh.

- **Genesis 42:21** - "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."

The Sages as well as the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem identified Joseph's son Manasseh as the person acting as Joseph's interpreter (Genesis 42:23), although he would have been an infant at the time! The rabbis however say he was age 7.

- **Genesis 42:23** - "And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter."

The rabbis explain that, later, Manasseh was the one who secretly placed Joseph's cup

in Benjamin's sack. When it is discovered, Benjamin was required to remain in Egypt as Joseph's servant - and the brothers tore their garments in grief.

- **Genesis 44:13** - "Then they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city."

Thus, Manasseh, according to rabbinical reasoning - by not warning his uncles that Joseph could understand them, and placing the cup in Benjamin's sack - had "caused the tribes to rend their garments" and therefore the inheritance of Manasseh was "rent in two" (Genesis Rabbah, 84, s.v. "vayikra Yaakov") and shared between what would now be referred to as "half-tribes."

Another explanation - The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, dispossessing the Amorites who were there; so Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. (**Numbers 32:39-42**)

All Israel had conquered the territory that Reuben and Gad were given. But the descendants of Machir son of Manasseh had conquered their territory alone. Also, they were the smallest clan of Manasseh, and would now have a larger inheritance in the territory they conquered. Besides, the Transjordan was larger than Reuben or Gad could hold and defend alone.

Other rabbis suggested that Moses may have wanted the tribe of Manasseh to span the Jordan east and west to make sure the Reubenites and Gadites would be prevented from breaking off from the rest of their brethren who inherited in the western part of the country; just as the goblet that Manasseh had placed in Benjamin's sack, upon orders from his father Joseph, was intended to make sure the brothers were indeed completely united. In other words, the half-tribe of Manasseh served as the connecting link, joining the Israelite tribes on both sides of the Jordan.

<https://www1.biu.ac.il/indexE.php?id=15318&pt=1&pid=14620&level=0&cPath=43,14206,14376,14620,15318>

Remember the Way of Balaam

Joshua 13:22 - "Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among them that were slain by them."

Who invited Balaam back into this story? And why tell us again about his death? (The same info is given in **Numbers 31:8**)

- **Numbers 31:7-8** - "And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword."

Numbers 31:16 - "And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD."

The rabbis explain that scripture says Israel should "remember" Balaam and his attempt to subvert Israel.

- **Micah 6:5** - "My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab devised (plotted against you) and what (how) Balaam the son of Beor answered (responded to) him; from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know (will recognize) the righteous acts of the LORD."

- or, "remember what good things I did for you (after that), from Shittim to Gilgal"

Targum - "Were not great things done for you in the plain of Shittim unto the house of Gilgal, that the righteousness of the Lord might be known?"

The Syriac version points more to the Spirit-induced blessings on Israel that Balaam prophesied against his will:

"Remember how Balak consulted Balaam from place to place, and what answers he returned him; all which was done, that "he (Balak) might know the righteousness of the Lord."

Traditions says Balaam was slain by Phinehas. Remembering the story of Balaam must include recalling the zeal of Phinehas against idolatry and fornication/mixing/ adulterating the truth at Baal-Peor

The New Testament talks about Balaam as a danger to believers' inheritance in the Promised Land. He is a sly enemy of the Rest.

- **1 Corinthians 10:11** - "Now these things happened to them as examples (typikos - types) and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."

Peter warned against "the way of Balaam," Jude against "the error of Balaam" and John against "the doctrine of Balaam" (**2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14**)

- "The way of Balaam" was a readiness to prostitute his high spiritual gifts and privileges for "The wages of unrighteousness" (**2 Peter 2:14**), being willing to preach something contrary to God's Word for personal gain.

- "The error of Balaam" was evidently his willingness to compromise his own standards of morality and truth in order "greedily" to accommodate those of his pagan patrons (**Jude 11**).

- Finally, "the doctrine of Balaam," which even in John's day was already infiltrating the church, was to use his own teaching authority to persuade God's people that it was all right for them also to compromise these standards, even "to commit fornication" (**Revelation 2:14**) with their idol-worshipping enemies.

Recalling the story of Balaam leads to zeal:

See **2 Corinthians 10:5-6** - "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."

We must "revenge" the error, the way and the doctrine of Balaam when we find it within ourselves trying to deprive us of our spiritual inheritance.

Although Joshua failed to complete his mission, Jesus did not fail. By faith we inherit the Promise, the Rest - which is completely available to us.