

**JOSHUA 17-24 ALLOTMENT OF PROMISED LAND; JOSHUA'S LAST SPEECH**

With this study, we will finish exploring the book of Joshua. A lot of it comes from the church's BRP.

After defeating most of the Canaanites, Joshua distributes the tribal territories according to God's will. In that way, there wouldn't be fighting among them and everything is done peaceably and in order.

In chapters 17-18, *Ephraim* is given the allotment of land, north of Jerusalem in the southern part of what will later be the kingdom of Israel. Famous cities in their territory included Bethel in the south, Shiloh in the middle, and Shechem in the north.

Manasseh received the land just north of Ephraim, which together formed the lot for Joseph. It was actually adjacent to the other half of their territory east of the Jordan, which effectively put the Jordan river in the midst of their land instead of on the border. Notable cities include Tirzah (the capital city of the northern kingdom, see 1 Kings 15:33), Megiddo (see 2 Kings 23:29; Revelation 16:16), Endor (1 Samuel 28:7), and Shunem (2 Kings 4:8).

When the tribe of Joseph complained that they thought they should have more land, Joshua had a simple solution—conquer the northern parts still occupied by the Canaanites. They fell back into their more fearful attitudes, but Joshua reminded them that since they were such a great people in need of more land, they should have no trouble (Joshua 17:14-18).

It is interesting to note the amount of land occupied by Ephraim and Manasseh in the Promised Land. Manasseh had much more than Ephraim, particularly when we consider the area east of the Jordan. Yet the greater national blessings had been prophesied to fall upon Ephraim (see Genesis 48).

How do we reconcile this? Simple. The prophecies regarding Ephraim and Manasseh were *not* fulfilled in the land of Canaan. They would be fulfilled much later, following Israelite migrations to future settlements in Northwest Europe and beyond. In later world history, while Manasseh, as the United States of America, will occupy a much larger country, Ephraim, as the British Empire, will rule more territory than any other people ever has.

Now that Ephraim's territory has been assigned, Joshua (an Ephraimite) and the children of Israel relocate the tabernacle and central gathering point from Gilgal to *Shiloh*, 18 miles to the northwest, in the midst of the new land of *Ephraim*. Joshua points out that Judah has the territory in the south and

Joseph the northern territory (18:5) While we think of this territory and these tribes as being divided when the monarchy splits, in fact, the Bible records they always maintained a sort of independence from one another. Even during the united monarchy, Saul and David had to deal with the two factions.

The rest of the land is apportioned out at Shiloh to the remaining seven tribes based on the results of a land survey conducted by three members of each tribe. Seven parcels are described, and the lots cast to determine where God wanted each tribe located.

The first parcel went to *Benjamin*--a narrow strip of land sandwiched between Ephraim and Judah, but it became the *most important* area of all. It included *Jerusalem* on the south, right next to the border with Judah. North of there was *Gibeah*, where Saul would have his home, and *Ramah* where Samuel would live, and Mizpeh and Gibeon. Even *Jericho* was part of Benjamin's territory. Bethel was a border town adjacent to Ephraim, who conquered it in Judges 1:22-26 and kept it when that land was divided.

Unlike those of Joseph, who protested at not having enough land, the people of Judah had too much (19:9). So the southern part of their territory was given to Simeon. It included Beersheba, an area associated with Abraham and Isaac.

Next came *Zebulun*, who received a parcel bordering Manasseh to the north. The Bethlehem listed (19:15) is not Bethlehem-Judah, which was south of Jerusalem in Judah's territory (compare 1 Samuel 17:12). Gath-hepher, the city Jonah came from, was in Zebulun (2 Kings 14:25). And by the time of the New Testament, *Nazareth*, where Christ grew up, had been established in this area.

As was the case with Ephraim and Manasseh, this was not all Zebulun had been promised either. Genesis 49:13 had stated, "Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships." Yet Zebulun's inheritance in the Promised Land did not border any sea—neither the Mediterranean nor even the inland Sea of Galilee. The fulfillment of this promise, then, would also come in later centuries with the migrations to Northwest Europe, and specifically with *Holland*, famous for its seacoasts and ships. This conclusion has been recently reconfirmed by Yair Davidy in his book, *The Tribes*.

The fourth lot went to *Issachar*, who got land north of Manasseh and east of Zebulun, bordering the Jordan (19:17-23).

Asher received a coastal strip north of Manasseh and west of Zebulun. It extended all the way to Tyre in southern Lebanon (19:24-31).

East of Asher, and north of Zebulun and Issachar, was *Naphtali*. It stretched from the entire western shore of the Sea of Galilee north to Lebanon (19:32-39). Along with Zebulun, it was known as *Galilee* (compare 20:7; Matthew 4:15).

Finally, *Dan* received a portion of land along the coast west of Benjamin and just north of the Philistine territory. This is where the Danite Samson carried out his exploits. But the tribe of Dan wanted more land, so some of its people conquered an additional area north of Naphtali (19:47; compare Judges 18).

After all the tribes received their inheritances, Joshua himself, an Ephraimite, chose a location within the land assigned to Ephraim to live out his last days (19:49-50).

As instructed, six cities were chosen as *cities of refuge*: Kedesh in the northern part of Naphtali, Shechem in the land of Ephraim, Hebron in the land of Judah, and Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan on the eastern side of the river Jordan (20:1-9).

In addition to the cities of refuge, the *Levites* were given 48 cities to live in. They were grouped geographically by sub-tribes. The priests received the cities in the southern tribes of Simeon, Judah and Benjamin. The non-priest Kohathites had cities in the next three tribes moving north: Dan, Ephraim and western Manasseh. Gershon had cities in the far northern tribes. And Merari's cities were split—in the southern part of the eastern tribes, and in Zebulun (21:1-41). In this way, Sabbath services (Lev. 23:3) could be conducted throughout Israel.

The Nelson Study Bible states: "This glorious conclusion to these two chapters and to the entire section (chs. 13-21) celebrates the fact that *all came to pass* exactly as God promised. [That is, it should be clarified, while there was still more to come, all had so far gone exactly as God had said it would.] What has been visible all along is now said plainly—the God of Israel is a promise-keeping God, who gave Israel the land in accordance with the promises He had made with its ancestors, including Moses and the patriarchs. And in addition to giving them the land, He also granted them *rest*."

The land has been apportioned, and *the eastern tribes* have fulfilled their responsibilities, so now, Joshua dismisses them to return home. The time and sacrifice has not been without its rewards, as they return with much wealth from the spoils of Canaan. Joshua urges them to share with those who remained to take care of their land and families (22: 8).

Before they go, Joshua exhorts them to follow God's law wholeheartedly (22:5). So it comes as a great shock when word comes back that they have built a large altar beside the Jordan River apparently contrary to God's explicit commands (compare Deut. 12:13-14).

In their zeal, a war party forms at Shiloh to deal with this clear transgression. Before heading off to battle, a delegation of tribal leaders, headed by Phinehas, the son of the high priest, is sent to find out just why they have done this. The delegation reminds them of some of Israel's past transgressions, and suggests that perhaps it would be better if they came over to the western lands after all.

The tribes explain, however, that things are not how they look to the western delegation. They say they built it as a "*replica* of the altar of the Lord which our fathers made" (Joshua 22:28), i.e., apparently a copy of the stone one that had been set up at Mount Ebal (compare Joshua 8:30-31). And, most importantly, this altar, they maintain, was not to be used for sacrifices as the original was, but rather to serve as a witness and reminder in years to come to Israelites on both sides of the Jordan that they too are a part of Israel, who also worship the true God (Joshua 22:27-28). The explanation is quite acceptable to Phinehas and the tribal leaders, so they return to Shiloh and a civil war is avoided (22:30-34).

Near the end of his life, Joshua summons Israel, primarily the leaders, and admonishes them to remain faithful to God. He specifically exhorts them to "hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day" (23:8). And then warns them of the consequences of "clinging" to the remnant of the Canaanites (23:12). *The Nelson Study Bible* says, "The word translated *cling* is the same word translated *hold fast* in v. 8, bringing the different instances of clinging into sharp contrast. God wanted His people to cling to Him, not to the Canaanites they were driving out. This required, among other things, that they not make marriages with unbelieving foreigners under any circumstances (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-4). Years later Solomon ignored this

command and proved how destructive the sin of intermarriage could be (1 Kin. 3:1; 11:1-8)."

Joshua concludes by telling the elders that rejection of God will exact a dire penalty: "You shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you" (24:16). This, of course, happened in later years, when as punishment, Israel was taken into captivity and deported by Assyria and Judah was carried away by Babylon. Yet rebellion was not long away, as it would dominate the period of the judges immediately following. Still, Joshua's warning may have done some good, as the elders after him remained faithful (24:31).

One last time, Joshua summons the elders, this time at Shechem, about 10-15 miles north of Shiloh. This was the place the blessings and curses had been pronounced more than two decades earlier (Joshua 8:30-35)—and perhaps Joshua chose it now for that reason. He rehearses Israel's history, much of which occurred within the last two generations. The Exodus had occurred less than 70 years earlier, and Moses had died less than 30 years earlier. Notice what he mentions about the Egyptian army perishing by God bringing "the sea upon them and covering them" (24:7). Doesn't sound like they perished, as some liberal scholar said, at the *Reed Sea*. God had said He would send the hornet to drive out the inhabitants (Deut. 7:20-23), and here it is related that this did indeed happen.

Joshua says, "Now, therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River [Euphrates] and in Egypt." This closely parallels the apostle Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 5:8, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"—that is, the same "sincerity and truth" mentioned by Joshua. The Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures the putting out of sin and coming out of the sinful ways of this world—coming out of Babylon and Egypt, as Joshua essentially put it, forsaking the following of all affections rivaling the true God—and replacing that with godly purity. And this is, of course, something we should always do throughout our Christian lives.

Then comes Joshua's declaration of his own direction despite what the people's might be: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (24:15). "With his famous words, Joshua clearly and

unambiguously took his stand on the side of the living God. Joshua modeled a perfect leader's actions. A leader must be willing to move ahead and commit himself to the truth regardless of the people's inclinations. Joshua's bold example undoubtedly encouraged many to follow with the affirmations of vv. 16-18" (*Nelson Study Bible*).

Indeed, even after telling the people that they could not fulfill God's requirements on their own and the seriousness of the obligation they were entering into, Joshua still manages to extract from them strong assurances with a covenant that they would never forsake God, after which he follows the common practice of setting up a "large stone" as a witness (verse 26; compare Genesis 31:44-52; Joshua 4). He also records these words in "the Book of the Law of God" at the tabernacle.

The book of Joshua concludes with the deaths and burials of Joshua and Eleazar the high priest, both in the land of Ephraim. While God could have inspired Joshua to write this, it is likely that He inspired someone else to add this ending. This last section also records the final burial of Joseph, also in the land of Ephraim, whose bones had been carried out of Egypt at his request (Genesis 50:24-25; Exodus 13:19).

The book of Joshua began with the words: "After the death of *Moses the servant of the Lord*, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, *Moses' assistant*" (1:1). Now notice how the book ends: "Now it came to pass after these things that *Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord* died" (verse 29). "This first reference to Joshua as the servant of the Lord shows clearly how Joshua had 'grown into the job' that Moses had vacated. Now the book comes full circle, recalling the references in 1:1 to Moses as the servant of the Lord and to Joshua as merely Moses' assistant" (*Nelson*, note on verse 29).

Joshua was more than just Moses' successor. He was himself a type of Christ, a hero of faith leading the people to conquer the Promised Land and thereby give them a home.