



The Division of Canaan



Lesson 4 - Joshua 13-24

What happened before?

Joshua led the people across the Jordan River. They fought many battles and, with God's help, took the land of Canaan. God had fulfilled the second promise He had made to Abraham 400 Years earlier, the promise that his people would be given a great land.

BIBLE STORY:



The Israelites had been enslaved in Egypt, had wandered in the wilderness for forty years, and had been on the battlefield in Canaan. At last, they could settle in their own land to pasture their herds and flocks, plant their vineyards, to grow their own food and to build permanent houses to dwell in.

Reuben, Gad and one half the tribe of Manasseh had already been given a portion on the East Side of the Jordan River. The second half of the tribe of Manasseh, along with the other nine tribes, would receive their portions of land on the West Side of the Jordan. Before his death, Moses selected ten men to represent the ten portions of land to be divided. Caleb was chosen to represent the tribe of Judah. Caleb and Joshua were two of the 12 spies sent into Canaan many years before. They had brought back the good report, while the other spies brought an evil report. Because he had followed God fully, God promised Caleb that he and his descendents would inherit the land he had walked on in Canaan. When Israel was gathered at Gilgal to divide the land, Caleb came forward and asked for the land God had promised him. Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him Hebron.

The others cast lots to determine which portion of the land would go to each tribe. The people accepted the result as the decree of God. The large portions of land went to the larger tribes and the smaller portions went to the smaller tribes.

Cities of Refuge

When a man committed a crime, he was to be punished in a way that was consistent with the crime—an “eye for an eye” and “tooth for a tooth”. If one murdered another, God required that they to be put to death. However, God recognized the difference between murder and accidental killings. For this reason, six cities of refuge were established, three on each side of the Jordan River. If someone was guilty of an accidental killing, he could flee to a city of refuge and be protected from angry relatives of the person who had been killed. Trials were held for each killing. Even if a person was found to be innocent, he must remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. Afterwards, he could go back to his own city and home. The cities of refuge were for strangers as well as for the Israelites.

Cities for the Levites

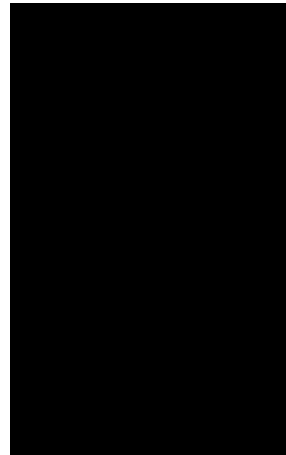
Canaan was divided among all the tribes of Israel except the tribe of Levi. Levi was the priestly tribe and was set apart for the service of God. They were given special work to do in Israel and were supported by the tithes of the rest of the people. God provided them with several cities rather than one large portion of land. The cities were scattered throughout the nation so that the priest would be available to serve the people. The cities included areas of surrounding pastures and grazing land for cattle. Other Israelites lived in these cities along with those from Levi. Thirteen cities were given specially to the priests and 35 cities to the Levites making a total of 48 Levitical cities.

The Levites had special duties given to them. When Israel traveled in the wilderness, the Levites transported the tabernacle and its furniture. When Israel occupied the Promised Land, the Levites assisted the priests in their work of taking care of the tabernacle and in the worship service. Men between the ages of 20 and 50 took part in this work.

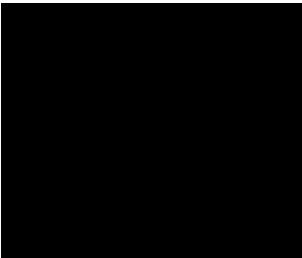
God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham’s descendants and He kept His word.

So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass. (Joshua 21:43-45)

Before the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh left with their families to go back across the Jordan to their land, Joshua commended them for doing what they had promised to do. They had gone before the other tribes in battle to help them take the land of Canaan. Before Joshua sent them back to the land given to them, he warned them to love the Lord God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments and to continue to serve Him. Joshua then blessed them and sent them away with much riches and livestock, silver, gold, iron, bronze and clothing and told them to share the spoil of their enemies with their brethren.



As the men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh were about to cross back over to the East of the Jordan River, they decided to build a great altar to the Lord. This altar was built as a reminder that the men of these three tribes were part of the people of Israel, even though they lived on the other side of the Jordan. They did not want to be regarded as a separate people.



When the other tribes heard about the altar, they thought it had been built to offer burnt offerings or some other kind of worship. All the other tribes assembled in Shiloh ready to go to war against Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. They sent a group of princes along with the high priest's son to question them. But Manasseh, Gad and Reuben explained that this altar was not for worship or for burnt offerings. Instead, it was a reminder for generations yet to come that these three tribes were part of the children of Israel. Even though the Jordan River served as a boundary line, the Israelites were still all one people! The other tribes were glad when they heard that, and all went to their homes, happy that they still were all one great people worshipping the true God. The altar was named "Ed" (the Hebrew word for witness), for it served as a witness that all the tribes served the true God and that they were one people.

As Joshua grew very old and neared the end of his life, he called for all the leaders of Israel. He reminded them to be faithful to God's law. He also reminded them that God had fulfilled His promises to them and had given them the land. With those reminders, he also gave a warning. He told them that if they served other gods, the Lord would take the land away from them!

Joshua then gathered the Israelites together at Shechem for a final address to the people. Joshua began his great speech by reviewing the history of Israel from the time of Abraham. God had been good to Israel, but now they were surrounded by nations that worshipped idols.

Joshua gave another warning not to commit idolatry! He told Israel that they must make a permanent choice to serve God and reject idols. He said, "Choose you this day whom you will serve." Joshua served as an example for the people of Israel as he publicly announced his choice. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The people promised, "We will serve the Lord, for He is our God."

Joshua wrote in the book of the law of God the things that were said that day. Joshua made a record of Israel's promise to serve God. Then he set up a stone under an oak as a reminder to Israel of their promise to serve God. Soon after this, Joshua died at the age of 110 years. Though Joshua was dead, his influence continued. Israel served God all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who lived and worked with Joshua.

