

# CHAPTER 48

In this chapter we have particular directions given for the distribution of the land, of which we had the metes and bounds assigned in the foregoing chapter.

- I. The portions of the twelve tribes, seven to the north of the sanctuary (v. 1-7) and five to the south (v. 23-29).
- II. The allotment of land for the sanctuary, and the priests (v. 8-11), for the Levites (v. 12-14), for the city (v. 15-20), and for the prince (v. 21, 22). Much of this we had before, Ezekiel 45.
- III. A plan of the city, its gates, and the new name given to it (v. 30-35), which seals up, and concludes, the vision and prophecy of this book.

## EZEKIEL 48:1-30

### THE DIVISION OF THE LAND

We have here a very short and ready way taken for the dividing of the land among the twelve tribes, not so tedious and so far about as the way that was taken in Joshua's time; for in the distribution of spiritual and heavenly blessings there is not that danger of murmuring and quarrelling that there is in the participation of the temporal blessings. When God gave to the labourers every one his penny those that were uneasy at it were soon put to silence with, *May I not do what I will with my own?* And such is the equal distribution here among the tribes. In this distribution of the land we may observe,

1. That it differs very much from the division of it in Joshua's time, and agrees not with the order of their birth, nor with that of their blessing by Jacob or Moses. Simeon here is not *divided* in Jacob, nor is Zebulun a *haven of ships*, a plain intimation that it is not so much to be understood literally as spiritually, though the mystery of it is very much hidden from us. In gospel times old things have passed away; *behold, all things have become new*. The Israel of God is cast into a new method.

2. That the tribe of Dan, which was last provided for in the first division of Canaan (~~690~~ Joshua 19:40), is first provided for here, v. 1. Thus in the gospel the last shall be first, ~~480~~ Matthew 19:30. God, in the dispensation of his grace, does not follow the same method that he does in the disposals of his providence. But Dan had now his portion thereabouts where he had only one city before, northward, on the border of Damascus, and furthest of all from the sanctuary, because that tribe had revolted to idolatry.

3. That all the ten tribes that were carried away by the king of Assyria, as well as the two tribes that were long afterwards carried to Babylon, have their allotment in this visionary land, which some think had its accomplishment in the particular persons and families of those tribes who returned with Judah and Benjamin, of which we find many instances in Ezra and Nehemiah; and it is probable that there were returns of many more afterwards at several times, which are not recorded; and the Jews having Galilee, and other parts, that had been the possessions of the ten tribes, put into their hands, in common with them, they enjoyed them. Grotius says, *If the ten tribes had repented and returned to God, as the chief fathers of Judah and Benjamin did, and the priests and Levites* (~~1005~~ Ezra 1:5), they would have fared as those two tribes did, but they forfeited the benefit of this glorious prophecy by sin. However, we believe it has its designed accomplishment in the establishment and enlargement of the gospel church, and the happy settlement of all those who are Israelites indeed in the sure and sweet enjoyment of the privileges of the new covenant, in which there is enough for all and enough for each.

4. That every tribe in this visionary distribution had its particular lot assigned it by a divine appointment; for it was never the intention of the gospel to pluck up the hedge of property and lay all in common; it was in a way of charity, not of legal right, that the first Christians had all things common (~~400~~ Acts 2:44), and many precepts of the gospel suppose that every man should know his own. We must not only acknowledge, but acquiesce in, the hand of God appointing us our lot, and be well pleased with it, believing it fittest for us. *He shall choose our inheritance for us,* ~~400~~ Psalm 47:4.

5. That the tribes lay contiguous. By *the border* of one tribe was *the portion* of another, all in a row, in exact order, so that, like stones in an arch, they fixed, and strengthened, and wedged in one another. *Behold how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren thus to dwell*

together! It was a figure of the communion of churches and saints under the gospel-government; thus, though they are many, yet they are one, and should hold together in holy love and mutual assistance.

6. That the lot of Reuben, which before lay at a distance beyond Jordan, now lies next to Judah, and next but one to the sanctuary; for the scandal he lay under, for which he was told *he should not excel*, began by this time to wear off. What has turned to the reproach of any person or people ought not to be remembered for ever, but should at length be kindly forgotten.

7. That the sanctuary was *in the midst* of them. There were seven tribes to the north of it and the Levites, the prince's, and the city's portion, with that of five tribes more, to the south of it; so that it was, as it ought to be, *in the heart of the kingdom*, that it might diffuse its benign influences to the whole, and might be the centre of their unity. The tribes that lay most remote from each other would meet there in a mutual acquaintance and fellowship. Those of the same parish or congregation, though dispersed, and having no occasion otherwise to know each other, yet by meeting stately to worship God together should have their hearts knit to each other in holy love.

8. That where the sanctuary was the priests were: *For them, even for the priests, shall this holy oblation be*, v. 10. As, on the one hand, this denotes honour and comfort to ministers, that what is given for their support and maintenance is reckoned *a holy oblation to the Lord*, so it intimates their duty, which is that, since they are appointed and maintained for the service of the sanctuary, they ought to *attend continually to this very thing*, to reside on their cures. Those that live upon the altar must serve at the altar, not take the wages to themselves and devolve the work upon others; but how can they serve the altar, his altar they live upon, if they do not live near it?

9. Those priests had the priests' share of these lands that had approved themselves faithful to God in times of trial (v. 11): *It shall be for the sons of Zadok*, who, it seems, had signalized themselves in some critical juncture, and *went not astray* when the *children of Israel*, and the other Levites, went astray. God will put honour upon those who keep their integrity in times of general apostasy, and he has special favours in reserve for them. Those are swimming upwards, and so they will find at last, that are swimming against the stream.

**10.** The land which was appropriated to the ministers of the sanctuary might by no means be alienated. It was in the nature of the *first-fruits of the land*, and was therefore *holy to the Lord*; and, though the priests and Levites had both the use of it and the inheritance of it to them and their heirs, yet they might not *sell it nor exchange it*, v. 14. It is sacrilege to convert that to other uses which is dedicated to God.

**11.** The land allotted for the city and its suburbs is called a *profane place* (v. 15), or *common*; not but that the city was a holy city above other cities, for the Lord was there, but, in comparison with the sanctuary, it was a profane place. Yet it is too often true in the worst sense that great cities, even those which, like this, have the sanctuary near them, are profane places, and it ought to be deeply lamented. It was the complaint of old, *From Jerusalem has profaneness gone forth into all the land*, <sup><2035></sup>Jeremiah 23:15.

**12.** The city is made to be exactly square, and the suburbs extending themselves equally on all sides, as the Levites' cities did in the first division of the land (v. 16, 17), which, never being literally fulfilled in any city, intimates that it is to be understood spiritually of the beauty and stability of the gospel church, that *city of the living God*, which is formed according to the wisdom and counsel of God, and is made firm and immovable by his promise.

**13.** Whereas, before, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were principally of Judah and Benjamin, in whose tribe it lay, now the head city lies not in the particular lot of any of the tribes, but *those that serve the city*, and bear office in it, *shall serve it out of all the tribes of Israel*, v. 19. The most eminent men must be picked out of all the tribes of Israel for the service of the city, because many eyes were upon it, and there was great resort to it from all parts of the nation and from other nations. Those that live in the city are said to serve the city, for, wherever we are, we must study to be serviceable to the place, some way or other, according as our capacity is. They must not come out of the tribes of Israel to the city to take their ease, and enjoy their pleasures, but to serve the city, to do all the good they can there, and in so doing they would have a good influence upon the country too.

**14.** Care was taken that those who applied themselves to public business in the city, as well as in the sanctuary, should have an honourable comfortable maintenance; lands are appointed, *the increase whereof shall*

*be food unto those that serve the city*, v. 18. Who goes a warfare at his own charges? Magistrates, that attend the service of the state, as well as ministers, that attend the service of the church, should have all due encouragement and support in so doing; and *for this cause pay we tribute also*.

**15.** The prince had a lot for himself, suited to the dignity of his high station (v. 21); we took an account of it before, Ezekiel 45. He was seated near the sanctuary, where the testimony of Israel was, and near the city, where the *thrones of judgment* were, that he might be a protection to both and might see the that duty of both was carefully and faithfully done; and herein he was a minister of God for good to the whole community. Christ is the church's prince, that defends it on every side, and creates a defense; nay, he is himself a defence upon all its glory and encompasses it with his favour.

**16.** As Judah had his lot next the sanctuary on one side, so Benjamin had, of all the tribes, his lot nearest to it on the other side, which honour was reserved for those who adhered to the house of David and the temple at Jerusalem when the other ten tribes went astray from both. It is enough if treachery and apostasy, upon repentance, he pardoned, but constancy and fidelity shall be rewarded and preferred.

## ~~<68>~~ EZEKIEL 48:31-35

### THE PLAN OF THE CITY

We have here a further account of the city that should be built for the metropolis of this glorious land, and to be the receptacle of those who would come from all parts to worship in the sanctuary adjoining. It is nowhere called Jerusalem, nor is the land which we have had such a particular account of the dividing of any where called the land of Canaan; for the old names are forgotten, to intimate that the *old things are done away, behold all things have become new*. Now, concerning this city, observe here,

**1.** The measures of its out-lets, and the grounds belonging to it, for its several conveniences; each way its appurtenances extended 4500 *measures* 18,000 in all, v. 35. But what these measures were is uncertain.

It is never said, in all this chapter, whether so many *reeds* (as our translation determines by inserting that word, v. 8, each reed containing six cubits and span, <sup><341B></sup>Ezekiel 40:5, and why should the measurer appear with the measuring reed in his hand of that length if he did not measure with *that*, except where it is expressly said he measured by cubits?) or whether, as others think, it is so many cubits, because those are mentioned <sup><341B></sup>Ezekiel 45:2 and <sup><341B></sup>Ezekiel 47:3. Yet that makes me incline rather to think that where cubits are not mentioned must be intended so many lengths of the measuring reed. But those who understand it of so many cubits are not agreed whether it be meant of the common cubit, which was half a yard, or the geometrical cubit, which, for better expedition, is supposed to be mostly used in surveying lands, which, some say, contained six cubits, others about three cubits and a half, so making 1000 cubits the same with 1000 paces, that is, an English mile. But our being left at this uncertainty is an intimation that these things are to be understood spiritually, and that what is principally meant is that there is an exact and just proportion observed by Infinite Wisdom in modelling the gospel church, which though now we cannot discern we shall when we come to heaven.

**2.** The number of its gates. It had twelve gates in all, three on each side, which was very agreeable when it lay four square; and these twelve gates were inscribed to the twelve tribes. Because the city was to be served *out of all the tribes of Israel* (v. 19) it was fit that each tribe should have its gate; and, Levi being here taken in, to keep to the number twelve Ephraim and Manasseh are made one in Joseph, v. 32. On the north side were the gates of Reuben, Judah, and Levi (v. 31), on the east the gates of Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan (v. 32), on the south the gates of Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun (v. 33), and on the west the gates of Gad, Asher, and Naphtali, v. 34. Conformable to this, in St. John's vision, the new Jerusalem (for so the holy city is called there, though not here) has *twelve gates*, three on a side, and on them are written *the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel*, <sup><611D></sup>Revelation 21:12, 13. Note, Into the church of Christ, both militant and triumphant, there is a free access by faith for all that come of every tribe, from every quarter. Christ has *opened the kingdom of heaven for all believers*. Whoever will may come and *take of the water of life*, of the tree of life, *freely*.

**3.** The name given to this city: *From that day*, when it shall be newly-erected according to this model, the name of it shall be, not, as before,

*Jerusalem — The vision of peace*, but which is the original of that, and more than equivalent to it, *Jehovah Shammah — The Lord is there*, v. 35. This intimated,

(1.) That the captives, after their return, should have manifest tokens of God's presence with them and his residence among them, both in his ordinances and his providences. They shall have no occasion to ask, as their fathers did, *Is the Lord among us, or is he not?* for they shall see and say that he is with them of a truth. And then, though their troubles were many and threatening, they were like the bush which burned but was not consumed, because *the Lord was there*. But when God departed from their temple, when he said, *Migremus hinc — Let us go hence*, their house was soon *left unto them desolate*. Being no longer his, it was not much longer theirs.

(2.) That the gospel-church should likewise have the presence of God in it, though not in the *Shechinah*, as of old, yet in a token of it no less sure, that of his Spirit. Where the gospel is faithfully preached, gospel ordinances are duly administered, and God is worshipped in the name of Jesus Christ only, it may truly be said, *The Lord is there*; for faithful is he that has said, and he will be as good as his word, *Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world*. *The Lord is there* in his church, to rule and govern it, to protect and defend it, and graciously to accept and own his sincere worshippers, and to be *nigh unto them in all that they call upon him for*. This should engage us to keep close to the communion of saints, for *the Lord is there*; and then whither shall we go to better ourselves? Nay, it is true of every good Christian; he dwells in God, and God in him; whatever soul has in it a living principle of grace, it may be truly said, *The Lord is There*.

(3.) That the glory and happiness of heaven should consist chiefly in this, that *the Lord is there*. St. John's representation of that blessed state does indeed far exceed this in many respects. That is all gold, and pearls, and precious stones; it is much larger than this, and much brighter, for it *needs not the light of the sun*. But, in making the presence of God the principal matter of its bliss, they both agree. There the happiness of the glorified saints is made to be that *God himself shall be with them* (<sup>618</sup>Revelation 21:3), that *he who sits on the throne shall dwell among them*, <sup>615</sup>Revelation 7:15. And here it is made to crown the bliss of this holy city

that *the Lord is there*. Let us therefore give all diligence to make sure to ourselves a place in that city, that we may be *for ever with the Lord*.