**The Divine Executor**

**Joshua 12 and 13 (ESV)**

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He was an inventor, an entrepreneur, a film maker, an investor, an aviator, an engineer, a philanthropist, and a billionaire. When he died, his net worth was, in today’s currency, almost $7,000,000,000. The controversy was that he had left no instruction behind to carry out his intent for the estate. But about three weeks after he died, someone discovered a handwritten will. It was a document that left 100’s of millions to charities, management aids, family, along with a mysterious gift of $156,000,000 to a gas station owner. When interviewed, this owner claimed that nine years previously, he had given a ride to a shabby hitchhiker about 150 miles north of Las Vegas. He had asked to get to the city and said he was Howard Hughes. This owner claimed to have forgotten about the incident until a few days after Hughes’ death, when a mysterious man appeared at the gas station and set a will on his desk. He didn’t know what to do, so he left the will at the Mormon church office. In the end, the court examined the note and decided it was a forgery. In the absence of any other authentic testament, the estate was divided between twenty-two cousins, and not a penny to the gas station owner.

A will can be one of the most boring documents you’ll ever read. It is legal pages filled with tedious language of bequests and encumbrances, estates and testaments and beneficiaries, devisees, legatees. It’s a document that states the wishes of the author and is supposed to be carried out by a surviving executor. I may have gotten some of those wrong because it’s just technical and it’s hard to follow. Most people don’t give it a second glance, let alone look with meticulous scrutiny, unless they have a special relationship with the author, or when a very large inheritance is at stake. Then all of a sudden, it matters very much precisely how that will is to be executed.

The middle chapters of Joshua are where many ambitious Bible-reading plans come to die. The Judean wilderness, ancient borders and tombstones. To many, these are a series of boring chapters that read like a wearisome will. Land to this tribe or that tribe, lists of conquered kings long ago, boundary markers for territories that no one can remember or care about, unless you have a reason to read. And certainly, we do, because the inheritance described in these chapters explore the character of the same God who will accomplish His will for us. He is the one who grants our inheritance and the one who brings it to pass. Our God serves as both the testator and executor, the author and affecter of the words of His will. What makes this section matter so much to us is the way God executes His will. It’s the way He does what He wants.

How is that exactly? How does God bring about His will? God executes the words of His will precisely the way He intends. Nothing can stop the execution of His will! If we grab hold of that truth and it grabs hold of us, then we won’t be able to help but press onward as we’ve said, pushing the boundaries of our faith into new territory we’ve never been before. It will embolden our faith and inspire us to move forward together. God executes the words of His will precisely the way He intends.

We’re going to look at these two chapters and we’ll hopefully reinforce that truth by exploring two lessons or two take-a-ways about the execution of God’s will. The first is the execution of His will despite us. The second is the execution of His will through us; despite us and through us. First, chapter 12.

**I. The execution of God’s will despite us.**

We could say the first take-a-way is that God’s execution of His will is certain. No matter what anyone tries to do, it will come to pass for sure. It’s guaranteed. Chapter 12 drives home this lesson through the promises we can expect God to keep. Chapter 12 is a summary of God’s promises kept through the conquest of Canaan on both sides of the river Jordan.

In verses 1-6, you can see the conquest under Moses of Sihon and Og on the west side. Verses 7-24 summarize the conquest of the kings on the east side. So you have 16 kings to the south and then you have 15 kings to the north. Perhaps most strikingly, if you look at verse 8, you can see the exact promise that He made hundreds of years before to Moses, fulfilled from Exodus 3:8. God gives them the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. God keeps His promise. It’s a continuation of what He had made to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob. Again, through Moses, He brings it about. Despite all the many failures of His people, God executes His will precisely as He intends, even despite us.

There is a phrase that stuck in my mind since I heard it by a retired Navy Seal. It’s a two word phrase that is on the list of, I believe, standardized American brevity codes. They say it on the radio during operations. This Seal was describing how people hit obstacles in life and then they start to panic as if it’s going to throw them off course. His example is saying something like, “Well we need to go to a certain place and drive. Oh no. What if there’s lots of traffic?” Here is his response: No factor. “No factor. I’ll take the side roads.” No factor! It means “not a threat.” Here’s the thing. God’s will is not threatened by us in any way. It’s certain. We say, “Well what about this? What about this? What about this?” In a sense, God says, “No factor. My will shall be executed precisely the way I intend.”

In chapter 12, we see several examples of non-factors that don’t hinder God’s will in any way. There are three non-factors to note. He is unthreatened despite the servants that He loses, despite the nuances He allows, and despite the opponents he faces. First, God’s promise continues despite the servants He loses. His will transcends the servants He loses. God is not enamored by a leader with the mystique of Moses or the tactics of Joshua. In verse 6, you can see that Moses, the servant of Yahweh, gave their land for a possession. The mighty leader! But if you remember the story of Moses, he failed. He didn’t enter the Promised Land. He died outside. Then we wonder, did that threaten God’s will? No factor. In verse 7, Joshua comes and he gives the land to the tribes of Israel as a possession, according to their allotments. But after Joshua, there is going to have to be another servant that will come, and another. Is God’s will threatened? No factor.

Despite the many servants He may lose, He has a plan and an ultimate Servant that will accomplish His will perfectly, precisely the way He intends. It’s not Moses’ great ability that brings God’s promises to pass. It’s not Joshua’s military strategy that executes God’s will. God makes whatever He wants to happen occur with whomever He wants. He’s not waiting around for amazing people who can finally bring His will to pass. Great or small, the power is not in the person; it’s in the promise. None of us are expendable in a way, or threaten God’s will. He can work through us, and here we see, despite us and despite the servants that He may lose.

Also, you can see the certainty of God’s will despite the nuances He allows. This is hard because it gets kind of technical. But if you follow what has been happening within Israel, there is a stigma that is going to form between the tribes. There were some tribes in Numbers 13 who asked for an inheritance on the east side of the river, before they crossed over. This is a distinction we’re reminded of in verses 1 and 6. These tribes took possession of the land beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise; those who were in the east. Moses gave them the possession, in verse 6, to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh. So there were some tribes who received an inheritance on the east side of the river. We’re reminded of that in Joshua chapter 1. They had a nuanced fulfillment of the promise because they made a special request. They were supposed to cross over with the rest of the tribes, but they made a special request on the east side. In a sense, they kind of stopped short, but this was a nuance that God was going to allow. Then in chapter 1 of Joshua specifically, these tribes are told that “even though this is your inheritance, you have to send over your warriors across to help us to conquer the rest of the land. Your home is on the east side, but you need to continue.” That nuance is going to make things a bit messy.

When my wife and I moved here, we were looking for apartments, trying to find a place to stay. We realized that there is a large distinction in perspectives based on location. We didn’t realize this, but people would say things like, “Oh yeah, that is all the way across the river.” Have you heard that? “Hey, where were you today? I was all the way across the river.” It’s kind of a funny thing coming from California, where you have multi-hour commutes, and people talking about all the way across the river. But it’s a big distance. It’s kind of a divide, isn’t it, that takes place sometimes? And we have a bridge. They didn’t have the same kind of bridge. It was an even bigger divide in Israel in that day. There was the west side and the east side.

There was a nuance that took place in the promise with these tribes that was going to cause a stigma. There was a perception that is going to provoke those tribes to feel threatened as outsiders later on in the book. It’s going to stir up some problems that are going to appear that it seems like a major mistake, that God was endangering His promise not only of the land, but of His people and all that He could accomplish through them. We think, “Oh no! Is this threatening God’s promise?” No factor! Despite the nuances God allows, His will remains utterly certain and you’ll see that through the book of Joshua as we move forward.

God’s will transcends the servants that He loses and the nuances He allows and despite the opponents He faces. You can see God’s power in chapter 12 simply by looking at the list of rulers from verse 9 through verse 24, who stood up to God and lost. From the king of Jericho to the king of Tirzah, God is unequaled by any ruler. He is not manipulated by tiny Ai or intimidated by mighty Hazor. He suffers no challengers to His supremacy. Now, we’ve seen mercy be offered to those who would come to Him through even Rahab in Jericho, but like we saw last week, so many refused. They defied God and they refused to say to God, “Thy will be done.” So in a sense, we almost see God saying, “Thy will be done.” They reject Him and in defiance, they are destroyed. And He counts them one by one by one. In Hebrew, Joshua 12 almost looks like an accounting chart. It’s a list of divine credentials. It’s like a monument of stone with inscriptions of all the defeated kings, like a tally score at a sports game or a head count of notches on a warrior’s belt. You can see it—one, one, one, one, one. Despite all the opponents God faces, His will remains utterly certain.

We often have seniors who will graduate and go on to college. Some will go on to play on a sports team in college. You get recruited for that sports team. You go and you go into the gym, maybe, and then they show you on the wall that history of the victories, or the win/loss columns. They display those banners that serve two purposes; to intimidate and to inspire. Anytime you face a tough opponent, the coach might point back at the wall and show “following my word will lead us to victory.” The point is that the execution of God’s will is certain despite us, and we can see it in the promises we can expect Him to keep. This is what the psalmist would say in

**Psalm 105:1** Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!

And later on, he would say

**Psalm 105:42-45** For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant. So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing. And he gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples’ toil, that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. Praise the LORD!

He keeps His promise! In the end, we’re assured of God’s will to keep His promise. It’s most clearly proven in the center of the Bible. As God’s promise began in the very beginning of Genesis 3 that there would be a seed, a Seed of the woman, a child who would come. That Seed is going to come through the line of Abraham, through the line of Isaac and Jacob. It’s going to come and it’s threatened, we perceive. Yet, we realize it’s utterly certain that He will keep that promise despite everything that happens. Since the beginning of exile from the garden until the start of a new heaven and new earth, there is One whose will transcends the strength and weakness of every servant He possesses, the difficulty of every nuance He allows, the threat of every opponent He faces. He is the one who listed the ultimate victory and said in His death on the cross, “It is finished!” He is the God who accomplishes His will perfectly. If we need courage for today’s and tomorrow’s commands, then sometimes we can read the execution of yesterday’s promises and find hope to move on. That’s the execution of God’s will despite us. It’s certain through the promises we expect God to keep. But second, look at chapter 13.

**II. The execution of God’s will through us.**

If the first take-a-away is that the execution of God’s will is certain, the second is that the execution of God’s will is complex. It’s something He does despite us and also something mysteriously that He works out through us. This is incredibly complex. It’s one of the most complex concepts in the Bible. We can see it in chapter 13 through what we’ll call the participation God wants us to embrace.

In the world of watch making, there are time pieces that show you the hours, minutes, seconds. They’re called simple movements. But when the time piece has a mechanical feature that displays something beyond that, like the week or month or a stopwatch feature, each one is called a complication. Each complication increases the price of the watch, often the time it takes to design it. The most complicated wristwatch I came across was one that had 36 complications including a 1,000 year calendar. It required 1,483 components to work together. Now beyond that, there is a mechanical pocket watch that took eight years to assemble and it has 57 complications requiring 2,826 parts. That’s the edge of complexity in human watch design. But it’s nowhere near the edge of complexity when it comes to the design of God. We see that this is a God who executes His will with certainty despite us, but He also chooses to execute His will mysteriously through us. This is the complexity of the participation God wants us to embrace.

One of the most mysterious parts of this book of Joshua and the Bible in general is the fact that God claims to be the one executing His will, here conquering these enemies, while He is using human agents like Joshua, Israel and others, through which He does execute that will. So we see that like we learned last week in chapter 11, the Lord is not the one doing the sinful rebellion, and yet the sinful rebellion was clearly entirely of the Lord’s doing. This is a complex mystery. We’re confronted with an affirmation of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Talk about complication! Somehow, according to God’s design, things are working harmoniously and in sync to achieve His will. One pastor, Spurgeon, was asked: how do you reconcile these two concepts? He said, reportedly, “I never reconcile close friends.”

Well how does this work? Was God the one who was bringing all this about or were the people bringing this about? Well one way that we can be sharpened in our thinking is to discern that there are at least two ways in which God speaks about His will. When God speaks of His will, sometimes He is referring to what we might call His declared will or His moral or revealed or stated will. It’s His desire for what should happen. Other times when He speaks of His will, He’s referring to His, what we might call, decreed will or His sovereign or hidden or secret design for what actually happens. This is complex, but we might say that God could declare or state through His moral law and call the nations to turn from their sin. But He also may decree that they not do that for the sake of His glory. This is how God can say in His declared will,

**Ezekiel 18:32** For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the LORD God; so turn, and live.”

But He can also accomplish His decreed will like last week in

**Joshua 11:20** For it was the LORD’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses.

This is how God can say in accord with His declared will that

**2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is being patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

He says elsewhere that God our Savior is one

**1 Timothy 2:4** who desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

And yet, He can still maintain a decreed will that in Proverbs says

**Proverbs 16:4** The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

From the very first book of the Bible, the one that introduces God as creator and promiser and also man as sinner and sufferer, somehow we’re told by the great sufferer Joseph, that all that man means for evil, God is able to intend for good. In the book of James, James would say

**James 1:13** Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

And yet, later in his letter, he shows that while our human will can’t prevent Him from executing His decreed will, it doesn’t absolve us from sin. James would say

**James 4:13** Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—

**James 4:15** Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

He acknowledges that God is in control, and yet he says

**James 4:16** As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

This is that complication of God’s design for the world. It’s a mystery that is very overwhelming if we try to wrestle with it. James agrees that God’s decreed will is sovereign over the affairs of our lives, but it doesn’t mean that we aren’t responsible for our sin. That’s complex. We saw it in Joshua chapter 11 and it continues here in chapter 13. God executing His will through us. There are a few aspects of our participation in the execution of this will that we can note.

The first is our responsibility. We’re responsible as moral beings for our response to God’s declared will. Romans 1 makes that clear. We don’t have excuses for how we respond to God’s will. We will be held to account. We may be tempted to make excuses for lack of commitment to that responsibility. One of those excuses we could call futility. It’s where we might say, “Why does it even matter? Why should I do what God wants when He’s going to do what He wants anyway? I mean, His will is certain, isn’t it?” Look at the words of verses 6 and 7 of chapter 13. God says of Himself

***6****… I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel.*

He claims He is going to be the one to do it. Then immediately after, He says to Joshua

*Only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you.* ***7*** *Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance…*

God Himself promises He is going to drive out the inhabitants, and yet He commands Joshua to allot the land. There is a claim that God will do it, and yet, also a call for Joshua to perform it and for Israel to carry it out. The word for God driving out or dispossessing the inhabitants and for Israel to possess their inheritance comes from the same Hebrew root. God would dispossess, but Israel was called to possess. This is not the only time that this happens in the Bible. We might say as Joshua could have said, “God’s got it taken care of. It’s all in His hands. He’s doing it. He’s going to make it happen. I’ll just let it happen.” It could have been a possible conclusion of believing in God’s sovereignty, but it’s not the one that God ends with and it’s not what Joshua falls into. It’s an excuse he rejects. He and the nation seek to obey and serve God as the means through which He executes His will; as a privilege, as a joy. It’s an amazing realization that takes place, here, because of how the land is going to get allotted or divided.

So here is the land. How is it going to be divided amongst the people? Well, God says by casting lots. Later on, the author will be more specific, but the land inheritance will be determined by God. This is an amazing thing because the territories will be divided the way that God prophesied many years before through Jacob, and later on in some ways, through Moses. By lot, it’s going to be divided exactly as God intends. One benefit of dividing by lot is that the tribes are not going to fight over the land that they wanted. It’s an answer to what Proverbs 18:18 says.

**Proverbs 18:18** The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders.

This is up to God. God decides! God says, “I will drive the people out. But the means by which I do it will be through the hand of my nation.” God works all of these complications together in what humans would say are seemingly random and even human agencies. Somehow God is working this out to execute His will through us. God makes sure it happens all according to His decreed will, and He intends for it to be done through the actions of His people. It is complexity, working it out according to plan. And they take part in it. Even when Israel fails, God continues. Even if their responsibility goes unfulfilled, God’s plan continues unthreatened. He still is executing His will through us. This is a mystery and overwhelming. You look at the complexity of what is happening and you think: if God is just doing what He wants, are we off the hook here? Are we off the hook if we fail? We say, no. We have the aspect of responsibility, but also of culpability.

God’s plan isn’t threatened. It’s complex. It’s happening through us. But when we choose to disobey His declared will, we’re still culpable. There is still a fault or blame for what is wrong. And actually, there are consequences that follow as a result. We see those consequences follow through compromises that are made in chapter 13. We’ll try to touch on three compromises.

First is the compromise of incomplete commitment. We see that here in Reuben, the tribe of Reuben. They follow in the footsteps of Reuben their forefather, who was the firstborn of Jacob. We’re reaching back into history now, of Bible knowledge, but Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob lost his inheritance. He didn’t set a good example because he slept with his father’s concubine. It was an outrage! Because of that, Jacob made a prophecy. In Genesis chapter 49, he spoke of the inheritance that his sons would receive, and he mentions Reuben

**Genesis 49:3** “Reuben, you’re my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

He should have received a lot, but Jacob says

**Genesis 49:4** Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father’s bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!

Reuben as an individual experiences the consequences, the loss of that inheritance. And now as a tribe, they receive an inheritance along with Gad and Manasseh; the two and a half eastern tribes. It seems like those are grouped together. They have in common that they’re all firstborns. There is another in Dan, but they’re firstborns. Reuben was the firstborn of Leah and Jacob. Gad was the firstborn of Jacob and Zilpah. Manasseh was the firstborn of Joseph and Asenath, a carryover of Jacob, the firstborn of Rachel. So they should be receiving the primary inheritance. But here, they don’t, because of what Reuben did. They had lost that honor. And that might have been a contributing factor to why they jumped the gun and asked for that inheritance first, before they entered the land. So here they are. They want that inheritance on the east side. There is lots of livestock that they had. It seemed a plentiful and attractive place. They’re not condemned for that request. God allows that nuance, remember. But we see here that the failure actually of incomplete commitment continues with them in verse 13. As a tribe, Reuben, here, we see

***13*** *Yet the people of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites, but Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day.*

So there where the people of Reuben were supposed to be, they failed to complete their obedience. It was incomplete. They failed to fully settle the land. God gave them the land, but they didn’t drive out the inhabitants the way that they were supposed to. They only went half-way. So here are these foreign nations living amongst them and they benefited from taxes, servitude, and then worse, hard work. So they settled and they only received part of the inheritance. This isn’t the only time we’re going to hear about incomplete obedience in Joshua or in the Bible. But there are some consequences that result. Even though God is bringing about His will, we see the consequences continuing to pour over from Reuben as an individual and then their failure as a tribe. Far later, those two foreign nations they don’t drive out are going to pose a problem.

First, the Geshurites. If you read ahead all the way in 2 Samuel 3:3, we discover that David has a son, a third son named Absalom. His mother, David’s wife, was a daughter of the king of Geshur. So Absalom, David’s son, was born to a Geshurite princess. Who was it that murdered David’s firstborn? Who was it that betrayed David, who defiled David’s authority as king, who designed a coup, who disobeyed God’s law and defiled God’s city, almost destroyed the nation, and almost threatened God’s promise entirely? It was Absalom. From whom was he descended in part? From Geshur. In case you think that connection is too weak, when Absalom rebelled, where did he take refuge to hide from David? The kingdom of Geshur. This is a big deal! Leaving the Geshurites alive will come back to haunt Israel. There are consequences to the compromise of incomplete obedience.

Also the Maacathites would end up fighting against them. They were a nation who should have been dealt with in Joshua’s day. In 2 Samuel chapter 10, the Ammonites had offended David, so they sent and hired Syrians and also the king of Maaca. They are going to pose a problem to David. Beyond these two, you can see in Joshua 2:2 that the Philistines are also mentioned as not adequately dealt with and they’re going to pose a problem. These are consequences resulting from the compromise of incomplete commitment. There is still culpability, even though God is doing His will despite us. We see Him doing His will through us, and yet we maintain culpability and consequences for our choices. It rings true deep into the future from Joshua 13:13. So that’s incomplete commitment.

Then we see the compromise, second, of feigned commitment or faked commitments by Balaam. Do you remember Balaam in Numbers 22-24? Balaam pretended to go with God’s Word. He didn’t want to seem to go directly against God’s Word. He hypocritically tried to follow God’s Word, in a sense, but he really wanted the benefits of disobedience. He didn’t heed God’s warning. And since he couldn’t curse Israel himself, he eventually uses tricks to entice them to disobey God and invite the curse of God upon them. This is half-way or feigned obedience. His town in Joshua 13:20 is mentioned; Beth-peor. That’s where he enticed Israel with the Moabite women and led them into destruction in Numbers 31. So the consequences catch up with Balaam in verse 22. He is culpable.

***22*** *Balaam also, the son of Beor, the one who practiced divination, was killed with the sword by the people of Israel among the rest of their slain.*

The end of his compromise was death. He feigned commitment and it didn’t absolve him of culpability even though God was working through it. So we see that compromise.

Then the third compromise is one we’ll call twisted commitment, for which we’re still culpable. We see this example in the tribe of Levi. So what do we know about Levi? Well if you go back to Genesis 34, we can see that Levi took vengeance into his own hands to secure justice prematurely, of his own making. Levi and his brother, Simeon, learned some disturbing news that their sister Dinah had been raped. So they devised a plan. This rapist wants to actually marry Dinah and he tries to make a deal. They pretend to make a deal and say, “Sure. If you are circumcised and all your people, then we’ll make peace and we’ll be together.” So the individual commits to doing that. But on the third day, when he and the men of the city were sore, in Genesis 34, these two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords, came against the city while it felt secure, and killed all the males. Then they plundered the city. Jacob responds to this twisted act of zeal and of vengeance. He says to them

**Genesis 34:30** Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me stink in the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

This actually provokes problems. Levi was consumed with wrath. He took vengeance into his own hands to secure justice prematurely. Those individuals that they actually made a tricky treaty with were of the Hivites. Later on, we see a tricky treaty in Joshua made against Israel, with the Hivites. Those Gibeonites were from that area. They promised to be at peace, and we find out, whoa! This has now come back to haunt the nation of Israel. The same people they had lied to and said, “We’ll be at peace with you,” but then they killed, now those people lied to them and said, “You have to protect us.” Will they follow through on that promise? They protect Gibeon. But for Levi, the consequences continue, here. We see that the wrath, that act of vengeance of Levi is going to be punished on Jacob’s death bed when he prophesies of the inheritance. Again, in Genesis 49, he said,

**Genesis 49:5-6** “Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council;

They are removed from having an inheritance of land and they’re going to be scattered. The tribe of Levi is divided and we find in chapter 13 that they don’t get land. It’s like coming into a new house and all the kids are running around picking rooms. “Oh, I get this room. I get this room.” Then dad says to one, “You don’t get a room.” They don’t have a present under the Christmas tree in the same way. These firstborn sons receive the premature and bountifully blessed inheritance over on the east side.

***14*** *To the tribe of Levi alone Moses gave no inheritance.*

There was no inheritance. No blessing. But God’s will is executed through us. We have responsibility, yes. We have culpability, yes. There are consequences, yes. But there is also something special called a mystery. There is a mystery that happens for Levi. Can God turn this for good?

The Levites, who were punished for that premature vengeance, actually come around later on in Exodus 32 and they take a stand for God with zeal. They stand against all the people who are rejecting God. As a result, God blesses them through Moses in Deuteronomy 33. God rewards them. We see His justice on display and that they’re scattered, but it becomes a blessing because Levi ends up being the priests serving for God. And by being scattered, actually, they get to be all over Israel and be people who represent God and be a blessing. God says here in Joshua 13 that they don’t have an inheritance as a land inheritance, but they receive something. They receive the offerings by fire to Yahweh. Those are their inheritance; the offerings. When people come and make animal offerings, they’re able to eat from that. They experience the blessing of that. But not only those offerings, there is something beautiful in the end.

***33*** *But to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance; the LORD God of Israel is their inheritance, just as he said to them.*

God Himself is their inheritance. They receive and participate in the means of transformation through the offering. And they see both the justice and the mercy of God united. This is the blessing that they experience. They experience the inheritance of God Himself through the offering. We realize that this is ultimately fulfilled in the promise of Jesus Christ, God Himself as the sacrificial offering. He’s the one through whom we experience the presence of God and that all the consequences and culpability of our sin for those who trust in Jesus by faith, is removed. It’s covered. And in this way, we can see what the prophet says in Lamentations.

**Lamentations 3:24** “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

**Psalm 16:5-6** The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

This is the inheritance we receive in Jesus, and there’s a mystery that only God can accomplish. That mystery is what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1, if you think about it in these ways.

**Ephesians 1:3-6** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace,

**Ephesians 1:7-11** In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

This is the mystery that we receive in Jesus. God is clear that we don’t accomplish our salvation. We’re not the ones who do the saving. God is the one who accomplishes it. We’re told that we’re saved by grace so that no one can boast. And yet, we’re told that we’re saved for the works that God has prepared for us to walk in. This is the mysterious complexity that God has for us that Paul talks about in Philippians, where he says

**Philippians 1:6** And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And the way he does that, Philippians 2 says that as we’ve obeyed, we

**Philippians 2:12b-13** …work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Somehow, Jesus has accomplished a victory that no one else could secure. He has sealed it forever. He finished it. Yet, through His grace He desires to accomplish that victory and continues to sanctify and transform us in real time, for His glory. God accomplishes His will despite us, and yet by His grace, accomplishes His will in His Spirit, through us; both through our failures and through our faithfulness. So that at the end of the day, we only have hope in Christ that God is accomplishing His will. And we can say with the Psalmist in

**Psalm 58:11** Mankind will say, “Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.”

He’s the One who accomplishes His will. He does it despite us, but He also wants to do it through us. There is a lot of complication and complexity that we can’t dive into here. We see it with Joshua where the land is conquered. God’s going to give it, and yet, they still have to fight the battles. The question is, are we ready to be used by Him? There are challenges that lie ahead, and faith in His power to help us face those challenges is something that God especially loves. We’re going to see that we require that kind of faith next week, when Caleb faces the giants.