

# God's Enduring Inheritance

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good, well we turn now in our Bibles to our reading for this morning, and we are in Joshua. Joshua chapter 13, page I think 188, if you've got a blue church visitor Bible.

So we are midway through a series in Joshua, beginning I think back in August or September. And we've got a couple of weeks now in it again. And this is another turning point in the book.

Up until this point, we've been with Joshua as he leads the people into the promised land across the Jordan. And the conquest, starting with Jericho and then spreading out into the land of Canaan. And it's been pretty thrilling stuff. Some great battles and great victories that the Lord has won for his people. And then here in chapter 13, it's a turning point as they move from conquest to carving up the land.

And we see that things begin to be divided up. The tribes are allotted their inheritance. And from chapter 13 here through to chapter 21, it's all about how the land is going to be divided up and which tribe gets what in terms of land.

[ 1 : 20 ] So this is the first chapter in this new section. So we'll start at chapter verse 1 of chapter 13.

And Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe of the people of Reuben according to their clans.

So their territory was from Ere, which is on the edge of the Valley of Arnon and the city that is in the middle of the valley. And all the tablelands by Medivah with Heshbon and all its cities that are in the tablelands.

And all the kingdom of Sion, king of the Amorites who reigned in Heshbon.

[ 4 : 46 ] And Moses defeated with the leaders of Midian, Evian, Rechem, and Zer, and Hur, and Reba, the princes of Zion who lived in the land. Balaam also, the son of Baal, the one who practiced divination, was killed with the sword by the people of Israel among the rest of the slain.

And the border of the people of Reuben was the Jordan as a boundary. This was the inheritance of the people of Reuben according to their clans, their cities and villages.

Moses gave an inheritance also to the tribe of Gad, to the people of Gad according to their clans.

Their territory was Jazar and all the cities of Gilead and half the land of the Ammonites, to Ere, which is east of Reba, and from Heshbon to Ramath-Mispa and Bethanim, and from Mahan to the territory of Debir, and in the valley of Beth-Haram, Beth-Nimra, Succoth, and Zaphon, and the rest of the kingdom of Sion, king of Heshbon, having the Jordan as a boundary to the lower end of the sea of Chenareth, eastwards beyond the Jordan.

This is the inheritance of the people of Gad according to their clans with their cities and villages.

And Moses gave an inheritance to the half-tribe of Manasseh.

It was allotted to the half-tribe of the people of Manasseh according to their clans. Their region extended from Mahanaim through all Bashan, the whole kingdom of Og, king of Bashan, and all the towns of Jea, which are in Bashan, 60 cities.

[ 6 : 25 ] And half-gilead and Ashtaroth and Edri, the cities of the kingdom of Og and Bashan. These were allotted to the people of Machir, the son of Manasseh, for the half of the people of Machir according to their clans.

These are the inheritances that Moses distributed in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan, east of Jericho. But to the tribe of Levi, Moses gave no inheritance.

The Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, just as he said to them. Amen. Well, this is the word of the Lord. Mighty blessed to us.

We'll do have Joshua chapter 13 open there in front of you, as we spend a few moments together on this.

Now, if you had been able to find out what was being preached on this morning, you would have seen that it was Joshua chapter 13.

[ 7 : 39 ] And if you got one step further and read it, you might want to have thought about bringing your deck chair into church this morning. Settle down for a wee snooze. You see, at first glance, this chapter is setting out all the inheritances.

Well, it seems pretty tedious, doesn't it? It's not the most exhilarating of reads. This and the next six or seven chapters. Long lists. Setting out all the inheritances for the various tribes in the promised land.

Lots and lots of geography. And even if maps and cartography are your thing, this is a bit tough going. Town after town is mentioned.

Geographic detail after geographic detail. Why is it all here? Why so much detail? It comes hot off the heels of some of the most enthralling and thrilling chapters in the Bible.

Chapters 1 to 12 of Joshua chart the conquest of the promised land. Astonishing miracles. The crossing of the Jordan. Great victories in battle. Taking down the almost impenetrable city of Jericho.

[ 8 : 49 ] It's cracking stuff. It's engaging. But then you come to chapters 13 to 21. Why not just skip over that? Why not just zoom straight to the end of the book?

Why not just skip these chapters? Because these chapters are all about God's enduring inheritance. Look at God's instruction there to Joshua in verse 6.

He says, Now for those Israelites, for those who are on the receiving end of this information, this was absolutely fascinating.

This meant everything to them. Just imagine for a moment that you have a wealthy relative. Now I've got to imagine pretty hard.

I come from a long line of teachers. But imagine you've got a wealthy relative. And they suddenly pass away. And you're one of the few living relatives left.

[ 10 : 00 ] You would make sure, wouldn't you, that you were there at the reading of the will. Lots of seemingly boring and irrelevant information suddenly becomes fascinating to you because it's setting out your inheritance.

And so in these pages, here in Joshua chapter 13 to 21, we read about the Israelites' inheritance. So try and imagine for a moment that you are in the shoes of Joblog's Israelites.

These pages detail their inheritance. They set out the land that they would go and live in. The promised land, long promised, was now within their grasp.

The promised land that had largely been conquered. Well, these pages describe who gets what.

But it's not just about them. It speaks of the inheritance that is promised to every Christian now.

Let's stand back for a moment. This idea of an inheritance, of a promised land, it's not new in the Bible's story. It goes back to the very foundations.

[ 11 : 14 ] What was it that God first tasked to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? He said, be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.

Not merely Eden, but to extend the borders of Eden to cover the entire earth. That was God's plan from the very beginning. Worldwide rule.

And the land that was promised to Abraham, the land of Canaan, a new Eden, that was never going to be the end of it. Canaan was just a foothold, a starting point from which the ends of the earth could be reached.

The goal was always to go further. The goal was always the whole world. The Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 4 says that the promise to Abraham and his offspring was that he would be heir of the world.

And with the coming of the Lord Jesus, we see the beginning of that great fulfillment of this promised inheritance, this promised land. Jesus became the heir of all things.

[ 12 : 25 ] The whole world, the whole cosmos belongs to him. He's heir to it all. And for all who belong to Christ, for all who are his, you have a part in that inheritance too.

Christ's spirit lives in you if you are his, and it's the deposit of the inheritance that is to come.

Ephesians chapter 1, Paul writes, you have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

Christ is heir to the world. And you and I are part of that. One day, we'll lay claim to it. One day, we will receive our full inheritance.

One day, Christ is coming back. He is returning. And he will claim his inheritance. The whole world will be his.

And because it's his, it will be ours. Now, do you know that? Is that promise real to you? If you and I know that one day, we will live with resurrected bodies in the new creation, won't that just change how we see everything now.

[13:47] We won't hold on to the things of this world quite so tightly. What we have in this world will suddenly seem less vital because we know there's a new world to come, a new creation.

If there are things that we have to give up now for the sake of his kingdom, it will not in the end be a loss. One day, you get to inherit the new creation.

So what if you don't get to go on that super luxury cruise looking at the seven wonders of the world? One day, you'll inherit the new creation.

So what if you don't get to go and visit Paris again? One day, the whole new creation belongs to you. You can go and visit the new Paris creation, whatever it is. That is the inheritance that awaits the Christian, the new creation.

It's real, it's solid, it's our promised land. But even as we wait now, even as we live in this world, don't we get a wonderful foretaste of it?

[14:48] God's kingdom, his rule, is already stretching in parts way beyond the borders of Canaan, that land that was promised to Abraham. There are Christians in every corner of the globe.

Isn't that just staggering? We see a foretaste of what is to come now. By the year 2050, more than half of the world's Christians will live in Russia, Latin America, and Africa.

Between 80 and 100 million Christians live in China now. It's simply astonishing, isn't it? But that is always the plan. It was always the world.

Think about the book of Acts and the movement that we see in the book of Acts. Beginning in Jerusalem, the gospel spreads to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

So these pages in Joshua that speak about these tribes of Israel receiving their inheritance, they aren't dim and distant. They are one chapter in the unfolding story of God's ultimate inheritance.

[15:58] And there is much for us to learn here about God's enduring inheritance. It didn't stop there with the promised land in the Middle East. It was always the world in view.

And that will one day be fulfilled for all Christians everywhere with the new creation. We inherit the world. So what are we to learn here in Joshua 13?

Three things. So firstly, looking at verses 1 to 7, we see here that God's promises of an inheritance stand firm no matter the scale of the task or the aging of his servants.

God's promises of an inheritance stand firm no matter the scale of the task or the aging of his servants. By this stage in the book of Joshua, much has been completed, much has been accomplished.

Significant victories have been won, the promised land was conquered, but there was still consolidation work to be carried out. That is what these chapters 13 to 21 are all about.

[17:03] Each tribe was given an area of land and it was their job to go and clear it out to make it their own. They were to go and occupy and take charge of that land that was theirs.

But even against the backdrop of these monumental victories, two realities stand out here at the start of chapter 13. Realities that from a human point of view might be a little discouraging.

But from the point of view of the writer and from God's point of view they're not discouraging at all because God's promises of an enduring inheritance stand firm no matter what.

So what are these two realities that we see here in verses 1 to 7? One, there is still a lot of land to possess. Look at the second half of verse 1. There is lots yet to possess.

And secondly, Joshua, the leader of Israel, first half of verse 1, is now old. He's advanced in years. There was much land to possess and Joshua, the great leader of Israel, was old.

[18:10] So firstly, there was much land to possess. It's time for a map. I've held off in Joshua until this point but it's time for a map. And now you'll see my great skills in map drawing here.

Hopefully you can see that okay. So this is a very rough outline of the promised land. You see the Sea of Galilee there in the north and the Dead Sea in the south and the River Jordan running up the middle.

You see Jericho just there on the left-hand side of the River Jordan. Now if you look at the next map, this shows the bit sketched in green. That is the land that was conquered under Moses.

So that is the land east of the River Jordan. And that is what we read about in chapter 13 from verse 8. Just look down there at verse 8 and we read about the half-tribe of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites.

Those were the two and a half tribes that inherited land east of the Jordan. You can read about that in Numbers. Chapter, I forget which chapter but you read about it in Numbers. So that's already happened.

[ 19 : 14 ] That's in the past. That's been done. And the next map shows the land that was conquered under Joshua, the land west of the Jordan.

So you can see there's much land that's been conquered. But the final map shows what remains to be conquered. See the bits in blue along the edge on the west and on the north? Those were the bits of land that we read about here.

Chapter 13 verses 2, 3, 4 and 5. There was still land that was yet to be possessed. There was still lots of land that needed to be completely conquered.

Now from a human and a military point of view this looks pretty tricky. Imagine you're Joshua.

That's quite a big area of land to cover. You've got a southwestern front, a northwestern front and a northern front.

To try and take that on military in military terms that's pretty difficult to do. You're going to stretch your army pretty thin. It looks like a tricky prospect. But notice verse 6.

[ 20 : 21 ] The Lord speaks words of tender reassurance to Joshua and to all of Israel. He just lists the lands that are yet to be conquered and he says this, I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel.

The Lord will do it. Just as he's been fighting for his people in chapters 1 to 12, he will continue to fight for his people in the future. The scale of the task look huge, impossible even from a human point of view but not so with God.

We can often limit God, can't we, to what we think is likely, what we think is achievable. But that isn't how God operates.

He makes big promises promises, but he is able to keep them. He is God and he can deliver exactly what he promises.

That was the case for Joshua. It looked like a big, difficult task but the Lord promised, I will do it. I will drive them out from before you. Let's not limit God.

[ 21 : 30 ] even as we consider the task that is before us, the Great Commission, the task of proclaiming the gospel to the nations, that seems too big.

It seems too ambitious, doesn't it? Well, it isn't. God is not limited in the ways that we are. God's gospel, his news, has gone from Jerusalem and now spreads to the ends of the earth.

God is not limited in the ways that we are and we are limited. That's the second reality we see there in verses 1 to 7.

Joshua was old. Even though he had lived a fruitful life full of service, there remained much to be done.

Even Joshua couldn't get all that needed to be done, done. There was much land remaining to be possessed and that teaches us that even a lifetime of service to God is not enough to do all that needs to be done.

[ 22 : 33 ] Even Joshua, he couldn't achieve all that was there to be achieved. He's limited. And that should encourage us. It should encourage you. We don't have to get everything done.

It's impossible for us. That should take a bit of pressure off. Perhaps you look at your area of ministry that you're involved with here at the Tron. Sunday school or maybe it's ladies fellowship or perhaps it's the Iranian ministry.

Maybe it's your small group. The work just seems unending. The problems seem insurmountable. And often they are. But it's not our job to fix every problem.

It's not our job to finish everything that needs to be done. It's impossible for us. It was impossible for Joshua. Joshua. So even though Joshua was old, even though he had a lifetime of fruitful ministry, there was still work for him to do.

His task no longer was leading Israel in battle, but it was now to be dividing up the lands. That was his task, verses 6 and 7. And God's promises weren't dependent on Joshua keeping going forever, doing the same task.

[ 23 : 49 ] No, God's promises were unchanging and would last even this greatest of servants. Perhaps for you there's been one of God's servants who has been a real rock, a crucial rock in your spiritual life.

Maybe it's a minister or an older saint, maybe it's a parent. But they, like all before them, are mortal. They won't always be there.

But their God is your God and he's unchanging. He's never ceasing. Dale Ruff Davis puts it this way.

The mortality of God's servants never handicaps the everlasting God. The people of Israel no doubt put great trust in Joshua.

But he was limited. He was mortal. And God's promises were not limited to Joshua. His promises didn't fade as he faded in age. No. God's promises stood firm.

[ 24 : 56 ] So when a spiritual leader perhaps moves on to new pastors or perhaps they die, God's promises don't disappear with them. They endure. It's greatly encouraging, isn't it?

God's promises never fail. people. But think about this from a human point of view. Joshua was old. Think about your own area of ministry.

Old age or perhaps some health complication that limits you. Means that you feel that you're not able to continue in that ministry. But old age does not disqualify you from serving.

It's simply the case that the nature of your ministry might change. And isn't that wonderfully the case that for many the most fruitful years of service are those years in the late autumn and the winter of life.

Perhaps you're well into your retirement. Perhaps retirement is on the horizon for you. Well there is much for you like Joshua to be doing. Joshua had led countless battles but that was now in the past for him.

[ 26 : 05 ] He had a different task. Perhaps you've been involved in one area for a long time but you just can't keep going with it. There are other things for you to do. Old age does not disqualify you from serving in God's kingdom.

In God's economy there is always work to be done. Fruitful work. Even in the latter years. God's promises of an inheritance stand firm no matter the scale of the task and no matter the aging of his servants.

God's promises of an inheritance can be trusted now and in the future because of all he's done in the past.

Joshua's task as we've seen is to allocate land to the tribes on the west side of the Jordan. Jordan. And we read about that from chapter 14 onwards.

But before we get there we have this little flashback to the east of the Jordan. This was the land that was defeated and conquered under the leadership of Moses.

[ 27 : 17 ] And we read about that in Numbers. And we read back there that some of the tribes wanted to settle on the east side of the Jordan. And Moses agrees. And he does so so long as those tribes help the other tribes conquer the land west of the Jordan.

And they do that. And so from verse 8 here to the end of the chapter we read about the inheritance that Moses granted to the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

But why is this here? Why this look over the bank of the Jordan to the other side? Why this flashback to Moses' day? Well, it's here, I think, to emphasize, that as Joshua is about to allot the inheritance to the tribes west of the Jordan, he and all Israel can trust God with it, because he's done it already.

It's here to emphasize God's faithfulness. Just as Moses had given land to those tribes on the east of the Jordan, so Joshua would be able to give land west of the Jordan.

And all through this passage, we are reminded of God's past acts of faithfulness, his past victories under the leadership of Moses.

[ 28 : 35 ] Again and again, we read about victories over Og and over Sihon. God gave them the victory, and he also gave them the land. And so now, as Joshua is about to do the same on the other side of the Jordan, he can do so with confidence.

And the tribes, as they receive that allotment from Joshua, they can look over the Jordan and see the other tribes have claimed theirs. Why can they do that with confidence?

Well, because God has done it in the past. He's done it before. As Dale Ralph Davis again puts it, this is the biblical prescription for faith. Faith finds both steadfastness and expectancy by rehearsing

and reveling in God's past acts of faithfulness.

And don't we have much greater acts of faithfulness to look back on than they did? As we consider God's promised inheritance for us, as we consider that, that new creation, that new heavens and a new earth, as we think about that, doesn't it almost seem fanciful, almost far-fetched.

But it is real and solid. It is reliable because we look back on great acts of faithfulness. We look back to events in history. Primarily Jesus Christ, God's Son, came.

[ 30 : 04 ] He dwelt among us in the muck of this world. He suffered. He died on a cross and he rose again. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the fact that guarantees for you and me a future inheritance with resurrected bodies in the new creation.

That one great act of faithfulness in the past, that is what guarantees the future for you and me. Paul, the apostle, writes in Corinthians, but in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

For as by man comes death, by a man has come also the resurrection from the dead. Faith finds both steadfastness and expectancy by rehearsing and reveling in God's past acts of faithfulness. So will you and I, will we rehearse and revel in God's great act of faithfulness in the resurrection? resurrection. That one event in history changes everything.

It is that one act in history that guarantees for you and for me that there's a future in the new creation, a promised inheritance. So will you rehearse and revel in that act of faithfulness?

[ 31 : 34 ] But it's not just that, is it? It's not just the resurrection. resurrection. God shows concrete ways in which he's faithful to us all the time, doesn't he?

Think about all that God does for you, the way he shows his faithfulness. Think about us as a church. He's given us leaders, he's given us premises, he's given us a work to do.

Think of his faithfulness to us over the past year. Calvin Grove beginning, Queen's Park beginning. Great acts of faithfulness that we can look back on.

That we can take confidence from. Think of your own life, your own family, and the concrete ways in which God has demonstrated his faithfulness to you over the years.

Yes, through the ups, but also through the downs. Hasn't he proved his faithfulness to you time and time again? And it's as we look back on those moments that we are given strength and courage for the future.

[ 32 : 37 ] God's promises of an inheritance can be trusted now and in the future because of all that he has done in the past. That's our second point.

And lastly, our third point, God's total faithfulness to his promises demands our total allegiance and care and obedience.

God is faithful. He's shown that time and time again. And the book of Joshua is all about God's faithfulness. And whilst Joshua is a resoundingly positive book, the people are seen to show fidelity to God again and again, there are one or two slight notes of caution amongst all that positive stuff. Just notice that comment there in verse 13. It comes in the midst of all this lists of the inheritances and it stands out like a sore thumb. You get this little aside from the writer.

Verse 13, Yet the people of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maccathites. But Geshur and Maccath dwell in the midst of the people to this day.

[ 33 : 49 ] And in fact, these two groups prove something of a thorn in the flesh for King David down the line. You see, after the initial conquest, there was still work to be done.

The land had to be cleared so that God's people could dwell in the land. And the particular people groups mentioned here, the Geshurites and the Maccathites, they lived northeast of the Sea of Galilee.

Think back to the map I showed and it's kind of in the northeast corner of the promised land, right on the edge. And its inclusion here in chapter 13 is perhaps a warning to those who first read this account of the importance of keeping going, not just in the initial thrill of the conquest, but in the longer term, in the hard work of occupying the whole territory.

Perhaps they just ran out of steam by the time they got to the Maccathites and the Geshurites. It's on the edge, it doesn't matter too much. We've done all this, we'll just forget about them. Well, they had to keep going.

And it's a warning to the future readers of this account that not just the initial thrill, but in the long term, slow work, they were to be faithful. And isn't this often our experience as well?

[ 35 : 15 ] We step up to meet a crisis. crisis. We can often surprise ourselves, can't we, at the things we're willing to endure in the heat of spiritual battle, when things are perhaps very difficult, when things are almost impossibly hard, we rise to the challenge.

But it's often in the more regular, in the more day-to-day slog, that we find faithfulness and careful obedience just more wearisome. We find it hard to keep going.

the excitement's died down perhaps. Last year proved to be one of those years for us as a church. It was an exciting time, getting things going at Calvin Grove and again at Queen's Park.

I'm fairly sure I'm safe to say that we won't be doing that again this year, but there is much work to be done this year in terms of building on and consolidating what began last year.

And that might prove to be a hard slog at times. So let's encourage one another in the midst of the work now. Let's remind ourselves of God's faithfulness to us, to be looking back over our shoulder what he's done for us in the past so that we keep going in the future.

[ 36 : 34 ] So let's be careful to give ourselves to the work this year, to remain faithful to God's promise this year. year. It's hard, isn't it?

Imagine a cold Thursday afternoon in the midst of February. It's quite tough going, isn't it, to drag yourself out to release the word or whatever it might be. But we're to keep going. There are jobs to be done, Bible studies to be written and led, folk to meet one-to-one, toilets to be cleaned, a bookstore to be manned, friends and family to reach out to to invite to services.

There is still much to be done. And even though the initial thrill might be over, there is still a long work to be got on with. So let's heed the warning here of verse 13.

Let's be careful to obey all that God's commanded, to keep going, to keep being faithful. God's total faithfulness to his promises demands our total allegiance and our care in obedience.

God has promised an inheritance for his people. And the promise he's made to us is absolutely astonishing, isn't it?

[ 37 : 53 ] A new creation, a new land, as solid and as real, perhaps more so than this one. It's an astonishing promise he makes.

He promises an eternity in the new creation. It seems to us almost too wonderful, too big, too improbable, but God's promises of an inheritance stand firm, no matter the scale of the task, no matter the aging of his servants.

God's promises of an inheritance can be trusted now and in the future because of all that he's done in the past. Joshua and all the people of Israel were stepping into a new phase.

there was a big land to inherit. It probably seemed to them a big task, but they were able to look back on God's faithfulness and his promise to be with them, to go before them, to drive the people out.

They were to rest on God's promise. God will surely do what he says. And so we too, as we look to our promised inheritance, we can look back, we can rest on what God has promised.

[ 39 : 09 ] It's a sure thing. Let me pray. Let me pray. I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel.

Only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance. Lord, what great words of promise we read of here. Your promises are huge.

Your promises are hard for us to get our heads around, but you promised to do it. And we thank you, Father, that we look back on great acts of faithfulness.

You are a faithful God. And we thank you that we can look forward with great anticipation, great confidence, because we look back on what you have done, and we look forward to what you will surely do.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, our Father. Amen. Amen.