

Joshua 17 Manasseh

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Overview

Elder son of Joseph, though demoted in Jacob's blessing in Gen 48:1-20.

The Split Tribe

17:1-5, cf. Num 26:28ff, descendants of Gilead's six sons were in the west, while other descendants of Machir, Gilead's father, were east of Jordan (1 Chr 2:21; 7:14, but difficult).

Their territory includes Mt. Carmel and most of the Jezreel valley, and is the largest cis-Jordanian allotment other than Judah.

Historical events: This is the territory of Samaria, which Omri king of Israel built as the capital of the northern kingdom about 925 BC (1 Kings 16:24). Thus it is the focus of the careers of Elijah and Elisha.

Elijah's Contest with the Prophets of Baal

Born somewhere in Gilead, which was largely East Manasseh; thus may have been of this tribe. LXX of 1 Kings 17:1 (cf. Josephus Antiquities 13.319) identifies his origin in a town of Gilead, traditionally north of the Jabbok.

Mt. Carmel for the context, 1 Kings 18:19ff

Run to Jezreel, 18:41ff.

Elisha's Miracle at Dothan

1 Kings 19:16, born in Abel-Meholah, in West Manasseh, toward the Jordan

2 Kings 6:8ff, Dothan is at wadi tip just above Mirkha

Leads the Syrian army to Samaria

Application

1. There were still faithful families in Manasseh, even during the corrupt years of the northern kingdom. Elijah and Elisha themselves were examples of the 7000 whom God assured Elijah remained (1 Kings 19:18).
2. God continues to bear witness to the northern kingdom through them. They are not under-cover, but rather constitute the foundation of the prophetic movement.

The Daughters of Zelophehad

Num 26:28ff, Of Gilead's six sons, Hephher had only female descendants, through the five daughters of his son Zelophehad.

Num 27:1-11, these daughters are mindful that they are the last of Hephher's line, and insist on holding his inheritance, leading to specific legislation to deal with this case. This is the basis for

the award to them in Josh 17:1-6. The ten portions for Manasseh east of Jordan (17:5) are for the five sons of Gilead who had male descendants, plus the five daughters descended from Hephher.

Num 36:1-13, the other sons of Gilead worry that these women will carry territory out of the tribe through intermarriage, so further legislation is given to protect against this.

Application: Contrast the attitudes both of Zelophehad's daughters and of Gilead's other sons with that of Esau in Gen 25:29-34, who despised his birthright. We have an inheritance as well:

- Rom 8:16-17, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ
- Gal 3:29, Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise; cf. 4:7
- Tit 3:7, heirs according to the hope of eternal life; cf. Heb. 1:14 heirs of salvation
- Heb 6:17, heirs of promise
- Heb 11:7, heir of the righteousness which is by faith
- 1 Pet 3:7, husband and wife are heirs together of the grace of life.

Thus the admonition of Heb 12:16 to us not to despise our birthright as Esau did. The descendants of Manasseh offer us just the opposite example, of a people who treasured God's gift to them and took steps to preserve it.

14-18, The Complaint of the Children of Joseph

14, they complain that they have received only one portion; in fact, they have two, but their point is that in their eyes it is only as one.

15, Joshua offers them in addition Mt. Gilboa, just to the north, heavily wooded and occupied by fearsome adversaries.

Application: Brotherly love does not mean encouraging dependency. We should encourage one another with ways we can help ourselves—opportunity, not a handout.

16, they fear the Canaanite chariotry in the intervening valleys, which would make integration of Gilboa difficult.

17-18, Joshua assures them that their resources are greater than they think, and able to overcome the adversaries, as formidable as they are.

Application: Joshua avoids two errors:

1. Do not let your brothers and sisters maintain an attitude of weakness and defeat before the forces of evil.
2. Do not underestimate the force of the enemy. The Canaanites do have iron chariots, and they are strong; in spite of that, "greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world."