



Joshua - Chapter Eighteen

III Joshua 13:1-21:45 - Dividing the Land (continues)

III.b Joshua 14:1-19:51 - Western territories (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eighteen

The people are gathered at the tent of meeting in Shiloh and Joshua is dismayed that the remaining seven tribes have not yet taken the land. He instructs the elders to select three men from each of the remaining tribes to go out and make a record of the land so that it can be apportioned and taken.

The land allocation of the tribe of Benjamin is then described, with their allocation being between that of Judah and Ephraim, thus forming a buffer zone between the major northern and southern tribes that would later be the focal points of two kingdoms.

III.b.ix Joshua 18:1-10 - The Territories of the Remaining Tribes

This section marks the structural and thematic midpoint in the account of the division of the land. Mention of the whole congregation of Israel calls to mind the unity of Israel as a people, even as each tribe receives its individual inheritance. Representatives of the remaining seven tribes to receive their allocation are sent out to reconnoitre the land and report back so that allotment can be concluded.

¹ Then the whole congregation of the Israelites assembled at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them.

² There remained among the Israelites seven tribes whose inheritance had not yet been apportioned. ³ So Joshua said to the Israelites, 'How

long will you be slack about going in and taking possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you?

Joshua 18:1-3

That the whole congregation assembled before the tent of meeting, or tabernacle recalls Israel's history under Moses, of whom Joshua is now the successor.

Shiloh, Khirbet Seilun, making its first biblical appearance here, serves as the central sanctuary that Israel was to establish once safely settled in the land: *<<When you cross over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is allotting to you, and when he gives you rest from your enemies all around so that you live in safety, then you shall bring everything that I command you to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name: your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, and all your choice votive gifts that you vow to the Lord>>* (Deuteronomy 12:10-11), confirmed by: *<<He abandoned his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mortals>>* (Psalm 78:60), and: *<<Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel>>* (Jeremiah 7:12); Shiloh was likely destroyed following the battle of Ebenezer (refer to 1 Samuel Chapter 4, Jeremiah 7:14 and 26:6-9), and was replaced as the central sanctuary by Jerusalem in the time of King David, a fact of which the present text makes no mention. This is a good indication that the Book of Joshua was written down before that time.

How long will you be slack about going in and taking possession of the land. Why would they not want to possess their land? Why would Joshua need to prod them? It may have been because these are people had not lived in permanent dwellings for more than a generation and therefore they were afraid of something new, even if it was good and what they had looked forward to all their lives.

Notice that the statement the land lay subdued before them sums up the first half of the book, while Joshua's question, 'How long will you be slack about going in and taking possession of the land?' pervades the second half of the book.

Mention of the God of your ancestors evokes God's promise of land to the patriarchs, and reference to the land as having now been given underscores the fulfilment of the repeated promise of Chapter One that the Lord would give them this land. The Lord has fulfilled all his good promises: *<<Not one of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass>>* (Joshua 21:45); how will Israel respond?

⁴ Provide three men from each tribe, and I will send them out that they may begin to go throughout the land, writing a description of it

with a view to their inheritances. Then come back to me. ⁵ They shall divide it into seven portions, Judah continuing in its territory on the south, and the house of Joseph in their territory on the north. ⁶ You shall describe the land in seven divisions and bring the description here to me; and I will cast lots for you here before the Lord our God. ⁷ The Levites have no portion among you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their heritage; and Gad and Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan eastwards, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave them.’

Joshua 18:4-7

Provide three men from each tribe. Seven tribes had not yet received their allocation nor had the land further north been fully investigated, so a scouting party representing these tribes was to go out and record what the land was like. It would then be divided appropriately and allocated to the tribes.

The Levites have no portion among you. Adding that the priesthood of the Lord is their heritage, this verse prepares for the designation in Chapter 21 of Levitical cities throughout the territories. Refer also to the comment made on Joshua 13:14.

Gad and Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan eastwards. Once again Joshua makes mention of the two and a half tribes that had been given land by Moses in Transjordan.

⁸ So the men started on their way; and Joshua charged those who went to write the description of the land, saying, ‘Go throughout the land and write a description of it, and come back to me; and I will cast lots for you here before the Lord in Shiloh.’ ⁹ So the men went and traversed the land and set down in a book a description of it by towns in seven divisions; then they came back to Joshua in the camp at Shiloh, ¹⁰ and Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord; and there Joshua apportioned the land to the Israelites, to each a portion.

Joshua 18:8-10

Set down in a book or on a scroll, or some other type of writing material which the Hebrew term *seper* does not specify.

III.b.x Joshua 18:11-28 - The Territory of Benjamin

Reverting to the standard reporting formula for land allocation, the boundaries for the land of Benjamin are given followed by their cities. Their allocation was to the north of Judah and south of Ephraim, and would eventually have Dan to their west.

¹¹ The lot of the tribe of Benjamin according to its families came up, and the territory allotted to it fell between the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Joseph. ¹² On the north side their boundary began at the Jordan; then the boundary goes up to the slope of Jericho on the north, then up through the hill country westwards; and it ends at the wilderness of Beth-aven. ¹³ From there the boundary passes along southwards in the direction of Luz, to the slope of Luz (that is, Bethel), then the boundary goes down to Ataroth-addar, on the mountain that lies south of Lower Beth-horon. ¹⁴ Then the boundary goes in another direction, turning on the western side southwards from the mountain that lies to the south, opposite Beth-horon, and it ends at Kiriath-baal (that is, Kiriath-jearim), a town belonging to the tribe of Judah. This forms the western side. ¹⁵ The southern side begins at the outskirts of Kiriath-jearim; and the boundary goes from there to Ephron, to the spring of the Waters of Nephtoah; ¹⁶ then the boundary goes down to the border of the mountain that overlooks the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is at the northern end of the valley of Rephaim; and it then goes down the valley of Hinnom, south of the slope of the Jebusites, and downwards to En-rogel; ¹⁷ then it bends in a northerly direction going on to En-shemesh, and from there goes to Geliloth, which is opposite the ascent of Adummim; then it goes down to the Stone of Bohan, Reuben's son; ¹⁸ and passing on to the north of the slope of Beth-arabah it goes down to the Arabah; ¹⁹ then the boundary passes on to the north of the slope of Beth-hoglah; and the boundary ends at the northern bay of the Dead Sea, at the south end of the Jordan: this is the southern border. ²⁰ The Jordan forms its boundary on the eastern side. This is the inheritance of the tribe of Benjamin, according to its families, boundary by boundary all round.

²¹ Now the towns of the tribe of Benjamin according to their families were Jericho, Beth-hoglah, Emek-keziz, ²² Beth-arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, ²³ Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, ²⁴ Chephar-ammoni, Ophni, and Geba — twelve towns with their villages: ²⁵ Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, ²⁶ Mizpeh, Chephirah, Mozah, ²⁷ Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, ²⁸ Zela, Haeleph, Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), Gibeah, and Kiriath-jearim — fourteen towns with their villages. This is the inheritance of the tribe of Benjamin according to its families.

Joshua 18:11-28



Tribal Land Allocations

Although one of the smaller tribes, **Benjamin** was significant not only as the tribe of Israel's first king, Saul (1 Samuel 9:21), but also because it served as a buffer between the dominant tribes to the south and north; its allotted territory fell between the people of Judah and the people of Joseph, i.e. Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh.

It would later become significant as the tribe that was almost destroyed in a civil war (Judges Chapter 20) because of the crime of the men of Gibeah (Judges 19:22-30), and from whom the apostle Paul would descend: <<*I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin*>> (Romans 11:1), and: <<*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee*>> (Philippians 3:4b-5).

Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). As with the tribe of Judah, Benjamin bordered the Jebusite city of Jerusalem that would later become the focal point for worship when David had the tabernacle brought to the city and Solomon replaced it with the temple.

After the time of Solomon the tribes would split into two with Benjamin and Judah forming the southern kingdom.