

**“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”:  
A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA**

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**GOD’S GIFTS TO THE OTHER TRIBES**

(JOSHUA 18:1-19:51)

**I. Introduction to the Inheritances of the Other Tribes (Joshua 18:1-10)**

- A. So far, we have covered the inheritances of three tribes: Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh.
- B. In 18:1-19:51, we find the allotments given to the remaining tribes of Israel (with the exceptions of Levi).
- C. When chapter 18 begins, “The land lay subdued before them”
- D. Then, verse 2 tells us: “There remained among the people of Israel seven tribes whose inheritance had not yet been apportioned.”
- E. Joshua calls a gathering of these remaining tribes to get them going with the taking their land: “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?” (v 3)
  - 1. At first, this statement comes across as a rebuke to these tribes of Israel.
  - 2. But Joshua scholars such as David Howard (*Joshua*, 360) and Robert Hubbard believe (*Joshua*, 414) that Joshua’s remark need not be taken as a rebuke because, as Hubbard himself explains, “In reality, the seven have received no prior mandate to occupy the land...”
  - 3. As such, Joshua’s words could be read as “motivational rhetoric to get them moving on his plan” (Hubbard, *Joshua*, 414).
  - 4. Joshua’s words may not be so much a rebuke as a kind of pep talk.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Was Joshua rebuking the remaining seven tribes? Why do scholars think that he was not?

**II. A Plan to Get Started (Joshua 18:4-7)**

- A. If the tribes are going to do what the Lord had asked of them, Joshua gives instructions to help them get started.
  - 1. He asks each tribe to provide three men for reconnaissance missions (18:4).
  - 2. After these men have done their footwork, Joshua asks that they write a description of the land with a view to their inheritances (18:4).
  - 3. Following that, Joshua says that the remaining land should be divided “into seven portions” (18:5).
- B. To make sure that there is no confusion and no unnecessary cause for conflict, “Judah shall continue in his territory on the south, and the house of Joseph shall continue in their territory on the north.”
- C. In verse 6, Joshua returns to his instruction: “And you shall describe the land in seven divisions and bring the description here to me.”
- D. Once the tribes have brought to Joshua the divisions of the land, Joshua says, “And I will cast lots for you here before the LORD our God.”
  - 1. The lesson is clear: The tribes are to lay their desires and plans before the Lord.

2. The casting of lots was the way God's will was determined at this point in time for the allotments which tribe gets what land.
  3. We are reminded that God is the ultimate Landlord and Giver of the land.
- E. The great doctrine of divine sovereignty is never far away. It is the very backdrop of the book of Joshua. In more technological terms, it is the operating system that runs the history of Joshua.
- F. In verse 7, we are told: "The Levites have no portion among you, for the priesthood of the LORD is their heritage."
1. We encountered the Levites back in 13:14: "To the tribe of Levi alone Moses gave no inheritance. The offerings by fire to the LORD God of Israel are their inheritance, as he said to him."
  2. The lives of the Levites revolve around the presence of the Lord in the tent.
  3. Through the Levites, God gives his people a picture of what it means to live completely for his glory, to be his priestly race in the world.
- G. Following the reference to the Levites, we have a reference to the other two and a half tribes on the east of the Jordan: "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."

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What were the instructions that Joshua gave to the people? What was his plan? (2) Why did the Levites not have any land allotted to them? (3) What lesson did the Levites teach Israel?

### III. The Mission Begins (Joshua 18:8-10)

- A. So, having received their instructions, "the men arose and went..."
- B. 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'" (v 8).  
—The repetition of the instruction may be meant to emphasize Joshua's key instruction and promise.
- C. "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" (v 9).
1. They obeyed Joshua to the letter.
  2. Once again, we have the theme of obedience. The men obeyed the Lord's anointed Leader.
- D. After they had done that, they returned "to Joshua to the camp at Shiloh," and verse 10 says, "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."
- E. What follows from 18:11 all the way to 19:48 is the breakdown of the allotments to these remaining seven tribes.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How did the men of the tribes respond to Joshua's instruction? (2) What follows from 18:11 all the way to 19:48?

### IV. God's Gift to Benjamin (Joshua 18:11-20)

- A. First: The allotment of *Benjamin* (18:11-20): "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."
1. So Benjamin's land rests between the lands of Judah and Joseph.

2. “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.”

B. Boundaries

1. Western boundary (v 14)
2. Southern boundary (vv 15-19)
3. Eastern boundary (v 20)

- C. From verse 21 to verse 28, you have a listing of the cities of the people of Benjamin according to their clans. And finally, the section ends with the clause: “This is the inheritance of the people of Benjamin according to its clans.”

**\*Question for reflection:** What cities were part of Benjamin’s territory?

V. **God’s Gift to Simeon (Joshua 19:1-9)**

- A. Second: The allotment of *Simeon* (19:1-9)

- B. Simeon is not actually given an independent allotment of land. Instead, Simeon inherits the scattered cities within Judah’s territory: “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.”

- C. Why was Simeon allowed a share in Judah’s land? “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” (v 9)

—This arrangement works out well because when we get to Judges 1:3, we see that Judah and Simeon team-up to fight the Canaanites.

- D. But another reason why Simeon did not inherit their own independent territory was due to the violence that Simeon and Levi perpetrated back in Genesis 34 and the resulting curse in Genesis 49:5-7:

<sup>5</sup> *“Simeon and Levi are brothers;  
weapons of violence are their swords.  
<sup>6</sup> Let my soul come not into their council;  
O my glory, be not joined to their company.  
For in their anger they killed men,  
and in their willfulness they hamstringed oxen.  
<sup>7</sup> Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,  
and their wrath, for it is cruel!  
I will divide them in Jacob  
and scatter them in Israel.*

—There you have it. The reason the tribes of Simeon and Levi do not have land of their own was due to the sins of their fathers.

- E. Yet, the fact that Simeon’s descendants still have a place to stay is testimony to God’s mercy.

1. Even if the people of Simeon do not have their own region, they at least have some cities. They are not cast out of Israel or condemned to wander in the wilderness.
2. God is merciful and the cities named in 19:2-8 reflect God’s continued provision even to his sinful people.
3. If you look at a map of ancient Israel, you will see Simeon in the middle, encircled or hemmed in by the rest of Judah.

- F. And in some sense, Simeon is really a reflection also of the Church as a whole.

1. In a sense, all of us are still suffering for the sins of our fathers, especially our first father Adam.
  2. Even though salvation has been granted to us in Jesus Christ, we have not yet entered into the full experience of that salvation.
  3. When we experience illness, sadness, or failure, we are still coming into contact with the consequences of that original sin of Adam and Eve.
  4. Yet, God continues to bless us. Mingled with the consequences of the fall are the blessings of heaven. God continues to be tender with his people.
- G. Simeon will be taken care of by Judah who shelters them in his care. Sound familiar?  
—God may be writing theology into geography. Simply amazing.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) According to v 9, why was Simeon allowed some land in Judah? (2) According to Genesis 49:5-7, why did Simeon not have any land of their own? (3) What does God's provision for Simeon have to say to us?

## VI. God's Gift to the Remaining Five (Joshua 19:10-48)

- A. After Simeon, the next tribes that come up include Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan.
- B. The breakdown of the tribal allotments
  1. Zebulun (19:10-16)
  2. Issachar (19:17-23)
  3. Asher (19:24-31)
  4. Naphtali (19:32-39)
  5. Dan (19:40-48)
- C. And it seems that for the most part, the process of allotment and possession seems relatively quiet for these tribes.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Who are the remaining five tribes? (2) What are their territories?

## VII. Dan's Struggle (Joshua 19:40-48)

- A. But in the case of Dan, there was some conflict in the process of taking the land (v 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”
- B. This episode was recorded to show the reality of the struggle for the land. Not everything went smoothly.
- C. As you and I seek to live the life that pleases God, we can expect opposition and struggles.
  1. But like our ancient forefathers in the faith, we mustn't be discouraged. Instead, we must rise up and press onward.
  2. The struggle may be long and hard. But God has promised to give us the victory.
  3. Dan's struggle for their land is really an exhortation to the rest of the Church to keep fighting the good fight.
- D. There is ultimately no reason to be discouraged or fall into despair. Why? *Because Jesus Christ has lived, has died, and has been raised from the dead and exalted into heaven for us.*  
—Christ is our primary and ultimate source of encouragement.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What struggles did Dan undergo? (2) What do Dan's struggles teach us about the spiritual life?

## VIII. God's Gift to Joshua (Joshua 19:49-50)

- A. Once all the tribes have had their allotments, Joshua receives his own allotment: "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" (v 49).
- B. Even this was done by the will of the Lord: "*By command of the LORD* they gave him the city that he asked, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim..."

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What land did Joshua take for himself? (2) Why is it significant that this was done "By command of the LORD"?

## IX. Conclusion to the Allotments of the Tribes (Joshua 19:51)

- A. Finally, the conclusion to this section of the tribal allotments (with the exception of Levi): "*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" (v 51).
- B. Verse 51 functions as a complementary bookend to 14:1: "*These are the inheritances* that the people of Israel received in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the people of Israel gave them to inherit."
- C. The similarities of 14:1 and 19:51 suggest that this is a single unit in the book of Joshua.

**\*Questions for reflection:** How does 19:51 function in the context of chapters 14-19?

## X. The Lord God Is Our Rest

**God delights to give rest and security to his people. God wants his people to know that security and rest that is in him. This has been God's good pleasure and joyous intention all along. As this section of allotments slows to a close, as we see Joshua receiving his own land, we can taste and see that the Lord has been good. Whatever storms Israel has had to weather in the process, God has come through for them. Whatever battles Israel has had to face, it was ultimately God who gave them the victory. Of course, we must see where all this is leading—to the ultimate and enduring salvation that God himself will accomplish through Christ Jesus, the obedient Son of God, the embodiment of Israel, the final Joshua. The future rest of the Church is embedded into the present rest of Israel. In Israel's inheritance, we see our future inheritance—not just the Promised Land, but the Promised World. Let this be our encouragement to persevere in our love of God. "To the one who conquers," our Lord Jesus says, "I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev 2:7). So we persevere, because it is God who works in us "both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). Amen.**

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does God delight to give his people? (2) Who is the ultimate source of Israel's and our victory and rest? (3) What is the Lord Jesus' promise to the Christian who perseveres in faith and good works? (4) "The future rest of the Church is embedded into the present rest of Israel." Discuss.