

File No. 43

JOSHUA 13:1–7; 14:6–14; 17:14–18; 20:1–9

Numbers 35:1–15, 22–29; Deuteronomy 19:2–7

POSSESSING THE LAND / CITIES OF REFUGE

(SBS Bk 2 Story Nos. 8 & 9)

Story Notes

Joshua 13 – 19

Allotting the land was to be done while Joshua was alive, to complete what Moses, the covenant head, had begun. Even though the land was not yet completely subdued, it could be allotted to each tribe because the Lord would drive out the remaining enemies.

The eastern side of Jordan had already been allotted by Moses to two and a half of the tribes.

The tribe of Levi did not need land to fulfil its vocation or as a means of livelihood: Levites were able to eat parts of the animals offered as sacrifices and received gifts from the offerings of the other tribes. So, the sacrifices were their inheritance, or, the Lord himself (13:14, 33). Here, in Levi, is a suggestion of the true nature of inheritance (Rev. 21:1–7). It is not something in itself but a participation in God and his goodness, and this was true of each citizen of Israel (Ps. 16:5–6).

The Levites were given possession of certain towns to live in together with their surrounding pastures (for example: 14:3–4).

God had prepared all Israel to receive their inheritance. With Joshua, they had been bold and very courageous. Caleb and Joshua were the only two who had been ready to take the land earlier. Now, at 85 years of age, Caleb had the same spirit and asked to be given as an inheritance the very area that had made the hearts of Israel melt before: the region where the giants of Anakim were. So, he drove out the three mighty sons of Anak.

Some of the Canaanites resisted attack and could not be defeated. These are noted in the allotting of the inheritance to Judah (15:63), Ephraim (16:9–10) and Manasseh (17:12–13). Then the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh wanted more territory for their large population, so Joshua gave them the hill country knowing that they would be able to clear the difficult land and drive out the difficult enemies!

The land was basically subdued and Israel met before God at Shiloh where the tabernacle had been erected. Seven tribes still had not conquered territory for their people so Joshua called for the land to be surveyed and allotted in readiness for their possessing it. After this was done, Joshua received a town as his personal inheritance.

Chapters 20

This book shows that everything was done according to the Lord's instruction through Moses. He was still present in this way, as covenant head, to ensure the people of God received their inheritance. The inheritance would remain even though internal violence would threaten it. Safe cities would protect accidental killers until they received a fair trial. They could return home after the death of the High Priest. The same provisions applied to strangers living in Israel even though they had no inheritance there.

Perhaps the death of the high priest suggested that even accidental death mattered to God, not because the killer was guilty but because someone did not live to enjoy their inheritance. A proverb says: 'Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife, but those who are slow to anger calm contention' (Prov. 15:18). The word used to calm is the same word 'rest', often used for rest from enemies in this book. What would be the value of peacetime if the people self-destructed.

The cities and lands allotted to Levites were devoted for their use even though they remained the inheritance of the other tribes. All the cities of refuge were appointed to Levites.

So God's promise was fulfilled and he had given Israel their land. They possessed their inheritance. They had rest from their enemies. Why, then, did David ignore this and say that Israel should pay attention to God's word so as to possess their inheritance (Ps. 95:7; Heb. 4:8)? He and the writer of Hebrews knew that inheritance was not just a matter of territory but of

being in the whole purpose of God. The promised land was Israel's inheritance, but it was a testimony to all that God would do for the world. Those who presumed on their inheritance did not truly possess it. The inheritance is given to those who acknowledge it as the work of God's hands and possess it with a view to being a blessing to the world, as did Abraham.

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