

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Joshua and Acts of the Apostles

Linking Theme: Fulfilment

*Passage for weekly reading (week 29):*

*Joshua ch. 's 13 – 19*

### Allocating the Land

There is a considerable time-lapse between the “rest from war” described at the end of ch.11 and the beginning of ch.13, as the Lord tells Joshua that he is “very old”! (All a leader needs is for the Lord to tell him that!) The one effect it is bound to have is to re-instil in Joshua the urgency of the task that is still to be accomplished, and the fact that, from his point of view, the time to accomplish it is limited. Probably the people had become battle-weary, and had lost momentum in dislodging and destroying the occupying Canaanites. Much land to the south-west was still unconquered, which was Philistine territory, and also land to the north, mainly in Sidonian occupation. Joshua is to take these lands and include them in the distribution to the 9½ tribes who have yet to settle properly. They still needed to possess that which the Lord wanted to give them.

The large tract given by Moses to the 2½ tribes east of the Jordan is now detailed precisely. Suffice to say that Reuben was given the southern portion, bounded on the western side by the Salt Sea (the Dead Sea), Gad the middle region bounded by the Jordan itself, with Kinnereth (Galilee) as its northerly limit, and ½ Manasseh has the area to the north, again bounded by Kinnereth and the tributary streams feeding into it. (See map “Land of the Twelve Tribes”, used by permission from Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 49530, U.S.A.)

Before detailing the distribution of the land west of the Jordan amongst the rest of the tribes, the land in Canaan itself, a very important allocation must be made as a priority. Caleb has to receive his inheritance before anyone else! He was, of course, from the tribe of Judah, the tribe to be instructed first, but that did not detract in any way from his pre-eminence. He claims Moses’ promise as to that inheritance (14 v.9), and is just as ready to possess his portion as he was those forty-five years ago! The presence of the Anakites in the area of Hebron meant little to him – the Lord being his helper, they would be driven out totally! Would that the other tribal leaders were like him! Caleb, however, had a “different spirit”, a spirit which the years had done nothing to quench or diminish (Num. 14 v.24).

Ch.15 gives us the boundaries of Judah’s territory, occupying most of southern Canaan, the Dead Sea forming the eastern boundary, Edom and the Nile Delta region being the lands to the south.

V.'s 13-19 make up a short section relating to Caleb's conquest of the Anakites, introducing us to Othniel, the nephew who became his son-in-law, and, some time later, one of Israel's judges. (The story of Caleb's gift of the "upper and lower springs" to his married daughter is replicated in Judges 1 v.'s 12-15). A comprehensive list of the townships within the various regions of Judah concludes the chapter. Note in passing that Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites living in Jerusalem (15 v.63).

Next in the allocation come Manasseh and Ephraim, described as "Joseph" in the text (16 v.1). The developing history of the nation over the next several centuries is linked importantly with Judah and Joseph as these tribes grow in dominance, hence the priority given here to their respective lands. Ephraim is listed before Manasseh, in accordance with Jacob's prophecy preferring the younger over the elder brother (Gen. 48 v.'s 19&20). Notwithstanding Jacob's words, at this stage Ephraim has the smaller allocation of the two, his portion being a central tract with Shiloh at its heart. Manasseh has a larger piece of land to the immediate north of this (quite apart from a large tract around Golan for the ½ Manasseh who would settle east of the Jordan), with what became Samaria located in the middle of it, and Megiddo to the north. Shechem is on the southern boundary.

**N.B.** Samaria was just a hill in those days, to the north-west of Shechem. Omri, the sixth king of Israel, developed it into a city, and in time it effectively became the capital of the region – see 1 Kings 16 v.'s 23&24.

The short account we have regarding Zelophehad's daughters (17 v.'s 3-6), fills out the reference to them in the law, where it was necessary to see that justice was done in respect of their inheritance (Num. ch.'s 27&36). When a man only had daughters, then they were to inherit his estate in the same way as sons. Joshua saw to it that this was done.

The record of the interaction with Joshua in v.'s 14-18 says much in regard to the attitude of Joseph's clans. Their leader seems to have little sympathy for them! They want more land, but are not keen on the prospect of taking over the area allotted to them, given the warfare that this would certainly involve – how different to Caleb's perspective!

Ch.'s 18&19 give the detail regarding the distribution amongst the remaining seven tribes (v.2). Joshua's patience was wearing thin, and he initiates the survey to get things going again. The land is to be divided having regard to that already given to Judah and Joseph (18 v.5). Although lots were cast to determine the settlement, there was nothing haphazard about the method. It was all done at the Tent of Meeting "in the presence of the Lord" (v.10). Much prayer and deliberation went into this! The detail for each tribe varies, but in each case includes some information in regard to boundaries and townships.

(Ref. map “Land of the Twelve Tribes” for a good indication as to each inheritance.)

Benjamin is drawn first, and given a strip of land between Judah and Joseph (v.11). Simeon has territory totally within that already allocated in the south to Judah (19 v.1). Zebulun is given land in the north, its southern limit being bounded by Manasseh. Issachar lay to the immediate west of Zebulun and his land extended to the Jordan river as the eastern boundary. Asher and Naphtali were the most northerly settlements, Asher’s western boundary being “The Great Sea” (The Mediterranean), Naphtali’s eastern boundary being the tributary streams running from Mount Hermon to Kinnereth insofar as they coincided with the limits of East Manasseh. Only Dan had difficulty in displacing the Canaanites in his region, and ultimately compromised by settling in the north, in the land allocated to Naphtali. The final allocation is for Joshua himself – last but not least! A town called Timnath Serah became his. As v.50 tells us – “**..he built up the town and settled there**”. “**And so they finished dividing the land**”.

### **Food for thought / discussion / prayer**

- 1) It seems, at the beginning of this week’s passage, that Israel was in danger of settling for a “quiet life” and, consequently, missing God’s best. Can you identify with that?
- 2) It is salutary to compare Caleb’s attitude in taking his allocated land to that of the other tribal leaders (ref.15 v.63, 16 v.10, 17 v.12, 17 v.16 & 19 v.47). Caleb had no difficulty in destroying the Anakites (15 v.14), whilst the others generally had to compromise. To what do you attribute his success?
- 3) Use the map attached to this week’s notes in identifying the locations of the tribal settlement. It’s a great help. The least it can achieve is to sharpen our knowledge of the Holy Land’s geography. It reminds us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

**Next week’s passage:** Joshua 20 – 24

Map 4: LAND OF THE TWELVE TRIBES

