

Joshua 16:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance.

Analysis

So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance—this summary statement concludes the general description of Joseph's tribal territory before focusing specifically on Ephraim's boundaries (vv. 5-9) and Manasseh's (ch. 17). The phrase **children of Joseph** emphasizes unity between the two tribes descended from Joseph's sons, Manasseh (firstborn) and Ephraim (younger), whom Jacob elevated to tribal status equal with his own sons (Genesis 48:5).

The verb **took their inheritance** (yinchalu, יָנְחָלוּ) uses the Hebrew root nachal (נָחַל), meaning to receive as a permanent possession or heritage. This wasn't mere temporary occupation but covenant inheritance passed to descendants in perpetuity. The concept of nachalah (נַחֲלָה, "inheritance") dominates Joshua 13-21, appearing over 50 times, emphasizing that Israel's possession of Canaan fulfilled divine promises rather than mere military conquest.

Joseph's double portion through his sons fulfilled Jacob's prophetic blessing (Genesis 48:15-20), where the younger Ephraim received precedence over firstborn Manasseh. This pattern of God exalting the younger over the elder (Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his brothers, David over his brothers) demonstrates divine sovereignty overturning human conventions, foreshadowing how God chooses the weak and despised to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

Historical Context

The elevation of Ephraim and Manasseh to full tribal status resulted in Joseph receiving double inheritance while maintaining twelve tribal allotments (since Levi received no territorial inheritance but cities among all tribes). This arrangement honored Joseph's faithfulness during the Egyptian sojourn while preserving the symbolic number twelve. Historically, Ephraim became the dominant northern tribe, with Joshua himself being an Ephraimite (Numbers 13:8). The northern kingdom that seceded after Solomon was often called "Ephraim" by the prophets (Isaiah 7:2; Hosea 4:17), indicating Ephraim's political and spiritual leadership of the ten northern tribes. Archaeological evidence shows the central hill country (Ephraim and Manasseh's territory) experienced the most intensive Israelite settlement in Iron Age I, becoming the demographic and agricultural heartland of Israel.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does Joseph's double portion—earned through suffering, slavery, and faithfulness—encourage you when enduring hardship for God's purposes?
2. What does God's pattern of exalting younger brothers teach about His sovereign grace choosing based on His purposes rather than human birthright or merit?
3. In what ways are you learning to be content with the specific inheritance and calling God has given you rather than comparing with others' allotments?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּנְחָל ו	בְּנֵי	יוֹסֵף	מְנַשֶּׁה ה	אֶפְרַיִם:
took their inheritance	So the children	of Joseph	Manasseh	and Ephraim
H5157	H1121	H3130	H4519	H669

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 17:14 (Parallel theme): And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto?

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