

• *Inheritance the dominant theme of Joshua*

Inheritance is the dominant theme of the days of Joshua. Consider the amount of times we have the different words meaning ‘inherit’ or ‘take possession’ or ‘inheritance’. Three main words are used constantly in Joshua in connection with ‘inheritance’.

(i) One of them is ‘possess’ or ‘take possession’ (Hebrew *yarash*). God had said to Abraham centuries before ‘I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it’. ¹ This word is used many times in the book of Joshua. ²

(ii) Another key word is ‘inheritance’ (*nachalah*) which is first used in Joshua 11:23 - Joshua gave it to Israel for an inheritance (*nachalah*). After that it is used another 49 times in the book of Joshua.

(iii) Then there is the verb, ‘to inherit’ (*nachal*). It is used in Joshua 1:6; 14:1; 16:4; 17:6; 19:9; 19:49.

There was a series of events involved in inheriting the land.

(i) First the land was chosen and marked out by God.

(ii) Then the people were informed of their inheritance. Each group of people in the land had to know what their inheritance was.

(iii) It was not fully possessed immediately, nor automatically. (iv) Conflict was involved in the taking of what was being given by God. Sometimes a group of people might be unwilling to get involved in the toils and struggles of taking their inheritance.

(v) Although God had sworn to give the land, the oath did not necessarily dictate precisely which generation should get it. Although someone would get the oath no particular generation got it automatically.

Joshua 17 proceeds to outline the inheritance to be given to the tribe of Manasseh. Verse 1a announces the topic.

Sequence of events involved in inheriting the land

1. Conflict

1. Again we note, **inheritance is secured by conflict**. A major inheritor among the people of Manasseh was the family of Machir. Evidently as a ‘man of war’ he made a major contribution to the conquest of the land. ¹ He received territory in Gilead and Bashan which was east of the river Jordan. And yet there was more conflict, for Machir’s descendants now had to go and dispossess the Canaanites and possess their possessions. There is ‘rest’ only when it is obtained – and then God will give us something else to obtain.

2. Conflict recognised and rewarded

2. **Conflict will not go unrewarded**. To the west of the Jordan, land was inherited by six clans, Abiezar, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hephher and Shemida. ¹ However in Hephher’s line there were no male heirs. Zelophehad was, it seems, the only son of Hephher, and he himself had only daughters. ² The daughters go to Eleazar and Joshua and ask for an inheritance. ³

• *Hephher and Zelophehad must be recognised*

The principle behind the incident of the daughters of Zelophehad is that it would not be right for the service of God to go unrecognised. If Hephher’s clan had received no inheritance, it would have meant that a major section of the family received no acknowledgement of what Hephher had done. The issue is not a matter of women’s rights! Women married within the clan and would have had land to live on whether they inherited land directly or not. The principle is that

¹ Genesis 15:7

² 1:11, 11, 15, 15; 3:10, 10; 8:7; 12:1; 13:1,6,12,13; 14:12; 15:14, 63; 16:10; 17:12, 13, 13, 13, 18; 18:3; 19:47; 21:43; 23:5, 5, 9, 13; 24:4, 8, 13

¹ 17:1 b

¹ 17:2

² 17:3

³ 17:4

Hepher and Zelophehad must not go without inheritance. In its Christian parallel, the principle is that those who participate in the conflict will not eventually lose out. 'God is not unjust to forget your work and the love which you have shown towards His name'. The principle is that Hepher and Zelophehad must be recognized even though they are no longer alive.

Manasseh's share of land consisted of the areas east of Jordan plus ten areas to the west. Five of them were for five of the clans of verse 2; another five were for the five granddaughters of Hepher. The units of land were not necessarily all the same size.

3. Unbelief and discontent a hindrance

3. Unbelief and a discontented spirit hinder the taking of inheritance. Verses 7–11 describes the border of Manasseh and adds a few explanations. Then the passage goes on to say that *'the people of Manasseh could not take possession'*. ^{¶1} This is strange since the text goes on to say the people of Manasseh were able to compel the Canaanites to contribute their labour to the upbuilding of the city. ^{¶2} It was a 'could not' which arose out of unbelief. They 'could not' because they would not believe that they could.

¶1 17:12
¶2 17:13

One of the Joseph-tribes – evidently Ephraim – complains to Joshua that they have only one stretch of territory. ^{¶1} It seems to be a complaint against Manasseh, since Manasseh had some land west of Jordan and another stretch of land east of Jordan. 'They have two portions but we only have one', complained Ephraim's people. It is surprising how much discontent comes into people who have a calling from God to possess their possessions. When we consider ourselves in relation to God we have enough to make us content. But as soon as we look around and compare ourselves with others, we can find people who have a greater ministry than ourselves!

¶1 17:14

• Comparing ourselves with others only slows us down

Joshua replies by challenging the clans of Joseph to make the forest land their own and dispossess the Canaanites. ^{¶1} They still have a complaint. ^{¶2} Joshua does not dispute the claim to greatness. He simply invites them to prove it by making a second stretch of land for themselves – the hill country occupied by Canaanites. ^{¶3} It is a great challenge but if they are a great people, let them show what they can do!

¶1 17:15
¶2 17:16

¶3 17:17–18

The Christian is in an analogous position. There is 'territory' there for us. Unbelief and dubious comparisons with others will only slow us down. There is much to be done for God in the name of Jesus. *'To the farthest borders it shall be yours... even though they have chariots of iron'*.



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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