

SESSION 5

"Possessing the Land"—Part 1
"Allotments and Special Cities"

I. PRAYER

II. BOOK OF JOSHUA

A. Charted

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA					
"Promise/Fulfillment of the Land"					
Enter		Conquer		Possess	
1	5	5	12	13	24
Jordan River		Canaan		East of Jordan	
				West of Jordan	

B. Partial Outline: "The Book of Joshua"

- A. "Entering the Land" (1–5)
- B. "Conquering the Land" (5–12)
- C. "Possessing the Land" (13–24)
 - 1. Division of the Land (13–19)
 - 2. Cities of Refuge (20)
 - 3. Levitical Cities (21)
 - 4. Eastern Tribes: Release (22)
 - 5. Farewell Address: Joshua (23–24)

*NB: Session 5 will cover points 1–3; Session 6 will cover points 4–5.

III. “POSSESSING THE LAND”: BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT (Part I)

A. Division of the Land (Chapters 13–19)

Old Testament historian Eugene Merrill (*Kingdom of Priests*, 122) observes:

Joshua 12–19 consists essentially of the tribal allocations. Once the initial conquest was completed, a task which took about seven years (ca. 1406–1399), it was necessary for the process of occupation to begin, for the abandoned cities would soon be repossessed by the people of the land were Israel to remain much longer outside them. One may assume that some such occupation had been in progress all this time, but it is clear that for the most part Israel remained concentrated in and about Gilgal. Indeed, until distribution of the conquered land was determined by lot and other means, no official or permanent residence could be taken up.

1. Land Yet to Be Taken (13:1–7)

Joshua 13:1

When Joshua had grown old, the LORD said to him, “You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.”

Joshua was an old, battle-hardened leader, likely about the age of Caleb (his fellow spy and companion, that is, about eighty-five years old). The war had been won; organized Canaanite resistance had been broken. But there were individual battles yet to be won.

Joshua 13:6–7

⁶ “As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians, I myself will drive them out before the Israelites. Be sure to allocate this land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have instructed you, ⁷ and divide it as an inheritance among the nine tribes and half of the tribe of Manasseh.”

- a. The Lord promised to drive out remaining Canaanites. The promise hinged upon faithfulness to the law.

Joshua 1:6–7

⁶ *Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.* ⁷ *Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.*

- b. The specific land discussed was to be the “inheritance” of the nine and a half tribes who settled west of the Jordan River.

Insight: “Inheritance”

Constable (*Notes*, 62) quotes Wiersbe.

“The word *inheritance* is found over fifty times in these nine chapters [13–21] and is a very important word. The Jews inherited their land. They didn’t win their land as spoils of battle or purchase their land as in a business transaction. The Lord, who was the sole owner, leased the land to them. ... Imagine having God for your landlord!”

2. Land East of the Jordan River (13:8–33)

Previously the two and a half tribes (half Manasseh, Reuben, Gad) had requested land on the east of the Jordan River. Moses agreed, but upon the stipulation that they would cross over the Jordan with the other tribes to defeat the Canaanites.

Numbers 32:31–33

³¹ *The Gadites and Reubenites answered, “Your servants will do what the LORD has said. ³² We will cross over before the LORD into Canaan armed, but the property we inherit will be on this side of the Jordan.”*

³³ *Then Moses gave to the Gadites, the Reubenites and the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan—the whole land with its cities and the territory around them.*

- a. Special grant of land given (8–13)

Joshua 13:8

⁸ *The other half of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites had received the inheritance that Moses had given them east of the Jordan, as he, the servant of the LORD, had assigned it to them.*

- b. No grant or land given to Levi (14)

Joshua 13:14

¹⁴ *But to the tribe of Levi he gave no inheritance, since the food offerings presented to the LORD, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as he promised them.*

The Levites received no specific inheritance except for forty-eight cities with pastureland for their flocks and herds (cf. 14:4; ch. 21—see esp. v. 41).

- c. Grant of the land to Reuben (13:15–23)
- d. Grant of the land to Gad (13:24–28)
- e. Grant of the land to half Manasseh (13:29–31)
- f. Summary statement (13:32–33)

Joshua 13:32–33

³² *This is the inheritance Moses had given when he was in the plains of Moab across the Jordan east of Jericho.* ³³ *But to the tribe of Levi, Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as he promised them.*

3. Land West of the Jordan River (14:1–19:48)

With the fulfillment of Moses' promise to the Transjordan tribes (east of the Jordan River), the remaining tribes received their inheritance. The map that follows on the next page gives a general look at tribal allotments.

- a. Allotment process (14:1–5)

Joshua 14:1–2

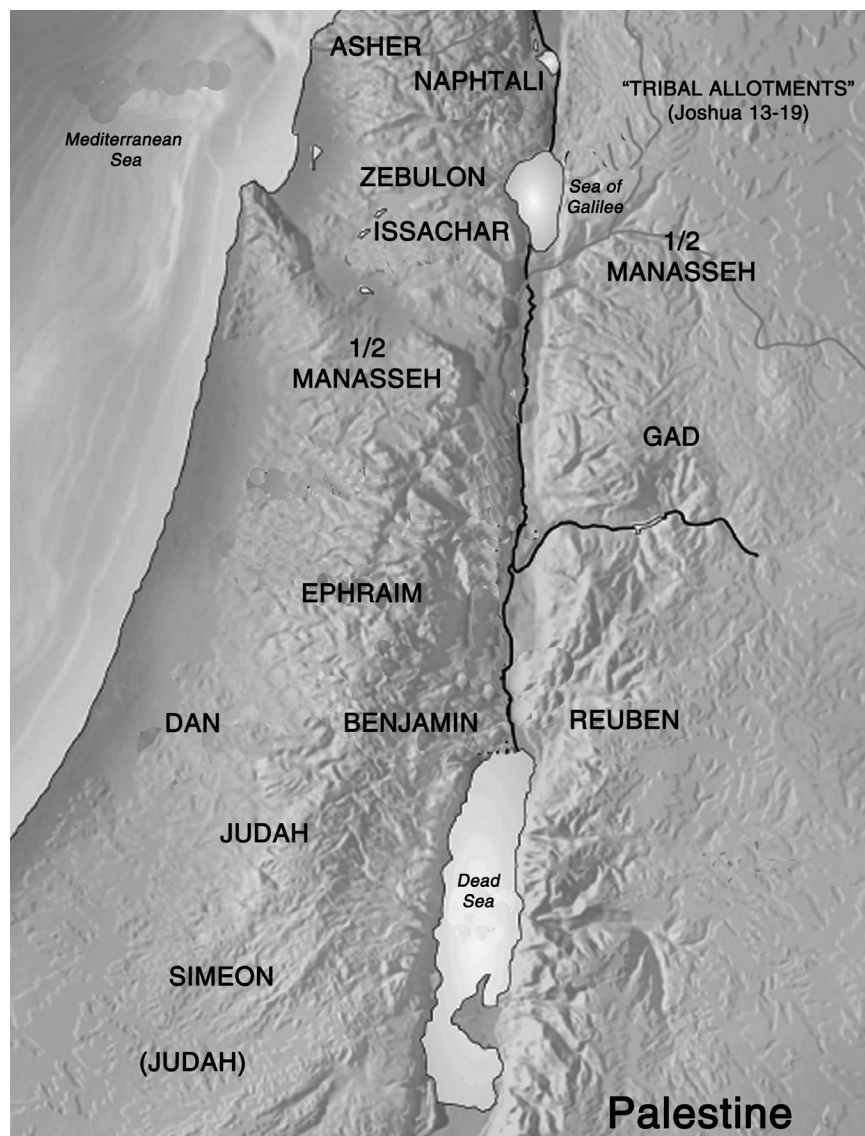
Now these are the areas the Israelites received as an inheritance in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel allotted to them.

² *Their inheritances were assigned by lot to the nine and a half tribes, as the LORD had commanded through Moses.*

- (1) Eleazar the priest and Joshua the leader, along with the heads of tribal clans, orchestrated the process.
- (2) Casting of lots determined general locations, but the population size of each tribe was also to be considered.

Numbers 26:52–56

⁵² The LORD said to Moses, ⁵³ “The land is to be allotted to them as an inheritance based on the number of names. ⁵⁴ To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one; each is to receive its inheritance according to the number of those listed. ⁵⁵ Be sure that the land is distributed by lot. What each group inherits will be according to the names for its ancestral tribe. ⁵⁶ Each inheritance is to be distributed by lot among the larger and smaller groups.



b. Allotment (special) request by Caleb (14:6–15)

(1) Caleb had been a **slave** (Egypt).

Caleb was forty years old when he was selected to be one of the twelve spies. That age would have earlier placed him as a slave in Egypt during his early adult years.

(2) Caleb had been a **spy** (Num 13–14).

Along with Joshua and ten others, Caleb journeyed from Kadesh-Barnea to spy out the land. This occurred forty years before the conquest began.

Joshua 14:7–9

⁷ I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, ⁸ but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly. ⁹ So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.

(3) Caleb had suffered as a wilderness wanderer (i.e., **sufferer**).

As a result of the people heeding the faithless, fearful report of the majority (ten spies) and ignoring the faithful pleas of Caleb (Num 13:30–32) and Joshua (Num 14:6–9), the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight-plus years (round number equals forty years).

(4) Caleb had been (still was!) a strong **soldier**.

Joshua 14:10–12

¹⁰ "Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! ¹¹ I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.

¹² Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

Joshua agreed, blessed Caleb, and gave him Hebron as his inheritance (14:13).

c. Allotment for Judah (15:1–63)

For the tribes in the actual land of Canaan, the first to receive their inheritance was Judah, the ruling tribe and likely the largest tribe (Num 33:54).

Genesis 49:10 (Jacob's prophetic blessing)

*¹⁰ The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he to whom it belongs shall come
and the obedience of the nations shall be his.*

This was the Messianic tribe from whom He (i.e., the Messiah) would come, specifically through the lineage of later King David (cf. Matt 1:1).

(1) Description of boundaries (1–12)

(2) Digression about Caleb's allotment (13–19)

Earlier in Joshua 14:6–15 is the narration of Caleb's special request of land and Joshua's fulfillment by ceding Hebron (Kiriath-Arba) to Caleb and his family. The Biblical writer inserts details about Caleb's attack and capture of the city.

Joshua 15:14–17

¹⁴ From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites—Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai, the sons of Anak. ¹⁵ From there he marched against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher). ¹⁶ And Caleb said, "I will give my daughter Aksah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher." ¹⁷ Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Aksah to him in marriage.

(3) Description of specific Judahite (i.e., belonging to Judah) cities (20–62)

- Cities in the Negev (21–32)
- Cities in the western foothills (33–47)
- Cities in the hill country (48–60)
- Cities in the desert (61–62)

(4) Discussion (summary?) of failure to drive out the inhabitants (63)

Joshua 15:63

⁶³ *Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah.*

This discouraging note may have a chilling, foreboding tone. The great failure after the conquest of the land was the Israelites' inability to drive out the inhabitants. The verse may foreshadow the troubles of the Book of Judges (Movement 5: Apostasy).

d. Allotment for Ephraim and Manasseh (16:1–17:18)

Joshua 16:4

⁴ *So Manasseh and Ephraim, the descendants of Joseph, received their inheritance.*

Joseph was the favored son of Jacob (Israel) and received the customary double-portion of blessing. His two sons took his tribal place in the distribution of the land.

(1) Territory of Ephraim (16:5–10)

As indicated on the previous map, Ephraim's allotment was in the central section of the land of Canaan. Like Judah, Ephraim also did not completely dislodge the inhabitants.

Joshua 16:10

¹⁰ *They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labor.*

(2) Territory of Manasseh (17:1–18)

One half of Manasseh's allotment was on the east side of the Jordan River (1). The allotment on the west side was described for the other half of Manasseh (2–11). They, too, were unable to dispel all the Canaanites from their land (12–13).

"The people of Joseph" (Ephraim and Manasseh) complained to Joshua that their territory was far too small for their large numbers. Joshua diplomatically responded (and perhaps brought realistic perspective to their unfounded complaint).

Joshua 17:15, 17-18a

¹⁵ *"If you are so numerous," Joshua answered, "and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites. . .*

¹⁷ *But Joshua said to the tribes of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh—"You are numerous and very powerful. You will have not only one allotment but the forested hill country as well."*

e. Allotment for the Remaining Tribes (18:1–19:48)

(1) Allotments uncompleted (18:1–10)

Joshua 18:1–2

¹ *The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. The country was brought under their control, ² but there were still seven Israelite tribes who had not yet received their inheritance.*

Insight: "Shiloh"

Located about twelve miles southeast of Shechem, Shiloh became the home of the Tabernacle and thereby the religious center for the nation newly established in the Promised Land. The Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Tabernacle and remained in Shiloh. During the lifetime of Eli (cf. 1 Sam 4), the ark was taken away from Shiloh, captured by the Philistines, and never returned to Shiloh. Psalm 78:60 notes, "He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among humans."

(2) Allotment for Benjamin (18:11–27)

(3) Allotment for Simeon (19:1–9)

Joshua 19:9

⁹ *The inheritance of the Simeonites was taken from the share of Judah, because Judah's portion was more than they needed. So the Simeonites received their inheritance within the territory of Judah.*

(4) Allotment for Zebulun (19:10–16)

(5) Allotment for Issachar (19:17–23)

(6) Allotment for Asher (19:24–31)

(7) Allotment for Naphtali (19:32–39)

(8) Allotment for Dan (19:40–48)

f. Special Allotment for Joshua (19:49–50)

Joshua 19:49–50

⁴⁹ *When they had finished dividing the land into its allotted portions, the Israelites gave Joshua son of Nun an inheritance among them,*
⁵⁰ *as the LORD had commanded. They gave him the town he asked for—Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim. And he built up the town and settled there.*

g. Summary: Allotments (19:51)

Joshua 19:51

⁵¹ *These are the territories that Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel assigned by lot at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And so they finished dividing the land.*

(1) This final distribution of land was completed at Shiloh, the new centralized location of the Tabernacle.

(2) Abrahamic Covenant promises included land, descendants, and blessing. The land had been conquered, though all the inhabitants of Canaan must yet be driven out. The Promise-Giver had become the Promise-Keeper. But the job of inhabiting the land was not yet complete.

B. Cities of Refuge (Chapter 20)

Joshua 20 (cities of refuge or asylum) and Joshua 21 (Levitical cities) describe special bequests within the tribal allotments.

1. Commanded through Moses

Joshua 20:1–2

¹*Then the LORD said to Joshua: ²“Tell the Israelites to designate the **cities of refuge**, as I instructed you through Moses,*

The Lord had commanded Moses to give to the Levites for their administrative control six “cities of refuge” (Num 35:6; cf. Deut 19:1–14) as well as forty-two other towns (Levitical cities; Num 35:1–5, 7–8).

The six cities were divided evenly, three east of the Jordan River and three west. The spacing out of these cities put a city near anyone living in the land. Note the map that follows.



*G.H. Livingston in ZPEB, 1:870.

2. Enacted through Joshua

a. Purpose of the cities

Joshua 20:3

³ so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood.

b. Procedure

Joshua 20:4–6

⁴When they flee to one of these cities, they are to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state their case before the elders of that city. Then the elders are to admit the fugitive into their city and provide a place to live among them. ⁵If the avenger of blood comes in pursuit, the elders must not surrender the fugitive, because the fugitive killed their neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought. ⁶They are to stay in that city until they have stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then they may go back to their own home in the town from which they fled.”

- (1) Blood revenge was a common custom in ancient times (e.g., Cain was concerned about revenge after killing his brother—Gen 4:13–14). Even by the time of the monarchy the practice was still observed (note Asahel’s pursuit of Abner for revenge—2 Sam 2:18–23). Provision had to be made to distinguish murder (Ex 20:13) and accidental killing (manslaughter).
- (2) The leaders of the city of refuge would have the responsibility to determine actual guilt. The city officials would ensure a fair trial and protection as the matter was investigated.

3. Cities set apart (Josh 20:7–9)

Again, note the previous map with the “cities of refuge” located.

C. Levitical Cities (Chapter 21)

1. Commanded through Moses

Joshua 21:1–3

¹Now the family heads of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the other tribal families of Israel ²at Shiloh in Canaan and said to them, “The LORD commanded through Moses that you give us towns to live in, with pasturelands for our livestock.” ³So, as the LORD had commanded, the Israelites gave the Levites the following towns and pasturelands out of their own inheritance...

As with the “cities of refuge” the Lord had commanded through Moses the establishment of forty-two additional cities for the habitation of the Levites (Num 35:1–3, 6–7).

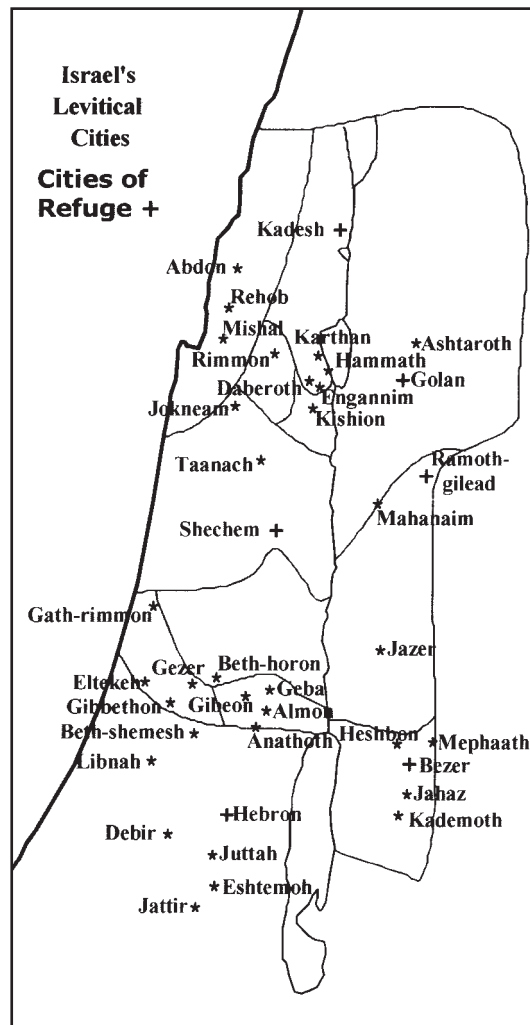
Levites were not owners of the cities. Earlier during the distribution among the tribes, it was noted,

"The Levites received no share of the land but only towns to live in, with pasturelands for their flocks and herds" (Josh 14:4).

Levitical cities (in fact, villages or towns) were not evenly distributed geographically though they are present within every tribal allotment.

2. Enacted through Joshua (21:4–42)

See the map that follows. Note where both Levitical cities and cities of refuge are located.



*Constable, Notes on Joshua, 72.

D. Summary: “Possessing the Land”

Joshua 21:43–45

⁴³ So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. ⁴⁴ The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hands. ⁴⁵ Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.

1. Note that “the Lord gave Israel all the land” (divine enablement) and Israel “took possession” (i.e., conquered it—human effort).
2. “Rest” speaks of entering into blessing (peace) and appropriating that which has been promised.
3. God has been faithful to His word. The question that remains is whether Israel will be faithful to God.

IV. LESSONS TO LEARN

A. Promise Fulfillment: The first half of the Book of Joshua centers on “Entering” and “Conquering” the land. The latter half highlights the “Possessing” of the land. What God had promised to Abraham and his descendants was being fulfilled.

Hebrews 10:23

²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

B. Responsibility: The Israelites have seen organized Canaanite resistance defeated. But the job must be finished; the inhabitants must be driven out. In NT theology we are gloriously saved by our faith (trust) in the benefits of Christ’s death on the Cross, but we are expected to continue to grow/develop in our faith (new standing in Christ).

Philippians 3:12–14 NLT

¹² I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. ¹³ No,

dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

- C. **Courage:** Caleb's life and in particular, Caleb's bold request (Josh 14:10–12) to be allowed the privilege to capture strong, fortified cities, challenges us to bold faith and courageous action.

1 Corinthians 16:13 NLT

¹³ *Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.*

- D. **Faithfulness:** The generation of Israelites who heeded the faithless spies' majority report back at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 13–14) did not live to see the capture of the Promised Land. But Caleb and Joshua did! Their faith-obedience in their younger years paid rich dividends in their latter. This heritage of faith was intended to be learned in early years and carried on to the end of life. Note Moses' very clear and very strong words.

Deuteronomy 6:1–3

¹ *These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.*

Proverbs 22:6

⁶ *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

1 Timothy 4:7–8

⁷ *Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*