

CAUTION FLAGS FOR ISRAEL

Summary and Historical Background

The possession of Canaan is considered in four parts. The first part (chapter 12) summarizes the conquest of Canaan. It tells of kings that were killed and the lands that were occupied on both sides of the Jordan River. The second part (chapters 13 through 21) records the division of the land. After approximately seven years of fighting for the control of Canaan, the major Canaanite cities were destroyed and Israel was the new ruling power. However, not all of the Canaanites were destroyed, just their main centers of power. Much work yet remained for the individual tribes of Israel to destroy all the wicked people in the land before they could take full possession of their inheritance. The boundaries of each tribe's inheritance were delineated. These boundaries did not describe actual territories then possessed, but areas which were to be claimed and conquered by faith. Failure to do this is alluded to in 15:63, 16:10, and 17:11, 12. This failure caused Israel much grief later in its history.

The third part (chapter 22) relates the departure of the 2 1/2 tribes to their own inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. Their faithfulness was praised by Joshua, but their unauthorized construction of another altar almost caused a civil war. However, the potential conflict was averted when the purpose of the altar was explained by them to be a witness to their unity with the 9 1/2 tribes on the west side of Jordan.

The fourth part (chapters 23, 24) is a record of Joshua's concluding words. First, he addressed Israel's leaders and urged them to remain faithful to God's law. Then he summoned the nation together to renew the Mosaic covenant with them. Joshua told them to put away their idols and be true to God.

I. Consignment of Canaan to Israel — 13:1-21:45

A. The Land to Be Conquered — 13:1-6

13:1-6 — The land which still resisted Israel fell into three main divisions: (1) the Philistine plain; (2) the Phoenician coast (includes present-day Lebanon) and Syria; (3) the kingdom of Geshur (on the east bank of the Lake of Galilee). These verses set the tone of the coming chapters. The boundaries were not what Israel actually possessed; these boundaries were their potential limits. Though the main centers of resistance had fallen, much faith in God and effort by their troops needed to be expended before the land would be completely Israel's.

B. The Inheritance of the Trans-Jordan Tribes — 13:7-33

13:7-13 — The various portions of the Trans-Jordan had been allotted to the other tribes by Moses (Num 32, Deut 3:12-17). This conquest was not complete; the Geshurites and Maachathites remained unconquered when the book of Joshua was written. These were not conquered until David's time and may not have been conquered by him (Absalom was the son of a Geshurite princess and David; Absalom fled to Geshur when he killed Amnon, 1 Sam 13:37).

13:14 — The tribe of Levi received no land with boundaries. They were given cities scattered throughout Israel (Josh 21). The offerings given to the LORD (which included the tithes and first fruits) were theirs instead of a portion of land (see Num 18:1-24). Joshua 18:7 refers to their inheritance as the "priesthood of the LORD," the entire ministry associated with the tabernacle. Joshua 13:33 describes Levi's inheritance as the LORD God of Israel.

C. The Inheritance of Judah — 14:1-15:63

14:6-15 — Caleb came humbly before Joshua to claim Hebron in Judah as his inheritance. There was no rivalry between the two, but a deep camaraderie based on a common service to the LORD. He reminded Joshua of his faithfulness in the day of their testing; the other ten spies had discouraged the people, but he had wholly followed the LORD. His loyalty was personal and complete.

Moses had promised Caleb an inheritance in Canaan because of his faithfulness. Now, after thirty-eight years of wandering (Deut 2:14) plus seven years of warfare, Caleb was ready to claim his portion of the land. He was physically and spiritually fit to take Hebron, even though it was the home of giants.

Caleb was the son of Jephunneh (a non-Israelite). He married a daughter of Hur of a clan in the tribe of Judah. By this means Caleb's father became an Israelite.

15:1-12 — Judah was given the southernmost land for its inheritance. A large part of it was arid. Later Simeon was given some southern cities in Judah.

15:16-19 — Caleb's daughter came to ask a special favor of him. Since she was in an arid land, she requested springs of water or water cisterns and received them.

15:63 — Though Judah captured and burned the suburbs of Jerusalem, the citadel itself remained unconquered until David's time.

D. The Inheritance of Joseph's Children — 16:1-17:18

16:10 — The city of Gezer was well fortified and never conquered until the king of Egypt conquered it for Solomon (1 Kings 9:16). That was 400 years later.

17:1-13 — Three major Canaanite cities (Beth-Shean, Megiddo, or Taanach) were allotted to Manasseh, but much of the territory pertaining to these cities was given to weaker tribes in the north. None of these cities or their lands were conquered until much later.

17:14-18 — The tribes of Joseph got greedy and demanded more land (though their territory was about the same size and better watered than Judah's). Joshua firmly refused them, suggesting two means of getting more land within their own territory. They could clear the mountains of the forest, or they could attack and defeat the Canaanites who lived in the lowlands.

E. The Inheritance of the Remaining Tribes — 18:1-19:51

18:1 — The city of Shiloh was founded at this time for the purpose of being the religious and political center of Israel. The Tabernacle remained there for 300 years.

18:2-10 — Joshua rebuked the seven remaining tribes which had not claimed their inheritance and sent out a party of twenty-one men to survey the land and determine seven portions.

18:11-28 — Divine wisdom is seen in the placement of Benjamin between Ephraim and Judah, which were potential rivals. Benjamin had ties by nature to Ephraim (Joseph and Benjamin were born of Rachel) and by appreciation it had ties to Judah (Judah had offered to take Benjamin's imprisonment in Egypt (Gen 43:8-9; 44:18-34)).

19:1-39 — The portion of land given to Simeon was located in the southern part of Judah. Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali were given land in northern Israel.

19:40-48 — Dan received a sea coast portion north of Judah. However, they were unable to drive out the Canaanites, so they went north to the area south of Mt. Hermon (around the time of Othniel's judgeship). They conquered Leshem and renamed it Dan.

19:49-51 — Joshua took his inheritance last of all. He claimed the city of Timneth-serah in Mt. Ephraim.

F. The Inheritance of the Levites — 20:1-21:45

20:1-6 — The six cities of refuge belonged to Levi and they provided places where a person that accidentally killed someone could flee and find refuge to save his life from the avenger. If

he was judged innocent, he would stay in the city until the death of the high priest. Then he could return to his own land without being killed by the avenger.

20:7-9 — There were three cities of refuge on the west side of the Jordan River; and three on the east side.

21:1-42 — In addition to the six cities of refuge, there were 42 other cities given to the Levites, scattered throughout Israel. This fulfilled Jacob's prophecy (Gen 49:5, 7).

21:43-45 — These verses sum up the book of Joshua. Three blessings resulted from Israel's obedience: possession of the land, peace in the land, and prosperity in the land. It was the LORD's purpose for Israel to subdue the Canaanites gradually (Ex 23:29, 30; Deut 7:22-24). The great cities had been conquered or weakened, but many Canaanites still lived in various towns throughout Palestine. However, Israel's failure to root out these Canaanites in due time was the cause of the apostasy in the time of the Judges.

II. Construction of the Altar of Witness — 22:1-34

The covetousness of the 2 1/2 tribes (Reuben, Gad and 1/2 Manasseh) to get their portion of land before the land of Canaan was conquered caused them problems. The LORD had enabled Israel to defeat Sihon and Og, kings of the land east of the Jordan River, so they could get into Canaan, but it is doubtful that this land was promised to them. In Ezekiel 47:13-21, the dimensions of the land are given that Israel will finally possess in Christ's Millennial Kingdom. In verse 18 the Jordan River is part of the eastern boundary of Israel. However, Moses gave them permission to have this land on the condition that their soldiers would help the other tribes conquer Canaan. They agreed to send their soldiers.

22:1-4 — When the warriors of the 2 1/2 tribes were about to return to their lands on the east side of Jordan, Joshua commended them for their faithfulness. They had kept their promise (Num 32:16-19) and had obeyed their commander. They could now return home in honor.

22:5-9 — Joshua gave them five basic commands for a successful walk with the LORD, blessed them, and gave them much riches from the spoils of battle.

22:10 — The warriors of the 2 1/2 tribes left for their homes, but when they came to the Jordan, they built an altar, probably identical to the altar in Shiloh, to state their right to worship the Lord in Shiloh with the other tribes in the future.

22:11-14 — The response of the rest of Israel was immediate and violent. They assumed that the Trans-Jordan tribes were setting up this altar for sacrifice, as an act of rebellion against the altar in Shiloh, and they began to make ready for war.

22:15-20 — Before waging war, they asked the reason for the altar. The 9 1/2 tribes saw in the altar three things: (1) a trespass, a deliberate sin violating the covenant (22:16); (2) an iniquity like that of Peor, which was idolatry (22:17; cf. Num 25); and (3) rebellion (22:18-19). The 9 1/2 tribes reminded the Trans-Jordan tribes of the high cost of sin.

22:21-29 — "The LORD God of gods" might be translated as "the Mighty One, God, the LORD." The Trans-Jordan tribes stated their reason for erecting the altar. It was not to offer offerings on it, but to remind the rest of Israel that the Trans-Jordan tribes were united to their brethren, even though separated by the Jordan River. The altar was simply to be a witness to the union of the tribes on both sides of the Jordan. This altar would not have been necessary if they had waited to receive their inheritance on the west side of the Jordan. The problem with monuments, however, is their inability to produce unity; only a

common service to the LORD can do this. The Trans-Jordan tribes later forgot their unity with their western brethren when Deborah and Barak fought the Canaanites (Judg 5:15-17).

22:30-32 — The 9 1/2 tribes accepted the explanation and peace was maintained. However, this chapter foreshadows the divided condition of Israel that would exist under the Judges.

III. Conclusion of the Ministry of Joshua — 23:1-24:33

A. The Address to the Leaders — 23:1-16

23:1-2 — Near the end of Joshua's life, he gathered the leaders of Israel together and urged them to be loyal to the covenant.

23:3-5 — He reminded them of the LORD's past blessings, Who gave them victory over their enemies and an inheritance of land.

23:6-11 — He urged (there are no Hebrew imperative forms in these verses) them to do three things to be godly: (1) they were to obey the law attentively, courageously, and thoroughly, rejecting all foreign gods; (2) they were to cleave to the LORD moment-by-moment (the Hebrew tense shows repeated action); and (3) they were to beware of the sinful desire of their own flesh (Prov 4:23-24), giving attention to love to the LORD.

23:12-16 — He warned them of the consequences of sin. The LORD would no longer drive out the nations, but they would remain and cause Israel great misery and ultimate destruction. As certainly as the LORD had performed the blessings of the covenant, so certainly He would execute the curses of the covenant.

B. The Renewal of the Covenant — 24:1-28

24:1 — Joshua summoned all Israel to Shechem, the same place where the covenant renewal ceremony was held earlier (8:30-35). A renewal of a covenant was common among nations of that day. From time to time the covenant had to be renewed. Similarly, the Mosaic covenant was not an eternal covenant. It had to be renewed periodically, and the Israelites were to present themselves and their gifts once a year before the LORD to pay tribute. (Deut 16:16).

24:2a — The author of the covenant is the LORD.

24:2b-13 — The LORD rehearsed His blessings to Israel. He called Abraham from the other side of the Euphrates (KJV, "the flood") to serve Him. The LORD led Israel out of Egypt. He destroyed the opposition on both sides of the Jordan. He sent the hornet (probably a symbol of God's terror) before Israel to drive out the Canaanites.

24:14-24 — Joshua reminded Israel of the LORD's demands: (1) reverence; (2) service (given by the most humble kind of servant); (3) sincerity; (4) fidelity; and (5) separation. He warned Israel especially of the danger of idolatry, since some of them had idols and the Canaanites that still lived in their midst had idols.

24:25-28 — The final act of the covenant renewal ceremony was the deposit of the treaty in the sanctuary for safekeeping. Joshua also wrote them on a stone, so that Israel could read and remember the promises they had made.

C. Death of Joshua — 24:29-33

24:29-33 — Three burials are recorded here: Joshua's, Eleazer's and Joseph's. Joseph's burial fulfilled the promise made to him in Gen 50:25. Israel continued to serve the LORD for the remainder of the lives of the elders who served with Joshua.