

**GRACE TEMPLE BAPTIST CHURCH OF LAWNSIDE**  
**Wednesday Night Bible Study**

**JOSHUA 13:1–19:51**

**PUTTING DOWN ROOTS AND RECEIVING GOD’S INHERITANCE**

**Summary**

The Book of Leviticus provides background for the book of Joshua. God set apart the Levites to instruct God’s people in his Word and to offer sacrifices for sin on their behalf. This is how Israel may live with God in her midst and yet not die. On the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), the Lord required Israel to approach Him through an acceptable priest (Leviticus 16:1–11), in an acceptable place (Leviticus 16:16–19), with an acceptable sacrifice (vv. 20–22). This is how Israel related to God in the land, but this system could not finally deal with the problem it addressed. Instead, the Levitical priesthood, with its tabernacle and sacrificial system, was preparation for Christ, who would sinlessly enter God’s true temple and offer the final sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 7–10).

Through Joshua the Lord divides the land among his people in such a way as to communicate His divine leadership in the process. Chapter 13 begins a new chapter in Israel’s life under Joshua’s leadership. This transition can be seen in the appearance of a new word in the story: inheritance. It appeared just once in the first half of the book (Joshua 11:23) but will occur 56 times from chapter 13 on. Though some areas of Canaan remain unconquered, the conquest is over, and Israel is ready to settle the land. These chapters record the meticulous, specific, and at times the seemingly monotonous division of the land.

At one level, the inheritance given to Israel is land, but at another, it is the Lord Himself. By distributing the land by lot outside the tent of meeting, the Lord conveyed His benevolent presence and rule among them (Joshua 19:51). The Lord’s presence is what is good about the land, and this is reinforced by the refrain concerning the Levites: “The Lord God of Israel is their inheritance” (13:33). This is the background to Paul’s statement in the New Testament that the Spirit is the “guarantee of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14). Unlike land, our inheritance as Christians is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (1 Peter 1:4), for Christ brings a new covenant of unending and uninhibited access to God (Hebrews 9:15).

Joshua 14:6 is the first time Caleb is mentioned in the book, but he’s no latecomer to Israel’s story. Caleb and Joshua have grown old together and now they bookend the land’s distribution. Caleb is mentioned first because Moses promised him a specific place and because he “wholly followed the Lord” (Joshua 14:8–9, 14). Caleb’s faithfulness is compelling: he treasured the Lord’s Word, persevered under trial, and maintained courageous and energetic obedience into old age.

Interestingly, though, Caleb's story goes back further. Caleb is a Kenizzite (14:6), one of the tribes mentioned in a string of peoples inhabiting the land when God promised it to Abraham (Genesis 15:18–21). In other words, this wholehearted follower of the Lord comes from a people originally marked for God's wrath.

In the course of dividing the land, an ominous qualification is offered: "Yet the people of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites, but Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day" (Joshua 13:13). The story of Joshua is mostly optimistic. But this growing refrain portends a haunting reality: the victory has been sweeping, but what remains could spoil it all. Israel's failure of faith is clear from their trepidation before "all the Canaanites who dwell in the plain [that] have chariots of iron" (17:16). These refrains create tension in the storyline of Joshua, which leads us to Christ, the only answer to human sin.

Joshua 16:4 reads, "The people of Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim, received their inheritance." Yet in verse 5, Ephraim receives an inheritance first, opposite his birth order. This subtle swapping of order highlights God's sovereign designs in the story of salvation. In Genesis 48, against human convention (and their father Joseph's expectation), Jacob blessed Ephraim with priority over Manasseh (Genesis 48:1–22). Likewise, a generation earlier, Jacob was chosen over Esau, and Isaac over Ishmael the generation before that; so, goes much of the story of the Bible. Judah was not the oldest or particularly virtuous, but God chose Judah so that Israel's future ruler would come from his loins (Genesis 49:8–12).

Moving toward the future, every Israelite who made their home in Canaan would eventually die there. Thankfully, however, the land functions as a foretaste of the new creation, the consummation of God's plan. Abraham understood this and "desire[d] a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16), and Paul, recognizing the global scope of the promise, spoke of Abraham's offspring as "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13). Abraham's hope is symbolically described in Revelation 21, where John describes his vision of a "new heaven and new earth," a place where the "dwelling place of God is with man," and where "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more" (Revelation 21:1, 3–4). Connecting Joshua's story with this hope, Ezekiel describes this future age with the symbolism of "land" and "inheritance" (Ezekiel 47:13–14). While Ezekiel and Revelation describe this final state with symbolism, this new creation will be no less physical than Israel's boundaries and towns across Canaan (I Corinthians 15).

**Chapters 13–19 Questions:**

1. What problem did God discuss with Joshua? (13:1–7)
2. To whom had Moses given inheritance and what kings had ruled this area? (13:8–13)?
3. What land was given to the Levites, and why? (13:14)?
4. Who was Caleb and why was a special inheritance given to him? (14:6–12)
5. Describe the borders of the territory inherited by Judah. (15:1–12)
6. What did Caleb have to do to take the city? (15:14)
7. What complaint was raised by some descendants of Joseph? (17:14–16)
8. How did Joshua respond to their complaints? (17:17,18)
9. How many tribes had received inheritance? How many remained to inherit? (18:2)
10. Of all the lots given, what inheritance was given Joshua? (19:49–51)

## **JOSHUA 20:1–21:45**

### **CITIES FOR JUSTICE, PEOPLE FOR WORSHIP**

#### **Summary**

The Bible is a story of promise and fulfillment held together by a series of unfolding covenants. The book of Joshua is one installment in that story. While the story of the Old Testament recounts dark days for Israel, the story of Joshua is largely encouraging. The people have generally obeyed, and the Lord has given them land through many powerful victories, just as He promised. This is why this section ends by referring to the “good promises that the Lord had made . . . [which] came to pass” (Joshua 21:45).

Joshua chapter 20 opens with a command from the Lord to appoint cities of refuge according to Moses’ instruction. Joshua carries out Moses’ instructions for Joshua 20–21 gives us a closer look at life in the land for Israel in two areas—criminal justice and worship—based on what Moses had said they should do when they entered the land. This section closes with a God-exalting summary of all that has happened to this point in the story.

A certain view of human beings undergirds all of Joshua 20. According to Genesis 1:27, “God created man in His own image.” Human beings are like God in important ways, representing Him in the world. An affront to any human being is an affront to God. This is why death is given as a penalty for murder (Genesis 9:6). The inestimable worth of humanity could not be clearer than on the Cross of Christ.

So, when we see the priests spread around the land, this should call to mind their specific function in the life of Israel to instruct the people in the Word and represent the people to God through the tabernacle and the sacrificial system. Every sacrifice offered for sin was a reminder of sin, its penalty, and the inadequacy of animal sacrifices to make atonement.

Joshua 21:45 is a sweeping description of how well things have gone for Israel: “Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed.” Some say Joshua is really a patchwork of material stitched together without a divine author behind it, but an understanding of literary genre can help us grasp the coherence of God’s Word: Joshua is a work of prophetic history. That is, this is history with a theological purpose. In light of the whole book, there is unfinished business, but the point of emphasis is the Lord’s faithfulness to His promises.

**Chapters 20–21 Questions:**

1. Explain the purpose of the cities of refuge. (20:1–6)
2. Who next requested to receive their possession in the land? (21:1,2)
3. The Levites consisted of what 3 families? Which one included the priests? (21:3–7)
4. How many cities did Aaron’s descendants receive? In what tribes were they? (21:4)
5. How many cities did the rest of that family receive, and where were they? (21:5)
6. How many cities did the Levites receive altogether? (21:41)
7. What promise had been fulfilled in 21:43–45?

## **JOSHUA 22:1–34**

### **AN ALTAR OF REMEMBRANCE, AN UNFORGETTABLE ALTERCATION**

#### **Summary**

It is possible for someone to say he belongs to God and be lying or self-deceived. That is what appears to be the case in Joshua 22. The western tribes' response confronts the seriousness of abandoning the Lord. Wisely, they listened to the eastern tribes before executing them. After Joshua sends Israel's eastern tribes' home with a parting speech, a surprising turn of events leads to a more cohesive nation. Joshua 22 is the beginning of the end. The conquest is over, and the land has been divided among the tribes. Chapters 22, 23, and 24 each begin with a parting speech from Joshua. He speaks to the eastern tribes, to Israel's leadership, and finally to all of Israel. Here in chapter 22, Joshua speaks to the tribes who came over the Jordan with the rest of Israel but whose inheritance had already been won east of the Jordan. The time has come for them to return home. When they do, the story takes an unexpected turn to one of the most intense moments in the book. The outcome is equally as unexpected and makes for a stronger and more unified nation.

In Joshua's words to the eastern tribes are a commendation for careful obedience (22:2–3) and a command for faithfulness to Moses' law (v. 5). We may be tempted to think of commands as rigid and unhappy things, but in verses 5–6 there is a positive, relational picture of obedience. The description of what it means to obey Moses' law is remarkable, especially Joshua's command to "cling to him" (Joshua 22:5). This corrects any notion that God's commands are dry or impersonal and gets to the heart of what God really wants from us. Such obedience is incompatible with clinging to this world, so the Lord will warn Israel about clinging to other gods in the next chapter (23:12). In Jesus Christ, we see the embodiment of what it means to cling to the Lord, and through Jesus, we are compelled to cling to Yahweh for life.

Nothing more tragic could be imagined for the eastern tribes than for their children to be separated from Israel west of the river. As God is one, so are His people. So, it is for God's new covenant people, the Church, in an even deeper way. Not all in Israel truly belonged to God, because not all believed as Abraham did (Romans 2:28–29). In the new covenant community, however, everyone knows the Lord (Jeremiah 31:34).

The eastern tribes were looking to the future when they built their own copy of the altar. This future orientation is natural to every believer in every place in God's salvation story. God requires us to come to Him on His terms. The eastern and western tribes both recognized this in the exclusivity of the tabernacle for approaching God. Just as the tabernacle was Israel's one way of relating to God, now Christ has made complete access to God possible through the one altar at Calvary. This is what the book of Hebrews tells us. Israel's tabernacle provided imperfect access to God through imperfect sacrifices and an imperfect priesthood. Jesus enters once with His own blood and secures for us an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:1–14), for Jesus is the only way to God because His Cross is the only possible way for sinners to stand before God and not die.

### **Chapter 22 Questions:**

1. Who were sent home and why? (22:1–4)
2. What charge did Joshua give them before they left? (22:5,6)
3. What did these people build on the way, and where did they build it? (22:10)
4. Describe the accusation made against them by the other tribes? What reasons did they give for their accusation? (22:11–20)
5. How did the 2-1/2 tribes respond? What conclusion was reached? (22:21–34)

## **JOSHUA 23:1–24:33**

### **JOSHUA DIES IN THE LAND, THE PROMISE OF REST LIVES ON**

#### **Summary**

The book of Joshua began by calling Moses the Lord's servant. Fifteen times Moses has been called God's servant (Joshua 1:1, 7, 13, 15; 8:31). Now, for the first time, Joshua is given the same title (24:29). With the death of every person, especially every leader, comes an important reminder for God's people. The theme of land is the stage and subject for all the action in Joshua. Its possession was an installation in God's fulfillment of his promise to Abraham (Joshua 23:14). For Israel it represented the place where everything would be right, their oppressors would be gone, and the presence of the Lord would be known. That sounds wonderful, yet Hebrews says that this and everything tied to Moses is but a "shadow" of our ultimate hope (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1). Even Abraham expected more than mere Canaan, considering his people "strangers and exiles on the earth." Instead, with him, we seek a new creation, a city "whose designer and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:8–16).

Joshua issues parting speeches to Israel's leaders and the nation, each speech rehearsing God's glorious promises and charting the way forward for the nation. Chapters 23 and 24 both begin with a parting speech from Joshua, who is now "old and well advanced in years" (23:1). The first speech is to Israel's leaders, and the second to the nation. While Joshua's speeches are optimistic in many ways, they also indicate much unfinished business and uncertainty concerning Israel's future. Joshua is excited for all that God has done yet frustrated by the superficiality of the people's allegiance. This tension between God's promises and Israel's disobedience is a theme throughout the Old Testament. It is a problem for which the coming of Christ (and the new covenant) provides the only solution. As Joshua breathes his last, this chapter cries out for the greater Joshua to come.

Through Joshua, the Lord gave rest to His people in the land. But this rest is neither secure nor complete. Enemy nations remained in the land because sin remained in Israel. Many years later King David would say to his people, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts," reminding them of what God said concerning Moses' generation: "They shall not enter my rest" (Psalm 95:7–11).

In Joshua's final speech he sets the conquest of the land in the broader story of the nation, a story of the Lord's making. God called Abraham, he sent plagues on Egypt, and he parted waters at the Red Sea. So, too, the conquest was his work. Twice the Lord says, "I gave them into your hand" (Joshua 24:8, 11). The message is plain: "It was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them" (vv. 12–13). In Christ, God defeats Satan and death, the enemies that stand behind all others. But he does so not by the sword, for at his arrest Jesus told Peter to put his sword away (John 18:11). Rather, he does so by means of his cross (Hebrews 2:14–17). On the Cross Jesus suffered the wrath both of God's enemies and of God himself as a sacrifice for sin.



These speeches are rich with fulfillment: “Not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you” (Joshua 21:43). Yet some of God’s promises are not so good, as Joshua indicates that Israel’s story will get worse before it gets better. Exile is threatened (23:13–16) as a consequence of disobedience, and 24:19 essentially seals their fate: “You are not able to serve the Lord.”

For all of our ambition and technology, humans have not solved the problem of death. It comes to the rich and the poor alike, to the just and the unjust (Ecclesiastes 9:2), and even giants of the faith like Joshua “go the way of all the earth” (Joshua 23:14). Even Joseph’s bones carried back into the land (24:32), remind us that the greatest men die. Thankfully, while there is no merely human answer to death, there is a divine answer in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without this the Christian faith is futile (I Corinthians 15:17–19). However, because Jesus has been raised from the dead, we too “will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (I Corinthians 15:52). This is why we don’t grieve as those who have no hope (I Thessalonians 4:13).

In his final farewell, there is urgency in Joshua’s voice as he speaks to his people for the last time: “Choose this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15). In his old age Joshua feels the shortness of life and the urgency of serving the Lord. David felt that same urgency when he wrote, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Psalm 95:7), and the author of Hebrews, quoting David, calls the Church to exercise the same kind of daily urgency together: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:12–13). Repentance and faith are necessary for salvation, and now is always the time to respond to God.

**Chapters 23–24 Questions:**

1. What had God done for them and what had Joshua done? (23:3–5)
2. Since God had blessed them, what should they do for Him? (23:11)
3. What would happen if they became influenced by people of the land? (23:13–16)
4. Where did Joshua meet the people in and for whom did he speak? (24:1)
5. How did Joshua begin his speech? (24:2)
6. What choice or challenge did Joshua put before the people and what choice had Joshua himself made? (24:14,15)
7. What choice did the people profess to make and why? (24:16–18)
8. Where did Joshua write a record of this and what is the significance of this? (24:26)
9. Describe the death and burial of Joshua. How old was he? (24:28–29)
10. Who else died and where was he buried? (24:33)