

Joshua 15:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families.

Analysis

This is the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families—this transitional verse marks the shift from boundary descriptions (vv. 1-12) to the detailed city lists that follow. The Hebrew *nachalah* (נַחֲלָה, "inheritance") denotes permanent family possession passed generationally, not temporary military occupation. This wasn't merely real estate distribution but covenant fulfillment of promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:7), Isaac (Genesis 26:3), and Jacob (Genesis 35:12).

The phrase *lemishpechotam* (לְמִשְׁפַּחֹתָם, "according to their families") indicates subdivision within the tribe. Judah's territory was distributed among family clans, ensuring equitable inheritance preventing permanent landlessness. This egalitarian land tenure system distinguished Israel from surrounding feudal societies where land concentrated among ruling elites. Each extended family (*mishpachah*) received land proportional to size (Numbers 26:54), creating economic stability and preserving tribal identity across generations.

Judah's prominence as firstborn of Leah (though not Jacob's eldest son) and recipient of the royal blessing (Genesis 49:8-12) is reflected in receiving the largest and most strategically important territory. From this tribe would come David's dynasty and ultimately the Messiah, the Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5).

Historical Context

Judah's allotment covered approximately 2,300 square miles in southern Canaan, from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, and from the Negev desert northward to the border with Benjamin. This territory included the hill country, the Shephelah (lowland foothills), the Negev (southland), and the wilderness of Judea. Archaeological surveys identify over 100 settlements in Judah's territory during the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age transition (13th-12th centuries BCE), confirming substantial occupation.

The family-based land distribution system (*nachalah*) prevented economic stratification. Land couldn't be permanently sold—it reverted to original families in the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:10-13, 23-28). This created remarkable economic stability compared to neighboring societies where land ownership concentrated among elites. The prophets later condemned violations of this system when the wealthy seized land from the poor (Isaiah 5:8; Micah 2:2).

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does understanding your spiritual inheritance in Christ (Ephesians 1:11, 18; Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4) shape your identity and values?
2. What does Judah's family-based inheritance system teach about God's concern for economic justice and preventing permanent poverty?
3. How should the permanence of Israel's land inheritance affect our understanding of God's faithfulness to His covenantal promises across generations?

Interlinear Text

זֶּאת	נַחֲלָת	מִטֵּה	בְּנֵי	יְהוּדָה
H2063	This is the inheritance	of the tribe	of the children	of Judah
	H5159	H4294	H1121	H3063
לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם:				
according to their families				
H4940				

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