

The United Tribes of Israel

(Joshua 13)

5/3/17; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

I worked a number of jobs as a teenager...

I loaded trucks.

I worked for dad in the screen printing business..

I worked at a golf course.

And for a summer, I worked in a warehouse picking orders for a supplier of boat parts and accessories..

The name of the company was West Marine.

My stepfather worked there and I got a job where I would come up and work the weekends..

The job wasn't that bad...

I would get a list and walk the aisles picking random boat accessories out of bins which I would pack in a box and then ship to the person who ordered them.

It was good in the sense that every order was different and required your attention to pick and then ship...

However, it also had its disadvantages as well..

And the major disadvantage was when it came time to do inventory...

On those occasions, I would have to go to every bin and every rack and count every item by hand...

Write it down and then move to the next item...

Talk about boring and putting you to sleep, that was what inventory was all about.

The worst items to count were the anchors..

The company had anchors in all sorts of weights..

20 lb, 30 lb, 50 lb. 75 lbs...

And counting them was no easy task..

You had to unload them of the pallets they were on and then count them as you stacked them back up...

But that is what taking inventory is all about..

It is tiring and most of all it is boring..

For the next 7 chapters in the book of Joshua, you are going to feel like we are taking inventory...

Because we have arrived at the final section in the book of Joshua which is all about distributing the Promised Land to the tribes of Israel..

We are going to hear about borders and rivers and mountains and names of places that are going to make your head spin and your eyes want to close...

We are going to talk about the tribes of Israel and learn more about the geography of Israel in 1400 Bc than probably you ever wanted to know..

Yet, what do we know about the Bible?

All Scripture is useful to our spiritual health and growth...

So, my job as we go through inventory the next few weeks is to find the parts that are helpful to us all and take a minute and learn from each of them..

But maybe before we get started, we really need to keep the big picture in mind...

The book of Joshua is the book of Israel coming into the land that God promised to give to Abraham..

We don't appreciate that fact very much for a number of reasons..

First, most if not all of us have never been a people on the move without a place to call home...

We can't even begin to relate to Israel who lived as slaves in Egypt...

Who escaped and ran from the Egyptians...

Who spent 40 years in the wilderness...

Who have waited for a place to call home for all that time as well...

It is just really hard to imagine a life like that..

It is really hard to think of not having a land to call your own..

To have a front yard and back yard so to speak...

And so, Joshua 13-19 may put us to sleep but for Israel it was Christmas morning..

As the land that they had conquered was now theirs...

It was time to pass out it out to the people..

It was time for them to have a home and place to lay their head at night...

So, let's dive into this final section of the book of Joshua and we will be faithful to finish the book as we started it..

Tonight, we are simply going to begin the process of unwrapping all the land promises to Israel..

And we need to begin in verses 1-6 of Joshua 13 with...

I. Work to Be Done (1-6)

Verse 1..

13 Now Joshua was old and advanced in years when the Lord said to him, “You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed.

It is most likely that Joshua was about 100 years old at this point in the book of Joshua..

WE know that Joshua died at the age of 110..

And so the Lord goes to Him and reminds him of his age...

And I will tell you, when the Lord calls you old, you are old...

But then the Lord throws in this at the end of verse 1...

“Very much of the land remains to be possessed...”

Now you may say, “what?”

Very much of the land still isn't under Jewish control??!!

I thought Joshua has taken the center of the Promised Land and the southern portion of the Promised land followed by the northern portion..

How can there be more left to conquer?

Think about it this way...

Tonya can walk in and I can tell her that I have been busy cleaning the whole house...

And I could have cleaned all the bedrooms and the bathrooms and the kitchen and the living room...

But it still isn't true that I cleaned the whole house...

There are probably closets with dirt in them...

The laundry room probably needs sweeping...

The yard probably needs some tidying up...

So even though I can say that I cleaned the whole house, the truth is that I didn't really clean the whole house...

The same is true for Israel...

They have conquered the land but there, but not every closet in Israel has been conquered...

Joshua is too old to lead Israel to clean out every nook and cranny of Israel...

And then the Lord begins to list all the work that remains in verse 2...

2 This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all those of the Geshurites; 3 from the Shihor which is [a]east of Egypt, even as far as the border of Ekron to the north (it is counted as Canaanite); the five lords of the Philistines: the Gazite, the Ashdodite, the Ashkelonite, the Gittite, the Ekronite; and the Avvite 4 [b]to the south, all the land of the Canaanite, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, as far as Aphek, to the border of the Amorite; 5 and the land of the Gebalite, and all of Lebanon, toward the [c]east, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon as far as [d]Lebo-hamath. 6 All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon as far as Misrephoth-maim, all the Sidonians

Now, here is a map of the area that was yet to be conquered in white...

Staring back in verse 2, the land of the Philistines is the west and south of Israel...

The Geshurites are up near the Sea of Galilee..

Then we go back south to the area east of Egypt..

Then we get more details about the land of the Philistines at the end of verse 3....

Then in verse 4 we go back north to Aphek and Sidon...

The bottom line of this section is to see that not all of the Promised Land had fallen to Joshua...

There are outlying areas of the Promised Land that still need work...

Now, what is the plan for that?

Well, the plan is for the people to finish off the work...

Joshua is now old, and it is time for the people to step up and do their part...

And the good thing is the God will be with them as much as he was for Joshua...

Look back at the middle of verse 6...

I will [e]drive them out from before the sons of Israel; only allot it to Israel for an inheritance as I have commanded you.

The good news for those charged with finishing the job is that God is going to drive the remaining people in the same way that he drove out others for Joshua...

What an encouragement that must have been to the people of Israel...

Though Joshua is fading out, God isn't.

That's a good lesson for us all...

Leadership is great and admirable and we all need leaders in our lives..

But there is also the reality that all of us as believers are led by the same Holy Spirit..

In God's design for his church, there are spiritual gifts but there is also one Spirit that guides us all..

That is why you must never let a man rise above the Lord as an object of your adoration...

So many times you see people who leave a church because a pastor leaves a church..

And though it isn't always true, many of those folks were there for the man rather than for the Lord..

Joshua is leaving the scene, but the people are not to leave the work that must be done..

They must continue to take the land even though their leader is about to be taken to heaven...

And so their is work to be done...

But their work is rewarded because the next thing we see in chapter 13 is this..

There is...

II. Land to Be Divided (7-33)

7 Now therefore, apportion this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh.”

As we think about the nation of Israel...

The nation was split into groups..12 groups to be exact of the sons of Jacob...

These 12 tribes became the states of the untied nation of Israel in a sense...

And as the land of Canaan is mostly under Jewish control at this point, it is now time to lay out what tribe gets what piece of land..

So, here is a map for you to look at as we move through these chapters of Joshua..

This is how the Promised Land would be divided among the 12 tribes of Israel...

In verse 7, you only see 9 1/2 tribes that are going to get the land...

The reason for that is that 2 1/2 tribes had already gotten their land...

So, let's begin with the 2 1/2 tribes in verse 8..

8 With [f]the other half-tribe, the Reubenites and the Gadites received their inheritance which Moses gave them beyond the Jordan to the east, just as Moses the servant of the Lord gave to them; 9 from Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of the Arnon, with the city which is in the middle of the valley, and all the plain of Medeba, as far as Dibon; 10 and all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, as far as the border of the sons of Ammon; 11 and Gilead, and the [g]territory of the Geshurites and Maacathites, and all Mount Hermon, and all Bashan as far as Salecah; 12 all the kingdom of Og in Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei (he alone was left of the remnant of the Rephaim); for Moses struck them and dispossessed them.

Some of the land had already been divided among the tribes...

And that was the land on the east side of the Jordan River...

This land had been to the tribes of Reuben and Gad as Moses brought the people up to the eastern side of the Jordan River as they prepared to enter..

So, 2 tribes, Rueben and Gad would have land on the eastern side of the Jordan along with half of the tribe of Manasseh...

The other half of the tribe of Manasseh would get land on the western side of the Jordan River..

And so, we see the borders of the land allotment for Gad and Rueben and half of Manassehe in verses 8-12...

But then we read this in verse 13..

13 But the sons of Israel did not dispossess the Geshurites or the Maacathites; for Geshur and Maacath live among Israel until this day.

WE have to go back to our pink map to see these two areas, but the Geshurites and Maacathites were the people to the east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee...

And all we get in Joshua 13 is one little note about this, but it seems that the not all the people of Israel finished the job to clear every little closet of people out of the land...

In fact two areas that were really Manasseh's job to clear out weren't cleared out..

Now what is the point of putting this little note in here?

I think it is a simple reminder that even the smallest details are still important to the Lord...

If He has commanded the people to finish the job, it is important to finish the job...

And because Israel was slack here, these people survived and lived among Israel for many years..

And what is the problem with that?

Well, pagan worship, lifestyle, and intermarriage, which were forbidden practices for Israel...

To leave a problem unattended is to invite that problem to grow...

You don't ignore a sore on your arm in hopes that it isn't anything...

It may be cancer that can spread to other parts of your body...

So, you cut it out that it won't infect the rest of the body..

Israel let a cancer stay within their midst, and that is never good...

That is why we must stay vigilant to not let any sin grow in our lives...

We don't need those sins that don't seem that important to hang around...

We have been commanded to put off sin and put on Christ, and anytime we see sin, we need to cut it out to prevent it from taking root and hanging around..

Israel just assumed that the people way up north weren't a big deal, but they were to the Lord..

And then verse 14...

14 Only to the tribe of Levi he did not give an inheritance; the offerings by fire to the Lord, the God of Israel, are [h]their inheritance, as He spoke to him.

We are going to see in a minute that every tribe of Israel got an allotment of land with the exception of the tribe of Levi, and we will talk about that more in a minute...

Verse 15..

15 So Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe of the sons of Reuben according to their families.

16 Their [i]territory was from Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of the Arnon, with the city which is in the middle of the valley and all the plain by Medeba; 17 Heshbon, and all its cities which are on the plain: 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 even all the cities of the plain and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses struck with the chiefs of Midian, Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the princes of Sihon, who lived in the land.

Once again, we see a simple repeat of the land that was given to Rueben in verses 15-21...

And then we find another tidbit of information in verse 22..

22 The sons of Israel also killed Balaam the son of Beor, the diviner, with the sword among the rest of their slain.

Balaam was a prophet who was enticed by the king of Moab named Balak to curse Israel...

And though God would not allow it, Balaam's sin led to Israel being led into sin as well...

And the consequence of disobedience was a premature death of Balaam at the hands of Israel...

Though sin may look harmless, it has a way of leading to trouble for all who engage in it...

Balaam wasn't allowed to curse Israel, but the sin was already committed in the heart...

And Balaam paid a high price for it..

We too must remember that sin doesn't have to have outward expression to find consequences in our lives..

Jesus said if you hate, you are committing murder..

If you lust you are committing adultery..

And I would say that if you are greedy, you are coveting...

And if you are planning deception, you are lying..

Balaam never made it to the point of actually cursing Israel, but he was already guilty of sin...

And he paid a high price for it as well..

Then the description of the borders of the land of Reuben continue in verse 23..

23 The border of the sons of Reuben was the [j]Jordan. This was the inheritance of the sons of Reuben according to their families, the cities and their villages.

Then we move to the tribe of Gad in verse 24...

24 Moses also gave an inheritance to the tribe of Gad, to the sons of Gad, according to their families. 25 Their territory was Jazer, and all the cities of Gilead, and half the land of the sons of Ammon, as far as Aroer which is before Rabbah; 26 and from Heshbon as far as Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim as far as the border of [k]Debir; 27 and in the valley, Beth-haram and Beth-nimrah and Succoth and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of Sihon king of Heshbon, with the Jordan [l]as a border, as far as the lower end of the Sea of [m]Chinnereth beyond the Jordan to the east. 28 This is the inheritance of the sons of Gad according to their families, the cities and their villages.

You can see the rough borders of the Gadites in the screen to the east of the Jordan River...

Then we move to a picture of the land given to half the tribe of Manasseh in verses 29- 31...

29 Moses also gave an inheritance to the half-tribe of Manasseh; and it was for the half-tribe of the

*sons of Manasseh according to their families.
 30 Their territory was from Mahanaim, all
 Bashan, all the kingdom of Og king of Bashan,
 and all the [n]towns of Jair, which are in Bashan,
 sixty cities; 31 also half of Gilead, with Ashtaroth
 and Edrei, the cities of the kingdom of Og in
 Bashan, were for the sons of Machir the son of
 Manasseh, for half of the sons of Machir accord-
 ing to their families.*

We then get a summary statement of the division of the lands to the east of the Jordan River in verses 32-33..

*32 These are the territories which Moses appor-
 tioned for an inheritance in the plains of Moab,
 beyond the Jordan at Jericho to the east. 33 But to
 the tribe of Levi, Moses did not give an inheri-
 tance; the Lord, the God of Israel, is their inheri-
 tance, as He had [o]promised to them.*

So, Gad, Reuben, and half of the tribe of Manasseh settled on the lands east of the Jordan River..

And then we see a reminder of what we saw in verse 14...

The tribe of Levi, the Levites did not get a portion of the land east of the Jordan from Moses.

In fact, the Levities are not going to get a set portion of the land west of the Jordan River either...

We will learn more about this later in the book of Joshua...

But the Levites were simply going to be scattered all over the land of Israel....

In fact, they were given 48 cities and places all over the Promised Land...

And the reason for that is this..

The tribe of Levi were going to be the priests of God for the people of Israel...

They were going to offer the sacrifices to God on behalf of the people...

They were going to lead the worship of God for the people of Israel....

Therefore, God didn't put them in one place and force the rest of Israel to travel to them to offer their sacrifices..

Instead, he scattered them all over the map so that all of Israel would have a Levite priest near them..

This is the mercy of God to make it convenient for his people to worship him...

And that is exactly what he did by not giving the Levites a piece of land on the edge of the Promised Land...

Conclusion

What is the point of the chapter?

Mainly, to see that the land on the east side of the Jordan River was also possessed by Israel...

We tend to think that only the west side of the Jordan mattered, but that wasn't the case...

God rewarded all of his tribes, even tribes who wanted land east of the Jordan...

We need to remember that the people of God are a people of unity..

Just because someone lives on the other side of the Jordan doesn't make them inferior to the people on the west side of the Jordan...

The Reubenites, Gadites and half of Manasseh had crossed the Jordan to help their brothers take the land..

It is only right that they receive their land as well, no matter where it was located...

And God used the first part of this section of Joshua that talked about dividing up the land to speak of the division of the land east of the Jordan..

And that's a good thing...

Because we as believers often view other believers who live on that side of the track or on that side of town as inferior Christians...

But that is not the case at all...

The cross levels the playing field...

Size of bank accounts, color of skin, kind of house, number of cars is not a measure of spirituality or value to the Lord...

The Lord looks past all those things and right at a person's heart...

The tribes on the east side of the Jordan River were not outcasts and rebels and poor and disadvantaged...

They were simple the people of God who wanted to live on the east side of the Jordan River...

And God gave them a land...

How important it is not to categorize believers...

The church isn't made of the rich church, the black church, the country church, the church of young people, the cowboy church and on and on and on...

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is simply the church...

And though we may disagree about some things, we must celebrate all that we have in common...

Israel was made of 12 tribes, but God was their one God and the land was one land to be divided according to the purposes of God...

Maybe we be a church of incredible diversity but may we also be a church that doesn't see people as living on the other side of the river...

Let us pray...