

Israel's Inheritance

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 August 2017

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Joshua 21. Now the family heads of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the other tribal families of Israel at Shiloh and Canaan and said to them, The Lord commanded through Moses that you give us towns to live in with pasture lands for our livestock.

So, as the Lord had commanded, the Israelites gave the Levites the following towns and pasture lands out of their own inheritance. The first lot came out for the Kohathites, clan by clan.

The Levites, who were descendants of Aaron the priest, were allotted 13 towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. The rest of Kohath's descendants were allotted 10 towns from the clans of the tribes of Ephraim.

Dan, and half of Manasseh. The descendants of Gershon were allotted 13 towns from the clans of the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan.

The descendants of Merari, clan by clan, received 12 towns from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. So, the Israelites allotted to the Levites these towns and their pasture lands as the Lord had commanded through Moses.

[1:25] From the tribes of Judah and Simeon, they allotted the following towns by name. These towns were assigned to the descendants of Aaron, who were from the Kohathite clans of the Levites, because the first lot fell to them.

They gave them Kiriath Arba, that is Hebron, with its surrounding pasture land in the hill country of Judah. Arba was the forefather of Anak.

But the fields and villages around the city they had given to Caleb, son of Jephunneh, as his possession. So, to the descendants of Aaron, the priest, they gave Hebron a city of refuge for one accused of murder.

Libna, Jatter, Estomoah, Holon, Debir, Ain, Judah, and Beth Shemesh, together with their pasture lands, nine towns from these two tribes.

And from the tribe of Benjamin, they gave them Gibeon, Geba, Anathoth, and Elman, together with their pasture lands, four towns. All the towns for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were thirteen, together with their pasture lands.

[2:35] The rest of the Kohathite clans of the Levites were allotted towns from the tribe of Ephraim. In the hill country of Ephraim, they were given Shechem, a city of refuge for one accused of murder, and Gezer, Gibzaim, and Beth Horon, together with their pasture lands, four towns.

Also from the tribe of Dan, they received Eltica, Gibethon, Ejelon, and Gath-Rimen, together with their pasture lands, four towns.

From half the tribe of Manasseh, they received Tanak, and Gath-Rimen, together with their pasture lands, two towns. All these ten towns and their pasture lands were given to the rest of the Kohathite clans.

The Levite clans of the Gershonites were given. From the half-tribe of Manasseh, Golan and Bashan, a city of refuge for one accused of murder. And Be-Esterah, together with their pasture lands, two towns.

From the tribe of Issachar, Kishion, Deborath, Jarmuth, and Enganon, together with their pasture lands, four towns. From the tribe of Asher, Mishael, Abdon, Helcath, and Rehob, together with their pasture lands, four towns.

[3:54] From the tribe of Naphtali, Kadesh in Galilee, a city of refuge for one accused of murder. Hamath-Dor, Hamath-Dor, and Kartan, together with their pasture lands, three towns.

All the towns of the Gershonite clans were thirteen, together with their pasture lands. The Merorite clans, the rest of the Levites were given. From the tribe of Zebulun, Jocneum, Karta, Dimna, and Nehalau, together with their pasture lands, four towns.

From the tribe of Reuben, Bezer, Jahaz, Kedemoth, and Methath, together with their pasture lands, four towns. From the tribe of Gad, Ramoth, and Gilead, a city of refuge for one accused of murder.

Mahanehem, Heshbon, and Jazer, together with their pasture lands, four towns in all. All the towns allotted to the Merorite clans, who were the rest of the Levites, were twelve.

The towns of the Levites in the territory held by the Israelites were forty-eight in all, together with their pasture lands. Each of these towns had pasture lands surrounding it.

[5:08] This was true for all these towns. So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there.

The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them. The Lord handed all their enemies over to them.

Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed. Every one was fulfilled. These different cities and the pasture lands around it, and that's much of what chapters 13 through 21 is like.

It's town after town, and city after city, and territory after territory, that can be quite daunting for us to get through.

And this is why listening to good preaching is so important, because the preaching we listen to helps us or hurts us when we come to the Scripture, when we read it ourselves.

[6:24] How we hear it, what it's preached like to us, is often how then we go to our Bibles and say, now what should I get out of this? So if a pastor preaches sermons like seven ways to make your life better, things like that, and then you go to a passage like Joshua, you're going to be trying to read it through those lens, that paradigm.

And so that's why it's important to listen to theological preaching, because we need to learn how to read our Bibles, and good preaching helps us to learn to be better readers.

So what do we do with Joshua 13 through 21? The book of Joshua can be easily divided into two sections.

We saw the first, one through 12, and the second section is 13 through pretty much 21, then there's some postscripts at the end.

The first section is all about conquering the land. The second section is now about possessing it, receiving it, inheriting it.

[7:39] If we were to give a theme, I want you to think with me, if you were to give a theme for the first section of Joshua, the first 12 chapters there, what is something that came up repeatedly?

There was an idea, there was a statement that kept on coming up again and again and again, in different contexts, to different people, said by different people. Do you know what it is?

It's be strong and courageous. And there's a lesson there for us. If we are to inherit eternal life, if we are to receive the heavenly kingdom, we have to be strong and courageous.

And we could deal that out and explore that more. But as we come to the second section, we have to ask ourselves now, what's the theological truth here?

What's the big idea to this big second section? Well, the theme is not be strong and courageous. You don't read that anymore after chapter 12.

[8 : 44] That's not part of the theme anymore. Now the theme is inheritance or possession. We saw it a few times in chapter 21, but about 50 times in the nine chapters, 13 through 21, that term comes up.

That idea appears. So Israel is now thinking, or Joshua has now turned its attention to inheritance. And it gets put like this in chapter 21 that I had read for you.

That last little bit in verse 43 and following, not one of the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed.

Every one was fulfilled. That's what you see in Joshua 13 through 21. That's the theological lesson of Joshua 13 through 21.

That God keeps all of his promises. He keeps all of his promises. And that's what we're going to cover tonight. Some parts of the Bible can be very difficult to put into a sermon form.

[9 : 54] And lists of towns, and lists of tribes, and then them deciding how they're going to split up the territory. That can be very difficult to sermonize. The first 12 chapters, what have we seen?

We've been sort of like going to a war movie. We've been going to Dunkirk or something like that. And it's been action. It's been spies. It's been escapes. It's been victory.

And then we come to the second section, and now it's like a land survey. And so we've gone from chasing Canaanites down roads with a sword in our hand to plotting along riverbeds, going up hills and going through forests, and plotting out territory, being a land surveyor.

And that's chapters 13 through 21. And so just to summarize what happened, we're going to go back in a couple of weeks and just pick out some, this section, and we're going to pick out some things and emphasize it.

But I just want to sort of take a 10,000 foot survey of chapter 13 through 21. First of all, the east had already, the east of the Jordan had already been divided between the two and a half tribes.

[11 : 17] And so those two and a half tribes had taken possession of their land. And now, west of the Jordan River is now to be divided.

And first Judah, as the premier, the most important tribe, gets their land first in the south. And then the next largest tribes, the half tribe of Manasseh and Ephraim, both sons of Joshua, they receive their land in the north.

And so you have Judah in the south and Ephraim and Manasseh in the north. And they take up the biggest amount of space. They're the biggest tribes. And then a land survey is taken.

And they just figure out what they have there. And then they cast lots. Lot's and the other seven tribes, who have not received territory, they took what Lot was cast to them as from the Lord.

And so each of the seven tribes then are listed as, then they have received their territory. And these were the cities that were a part of it. And then we read of the Levites. They didn't have any defined territory.

[12:26] They were spread out among God's people because they had to minister to God's people. They had to be part of God's people. And remember, the Lord was their inheritance. And we can talk about that more later.

They received their cities. Finally, cities of refuge were set up. Cities where people who had accidentally killed someone, that they had been accused of murder, they could run to and be safe in order for a trial to be established before the Avenger of Blood chased them down and just killed them.

That's what those cities of refuge were. Now, chapters 13 through 21, it goes into great detail. And town after town is named.

And probably everyone reading it says to themselves, what am I supposed to get out of this? Everyone probably can get through chapters 1 through 12 fairly easily.

13 through 21 is much more difficult. In the second half, we're now looking through sort of like technical, legal papers in the lawyer's office of, now this is the property that belongs to these people, wherever that is kept.

[13:39] And the problem is, like I said, is we are too far removed. We're too detached. We have to see it like Israel would have seen this.

We have to read this with the eyes of an ancient Israelite instead of a modern person so far away. This wasn't just any old land divided up thousands of miles from here.

This land was their inheritance. Now, if your parents have passed away, I want you to think, what is something that you have from them that you cherish?

Maybe it's a Bible. Maybe it's pictures. Maybe it's some of their furniture. Maybe it's an old chair.

It's something of theirs, and it matters to you. It's from them. It matters to you because it used to be theirs, and now it's come to you. It's part of your inheritance.

[14:49] And when it came time to divide up mom and dad's estate, was that important? Was that exciting?

Was that nerve-wracking? Did it matter to you? You bet it did. You bet it did. That's why there's so many fights when it comes time to divide up estates because it matters so much.

It's sensitive. It's close to people. And so, that was theirs, and now it's yours. And so, think of that Bible, or think of that picture, or think of that furniture, or whatever. Do you care about it?

Is it precious to you? Do you treasure it? And I'm sure the answer is, you do. That's what chapters 13 through 21 meant to Israel. The ground, the fields, forests, the cities, the villages.

This was the record that it belonged to them now. That it was theirs. Sometimes, when people have paid off their mortgage, they have a mortgage-burning ceremony as an exciting thing to say, now this land, or this house that I've been paying on is finally mine.

[16:14] It matters. That's how it was for Israel. The God of heaven, the God of earth, gave it to them as their inheritance.

And it did matter. Or you can think about it in a different way. Have you ever had to wait a long time to receive something? You've had to work really hard for it or you've hoped and you've longed for it.

Maybe it's the salvation of your children and you've prayed for that and you've longed for that and you've hoped for that. And it's not been a time or two. This is something constant.

And at last it happens and God saves them. Does that excite you? Does that matter? Yes. That's how this felt like to the Israelites because this had been something God said I'm going to do and they had to wait and wait and wait and now here they are.

They have it. So all of this geography in chapters 13 through 21, it's promised geography. It's long-homed for geography.

[17:22] It's hard-fought for geography. And now God has kept his promise and at long last it's theirs. Or you hold your long-awaited baby in your hands and you say, I waited for this one.

Or you watch your long-lost daughter baptized and you hug her and you love her and you love him for what he's given you and you say, the Lord gave me this one.

It matters. That's what this land was for God's people. Here they were. These just names on a page so much to us.

It was a real place to them. They could walk. They could touch. They had dirt under their feet that said God was faithful.

God was good. God loves us. So they could walk in God's faithfulness, God's kindness. In the words of Joshua 21, the Lord gave all the land he had sworn to give to their forefathers.

[18:30] The Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed.

Everyone was fulfilled. What's the theological lesson? As you go to read this in your own time, what should you be looking for?

The lesson from this passage is this, that the Lord keeps all of his promises. It doesn't matter what's standing in the way. The Lord keeps all of his promises.

This is nine chapters of detailed, specific, promise-keeping. Perfect promise-keeping. And it's written to teach us that our God is going to keep every single one of his promises.

Right down to the last city, so to speak. There's no failing words. And so, what we're going to do, what we're going to do is look at this large section under three pairs to pull it out and apply it.

[19:41] We're going to look at it under three pairs. And each of them includes a them and an us. A them and an us. And the first pair is, what did God promise them?

And what did God promise us? What did God promise them? And what did God promise us? Remember, the Lord did everything he had sworn to do. So, them getting the land was something the Lord had promised to them.

All of his good promises came true. And so, what did the Lord promise to them? Well, remember, he promised years and years ago to Abraham. He said, Abraham, you are going to be a great nation.

And at this time, he is an old man with an old wife, a barren wife, and he says to them, I will make you a great nation, and I will make you a blessing to every nation, to all nations.

These huge promises. And now he says, now go to the land I'm going to show you. And when he had been in that land for a little bit of time, or some time, the Lord comes to him again, and he says, I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.

[20:52] He's promising, I've brought you here because this is going to be your descendants' land. And Abraham says, but how will I take possession of it? How will I inherit it?

And the Lord said, here's your answer. Get a heifer, get a goat, get a ram, split them in two. And it says in Genesis 15 that the Lord walked through those pieces.

And he swears an oath by blood that in 400 years, your descendants will come to this land and will receive this land.

Now, how many children did Abraham have at that time? None. None. But God had sworn by blood, I will do this.

and then God gave the same promise to Isaac and he gave that promise to Jacob. That's what the Lord promised. You're going to be a great people. You're going to have this land.

[22:02] You're going to be a blessing to every nation. Now, what has God promised to us? 2 Peter 3:13. What has God promised to you?

But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. What has God promised you?

New heavens, new earth, the home of righteousness. This world here, this is not the home of righteousness. This is the world where sinners and it's greed and it's murder and it's strife and it's idolatry.

the people here, they're heartless, they're ruthless, they're faithless, they're inventors of wickedness and they not only do wicked things, then they approve of others when they do them.

That's this world and this world isn't our home, is it? It's not our home. We're homeless, we're sojourners, we're foreigners, orphans, away from the Father's house and Jesus says, I'm not going to leave you as orphans.

[23:17] And that first means I'm going to come by my spirit to you. But I think finally it means I'm going to bring you to myself. You're going to live with me.

That's what God promises. That's what God promises you. This world isn't our home, but our home is coming where we belong, where our people live, where righteousness dwells.

that's the promise. We need to keep that promise in our hearts and in our minds because you cannot live the Christian life without a view of heaven.

Only with heaven in sight can you get a perspective of this world. Heaven is our great hope. There's no heaven, there's no hope.

We have no hope, we have no joy. joy. We have no joy. We have no life. We have no life. We can't live the Christian life. But what can give us perseverance knowing that there is a finish line, that there is a home to get to, that there is a well-done, good, and faithful servant, there is a come and enter into the joy of your master.

[24:33] That's God's promise. That's the first pair. What God promised to them and what God promised to us. Now the second pair is what obstacles stood in the way, or stands in the way.

Well in their way, I don't have to go into great detail, there were people already living in the land. It wasn't like it was empty, it wasn't vacant. There were nations and kings and giants and soldiers. Between Abraham and Joshua 13 through 21, there is barrenness and old age, there's the impossibilities of the human body.

Old women don't have children. And between Abraham and Joshua 13 through 21, there's Pharaoh and Pharaoh's armies, there's the Red Sea, there's a howling desert, there's hunger, there's thirst, there's Balaam, that false teacher, that one who would lead them into sin and into destruction.

They're their own sin, and their own unbelief, and their own fear, and their own words, and their own concern that would hold them back. There was enemies within and enemies without.

There was violence on the one hand, and there was deceit on the inside, lies on the other hand. And there was time, year after year, time, those long years all stood in the way.

[26 : 01] And for us, Paul says it for us, we were greatly harassed. There were conflicts without, and there were fears within.

If you think Paul was just this guy who never struggled with fear, you need to read that verse. What stands in our way?

False teaching that would lead us astray? Our own hearts that bubble up deceit, that seem so convincing.

There's trials. There's pain. There's cares. There's concerns that weigh on our hearts, and they can feel like too much. There's our own sin in our own hearts, prone to wander.

Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. There's the devil. A real being. A real supernatural angelic being who hates you.

[27 : 10] Who is not consistent. Who doesn't care about being consistent. Who will lie to you one way and lie to you other and destroy you with one hand and give you pleasure with the other.

He's not consistent. He's not concerned with that. He is out to destroy you. And then there's the world. There's that siren song that we want to belong.

We want to be a part of this world. We want to be liked. We want to be important. We want to be loved. We want to be cruel. There's our own flesh. It's that restless insurgency that's always wanting independence.

We heard about that this morning. It's that flesh that says, oh, if we could only be done with God, if God just wasn't there, if God wasn't real, if I didn't have to deal with him. And it's that independence that the devil loves to promise us.

And maybe it's just time. Time. Who knows what lies in front of us? Who knows what things will come?

[28 : 16] what trials lie hidden in the thicket of the future? And so we can say, see all those obstacles.

Will I ever make it? Will I ever get there? Will God actually keep his promise? Well, there's obstacles for them, there's obstacles for us.

And now, finally, the third pair is, what happened? What happened? What happened to them and what's going to happen to us? Well, we've read it.

We've seen what God promised. We've seen all those obstacles. Now, what happened? Not one of all of the Lord's good promises failed. Not a single one.

Not one. Not one of all those promises. Abraham, I will make you into a great nation. Now, Israel, 380 years or 60 years later, walks out of Egypt a great nation.

[29 : 23] Too numerous to count. Abraham, in 400 years, they will walk into this land and the Red Sea splits open and the Jordan River piles up and they walk into the land and he says, I will give them this land.

And there were 31 kings that said, no, that's not my plan. That's not what I want. That's not what I'm going to do. And 31 kings were wrong. And so we get to Joshua 21 and now the land is theirs.

It's by right theirs. It's in name theirs. We're going to see next time that there was some work still to do to actually make it their own. They had it by name and in some places they needed to really take ownership of it.

But all the land was theirs. The Lord kept every promise right down to the last detail. Right down to the last detail. And all of those enemies couldn't stop God.

All the lies, all the fear, all of it, none of it could keep God from keeping every promise down to the last detail. His power was too much.

- [30 : 43] His power was too much. His wisdom was too much. He was too wise for all of those enemies. His grace was too much.
- His grace was greater than their sin. He was just too faithful. And that's our God.
- God. That's your God. Go to any promise in the Bible. And you can say that promise is sure. Because God is too strong.
- He is too loving. He is too wise. He is too anything and everything to let that promise fail. That's our God. And so brothers and sisters, we are waiting.
- We are waiting. Just like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. We are waiting. Waiting on the Lord. But every second that the clock ticks is a second closer to heaven.
- [31 : 42] We are closer now than when we first believed. And yes, we have fears and we have unbelief on the inside, but God is greater than our hearts and we have enemies within, but God has said, you know what?
- I have enthroned my king on my holy hill. This universe is not an anarchy. It is not a democracy. It is a monarchy.
- Jesus Christ is king of kings. And just like the Israelites took their possession and walked in it, they stood in fields and walked down paths, all that promised geography that became theirs, one day we will do that in heaven.
- Our feet will walk on new heavens and new earth and the Lord will give us rest on every side. Now, how do I know it? Because the God who cannot lie has said it.
- The God who does not change his mind. Children, you all know the sadness and the disappointment of your parents changing their mind.
- [32 : 50] Well, God doesn't change his mind and he doesn't lie and he can't be thwarted. He's too strong, he's too loving, he's too good. And what he says, he does.
- What he says, he does. What he promises, he brings about. And now, that means it's great hope and expectation for us.
- We have a hope that's living. We're not going to be disappointed. But if you're an unbeliever, that is both good news and that is bad news for you. That God is this God, that he's steadfast, that he is faithful.
- The bad news is he, for you, as we heard it this morning, he's appointed a day in which to judge the world. He has promised justice and judgment. He has promised wrath and ruin on the world of men.
- He has promised an earthquake that will shake everything. He has promised to tear away the mask that the world is wearing. He has promised death. The wages of sin is death.
- [33 : 55] It's promised. That promise is hanging over your heads. You're lost. But there is good news. Because God promised a Savior and Jesus Christ was born.
- God promised a sacrifice that would take away sins. And Jesus died once for all to take away sin. And God promised a Savior that would not see decay. And Jesus rose on the third day, just like God promised that he would.
- And he has been exalted to grant repentance and salvation to sinners. And God promises that anyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.
- That's the good news. There's the promise of judgment hanging over your head, but there's also this promise of salvation for all who would call on the name of Jesus.
- Jesus, you see, one way or the other, you're going to come to terms with the promise of God, the faithfulness of God.
- [35 : 03] You have to deal with God. He won't be put off forever. And so his gracious word now is believe and live.

Believe and live. There's no sin that's too much. There's no heart that's too far gone. Believe and you'll be saved. That's what the God who cannot lie says.

That's the God who is so strong that no one can stop him from keeping his word. You aren't strong enough. Your sin isn't strong enough. Your guilt isn't too much. He says, believe and you will live.

And so my word is take him at his word. Take him at his word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are this kind of promise-keeping, unchangeable God that you make promises and then you keep them.

And so every promise is yes and amen in Jesus Christ for us. Every good thing that you said you would do is going to happen.

[36 : 15] judgment will happen as well. You have not left us to wonder what you will do. You've said you will do it.

Pray that we would take you at your word. I pray for the lost, that they would take you seriously because you are taking your word seriously. and for us who have believed, I pray that you would not let Satan rob us of those joy giving promises that are ours.

That he would not trap us in doubting castle, but that your promises would come to us and we could live on them with hope and expectation that you are our God who sustains us and helps us.

So I pray for all of us as we go into this next week that we would go with our eyes fastened on your word and on you, that we would go with our hearts leaning into your promises, taking you at your word, and out of that faith and that confidence and that hope, that we would live a joyful Christian life that would be brilliant and glorious for you, that others would see and wonder about the hope that we have and that we could give an answer for the reason for that hope.

Pray this in our Lord's name. Amen.