



Settling the Eastern Tribes Joshua Chapter 13

Introduction

The initial conquest of the Promised Land had been completed under Joshua's spirit-filled leadership, and this meant the nation of Israel had a homeland. The tribes could begin breaking camp at Gilgal to settle into their own areas. There was just one problem. Boundaries were not yet defined. God revealed His plan to avoid territorial squabbles through His leader, Joshua. "As in the matter of warfare, so in the distribution of the land among the tribes, divine direction, rather than human reason, was the decisive factor" (The Biblical Expositor, Charles F. Pfeiffer).

As Christians, our leader is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has a perfect plan for every detail of our lives. If we consult Him, wait on Him, and believe He will answer our prayer, we will experience the blessing of His guidance and the wisdom of His ways. Do you always consult Him before taking the next step forward?

Outline of Joshua 13

- I. Joshua's Assignment - Joshua 13:1-7
- II. Jordan's Eastern Settlement - Joshua 13:8-33

I. Joshua's Assignment - Joshua 13:1-7

- A. Joshua's Advanced Age - Joshua 13:1

"*You are old, advanced in years,*" the LORD told Joshua. Joshua was forty years old when Israel left Egypt and eighty at the beginning of the conquest. He was therefore at least eighty-seven when God appeared to him with another assignment.

God does not retire many of His servants. *They shall still bear fruit in old age* (Psalm 92:14). They die with their boots on. They keep walking right into heaven. Most of them seem to like it that way, for there is joy in serving Jesus and undiminished excitement in bearing fruit for Him.

- B. Territory Yet to Possess - Joshua 13:2-5

None of the land west of the Jordan had been assigned. "*There remains very much land yet to be possessed.*" Is this true in your life? How much of the territory God has promised to you still remains to be possessed? Jesus told His disciples, "*Do business till I come*" (Luke 19:13). Even today He would have us take territory from our enemies (the world, flesh, and the devil) for Him and occupy as holy ground. Our territory consists of

inner strongholds of personality (natural flesh), outer strongholds of evil (demonic), and ungodliness in the society where we live (worldly) (See 1 John 2:15-17). Jesus, the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10), will reveal those areas to us if we ask Him.

1. "*All the territory of the Philistines*" - 13:2

The south coast of Canaan, from Egypt's northern border and continuing up the coast, was inhabited by the warlike Philistines, some of whom were remnants of a giant race. The "*five lords of the Philistines*" with their capital cities of Gaza, Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron controlled this territory and remained unconquered until David's day.

2. "*Sihor, which is east of Egypt*" - 13:3

Sihor probably refers to an eastern tributary of the Nile which flowed into the desert south of Palestine, becoming a seasonal "rain trough" to the Mediterranean Sea.

3. The Sidonians, Lebanon, and Mount Hermon - 13:4-5

The northern coast was dominated by the Phoenicians. They were apparently a sea-going people who may have been ancestors to the Polynesians. The boundary went inland below Mount Hermon to the entrance to Hamath, which is in Syria.

- C. Victory Promised - Joshua 13:6

"*All the inhabitants of the mountains from Lebanon...and all the Sidonians - them I will drive out from before the children of Israel,*" was the LORD's promise to Joshua. Joshua was to assign these lands to the individual tribes who would be responsible for conquering the inhabitants of their assigned inheritance.

- D. Nine-and-a-half Tribes - Joshua 13:7

Of the twelve tribes, two-and-a-half had received their inheritance under Moses east of Jordan. They were Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh. Nine tribes and the other half tribe of Manasseh had yet to receive their land. The LORD commanded Joshua to assign each their portion. It would be better to allow each tribe to settle and drive out the inhabitants of their own territory than to further engage the whole nation in local skirmishes.

In like manner, each believer is individually responsible to thrust out the enemy of his or her soul. We are not to engage the whole church to fight all our individual battles. The apostle Paul wrote that each one of us is to, *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil* (Ephesians 6:11). As we gird ourselves with the armor Paul describes in Ephesians 6:13-18, we will not be alone. We are also called to *bear one another's burdens* (Galatians 6:2) uniting in prayer with the local body of Christ and *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit* (Ephesians 6:18) for individuals as well as society.

II. Jordan's Eastern Settlements - Joshua 13:8-33

A. The Two-and-a-half Eastern Tribes - Joshua 13:8-32

Just eleven days after God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, they had an opportunity to enter Canaan at Kadesh Barnea in the sparsely settled southwestern area. They might have had little resistance there. But they did not believe God and were therefore overwhelmed by the sight of Philistine giants. Consequently, they wandered forty years in the wilderness until all of the unbelieving generation died, except for Joshua and Caleb.

Moses led the new generation, which had grown up in the desert, to the more formidable eastern side of the Jordan. He prudently asked for safe passage from the inhabitants of the land they passed through, promising to touch nothing belonging to them. His request was denied.

Moses had not intended to conquer the lands east of the Jordan. However, the hostility of the kings made it necessary. After the eastern conquest, some of the tribes wanted to settle there in the fertile pasture land. Moses gave permission on the condition that the men continued to fight with their brethren until the land was subdued. This they did.

B. Previous Prophecies Regarding the Eastern Tribes

1. Jacob's prophecies - Genesis 49

Jacob's twelve sons had become the leaders of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel, the name God had given to Jacob at Peniel (Genesis 32:27-28). As the family patriarch, he gave blessings to his sons while on his deathbed (Genesis 49). He spoke not only as the head of the clan but also as one of the patriarchs of the nation of Israel, along with Abraham and Isaac. His authority was God-given. Therefore, his pronouncements carried much more than sentimental weight.

2. Moses - Deuteronomy 33

Moses had also blessed each tribe before he died. He prophesied both in the sense of foretelling their futures and predicting the consequences for their respective behaviors. Like Jacob, Moses spoke as a prophet of God and with God's authority.

C. Prophecies Relating to the Eastern Tribes

1. Reuben - Joshua 13:15-23

a. Jacob's prophecy - Genesis 49:3-4

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power." (Firstborns had great status in the eastern world.) *"Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it - he went up to my couch."* Jacob carried the grief and disappointment of his eldest son's behavior to his grave. But he did not overlook the repercussions. Reuben lost the blessing of the firstborn.

b. Moses' prophecy - Deuteronomy 33:6

"Let Reuben live and not die, nor let his men be few." Death was the prescribed punishment for Reuben's sins. But God did not will that a tribe of Israel should perish. God's mercy tempered His judgment.

c. Borders

"Reuben's territory lay east of the Dead Sea between the Arnon River and Wadi Husban (Hesbon) which flows into the Jordan just south of Jericho" ([Teacher's Bible Commentary](#), Franklin Paschall and Herschell Hobbs).

2. Gad - Joshua 13:24-28

a. Jacob's prophecy - Genesis 49:19

"Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last." Gad would be overrun by others, but it was comforting to know that the tribe would survive and triumph. We have that same assurance in Christ. No matter how intense the opposition becomes, we are assured of survival and triumph.

b. Moses' prophecy - Deuteronomy 33:20-21

"Blessed is he who enlarges Gad; he dwells as a lion, and tears the arm and the crown of his head. He provided the first part for himself, because a lawgiver's portion was reserved there. He came with the heads of the people; he administered the justice of the LORD, and

his judgments with Israel." This is a bit mysterious. It seems that Gad received a good share of the booty from battle and brought it home.

c. Borders

"Gad claimed the land from the Wadi Husban on the south to Mahanaim (located near the Jabbok River) on the north. Apparently this included a narrow section of the Jordan valley extending up to the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Gad's holdings were bordered on the east by the Ammonites, who provided a lasting threat to their holdings. Gad survived, however, and gradually absorbed Reuben's lands" (Teacher's Bible Commentary, Franklin Paschall and Herschell Hobbs).

3. Half-tribe of Manasseh - Joshua 13:29-32

a. Jacob's prophecy - Genesis 49:22-26

Manasseh and Ephraim were Joseph's sons and Jacob's prophecy for Manasseh is included in his prophecy for Joseph. Jacob loved Joseph with a special tenderness, perhaps because he was Rachel's first-born. Just as Jacob *loved Rachel more than Leah* (Genesis 29:30), so he *loved Joseph more than any of his children* (Genesis 37:3) and gave him the double portion. The double portion normally went to the firstborn, however Reuben had disqualified himself, as had Simeon and Levi. Instead of Joseph inheriting directly, his two sons each received an inheritance. In this way, the lack of the Levites as inheritors of territory is made up and the number of landed tribes remains at twelve.

b. Moses' prophecy - Deuteronomy
33:13-17

Moses alludes to the double portion in his glowing prophecy of Joseph, "*His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns like the horns of the wild ox; together with them he shall push the peoples to the ends of the earth; they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh*".

c. Borders

According to The Teacher's Commentary (Franklin Paschall and Herschel Hobbs), "The half-tribe of Manasseh settled in the territory running northward from Gad's boundary near Mahanaim to an undisclosed frontier north and east of the Sea of Galilee."

4. Moses' distribution - Joshua 13:32

When Moses knew that he would not enter the Promised Land, he assumed that he would not participate in dividing the inheritance among the tribes. He leaped to a wrong conclusion as many do when they underestimate God. Moses underestimated God's power, creativity, and love for him. Actually the territory Moses assigned is as large as Canaan itself on the other side of the Jordan.

D. Levi - Joshua 13:33

The Levites received special mention because they received no territorial inheritance from Moses or Joshua. The LORD God of Israel was their inheritance, as He had told them (Numbers 18:20). What better inheritance than to have the LORD himself? Of course God was with the other tribes too, but He promised to be with Levi in a special way.

We may need to be willing to have less, to deny ourselves, to lose our lives for Christ's sake in order to receive the special presence and power of God. Sometimes the LORD says, "You cannot have what others have, but you can have Me." Which would you rather have?

Applications

1. What has God given you as possessions here on earth? Has he given you family, a career, an ability or talent, health, intelligence, position, or influence? How will you move forward to make the most of what God has given you?
2. Are you possessing all God has given you as territory conquered for Christ and His use? How have you put on *the whole armor of God* (Ephesians 6:11-18) to use in your life? Who will you ask to pray for you as you now venture to do this?
3. Are you content within your own borders, not desiring another's territory? Will you give thanks to God today for what He has given you? Make a list of the things you are grateful for.
4. Will you believe that God can bless you where you are, in your current situation?
5. Do you ever underestimate the power of God? Do you pray and then fear taking a step forward? When have you put limits on what God can do when serving Him or leading others? In what areas will you boldly put your trust in God to work His mighty power in your life?