

God's Enduring Inheritance

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 00] We're going to open our Bibles now and read together. If you don't have a Bible, if you're a visitor, there's Bibles at the side, at the back, at the front.

Do feel free to go and pick one up and then you will be able to follow on. We've been studying with Paul Brennan in recent weeks in the Old Testament in the book of Joshua. And today we come to chapter 13.

We're going to read together chapter 13 and a little bit into chapter 14, which you'll see involves a lot of names and a lot of geography.

So let's try and get through this together. Joshua chapter 13, then reading at verse 1. Now Joshua was old and advanced in years.

And the Lord said to him, you are old and advanced in years. And there remains yet very much land to possess. This is the land that yet remains.

[1 : 02] All the regions of the Philistines and all those of the Geshurites. From the Shehor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it's counted as Canaanite.

There are five rulers of the Philistines. Those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. And those of the Avin in the south.

All the lands of the Canaanites. And Mira that belongs to the Sidonians. To Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites. And the land of the Gebelites. And all Lebanon towards the sunrise.

From Baal Gad, below Mount Hermon. To Lebo Hamath. All the inhabitants of the hill country. From Lebanon to Mishraput Maim. Even all the Sidonians.

I myself will drive them out before the people of Israel. And they allot the land to Israel for an inheritance. As I have commanded you.

[2 : 00] Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes. And the half tribe of Manasseh. With the other half of the tribe of Manasseh.

The Reubenites and the Gadites. Receive their inheritance which Moses gave them. Beyond the Jordan. Eastward. As Moses the servant of the Lord gave them.

From Arior. Which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon. And the city that is in the middle of the valley. And all the table land of Medibah. As far as Dibon. And the cities of Sihon.

King of the Amorites. Who reigned in Heshbon. As far as the boundary of the Ammonites. And Gilead. And the region of the Geshurites. And the Macathites.

And Mount Hermon. And all Bashan to Salica. All the kingdom of Og in Bashan. Who reigned in Ashtaroth. And in Edri. He alone was left of the remnant of the Rephaim.

[2 : 57] These Moses had struck. And driven out. Yet the people of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites. Or the Macathites.

But Geshur and Macath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day. To the tribe of Levi alone. Moses gave no inheritance. The offerings by fire to the Lord.

The God of Israel. Are their inheritance. As he said to them. And Moses gave an inheritance to the tribe. Of the people of Reuben. According to their clans.

So their territory was from Arior. Which is on the edge of the valley of Arnim. And the city that's in the middle of the valley. And all the tableland by Medibah. With Heshbon and all its cities.

That are in the tableland. And all the kingdom of Sion.

[4 : 08] King of Amorites. Who reigned in Heshbon. Who Moses defeated. With the leaders of Midian. Evai. And Rechem. And Zur. And Hur. And Reba. The princes of Sihon. Who lived in the land.

Balaam also. The son of Baor. The one who practiced divination. Was killed with the sword. By the people of Israel. Among the rest of their slain. And the border of the people of Reuben.

Reuben. Was the Jordan. As a boundary. This was the inheritance. Of the people of Reuben. According to their clans. With 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 Jazer. In the cities of Gilead.

And half of the land. Of the Amorites. To Arior. Which is east of Rabba. And from Heshbon. To Ramamizpah. And Betanim. And from Machinim. To the territory of Debir.

[5 : 08] And in the valley of Bethharam. Bethnimra. Sukkoth. And Japhon. The rest of the kingdom of Sihon. Of Heshbon. Having the Jordan. As a boundary.

To the lower end. Of the sea of Chinareth. Eastward. 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 Machinim. Through all Bashan. The whole kingdom. Of Og. King of Bashan. And all the towns. Of Jer. Which are in Bashan. Sixty cities. And half Gilead.

And Ashtaroth. And Edre. The cities of the kingdom. Of Og of Bashan. These. Were allotted. To the people. Of Mahir. The son of Manasseh. For the half. Of the people.

[6 : 03] Of Mahir. 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. The God of Israel. Is their inheritance. Just as he said. To them. And these are the inheritances.

That the people of Israel. Received. In the land of Canaan. Which Eliezer. The priest. And Joshua. The son of Nun. And the heads. Of the fathers. Houses. Of the tribes. Of the people. Gave them. To inherit. Their inheritance.

Was by lot. Just as the Lord. Had commanded. By the hand of Moses. For the nine and a half tribes. For Moses. Had given an inheritance. To the two and one half tribes. Beyond the Jordan.

But to the Levites. He gave no inheritance. Among them. For the people of Joseph. Were two tribes. Manasseh. And Ephraim. And no portion.

[7 : 01] Was given to the Levites. In the land. But only cities. To dwell in. With their pasture lands. For the livestock. And their substance. And the people of Israel. Did. As the Lord.

Commanded. Moses. They allotted. The land. Amen. And may God bless to us. His word.

Well, good evening, folks. Please do have Joshua chapter 13 open in front of you. That would be very helpful if you can have that at hand.

Now, if you've been able to find out what was being preached this evening, you would have seen that it was Joshua chapter 13, which, if you're a regular here, you would, of course, have known from reading the weekly email.

And having seen that in the weekly email, you would have turned in your Bible and read Joshua 13, I'm sure. So you've all read it before coming. And if you had done that, you might want to have thought, hmm, I might bring my deck chair to Sunday evening church and have a little snooze whilst this is going on.

[8 : 14] Because this seems a little bit tedious as you look on through these chapters in Joshua, from chapter 13 here through to chapter 21. It's a lot of lists, a lot of difficult names.

It all seems a bit dry. These lists setting out the various inheritances for the various tribes in the promised land. Lots and lots of geography.

And even if maps and cartography aren't your thing, well, it's a bit tough going, isn't it, reading over these long lists.

Town after town is mentioned. Geographic detail after geographic detail. Why is this here? Why all this detail? It comes off some of the most enthralling chapters in the Bible, those opening 12 chapters of Joshua, full of battles and citing stuff.

It's thrilling to read. Astonishing miracles. The crossing of the Jordan. The defeat of Jericho. It's cracking stuff. It's really engaging. But then you come to chapter 13.

[9 : 21] Why not just skip it? Why not just move over these chapters? Well, we're not going to skip these chapters because these chapters are all about God's enduring inheritance.

It answers in part, what are God's people saved for? What are they saved for?

What are we saved for? Look at the instruction given to Joshua there in verse 6 of chapter 13. Have a look at that. It says, Only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance as I commanded you.

Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance. Now for those Israelites, this list of land, this list of towns, it was absolutely fascinating.

For them, this was of the utmost importance. This meant everything to them. Just imagine if you have, up till now, an undiscovered, very wealthy relative and they passed away.

[10:34] You're going to be at the reading of the will, aren't you? You're going to be there listening eagerly. What's coming my way? What's my inheritance from this incredibly wealthy relative? You want to know exactly what your inheritance is, the exact sums of money.

You want to know the precise boundary lines of the property that's coming to you. And so as you read these pages, as you read these chapters, try and stand in the shoes of Joe Bloggs' Israelites. These pages detail their inheritance. The promised land, long promised, is now within their grasp. They're arrived. They're in the land.

And these pages detail what land their tribe is going to get. Where are we going to live? But it's not just about them. These chapters speak of the inheritance that is promised for every Christian. Then and now. It begs the question, what is our hope? What is it that we've been rescued for? What is it we're looking ahead to?

[11:47] Not only in this life, but beyond. Into eternity. What is our inheritance? How do we know that we're going to be safe for all eternity? This idea of inheritance, it gets to the very heart of our deepest desires and longings.

This idea of inheritance, of a promised land, is not new in the Bible. It goes right back to the very foundations. inheritance. What a God first task mankind with in the Garden of Eden, those early chapters of Genesis.

He said to Adam and Eve, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. not merely Eden.

They were to extend the borders of Eden to cover the entire world. That is God's plan from the very beginning. Not just a little parcel of land of the Middle East, but the globe, the whole world.

And the land promised to Abraham, the land of Canaan, which Joshua and all his tribes are now standing, that new Eden, that was never the end of it. That was never the complete story.

[13:00] Canaan was just a foothold. It was just the beginning, a starting point from which the ends of the earth would be reached. The goal was always to go further. The goal was always the whole world.

Paul, the apostle, in Romans 4 says this, the promise to Abraham and his offspring was that he would be heir of not just Canaan, but the world.

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

The whole world belongs to him. He's heir to it all. And for all who follow Christ, we have a part in that inheritance now.

And Christ's Spirit lives in us. All who are his. We have that deposit of the inheritance to come.

Ephesians 1 tells us that we have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire it, until we take possession of it.

[14:11] We have the promised Holy Spirit within us. Christ is heir to the world. And you and I are part of that. And one day, one day we will lay claim to all that's been promised to us.

One day Christ will return to claim his inheritance. The whole world will be his. And because it's his, it will be ours. Do you know that?

Do you know that's your future inheritance? Is that real to you? If you and I know that one day we will live in this new creation, if that is clear in our minds and our hearts, then won't the things of this world seem suddenly less vital?

Less of a hold upon us. Because we know what is coming. If there are things that we have to give up or forego for the sake of this kingdom, it will not in the end be a loss, will it?

Because of what our inheritance is, what is coming. We are heirs to the new creation. And we have a wonderful foretaste of it already, don't we?

[15:25] We don't yet experience the full inheritance, but we get a small foretaste of it now. God's kingdom stretches in part way beyond the borders of the promised land, doesn't it?

There are Christians in every corner of this globe. And that is just staggering, isn't it? To think the spread of the gospel now. Apparently by the year 2050, more than half the world's Christians will live in Russia, Latin America, and Africa.

There are between 80 and 100 million Christians living in China today. Christian minorities are growing throughout Muslim nations, throughout the Middle East, and along the Pacific Rim. It is simply astonishing as we see where the gospel has exploded from.

There in Jerusalem, all the way to the ends of the earth. That's always been the plan, hasn't it? Think about the book of Acts. That movement, beginning in Jerusalem and then going beyond to Samaria to the ends of the earth.

So these pages in Joshua, talking about the tribal inheritances in the land of Canaan, they are not dim and distant to us.

[16:34] They speak profoundly of our inheritance, of what will be our future. And they are only one chapter in the unfolding story of God's ultimate inheritance, which is the world.

And so there's much for us to learn here about that, about God's enduring inheritance. Three things quickly to think about as we think about God's enduring inheritance.

The first is in verses one to seven. And we see here that God's promises of an inheritance, they stand firm no matter the scale of the task or the aging of his servants.

God's promise of an inheritance, it stands firm. No matter the scale of the task or the aging of his servants. Now by this stage in the book of Joshua, lots has been accomplished.

Significant victories have been won. We've seen that in the past few months. The promised land has largely been conquered. But there was still consolidation work to be carried out. That is what these chapters 13 to 21 are all about.

[17:40] Each tribe was allocated its territory and they were now to go and fully occupy these conquered lands. But even against the backdrop of these monumental victories, two realities stand out here at the start of chapter 13.

Realities which from a human point of view might seem a little discouraging. But from the point of view of the writer and from the point of view of God, these are not discouragements at all because God's promises of enduring inheritance stand firm no matter.

Lads, is my thing not working properly? I'm getting a lot of feedback. Is that okay? Okay. Sorry. Maybe just me where I'm standing. I think that's worse.

Sorry. My fault. My fault. So there are two realities. And the first is the second half of verse one. There is still much land to possess.

That's the first reality. Number two, Joshua, the leader, he's now old. He's advanced in age. So there's still a lot of work to be done and that great leader, he's getting old.

[18:57] From a human and military perspective that looks a bit tricky. To possess these lands it means stretching the army across a huge space. Stretching the army out pretty thin.

But notice verse six. The Lord speaks words of tender reassurance to Joshua. Look at what he says. I myself will drive them out before you. I'm going to do it.

Just as he's fought for his people in chapters one to twelve, he would continue to fight for his people in the future. The scale of the task looks huge. Impossible even from a human perspective.

But not so with God. I think we can often limit God, can't we? We can limit his promises to what we consider to be likely and achievable.

But that isn't how God operates, is it? He is God. He can deliver whatever he promises. Even if we consider the scale of the task in front of us beyond our capability.

[19:59] the task of proclaiming the Gospels to the nations, that's beyond us, isn't it? But it isn't, is it? Because God is not limited. He's not limited in the ways that we are.

We are limited. And that's the second reality we see in these first seven verses. Joshua was old. Even though Joshua had lived a fruitful life full of service, there remained much to be done.

Even Joshua, the great man that he was, he couldn't complete the task. There wasn't enough time. That so much land remained to be possessed, it teaches us that even, even a lifetime of faithful, fruitful service for God, it's not enough to do all that needs to be done.

And that, I think, ought to encourage us a bit. We don't have to get everything done. It's impossible for us to do it. Even the greats, even the men we look up to, even Willie Still we were hearing about on Wednesday evening, even great men like that, they can only achieve so much.

I think that takes a bit of the pressure off, doesn't it? We can't do everything. We are limited.

Perhaps you look at your area of ministry in the life of the church, whatever it may be.

[21:27] Junior church, release the word, the sound team, the welcome team, the work seems unending. There's always too much to do. And that's true. There is more to be done than you and I

could ever do, and that's okay.

I think it's a great help to remember our limitations, to remember that the work of ministry does not depend on you or me. Because we can never do it all in the first place.

But even though Joshua was old, even though he was getting on, there was still work for him to do. His task no longer was leading Israel into battle, but now it was to be dividing up the land verses 6 and 7.

That was his job now. And God's promises weren't dependent on Joshua keeping going forever, doing the same task. No. God's promises were unchanging and would outlast even his most faithful servants.

Perhaps there's been one of God's servants who's been, for you, a crucial rock in your life. A Joshua-type character. Maybe a minister, maybe an older saint, a parent.

[22 : 44] But the thing is, like all men and women before them, they're mortal. They're mortal. And they won't always be there. But the thing is, their God is your God.

And that's the key thing. He is unchanging. He never ceases. He never fades away. He never grows old. One preacher put it this way, the mortality of God's servants never handicaps the everlasting God.

God. So even though great servants may come and go, that will not undo God's purposes. So when a spiritual leader moves on, maybe they've gone to a new place or perhaps they pass away, God's promises don't go with them.

His promises endure. And that's encouraging, isn't it? Think about your own area of ministry. Maybe old age, perhaps some health complications mean that you can't quite do what you did before.

But that doesn't disqualify from serving the Lord. Of course not. It simply changes the nature of your service. And it's wonderfully the case, isn't it, that for many, the most fruitful years of service are those in what you might call the autumn of life or the winter of life.

[24 : 10] Perhaps you're well into retirement. There is much for you to do like Joshua. There is much fruitful service for you yet.

All the wisdom you've acquired, all the years of faithful service, what can you pass on to the next generation? How can you continue to serve the Lord in different ways? You see, God's promises here of the inheritance, they are unshakable.

No matter the scale of the task, it seems overwhelming. And no matter the aging of God's servants, his promises, his inheritance isn't touched.

That's the first thing. Second thing, from verse 8 onwards, we see that God's promises of inheritance can be trusted now and in the future because of all that he's done in the past.

We can trust him for the future because of all that's happened in the past. Joshua's task here is to allocate the land on the west side of the Jordan.

[25 : 15] Somebody was chatting to me this morning about having maps available. I should have had that. It would be quite helpful to see the maps. But you've got the river Jordan running down the middle and Joshua is to allocate the lands on the west of the Jordan.

But before we get into all of that detail about the west of the Jordan, chapter 14, we've got a flashback to the land east of the Jordan. This was the land that was defeated and conquered under the leadership of Moses.

You can read about that in Numbers. As you read back in Numbers, we see that some of the tribes wanted to settle on the east of the Jordan and Moses agrees. So long as they help the rest of Israel with a conquest on the west of the Jordan.

And they do it. Those east tribes, they help the west. And so from verse 8 to the end of the chapter, we read about the inheritance Moses granted to the tribes on the east of the Jordan.

Gad and Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Now why is this here? Why this flashback to Moses and why this geographic shift from the west of the Jordan to the east?

[26 : 30] Well, I think it's here to emphasize that as Joshua is about to allot the inheritance on the west side, he and Israel can trust God because he's done it already. They can trust him for the west side because what's already happened on the east.

This passage is here to emphasize God's faithfulness. Just as Moses had given the land on the east, so Joshua would be able to give the land on the west.

west. And all through this passage, we are reminded of God's past victories under the leadership of Moses. Again and again we read victories over Og and Sihon.

God gave them victory and he gave them the inheritance. And so as they look ahead to the west, as Joshua's about to allocate the land, he can do it with confidence.

Just look at what happened on the east. Remember that? Those tribes, they received their allotted land. God had done it in the past and he would do it again. And isn't that so often the case?

[27 : 36] That our faith is steadied by rehearsing and celebrating God's past acts of faithfulness. That's what's happening here.

Joshua is saying, remember, look what happens. It's going to steady them as they look to take their new land on the west side. And don't we have even greater acts of faithfulness to look back on, even in these?

As we consider God's promised inheritance for us, one day a new creation, it seems almost fanciful, doesn't it? Far-fetched. But we look back on these great acts in the past.

We look back on real events in history that guarantee our future. Jesus Christ, God's own son, entered the muck of this world. He lived. He suffered.

He died on a cross. He was raised from the dead. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one fact that guarantees for us, for you and me, the future inheritance that has been promised to us, the new creation.

[28 : 45] salvation. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians says this, but in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

For as by man came death, by a man has also come the resurrection of the dead. You see, our faith is steadied, isn't it? As we rehearse and celebrate God's acts of faithfulness in the past, as we look back, remember, celebrate the death, the resurrection of Jesus, that one event changes everything. And so we must rehearse and celebrate these acts of faithfulness in the past. And not only these great moments in salvation history, but also the smaller events.

As we look back on our own lives as a church, as individuals, remembering God's smaller acts of faithfulness to us, that's really steadying for us for the future, isn't it? Think about the leaders God has given you.

Look around you at one another. See those who have found faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in our midst in recent times. Doesn't that encourage you? And steady your faith as we look to the future.

[30 : 08] Think of the creche and the junior church rooms bursting at the seams of all these youngsters. Think of your own life, your own family, and the concrete ways in which the Lord has shown his faithfulness again and again through the ups and downs.

Think about Margo's video from this morning, how she could testify to God's goodness through all her life. And doing that, remembering God's past acts of faithfulness, doesn't that steady you for the future?

It reminds you that God is with you, he doesn't fail you. God's promises of our future inheritance can be trusted because of all he's done for us in the past.

That's the big emphasis there from verse 8 to the end. But one last thing to draw out before we close. We've seen here God's total faithfulness, he's going to do what he's promised, but that demands our total allegiance and our care and obedience.

Look at verse 13. It's one of those comments you might pass over quite quickly. But just notice verse 13. Yet, the people of Israel did not drive out the Gereshites or the Maccathites, but Gesher and Maccath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day.

[31 : 38] And in fact, these two groups proved to be something of a thorn in the flesh down the line for King David. See, after the initial conquest, there was still work to be done.

Even though the land had been conquered, it hadn't been totally overwhelmed. The land had to be cleared. People had to be totally overwhelmed so that God's people could dwell in the land.

And these particular groups here, the Gereshites and the Maccathites, they lived north and east of the Sea of Galilee.

So way up in the northeast, on the edges, the limits of the promised land. It's 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, not just in the Jericho moments, the battle of Ai, those exciting moments, those big battles.

[32 : 39] Perhaps a little reminder to keep going. The longer term hard work of occupying the whole territory, even to the outer extremes, even that north east corner, where the Gereshites and the Maccathites live.

Perhaps they felt they were on the fringes, didn't matter too much. Well, it did matter, didn't it? Enough for the writer to include it.

And that is often our experience, isn't it, in the Christian life. We step up to meet a crisis. And we can often surprise ourselves at the things we're willing to do to endure in the heat of spiritual warfare, when things are perhaps very difficult.

And we've seen that as a church, haven't we, over the decades. But it's in the more regular slog that we find faithfulness and careful obedience more wearisome on the outer fringes, up near the Maccathites and the Gereshites.

Let's encourage one another as we work week in, week out. Let's remind ourselves of God's amazing faithfulness to us. Let's be careful to give ourselves each week, each day to the slow work of the gospel.

[34 : 03] Not every week is a big battle, is it? Not every week is an exciting moment. There are jobs to be done, Bible studies to be written and led, folk to meet one-to-one with, toilets to be cleaned, a bookstore to be manned, friends and family to reach out to, to invite, to come along to church, to come to life.

Not too late by the way, begins tomorrow night, there's always space. There's always the mundane things that needs done in the life of the church over the long term.

So let's not leave things undone. Let's just heed that warning of verse 13. Let's not leave things undone on the fringes, the unseen things, the less exciting things.

God's total faithfulness to his promises, it demands our response of obedience, doesn't it? Of careful, diligent obedience. So yes, God's promised inheritance for his people.

It's absolutely astonishing, isn't it? Remember what he's promised us? Eternity in his new creation.

[35 : 21] Christ will reign over this whole world and we are heirs with him. It seems, as we think about it, too wonderful, too big, too improbable. But remember these realities, God's promises of that inheritance, they stand firm, no matter how big we think this task might be, no matter the aging of his servants.

And we can trust him for it, can't we, because of what he's done in the past. So do you have certainty about your inheritance? Do you have certainty about the future that's coming?

You might well be very clear on what you've been saved from, saved from sin, saved from the coming judgments, but are you clear on what you've been saved for? Do you have in your mind a clear vision of the future, that promised inheritance?

Because we have a glorious inheritance to come. Listen as we close to the Apostle Peter. We were listening to him this morning, in Acts chapter 2, but hear these words from his first letter.

He says this, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

[37 : 03] That is the salvation we are looking forward to, that inheritance. inheritance. It's an inheritance that we can know as we look to Jesus in faith, trusting in him for the forgiveness of our sins, for the gift of everlasting life.

And only God can give us that gift. Only he can give us a new heart. Only he can cause us to be born again to a living hope. Only God can save us from our sins.

And when he does, and when we trust him, he guarantees an inheritance kept in heaven for us. Friends, that's our hope. That's our inheritance. Let me pray. Our heavenly father, please give us the eyes to see all the wonderful things you promised in your word to us.

It's hard for us to comprehend the extent of what you have promised. But Lord, help us as we read these words, as we hear of this inheritance.

[38 : 21] Would you help us to take it not by sight, but by faith, because you have promised it and you are trustworthy. So please help us to respond in faith.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Amen.