

Joshua Chapters 17 to 24 (selected passages)

Introduction

Chapters 13 to 19 deal with the distribution of the land to the ‘twelve’ tribes. Chapters 13 to 17 detail the assignments made at Gilgal (Joshua 14 v 6), starting with (i) the two and a half tribes (Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh) which had as their inheritance land east of the Jordan, as conquered previously under Moses; followed by (ii) Judah, Ephraim and the other half of Manasseh. Later Joshua moved the camp and the tabernacle to a more central location, Shiloh (Joshua 18 v 1), and Chapters 18 and 19 detail the assignments made to the remaining seven tribes at Shiloh: Benjamin, Simeon (which gets co-mingled with Judah), Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and Dan – see attached map overleaf for the tribal territories.

Levi (the ‘thirteenth’ tribe) had no land for an inheritance, but instead received a greater inheritance: God himself (Joshua 13 v 33); and they were also given 48 cities (as detailed in Chapter 21). Joshua was the last to receive his inheritance: the city of Timnath-Serah (Joshua 19 v 49, 50), in the hill country of Ephraim. Like Caleb (Joshua 14 v 12), Joshua preferred to live in the mountains.

Joshua’s farewells speeches are recorded in Chapter 23 and 24: firstly to Israel’s leaders at either Shiloh or his home in Ephraim, and secondly to all the tribes at Shechem. He warned them of *future dangers* (23 v 1 to 16); reminded them of *past blessings* (24 v 1 to 13); and challenged them to *present responsibilities* (24 v 14 to 28).

The daughters of Zelophehad (Joshua 17 v 1 to 6)

The daughters of Zelophehad were treated by Moses as an exception to the rule: daughters were allowed to carry their father’s inheritance if he had no sons, yet they must marry within their tribe (Numbers 27 v 5 to 8, 36 v 6). The claims of Christ rest on this unique ruling, as Jesus was the son of Mary, the daughter of Heli who had no sons (thus Mary could carry her father’s inheritance) – see Luke 3 v 23 (Joseph is listed as Heli’s adopted son because of Mary), and Matthew 1 v 16.

The cities of refuge (Joshua 20 v 1 to 9)

The six ‘cities of refuge’ (three east and three west of the Jordan) were Israel’s remedy for anyone guilty of ‘manslaughter’. These cities were available to all, including sojourners, and served as a refuge from the ‘avenger of blood’ (for background see Deuteronomy 19 v 1 to 10).

We can see this as a ‘type of Christ’. Are we guilty of ‘murder’ or ‘manslaughter’? Jesus cried from the cross “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23 v 34). Who is our refuge from the accuser and avenger? When the high priest died, the ‘manslayer’ could go free (v 6) – so who is our ‘great high priest’?

The names of the cities are significant: *Kedesh*, ‘holy place’ – God makes us holy in Christ; *Shechem*, ‘shoulder’ – like a shepherd Jesus carries us upon his shoulder; *Hebron*, ‘fellowship’ – we enjoy fellowship with Christ; *Bezer*, ‘fortress’ – Jesus is our fortress; *Ramoth*, ‘heights’ – we walk upon high places; *Golan*, ‘exile’ – we are pilgrims, passing through.

Joshua’s charge to Israel’s leaders (Joshua 23 v 1 to 16)

- To whom is Joshua speaking on this occasion? On what conditions does the promise in verse 5 depend?
- How is the faithfulness of God shown in this chapter? See also Joshua 21 v 43 to 45.

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Future dangers – Israel was to remain a separated people, for three reasons:

- (i) what the Lord did for Israel (v 3, 4) – the Gentile nations were God’s enemies and therefore Israel’s enemies;
- (ii) what the Lord said to Israel (v 5 to 10) – the secret of Joshua’s success was his devotion to the Word of God;
- (iii) what the Lord would do to Israel (v 11 to 16) – the Word of God is a ‘two-edged sword’: if we obey it, God will bless us; if we disobey it, God will discipline us until we submit to him.

Joshua’s three main admonitions were

- (i) keep God’s Word (v 6);
- (ii) cling to the Lord (v 8);
- (iii) love the Lord (v 11).

The covenant renewal at Shechem (Joshua 24 v 1 to 28)

- Note the significance of the place chosen by Joshua for this occasion (see Genesis 12 v 5 to 7). In what other ways did he seek to make this as impressive and memorable an event as possible?
- Why does Joshua caution the people against a lightly made commitment (v 19 to 20)?
- How do they respond (v 21)?

Past blessings – Israel’s roots are important since God’s chosen people have a destiny to fulfill. Abraham was called by God’s sovereign grace. God delivered Israel from Egypt. He guided them, and brought them out that he might bring them in (Deuteronomy 6 v 23). When Balaam tried to curse Israel, God turned it into a blessing. God gave them their land...

Present responsibilities – the people are to ‘serve’ God, ‘fear’ him, and ‘obey’ him. Joshua commands the people to ‘choose’ whom they will serve (v 15) – other pagan gods, or the Lord. Notice they are to choose *whom* they will serve, not *if* they will serve. We all serve someone – either self, or ‘the world’, or the devil (whether intentionally or not) – or the Lord...

Joshua's death and burial (Joshua 24 v 29 to 33)

The book closes with three burials: Joshua; Eleazar the high priest, also buried in Ephraim; and the bones of Joseph buried in Shechem on the piece of land Jacob bought from Hamor (Genesis 33 v 19), thus fulfilling Joseph’s dying request (Genesis 50 v 25).

So the ‘wilderness’ generation passed away, and each generation is challenged to conquer the land of blessing and promise that God has for it. And we will do so, as we pay close heed to our ‘Joshua’, the Lord Jesus Christ!

PLEASE TURN OVER...

