

• *The division of the land*

Joshua 1–12 has dealt with the conflict in which Joshua conquered much of the land. The second main section of the book of Joshua ¹, tells us of the division of the land.

¹ chapters 13–22

• *Lists and geographical details illustrate Bible themes*

These chapters have lengthy lists and geographical details in them, which might seem uninteresting. Yet they are stimulating because they deal with ‘inheritance’. Topics such as inheritance, covenant, oath and ‘entering into rest’ are major themes of the Bible, and the book of Joshua will help us to understand them. It is a crucial thread of teaching that runs through the Bible.

1. Others carry on what has been started

1. **God’s servants and leaders often have to let others carry on what they have started.** Joshua is elderly ¹ and the work of subduing all of Canaan has not been completed. ² Although much of the central area of Canaan has been conquered there are some areas that have not. God tells Joshua that more remains to be done but God does not say that Joshua will do it. We only make a contribution. We cannot do everything. Sometimes Christian leaders get too greedy, too ambitious. They want to have the reputation for having done everything. We have to leave something for the next generation to do.

¹ 13:1a
² 13:1 b

• *Incomplete conquest*

• *The next generation*

• *The area still to be subdued*

God defines the area which still needs to be subdued. There is (i) the Philistine region in the south-east, and (ii) the land of the Gushurites also in the south (13:2; compare 1 Samuel 27:8). These Geshurites are not to be confused with the ‘Geshur’ of Joshua 12:5; 13:11 and 13 which was in the north. This southern unconquered area ranged from as far south as the Egyptian border to the Philistine area further north around Ekron. Then there were (iii) five Philistine towns (13:3 reads ‘...*Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron; ...*’). Also there was (iv) the southern area where the people called the Avvim lived (13:3–4 continues: ‘...*and the Avvim in the south*’). Turning to the north of the country (13:4) there was (v) ‘*the whole land of the Canaanites*’ (by which it means the central coast) and (vi) Mearah (the identity of which is unknown). Then (vii) there was the area of the Giblites who lived in Gebal on the coast (1 3:5a) and (viii) a stretch of land in the far north near Mount Hermon (1 3:5b). Verse 6a continues the list (‘*all the inhabitants of the hilly areas from the Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, that is, all the Sidonians*’); it refers to (ix) the northern coastal region above Tyre.

• *Much land for the next generation to conquer*

The precise details of the localities are perhaps not significant to us. The important thing is there was much land unconquered. Joshua did not achieve everything in one generation. If he himself had continued the work of Moses in conquering Canaan, there needed to be others who would carry on the conquest.

• *Rest*

Verse 6b seems to mean that there is an area which God will directly give to Joshua without the Israelites having to do anything more than occupy the land. When you ‘enter into rest’ you ‘cease from your own labours’ and the reward comes easily.

2. The nature of the work changes

2. **God’s servants and leaders often have to allow the nature of their work to change as their lives proceed.** We tend to think we shall always be doing exactly the same work, but sometimes God changes the direction of our lives. It may well happen as we become older. Joshua is elderly. He still has work to do, yet it is lighter work. The main thing he must do now is allocate the land. ¹

¹ 13:6c, 7

• *Joshua*

allocates the land

• *East of the Jordan*

• *The last remains of Paganism*

• *The Levite's inheritance*

• *Reuben*

Two and a half tribes received their inheritance east of the River Jordan as had been agreed with Moses many years before. ¶¹ The border is defined geographically. ¶² The eastern side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea – in the area that extends from the Arnon river what flows into the eastern side of the Dead Sea up to the far north – belonged to the Reubenites, the Gadites and to half of the tribe of Manasseh.

¶¹ 13:8
¶² 13:9–12

Joshua 13:13–14 has two extra comments. (i) Israel actually failed to drive out the last remains of paganism and some of the pagan people were still present in the days when the Book of Joshua was put together, a generation later. ¶¹ (ii) The Levites had to be content with God alone as inheritance ¶²

¶¹ 13:13
¶² 13:14

Joshua 13:15–23 describes Reuben's inheritance. Joshua 13:24–28 describes Gad's inheritance. Joshua 13:29–31 deal with the inheritance of half the tribe of Manasseh. Again there are two concluding notes. ¶¹ (i) This section has dealt only with the east of Jordan ¶² and (ii) the Levites have God as their inheritance. ¶³ Upon all of this we have some comments of our own.

¶¹ 13:32–33
¶² 13:32
¶³ 13:33

3. Cooperate with God

3. The inheritance is acquired by co-operation with God. The land is given by God, yet has to be taken by the Israelites. This is the way it is with our spiritual inheritance, the things God is promising to do through us and to give us. This is a mysterious combination of giving and taking. We too have an inheritance. It begins in this life, yet at the same time everything done for God is laid up as 'treasure in heaven' one day to be revealed. God wants us to 'inherit the promises' by faith and patience.

4. Levites point to the nature of the Christian's inheritance

4. The Levites are a key to the nature of the Christian's inheritance. For most of Israel the 'inheritance' was land; it was a piece of ground in the territory of Israel. Yet the Levites were not given any country estates. They lived in towns and did little farming. They spent their time not in getting produce but in spiritual ministry. They used the cities as focal points in a teaching ministry directed towards all of the people of Israel.

The Levites' inheritance was God Himself. They pointed to a richer and deeper kind of 'inheritance', one in which what was inherited was the presence of God. The Christian is an 'heir of God'. ¶¹

¶¹ Romans 8:17

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