

Joshua 12:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Them did Moses the servant of the LORD and the children of Israel smite: and Moses the servant of the LORD gave it for a possession unto the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

Analysis

Them did Moses the servant of the LORD and the children of Israel smite: and Moses the servant of the LORD gave it for a possession unto the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

This recapitulation of the Transjordan conquest (Numbers 21; Deuteronomy 2-3) serves multiple purposes. First, it acknowledges Moses' foundational role—twice calling him "the servant of the LORD" (ebed Yahweh, עָבֶד יְהוָה), the same honorific title introducing the book (1:1). Joshua's conquest west of the Jordan built upon Moses' conquest east of the Jordan, demonstrating continuity in God's redemptive plan across leadership transitions. No human leader is indispensable; God's purposes advance through successive generations of faithful servants.

The allocation of Transjordan to Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh (Numbers 32) was controversial—these tribes chose attractive grazing land over entering the Promised Land proper. Moses permitted this on condition they assist in conquering Canaan (Numbers 32:20-32), which they faithfully fulfilled (Joshua 1:12-18; 22:1-6). This arrangement illustrates both human freedom in responding to God's gifts and the communal obligations that come with tribal membership. The Transjordan tribes couldn't simply claim their blessing and abandon their brothers; covenant membership required mutual support.

Theologically, this verse establishes that all of Israel's territory—both Cisjordan and Transjordan—comes through divine gift mediated by faithful human leadership. The repetition of Moses' title emphasizes that authority derives from divine calling, not personal ambition. Both Moses and Joshua functioned as covenant mediators, foreshadowing Christ's superior mediation (Hebrews 8:6). The land distribution was not conquest-spoils divided by victors but inheritance allocated by God through His servants, maintaining the theological principle that everything Israel possesses comes as unmerited gift.

Historical Context

The Transjordan conquest defeated two major Amorite kingdoms: Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan. These kingdoms controlled vital territory east of the Jordan from the Arnon River (modern Wadi Mujib) northward to Mount Hermon, including the Gilead highlands and Bashan plateau. Archaeological evidence confirms significant Late Bronze Age occupation in these regions, with various tells showing destruction layers consistent with Israelite conquest timing.

Og king of Bashan achieved legendary status in Israelite memory, remembered for his giant stature (Deuteronomy 3:11) and his bed's enormous dimensions. Whether literally a giant (Rephaim) or simply a very large man enhanced by legendary tradition, Og represented formidable military opposition. His defeat demonstrated Yahweh's superiority over seemingly invincible enemies, providing encouragement for the subsequent Cisjordan conquest. Psalm 135:11 and 136:20 commemorate these victories as evidence of God's chesed (steadfast love).

The territory's allocation before the Jordan crossing (Numbers 32) created practical challenges—the Transjordan tribes lived separated from the tabernacle and central worship. This distance would later contribute to misunderstanding (Joshua 22:10-34) and eventual vulnerability to foreign invasion. The Transjordan tribes were first taken into Assyrian exile (1 Chronicles 5:26), illustrating the spiritual danger of geographic distance from central worship. This prefigures New Testament warnings against isolating oneself from the gathered church (Hebrews 10:25).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the cooperation between Transjordan and Cisjordan tribes in completing the conquest challenge modern individualism in favor of covenant community?
2. What does the eventual vulnerability of geographically separated tribes teach about the importance of proximity to corporate worship and community?
3. How do Moses and Joshua's successive leadership roles illustrate God's faithfulness in raising up leaders across generations to accomplish His purposes?

Interlinear Text

הַכֵּן יְשַׁבֵּא לְיִהְעֵן וּבְנֵי הָעֵדָה מֵשֶׁה
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it for a possession half the LORD servant the of the LORD did Moses them gave

שְׁבָט מְנַשֶּׁה: שְׁבָט מְנַשֶּׁה: לְגַדְעָן
of Manasseh tribe half and the Gadites and the Reubenites unto the

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 32:33 (References Moses): And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about.

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