

JOSHUA

Lesson 19 - Chapters 15, 16, and 17

Today we're going to cover three full chapters of Joshua: chapters 15, 16, and 17 because they cover the giving of land on the west side of the Jordan to the most important of the 12 tribes: Judah and then Ephraim (but also Manessah). In a more technical sense the two tribes of most importance were Judah and Joseph; but Ephraim and Manessah for some divine reason would take the place of the tribe of Joseph for a time.

The land on the west side of the Jordan WAS the Promised Land and nowhere else. The land on the east side of the Jordan was NOT the Promised Land but nonetheless it was allotted to the Israelite tribes of Reuben, Gad, and about ½ of the tribe of Manessah because they asked for it and Moses granted their requests.

Why do I say that Judah and Ephraim are the most important of the tribes? Because the deathbed blessing upon his sons (known to us commonly as the tribes of Israel) by Jacob SPLIT the traditional firstborn blessing into two parts, one part going to Ephraim and the other to Judah. We'll not fully review the last few chapters of Genesis where this series of blessings occur, but let me sum up what happened because it has as much to do with the redemption (or salvation) process that God developed for mankind, as does the advent of the Messiah, Yeshua.

The way that continuity of leadership, control, and wealth was passed down within the ancient families, clans, and tribes of Israel was by means of a ceremony and formal legal act called the firstborn blessing. This concept was not at all unique for the Hebrews; it was fairly standard within all tribal societies and to a large degree remains so to this day. The concept of the firstborn blessing was powerful and generally not alterable once it was made; it was also accepted as fully enforceable as any of the best contracts that the most expensive of today's attorneys could possible fashion.

The firstborn blessing that was used among the Hebrews and defined in the Bible by divine ordinance consisted of two basic parts: 1) the double-portion blessing and 2) the transference of ruling authority. The double-portion blessing therefore involved wealth and material blessing while the transference of ruling authority dealt with inheritance of tribal leadership. The two basic parts of the firstborn blessing were invariably linked together and the same person received both.

Now the term, "the firstborn", by definition means firstborn *male* offspring. There is no such thing in the Bible as a female firstborn. But something strange and important happened early in

Hebrew history when Jacob SPLIT the firstborn blessing he was bestowing on his sons into its two basic parts and assigned one part to Judah and the other part to Ephraim. Jacob transferred the leadership of the tribe of Israel to Judah and the double-portion blessing of wealth and material blessing to Ephraim. That doesn't sound so difficult to comprehend, does it? But wait; it gets a little more complicated than that.

In fact even though the name Ephraim is used to describe the person who received Jacob's tribal wealth, in reality it was Joseph who was the inheritor. Joseph was Ephraim's father.

Some days or weeks before Jacob called all of his sons together to pronounce the firstborn blessing before he passed, he called Joseph to come to his bedside and to bring with him his two Egyptian-born sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Manasseh was Joseph's firstborn and so when Joseph's father Jacob called his 2 grandsons to come forward so that he could bless them (this was a different kind of blessing), Joseph was shocked when his father crossed his arms and put his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left onto Manasseh's head. The right hand is always the greater hand; it is symbolic of the hand that bestows greatest blessing and authority. Thus when we read that Yeshua sits at the Father's right hand in Heaven, it is because the one who sits to the right of the king or master is the most favored.

Joseph even tried to correct his father, probably because he thought the old, infirm, and nearly blind Jacob was merely making an unintentional error by placing the hand of greatest blessing on the younger of the 2 children. But Jacob abruptly told Joseph that he knew full well what he was doing. In this blessing of his grandchildren Jacob not only bestowed greater status upon Ephraim the younger of his grandchildren, he also adopted both of his grandchildren away from Joseph. He changed the status of his grandchildren to sons. And in doing so he displaced Joseph as a tribal progenitor and name, and replaced him with Joseph's two sons (who were now, legally, Joseph's brothers) Ephraim and Manasseh.

Now while to us this may almost sound like some kind of weird archaic punishment upon Joseph, in fact it was all meant as blessing for him because in an instant Joseph became not one but TWO tribes (the newly formed tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh); Joseph doubled. Not only that but the Scriptures explained that these two new tribes would go forward "in the name" of Joseph. Effectively Ephraim and Manasseh would be as placeholders in history for Joseph's tribe until some undefined time far into the future when Joseph's tribal name would rise up again and take preeminence.

But there was yet another effect in these ceremonies: Joseph (by means of Ephraim) was receiving the double-portion part of the firstborn blessing (this would happen a few days or months later when Jacob formally pronounced the firstborn blessing with all of his sons present). By Joseph becoming two tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh), THIS was the double-portion. When Joseph's two tribes entered the Promised Land they would each get territory, they would each establish wealth, and this would all be eventually ascribed to Joseph. So the double-portion became double in the most literal possible way.

Since Ephraim was also pronounced as the firstborn by Jacob (leaving poor Manasseh, the oldest child of Joseph, to lose his traditional place of honor as the actual firstborn), then it was

Ephraim's name who became the greater of the two brothers and so when the Bible speaks in shorthand (as it often does, expecting the reader to know what it is abbreviating) it will say that Ephraim carries the rod of authority for the tribe of Joseph, and says little about Manessah.

So what we must keep in the back of our minds when studying especially the Old Testament, but also many sections of the New, is that Ephraim is operating under the authority of the tribe of Joseph and that while Manasseh has become lesser in status than Ephraim the Lord has not forgotten about Manessah. This especially comes back around in the tribal listings of Revelation that pertain to the end times and thereafter.

Thus we have come full circle; Judah was given the leadership of Israel, while Ephraim (in the name of his father Joseph) was given the double-portion. This makes them the two most important tribes of Israel, and so they are the first to receive the blessing of land inheritance inside the Promised Land; and this is the subject of Joshua chapters 15 –17.

But now let me show one more interesting thing. On the east side of the Jordan River Manessah was one of 3 tribes who took land possession there. What we're about to see in these next few chapters of Joshua is that Manessah would ALSO get another portion of land INSIDE the Promised Land. Manessah would wind up with TWO portions of land. This fulfilled God's promise to Jacob (who had apparently followed God's divine instruction to him to elevate Ephraim to firstborn status above the elder Manessah) of still giving mighty blessings at a later date to Manessah to make up for this undeserved removal of his rightful firstborn status.

CJB Genesis 48:18 Yosef said to his father, "Don't do it that way, my father; for this one is the firstborn. Put your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused and said, "I know that, my son, I know it. He too will become a people, and he too will be great; nevertheless his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will grow into many nations."

In a way only God could manufacture Manessah ALSO received a double-portion; he received one portion of land inheritance on the east side of the Jordan and a second on the west side of the Jordan. And when we look back we can now better understand at least one purpose for God permitting 2 ½ of Israel's tribes to settle on land OUTSIDE the Promised Land. Nothing in this world happens accidentally.

As we get ready to read Joshua 15 –17 let's review what we have learned from Joshua 14. The compiler of the book of Joshua gives us two important themes regarding the distribution of the Land of Canaan. First he has shown us that the promises and prophecies of the Torah to the Patriarchs followed precisely the pattern that the Lord said it would. The right person distributed the land and the right persons received the land. The excluded persons were sent to their own land, and priests and their Levite tribe were given no land inheritance or land responsibilities. Even the issue of the expanding and contracting number of Israelite tribes is re-explained and it is made clear that this is so God can bring about His plan for Israel.

We're also reminded that the land inheritance each tribe would receive was for the good of the

people, it was the result of a promise of Yehoveh and not because some earthly king had arbitrarily given away land tracts to aristocrats or political partners for his own ultimate benefit.

The second theme of the compiler is to demonstrate just why it was that Judah had received that first Promised Land inheritance (even though the first allotment was not actually Judah but only the clan of Caleb, one of the many clans that formed Judah). This too fulfilled a promise. But it also demonstrated something that many modern Jews prefer to forget: the Lord gave a section of the Promised Land to a person of foreign origin. Caleb was in the line of Kenaz, a line emitting from Edom (Esau). Caleb had been brought into the tribe of Judah for sure, and we know this from the book of Numbers as we hear the story of the 12 spies who go out to scout out the Land of Canaan for Moses.

But we see that the issue of receiving an inheritance from the God of Israel was much less about family and genealogy than it was about obedience to Yehoveh. Kalev (Caleb) was the perfect example of those who had received the land from God, but he would also be a reminder to future generations of Israelites who would lose the land because they followed the ways of Solomon. King Solomon did NOT follow the Torah, he instead had great lusts for personal wealth and power and so led the life of an internationalist; he went to foreign lands, brought home foreign wives, and permitted foreign ways and gods to be brought into Israel. This behavior lit the pathway to Israel's future destruction due to their rebellion against God.

It would be best if we read chapters 15, 16, and 17 in one sitting but I don't think you would enjoy it as it contains long lists of cities and boundaries, most of which aren't even identifiable in our day. So let's read chapter 15, we'll talk about it for a few minutes, and then we'll read 16 and 17 together.

READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 15 all

Chapter 15 is about the distribution of land to Judah. Caleb (of the tribe of Judah) had already received some land and now the whole of the land that Judah would receive is explained. It is not important for us to examine every city and boundary; for one reason we'd never remember it. A map is the better way to demonstrate what was officially given to Judah for its inheritance.

Judah was to be a rather large territory because it was a rather large tribe; and the purpose of the 2nd round of lots as supervised by Eleazar the High Priest and Joshua was to match the already decided relative location of each tribe (decided by the lots that Moses officiated over some years earlier) with the population size of each tribe.

Roughly speaking the territory of Judah extended from the north of the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, and on the south along the shore of the Dead Sea, continuing towards Kadesh-Barnea, and then west to the Wadi el Arish (also called the Wadi of Egypt).

Because the 9 ½ tribes' territories were contiguous (that is, where one ended the next one began) and bumped up against one another, we'll find some of the boundary lines repeated in later chapters as pertaining to other tribal territories. For instance, the northern boundary for

Judah was also the southern boundary for Benjamin because the two lay next to one another.

Verse 12 is rather interesting when we understand what it infers. It says that the Great Sea is Judah's westernmost boundary. The thing is we know from earlier chapters that Joshua took none of the coastal areas of Canaan and that the land given to Judah then essentially includes parts of Philistia and their ally to the south, the Gerushites. Here's the thing to understand: the giving of the land was not only a gift of territory; it was the assigning of a responsibility to FINISH conquering that territory. Much of Judah was already conquered, but other parts (like the coast) were still in enemy hands and it fell to the members of Judah's tribe to make war until the job was done.

Later in Joshua we'll find that as it began to sink in to the minds of the other tribes just what it was they were signing up for when they accepted their tribal land inheritance, they refused to take it. They said, "no thank you", to Joshua and to God and Joshua had to rally some muscle and support to get the tribes to agree to go ahead with their land inheritances. This, of course, harkens back to the same exact attitude that was displayed by 10 of the 12 scouts that were sent out by Moses (from Kadesh) to reconnoiter the Promised Land and they came back with a resounding, "thanks but no thanks". Only Kalev (tribe of Judah), and Joshua (tribe of Ephraim) said that Israel should believe God and take the land. Thus Israel was sent away by God to wander in the wilderness until that generation had died off. And notice that because history is circular and thus repeats itself, Kalev (tribe of Judah) and Joshua (tribe of Ephraim) immediately took their land inheritances when offered, while the others balked.

So in verse 13 we get back to the history of Caleb and his land inheritance and we're told that the area he was given was not fully conquered; but Caleb actually ASKED for this unconquered area (a sign of great courage and merit and trust in God). Further the Lord told Joshua that he was to give to Caleb so it was a done deal. That area was Hebron and it was under the control of the Anakites a race of giant fierce warriors. We are told that in time (after Joshua's death, actually) Caleb's clan would drive out the 3 ruling clans of the Anakites: Sheshai, Achiman, and Talmai.

But apparently Kalev's clan had considerably more trouble conquering the area of Debir, so much so that he decided the best course of action was to seek a volunteer leader to try and take Debir, to whom he'd award his daughter called Achsah as a wife if successful. Please notice that the CJB renders this daughter's name in verse 16 as Adar and then in 17 as Achsah. I don't know why, and the Hebrew is the same for both passages (perhaps it's a simple error or there's something more to this that I have never found).

Let me make pause for a second and point out that we're reading a lot of double names for places: Debir and Kiryat Sefer for instance. The reasoning behind this is fairly simple: one name is the name it was called by the Canaanites and the other the name the Hebrews gave it. Even today the Arabs call Jerusalem Al Quds while the Hebrews called it Yerushalayim. Both are accepted. The Middle East is ancient; places have changed hands many times, languages have shifted and changed, and differing cultures live side-by-side each within the framework of their own unique historical culture and traditions. A significant number of these ancient place names still go by double names today.

Back to Kalev offering his daughter to the man who could take the city of Debir. A fellow named Othniel managed to do it and so received Kalev's daughter. What is kind of interesting is that Othniel was actually Caleb's younger brother. So what we have here is that Othniel was Achsah's uncle; we have a niece being given to her uncle as a bride.

This was legal and it was done often in the Bible era. It also served to keep power within a given clan. Remember, while we tend to think mainly of the 12 tribes of Israel when dealing with the Bible, it was the individual clans within each tribe where the power lay. This reality is played out a bit for us in the following verse when right after the marriage Achsah approaches her father Kalev and asks him for a field (this at the urging of her new husband).

Apparently Kalev had given Achsah some land in her bride's dowry and this land was in the Negev. It was not very good land (probably arid), and now Achsah came back to her father and asked him to give her some land with water on it.

This chapter finishes up by dividing the land of Judah into 4 districts that are really climate and fertility regions: the southland (the Negev), the lowlands (the Shefelah), the mountains, and the Judean desert.

The Negev is a kind of transition zone; it transitioned from the fertile regions of the Shefelah and the mountains to the desert. So the Negev could grow crops in some areas, and be marginal pasturelands in other areas, but then as it neared the desert the soil became dry and unusable.

The Shefelah transitioned from the mountains down to the Mediterranean Coast. It had excellent growing conditions with rich soil so it was prime farming grounds.

The mountains were excellent for grazing and pasturelands, and where there were plateaus they could generally support orchards and vineyards.

The Judean desert was a wasteland with practically no vegetation or water.

Now we're not going to study these long lists of cities and villages, so I just want you to understand that there is a basis for grouping these cities and villages as it has been laid down. These various villages within a group were co-operative and to some degree depended on one another. Geography also plays a role just as it always has in determining where you can have a village or town and where you can't. Before the era of canals and massive land moving machinery, here in Florida towns were built along natural waterways or on higher ground above the swampy areas. You might have a few square miles of high ground suitable for crops, livestock and the construction of stores and dwellings separated from the next suitable area by many miles of more swamps. So towns and villages are clustered on areas of suitable ground and one might have to go some distance before another ideal area is found. Transportation between these islands of civilization can be very difficult even 50 years ago, let alone 3000 years ago. But when a cluster of villages is on a large enough parcel, then commerce and the common defense is more possible and working together this group of villages is more or less self-sufficient.

That is the reason we find these groupings of villages listed in Joshua 15. These are clusters of villages separated from the other clusters of villages by geography; whether that geography is miles of parched desert, high mountains with few passes, a lake, or perhaps a river. These village clusters depended on one another and acted together as a rather complete local economy. There were usually one main city in a cluster with some larger towns, and then many small villages. Further certain clans tended to prefer certain areas. Perhaps one clan was renowned for a tradecraft, another for their expert wine making, and still others for their shepherding. It was better for everyone in a clan if they were the dominant clan in a cluster of villages, located in a district that suited their needs and skills. There was less conflict, more co-operation, marriage between families within a clan (which was greatly desired) was easier to accommodate and control, and the all-important power of the clan would have the best environment to grow with the fewest impediments and outside influences.

The final verse of chapter 15 makes it clear that whenever the compiler of Joshua lived, it was before King David. Because he says that the Jebusites who lived in Jebus still controlled it and the tribe of Judah (up to then) had no luck in driving them out.

Let's move on to chapters 16 and 17.

READ JOSHUA CHAPTERS 16 AND 17 all

Judah has its land, now it's time for the Joseph tribes to get theirs. Notice that in chapter 16 verse 1 it says that a lot was drawn **for the descendants of Joseph**. In other words only ONE lot was drawn for Ephraim and Manasseh together (not one for each), and it was done in the name of Joseph. This is why I went through the long explanation at the beginning of today's lesson. The Joseph tribe now consisted of the separate tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh with Ephraim being the dominant one.

So the boundary description we get to start this chapter is of the entire area that Ephraim and Manessah would hold, when taken together. So even though from one perspective Ephraim and Manessah held independent and autonomous tribal areas, from another viewpoint they could be looked at as a single entity; the tribe of Joseph.

This land allotment for the Joseph tribe did not have a common border with Judah; it represented the northernmost land conquered by Joshua. The land in between Judah and the two tribes who formed the Joseph tribe would eventually be given to other and smaller tribes of Israel.

The border to the east was the Jordan River and to the west was the Mediterranean. But just as it was for Judah, none of the coastline had been conquered so the duty to take it fell to Ephraim and Manessah. It's best to just see the area on a map to understand their territory than to try and describe it in words.

After the first 5 verses have defined the total territory given to the Joseph tribe, now it is divided between Ephraim and Manessah with Ephraim getting his first because of his preeminence as

having been given firstborn rights. The most pertinent information beyond the giving of the territorial boundaries is that in the area of Gezer the Ephraimites were unable to drive out the Canaanites who lived there. But we'll find out in later books that Ephraim did manage to subjugate them and basically used them as serfs. This is a theme that we'll find constantly playing out regarding the settling of the Promised Land; the tribes accept their land inheritance, they work a bit at driving out the Canaanites, but as often as not they can't (or find a reason not to) and so they settle for a compromise. For the Lord God, however, compromise is a human concept. Compromise is not a middle ground between doing what is wrong and what is right or some type of marginally acceptable area that lay between obedience and disobedience. Compromising God's principles and instructions is sin; and sin has long ranging consequences that might not be totally apparent for decades or even centuries.

Quickly the text moves on to the allotment of land for the other Joseph tribe, Manasseh. By the way: you will note that I have spelled Manasseh a couple of different ways. Since we are but attempting to sound-out a Hebrew word into English, the point is to form a series of alphabet characters that can get us close to the way the word sounds in it's original tongue. Therefore there is no one correct spelling for most Hebrew words that are being pronounced within English grammar rules.

And it is interesting that in this verse we are reminded that Manasseh WAS the firstborn of Yoseph (Joseph). And this bit of text just emphasizes the unusual nature in the order of the land allotment (Ephraim first, then Manasseh). I think that just as we struggle in our time so mightily with how to apply the Law of the Old Testament to our lives, taking into account the coming of our Savior and what that means; plus adding in the realities of how enormously different a modern Western culture is from an ancient Hebrew culture, that we should be able (to some degree) to appreciate how hard it was for the Hebrews to apply and accept some of these curveballs that God threw at them from time to time. And the Ephraim and Manasseh situation whereby the 2nd born was given 1st born rights must have chaffed at them. How were they to apply this? Did Ephraim get ALL rights of the firstborn, or did Manasseh get some? Just how literally and to what length were they to apply Jacob's cross-handed blessing to the hierarchy of tribal leadership and rights of property possession?

However I also think that while virtually every Bible scholar and commentator I've ever read looks at this statement about Manasseh as only a statement that both acknowledges and apologizes for having the natural firstborn son (Manasseh) get his land allotment only after the natural 2nd born (Ephraim) got his (which is a nearly unthinkable breach of inheritance protocols in that era), it is obvious to me that it is also meant to explain WHY it is that only Manasseh wound up with two separate and distinct territories when everyone else only got one. After all that is a question that certainly would have been asked by other tribal leaders and their clans for centuries to come. All one has to do is look at a map to see that not only did Manasseh get one territory on the east side of the Jordan River and another separate and distinct territory on the west side of the Jordan, but that both these territories were quite large in relation to what the other tribes received. I see that in God's amazing provision Manasseh STILL received a double-portion that a firstborn is normally entitled to, even though the Lord (for His own sovereign reasons) supernaturally instructed Jacob to switch the birthrights of Ephraim and Manasseh.

We'll continue on with this chapter and look at another Biblical oddity it contains, next week.