

PROMISED LAND 1: Lesson Three, Division of the Land ***Joshua 13 - 24***

Subject: Joshua divided Canaan among the tribes, designated special cities, and gave farewell speeches.

Main Idea: The “Promised Land” is the place of greatest spiritual blessing this side of Heaven.

Principles:

1. *Promised Land dwellers experience the thrill of discovering that the indwelling Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Power.*
2. *Promised Land dwellers experience the joy of discovering that God Himself is their inheritance.*
3. *Promised Land dwellers experience the blessing of discovering they have a spiritual family.*

Introduction

What comes to your mind when you think of your favorite place on earth? Maybe you think of home. Perhaps it is a place where something special occurred or an enchanting place you have visited. It might be a place you have only dreamed of visiting.

We have been learning about the Israelites’ arrival in the Promised Land, the place they had waited to inherit for many generations. The Psalmist believed the land was more than a piece of geography. It symbolized God’s blessing on his life. It represented God’s goodness and the fulfillment of His promises. He wrote, “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance” (Psalm 16:6). For him, the Promised Land had personal, spiritual significance.

Thus far, in our study of the book of Joshua, we have read of Israel’s conquest of Canaan. We have talked about the fact that, for us today, to enter into the “Promised Land” means entering the richness of life in Christ that God offers: a life of joy, peace, and spiritual fruitfulness. We have learned that entrance involves a decision to submit to Christ’s lordship and occupation means fighting spiritual battles. With each attempt to overcome sin, we will be met with resistance from our enemy in the spiritual realm, who uses various strategies to discourage and defeat us. We must equip ourselves for these spiritual battles with spiritual armor. Not only do we have an enemy in the invisible, spiritual realm, we meet with resistance from our own sin nature, which rationalizes sin, convinces us the battles are unnecessary, and strategizes compromises.

Although we may feel somewhat intimidated by this process, which the New Testament calls sanctification, the last half of the book of Joshua reminds us that the Promised Land is the place of *greatest spiritual blessing* this side of Heaven. When Christ is Lord over our lives, we experience such blessing that the decision to submit to Him and (in Paul’s words) “fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12) is one we never regret! The abundant life in Christ is a delightful inheritance. In fact, it is the greatest place of spiritual blessing this side of heaven!

I. Allotment of Land – Joshua 13-19

A. Joshua's Two Responsibilities – Joshua 13:1-7: In the first seven verses of Joshua 13, we discover that God had assigned Joshua not one but two primary leadership responsibilities during his tenure as Israel's leader. He was not only to oversee the conquest of Canaan but he was also appointed to divide the land among the tribes.

i. Land Yet to be Taken

1. *Two Counterbalancing Views*: Chapter 12 summarizes the Israelites tremendous victories. Verse 1 of chapter 13 indicates that there were yet large areas of land in Canaan to be taken over. For the first time, we see that the book presents two counterbalancing views: In places, we read that Joshua took the entire land (10:40-42, 11:16-23, 21:43-45), but on a number of other occasions we are told that large portions of the land still remained untaken (13:1-6, 15:63, 16:10, 17:12-13). To make sense of this, we must realize that the Lord gave Israel the *title* to all the land. But Israel's *possession* of the land only came through faith and obedience. God decreed Israel's *ownership* of the land, but Israel did not *occupy* all of it. Thus, the counterbalancing statements make for a realistic view of Israel's situation.
2. *Spiritual Application*: In the same way, our salvation in Christ is a free and gracious gift from God, but the abundant life in Christ is one we must work to fully occupy. The New Testament presents this mystery concerning our sanctification. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul puts it this way: "Continue to *work out your salvation* with fear and trembling, for *it is God who works in you* to will and to act according to his good purpose [my emphases]." God will ultimately accomplish the work of making us like Christ, but we have a role in it as well. We are co-workers with Him. That's why some Christians experience the abundant life in Christ more fully than others.
3. *Locations*: While Israel had conquered the heartland of Canaan, the Philistines continued to dominate the land along Israel's southern coastline. (In Joshua's day, the "Philistines" were either forebears of the later residents who were called by that name or simply given that name in Joshua because their land later became Philistine territory.¹) The far north was still under Syro-Phoenician control. The Lord assured Joshua that *He* would drive the Canaanites out (13:6). *It was a promise conditioned on Israel's faithfulness*. No doubt, the Israelites were weary of war. Yet, before his death,

Moses warned of the danger of allowing any Canaanites to remain. The repeated statement that pockets of Canaanites were not entirely driven out readies us for the problems that are described in the book of Judges.

- ii. Allocation of the Land: Verse 1 indicates that Joshua was now old. He would have to trust God that the tribes would continue doing the work of removing the remaining Canaanites. Yet there was a second task the Lord had assigned to him, one he would accomplish before his death: the division and allotment of the land as a permanent inheritance to each of Israel's tribes.

B. Tribes Not Receiving a Land Inheritance in Canaan – Joshua 13:8-33: The second half of the book of Joshua describes the distribution of the land west of the Jordan, in Canaan-proper, also known as the Cis-Jordan (this title is uncommonly used). The prefix “cis” is from the Latin and means “on this side.” Before describing the land allotment, the remainder of chapter 13 tells of those who did not receive inheritances in Canaan.

- i. Transjordanian Tribes: Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had already received an inheritance east of the river, the “Transjordan.”
- ii. The Levites: The Levites are also mentioned (13:14, 33) as not receiving a land inheritance, although their situation was quite different than that of the Transjordanian tribes. Centuries earlier, Jacob (Israel) cursed two of his sons for murdering the Shechemites. According to the curse, the descendants of Simeon and Levi would be dispersed and scattered in Israel (Genesis 34:25-31, 49:5-7). However, after the Israelites left Egypt, the Levites proved their loyalty to the Lord and became a tribe with special priestly honor. Although they were not deeded a parcel of land to live as a tribe, they were granted a different kind of inheritance: they received the best portions of the offerings the Israelites brought as sacrifices, as well their tithes. The practical implication of this provision of food and money was that they did not need to work land to make a living. Priestly service to the Lord and the Lord Himself were their inheritance (Numbers 18:20, Joshua 18:7). Although they were scattered throughout Israel, the Lord intended their scattering as a blessing to Israel. In this sense, their curse was reversed.

C. Nine-and-a-Half Tribes – Joshua 14-19

- i. Introduction to the Allotment – 14:1-5
 - 1. At the beginning of chapter 14, the writer explains that even with the Levites excluded as recipients of a tribal tract, Joseph's division into two separate tribes (Manasseh and Ephraim) still resulted in a total of twelve tribes (14:3-4). Thus, nine-and-a-half tribes would

be deeded land west of the Jordan. *Eleazar*, Aaron's third-born son and high priestly successor (his two older brothers had died) was Joshua's companion in dividing the land. The process of assigning land was accomplished by the casting of lots. This was a commonly used Old Testament means of determining God's will since, as the Israelites understood, God controlled the lots (Proverbs 16:33).

2. The land division was cause for great rejoicing in Israel! God had promised the Patriarchs that He would give this land as a permanent inheritance to their descendants hundreds of years earlier. Since that time, many generations of Israelites had spent their lives enslaved in Egypt and yet another generation of Israelites had wandered in the desert. All these generations had anticipated the fulfillment of God's promise. After so many years, each family was finally inheriting land, just as God promised! The detailed recording of all the boundaries seems to emphasize the fulfillment of God's promise. He gave them every single bit of the land He had promised. Sadly, the closest Israel came to actually occupying, or at least controlling, all their territory occurred only during the reigns of David and Solomon.ⁱⁱ

ii. Judah's Land – 14:6-15:63

1. *Caleb Highlighted* – 14:6-15; 15:13-19: Judah, the tribe with the kingly destiny, was the most important (Genesis 49:8-10). Their allotment came first. Within that tribe was a man who deserved special attention: Caleb. Caleb had been Judah's representative spy in exploring the land forty-five years earlier. Of the twelve spies, only he and Joshua (who represented his own tribe, Ephraim) returned to Moses with confidence that the Lord would overthrow the Canaanites and give them the Land, as He had promised. Because of their faith, out of all their generation, only these two men lived to enter Canaan. Although the books of Moses have already impressed on us that Caleb was a man of faith and convictions, in this passage we learn even more about his character.
 - a. First, we see that Caleb was eager to give God glory publicly. He approached Joshua and stated that the Lord had not only kept him alive to enter the land but at eighty-five years of age, had given him the health to be as strong and as vigorous for battle as he had been at age forty.
 - b. Second, we learn that Caleb was a man who lived in the present. Rather than contenting himself with safe arrival in the land, he was intent on driving out the Anakites, the residents of Canaan that his own generation had most feared

(Numbers 13:23, 33).¹ Later (chapter 15), in the middle of the description of Judah’s boundaries, we learn that Caleb was successful!

- c. Third, although Caleb inherited Hebron, 19 miles to the southeast of Jerusalem, within the territory deeded to Judah, he boldly expanded his territory to the nearby town of Debir, by means of his son-in-law Othniel (Judges 1:11-20). This first mention of Othniel introduces one of Israel’s judges to us, a position Othniel later held (Judges 3:9-11).
2. *Judah’s Boundaries*: Judah received a very large tract of land in the southern Canaan. The most southerly portion was in the Negev, an arid and less habitable region. Additionally, a portion of their large tract fell to Simeon, as we will discover in chapter 19. The last verse of chapter 15 says that Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites from Jerusalem. As it turned out, the Jebusites were not permanently removed from Jerusalem for another 400 years, when David defeated them (2 Samuel 5:6-10).
- iii. Ephraim and the Half of Manasseh (Tribes of Joseph) – Joshua 16-17
 1. *The Ephraimites Land*: After Judah, Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh received their allotments. Along with Judah, these were the dominant tribes. Later, in the days of Israel’s divided monarchy the southern kingdom was known by the name “Judah.” Although the northern kingdom was most commonly called “Israel,” occasionally the Bible also refers to it as “Ephraim” (its most dominant tribe). After the boundaries of Ephraim are listed, 16:10 tells us that, like Judah, they were unable to dislodge the Canaanites from Gezer.²
 2. *Two stories about the Tribes of Joseph*: In the context of describing the land given to the half-tribe of Manasseh, the writer recorded two stories about the tribes of Joseph.
 - a. *The first* story shows that the five daughters of Zelophehad, like Caleb, were eager to receive their inheritance. Formerly, Moses had consulted the Lord and rendered the decision that, in a case like Zelophehad’s, where a man died without any sons, his land would pass to his daughters. The decision is evidence of the Lord’s recognition of a woman’s value and

¹ Joshua 11:21 records that the Anakites had already been driven out. Apparently, some had returned to their former places.¹

² Gezer is listed among the cities Joshua had conquered in 10:33. Again, we must assume that, within a short time, Canaanites began to repopulate it.²

contrasts with the patriarchal culture. In Joshua 17, each of the women is listed by name.

- b. *The second story* tells of the people of Ephraim and Manasseh approaching Joshua and asking for additional land.
 - i. Joshua told them they needed to do the work of clearing the land they had been given. The tribes of Joseph claimed that, even if cleared, the hill country they were given would still not be enough. Joshua then encouraged them to take the extra land they needed by overthrowing the Canaanites in the surrounding plains. The tribes of Joseph feared these Canaanites because they had iron chariots. Nevertheless, Joshua encouraged them that if they needed the additional land, it was theirs for the taking. He exhorted them to courage, as a father would to a son saying, “With the Lord’s help, you can do this!”
 - ii. Rather than driving the Canaanites out, 17:12 tells us that the Manassites did not force the Canaanites out of their territory. Over time, simply subjected them to forced labor. As large tribes, they had believed they deserved more land but were unwilling to take possession of all the land they’d been given. Their unwillingness to do the hard work of removing the local people stands in sharp contrast to the eagerness of Caleb and the daughters of Zelophehad to claim their full inheritance. Their sour attitude is well-captured by Old Testament history expert David Howard, Jr., who translates their complaint: “I am a numerous people whom Yahweh has blessed *until now*”ⁱⁱⁱ (17:14). This resentful attitude was also characteristic of the Ephraimites in later years (Judges 8:1-3, 12:1-3).
- iv. The Remaining Seven Tribes – Joshua 18-19
 - 1. *Shiloh* – 18:1, 8, 10: The Israelites had been camped at Gilgal (14:6). Seven tribes still awaited their inheritance. Now, they all moved to Shiloh where the lots would be cast for these tribes. Shiloh was within Ephraim’s territory, approximately twenty miles

northwest of Gilgal. Its central location within the land may have been the reason it was chosen. 18:1 tells us the Tent of Meeting was set up in Shiloh. This is the first mention of the Tabernacle in the book of Joshua. It remained at Shiloh until the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:9, 7:2), another 400 years.

2. *How the Land was Surveyed* – 18:4-10: At Shiloh, Joshua appointed three men from each of the remaining seven tribes to survey all the land not already deeded to Judah and the tribes of Joseph. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that these men were experts in geometry. “Probably their parents had mastered the science of land surveying in Egypt. Who among them dreamed that their children would ever put that knowledge to use so strategically in their land of promise?”^{iv} These land descriptions were returned to Joshua, who then cast lots for them.
3. *Allotments for Benjamin and Simeon* – 18:11 – 19:9: Benjamin is listed first and given much space in the record. He had been one of Jacob’s favored sons. The tribe’s land lay right between the dominant tribes of Judah and Joseph. Next is Simeon’s inheritance. It was fully within the boundaries of Judah. As mentioned, Jacob foretold that Simeon would “be scattered” (Genesis 49:5-7), and indeed, over time, the tribe became indistinguishable from Judah, losing its unique identity.
4. *The Last Five Tribes* – 19:10-48: The final tribes to receive their inheritance were Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. The first four received the territory to the north of the tribes of Joseph. Dan’s territory, alongside Benjamin’s, lay between the much larger tracts of Ephraim and Judah. The Danites never settled in the land they were allotted. Like several of the other tribes, they were unable to drive out the Canaanites. However, the tribe of Dan *altogether abandoned their territory* and relocated in the far north, where they attacked the city of Leshem and renamed it “Dan” (Judges 18).
5. *Joshua’s Inheritance* – 19:49-50: The description of the division of the land began with the personal inheritance of Caleb and ends with the personal inheritance of Joshua, Israel’s two elder statesmen.

Summary Statement: Joshua and Caleb’s courage and faithfulness stands in sharp contrast to Israel’s failure to finish dislodging the Canaanites.

Some believers remain fearful or lazy about claiming God’s promises, while some are bold and never give up. Caleb and Joshua did not stop short of victory. They persevered into old age, determined to possess all that they were given. At eighty-five years old, Caleb found the Lord had given him the power of a much younger man to engage in these battles. How wonderfully these two men illustrate what can be accomplished in the power of God’s Spirit.

Principle: *Promised Land dwellers experience the thrill of discovering that the indwelling Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Power.*

Experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit is one of the great joys of living in the “Promised Land” of life in Christ. What we could never do on our own, He accomplishes in us and through us. In fact, Paul tells us that God “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Illustration: One year, I worked alongside a Christian whose personality really grated on me. Although I was outwardly pleasant, inwardly I fumed in her presence. One day, while she and I were working together in a group, she began to address us. As I was looking at her, I thought to myself, “This woman is not lovely to me, but she is priceless to our Savior.” In that very moment, I prayed, “Lord I cannot love her on my own, but you love her and you indwell me. Will you please begin loving her through me?” That very instant, I began to see my co-worker differently. The very habits that had been annoying me, I suddenly found endearing. I was keenly aware that the Spirit of power had come over me and accomplished what I could not on my own. Over the next few weeks, I was surprised to find that I actually had a new friend.

Our project ended for a couple of months, and during our break, I was approached and agreed to become the overseer. When we resumed, the Lord blessed me in a special way that I will never forget. That dear Christian woman became my greatest supporter. She encouraged me in the years that followed beyond anyone else in the entire group. She even involved her husband and children, showering me with respect, genuine love, and appreciation. How humbled I felt, but I was also amazed by what the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit will do!

Application: Some believers enter the Promised Land and are surprised to find the giants they most feared battling, sins that had a great hold on their lives, immediately overturned, as was my experience on that particular occasion. Other times, we do not have such an immediate experience but must faithfully engage in a longer battle toward victory. Whether the battle will be long or short, if we never engage in it, we will miss the opportunity for the mighty power of the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

Paul prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened, “in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.” He explained, “That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 1:18-20). Wow!

Transition: Once all the land was divided, Joshua designated special cities, according to the Law of Moses. Joshua 20-21 tells of the “Cities of Refuge” and the towns that were set aside for the Levites.

II. Designation of Special Cities – Joshua 20 - 21

A. Cities of Refuge – Joshua 20

i. Purpose

1. In the case of premeditated murder, the Law of Moses demanded “life for life” (Exodus 21:23). A family member of the murdered person was responsible to seek and legally kill the murderer (Numbers 35). This appointed family member was the “avenger of blood.” The Hebrew term is *gō’ēl haddām*. The simpler term “*gō’ēl*” is used far more often in the Old Testament. It is often translated “close relative” or “kinsman redeemer.” David Howard, Jr., again, explains this well: “The *gō’ēl* seems to have been one who had certain obligations to fulfill, whether they were recovering people or property that had been lost through indenture, or they were paying a fee (usually by a relative or an owner), or they were meting out punishment for killing someone.”^v
2. However, in the case of manslaughter, there was no death penalty. For someone who accidentally or unintentionally killed another, six “cities of refuge” were safe havens, until he or she stood trial. Upon arrival at the city gates, the person’s case was presented to the elders. Once permitted to enter, the person had to remain in the city until their official trial before the assembly and the death of the high priest. After that, he or she could safely leave.

ii. Location: Three Cities of Refuge were chosen on the east side of the Jordan and three on the west. Of the three, one was in the north, one was in the south, and one was in the center of the land. Thus, anyone could quickly find a haven within a reasonable distance.

iii. Significance: These cities are a reminder of the refuge that the believer finds in Christ. When we enter into His salvation, we no longer face judgment and eternal death but are safe and secure. In Joshua’s day, a time of war and great bloodshed, God’s affirmation of the value of life, by

condemning murder and providing refuge for a manslayer, must have given the Israelites great comfort.

B. Towns for Levites – Joshua 21: The six designated Cities of Refuge were actually a subset of forty-eight towns that were designated for occupancy by the Levites. The Levitical cities were taken from all parts of Israel. Joshua 21 lists them according to the clans of Levi: the Kohathites, the Gershonites, and Merarites. In Joshua’s day, the Israelites may not have captured all these cities and it is uncertain whether the Levites ever occupied all of them. Nonetheless, Joshua 21 emphasizes the fact that they were deeded to the Levites.

- i. The Levites Distribution: In addition to assisting the priests, the Levites had another important job. They were to instruct the people in God’s Law (Deuteronomy 33:10). Their distribution throughout Israel would have allowed them to accomplish this task more easily, greatly blessing everyone. The appointing of the Levitical cities was surely another example to the Israelites of the Lord’s special and unique provisions for them in the Promised Land.
- ii. The Aaronic Kohathites: Aaron and his priestly descendants were an especially honored subset of the Kohathite clan. They were given cities in Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, the lands immediately surrounding Jerusalem (it was within Judah). Although Jerusalem was not designated as the city in which the Lord’s temple would be erected for another 400 years, this positioning is certainly interesting.

Summary Statement: The Levites were not granted a tract of land. Instead, the Lord was their inheritance.

Were they disappointed? Unless the Israelites provided for them, in accordance with the Law, they could not live and do the work God had given them. Without their own land to work, it seems the Levites would need to live by faith.

Illustration: Rarely has an individual been willing to live a life of faith as did the Victorian Christian and social reformer George Müller. His concern for orphans in his hometown of Bristol, England resulted in provision for more than 10,000 orphan children. He barely had enough food for his own family but trusted the Lord to meet his every need. “To one who asked him the secret of his service, George Müller said: ‘There was a day when I died, utterly died... died to George Müller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will—died to the world, its approval or censure—died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends—and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.’”^{vi}

George Müller lived in the Promised Land. Is this hard dependence the abundant life in Christ, you may ask? It is indeed, for George Müller saw God provide in ways that few Christians ever experience. His life of utter dependence was the channel for the Lord to do great and surprising things.

This is the key to understanding how the Israelites could be told to drive the Canaanites out of the Land and, at the same time, told that the Lord Himself would do it. We enter the life of faith, willing to do the hard work (as George Müller did and as the Levites were being required to do), but in the end, we find that the Lord Himself makes the full provision.

Principle: *Promised Land dwellers experience the joy of discovering that God Himself is their inheritance* (Acts 20:32, Ephesians 1:14, Colossians 1:12, 3:24, Hebrews 9:15, 1 Peter 1:4).

Paul explains that the word of God in its fullness is the mystery of “*Christ in you*” (Colossians 1:26-27). *He* is our inheritance. Once we understand the wealth of what has been given us, we have to wonder why we ever prefer to rely on ourselves! Yet, we somehow find self-dependence easier.

By the time of the Judges, we find that the priesthood had been corrupted. The priestly sons of Eli stole from the Israelites to increase their own wealth. How much richer their lives would have been if they would have lived by faith with the Lord as their inheritance. They missed the blessing of discovering that, to the faithful, God shows Himself faithful (Psalm 18:25).

Application: For what need will you trust God to provide? “It was a saying of George Müller that faith grows with use. If we would have great faith we must begin to use the little faith we already have.”^{vii} God’s provision may come quite miraculously or by rather ordinary means but, either way, the thrill of experiencing His faithfulness will convince you that there is no greater way to live this side of Heaven.

Transition: Once all the land was divided and the special cities designated, the Eastern tribes were finally free to return home.

III. Conflict and Commitment – Joshua 22 – 24

A. The Eastern Tribes’ Altar – Joshua 22

- i. Its Purpose: After Joshua commended the eastern tribes for faithfully assisting their brothers and challenged them to love the Lord with all their hearts and carefully obey His Law, he blessed them and sent them home. When they approached the Jordan, they built a large altar, presumably so large that it could be seen from across the river. It was to remind their descendants of their unity with the western tribes and their obligation to

cross the river to bring offerings to the Lord. They also intended it to remind the western tribes that the people across the river were their brothers and had an equal share in the Lord.

- ii. The Misunderstanding: The Law of Moses allowed for only one altar on which the Lord's sacrifices could be offered (Leviticus 17:8-9), the altar at the Tabernacle. The western tribes misunderstood the purpose of the altar built by the eastern tribes. They assumed the eastern tribes had rebelliously created an alternate location for worship and intended to use it for offering sacrifices.

- iii. The Confrontation: Knowing that, in the past, the rebellion of some of God's people had had consequences for all of them (22:18), they were alarmed and determined to kill the lawbreakers. While gathering for war, they sent Phinehas (High Priest Eleazar's son) and some tribal representatives ahead to confront the eastern tribes. In the years immediately preceding Israel's conquest of Canaan, the Israelites had fallen into idolatry and Phinehas showed special zeal for protecting the Lord's reputation (Numbers 25). On this occasion, he and the other representatives reminded the eastern tribes that if they broke faith with the Lord, all the tribes would be punished (22:18).
- iv. Unity Restored: The eastern tribes were completely surprised by the misunderstanding and explained their true intention. The relief of this good news brought great rejoicing, praising of the Lord, and the end of any discussion of war. Israel's political strength lay in the unity between her twelve tribes. That unity was founded on their common worship of the Lord. However, the division of the tribes on two sides of the river and the civil war that nearly broke out so early in their history in the Promised Land were significant harbingers of ongoing disunity.

B. Joshua's Farewells – Joshua 23 – 24: Near the end of his life, Joshua gave two farewell addresses: one in Shiloh, Israel's center of worship, and one in Shechem. If he and Caleb were close in age (a reasonable assumption), these speeches could have been delivered as much as 25 years after the land was divided (since Caleb was 85 at that time and Joshua died at age 110). It is not clear whether Joshua gathered all the people or only their representatives on the first occasion, but on the second, he certainly gathered them all. These farewell addresses position Joshua alongside Moses and Jacob in terms of the respect his

leadership commanded. Not surprisingly, Joshua’s farewell speech bears many similarities to Moses’.

- i. First Farewell – Joshua 23: At Shiloh, Joshua challenged the Israelites to expect God to drive out the remaining inhabitants of the land, to be very strong and careful to obey the law completely, and to hold fast and be careful to love the Lord fully. He warned them against allying or associating with the nations that remained, and against flirting with or serving their gods. Finally, he reminded them that God’s promised cursing would certainly occur if they failed to heed these warnings. The Lord would no longer drive the Canaanites out but would leave them to ensnare the Israelites until they perished from the land. He also reminded them that not one of God’s good promises had failed.

- ii. Second Farewell – Joshua 24: The second farewell was more formal, for it included a covenant renewal. This speech and covenant occurred at a place of special historic significance. Shechem was the first place Abraham built an altar after he arrived in the Land. There, the Lord promised he would inherit Canaan (Genesis 12:7).
 1. *Purpose of Covenant Renewal*: Earlier, the Israelites had renewed their covenant with the Lord at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. But we are forgetful creatures. Promises we make with utmost sincerity are too easily forgotten over time. Joshua was wise to ask for the people’s renewed commitment.
 2. *Description of the Speech*
 - a. The speech Joshua gave on this occasion largely differs from the one in chapter 23 in that it includes a short summary of Israel’s history. The history lesson emphasizes God’s faithfulness in having kept His promises, pointing out that the Lord had exceeded their expectations, giving them vineyards and olive groves that they had not planted and cities that they had not built.
 - b. Once again, Joshua reminded them of the danger of idolatry. He said, “Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped” (apparently, some idolatry was already taking place).
 - c. Finally, he challenged the Israelites to choose whom they would serve. When they eagerly agreed, he reminded them that they were making a commitment that was not easily kept. He added, “You are not able to serve the Lord,”

foreshadowing what occurred within a generation. Yet, the Israelites insisted they would. Joshua recorded “all these things” (24:26) and set up a stone as a witness to their commitment. The Israelites were now accountable to God and to one another. They were a family and as a family, they entered a unified agreement.

- iii. Three Burials: The final verses of the book tell of Joshua’s death at 110 and his burial in the land he had inherited. Some have suggested that 110 may not have been Joshua’s actual age at the time of his death, since Joseph is stated to have lived the exact same amount of time (Genesis 50:26). An Egyptian convention described a prominent person who lived a good, full life as having lived “110 years.” Second, we are told that Joseph’s bones were buried at Shechem (24:32). (They had been carried out of Egypt in fulfillment of Joseph’s deathbed request, Genesis 50:25.) Finally, we read of the death and burial of Eleazar, the son of Aaron and high priest (24:33). These statements mark the end of an era. From this time forward, Israel’s leadership was never the same in nature.

Summary Statement: The conflict and commitment in these last chapters of Joshua emphasize the importance of Israel’s unity. Although they had their own tracts of land, they were still one great family and needed to remain unified.

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed His great High Priestly prayer of intercession for all believers (John 17). He repeatedly prays that we may be one and be brought to complete unity (John 17:11, 21, 22).

Principle: *Promised Land dwellers experience the blessing of discovering they have a spiritual family.*

Application: Our culture often encourage our independence but the body of Christ (the New Testament’s term for all believers) only operates properly with recognition of mutual interdependence (Romans 12:4-5).

Have you discovered the blessing of having members of your spiritual family pray for you? Of course, we can pray for ourselves but, just as the Lord requires we ask before we receive (Matthew 7:7, James 4:2-3), He also sometimes chooses to withhold an answer until we involve *others* in praying along with us. Prayer support is just one of the blessings of being part of God’s family.

You have probably had the experience of seeing something on some occasion that amazed you and wished someone else were there to witness it along with you. Our life in Christ is meant to be a shared experience. Hopefully, you participated in a discussion of your lesson,

just before this Closing Summary, and shared with your group about something God has done in your life (Question 15). In the summer months, our family has the privilege of being at a Christian camp where we hear dozens, maybe hundreds, of stories each year about God's work in and through the lives of our sisters and brothers in Christ. There is something about hearing these stories that feels as though we are receiving a taste of Heaven. It is because we have a common bond and a common destiny. We are God's family. Having a spiritual family is a tremendous blessing!

Conclusion

Perhaps you have been saved by faith and received Jesus as your Savior and Lord but are standing on the far banks of the Jordan wondering whether you are willing to do the hard work of battling against specific sins. The book of Joshua reminds us that this is the only way to enter the Promised Land of abundant life. However intimidating it may sound to you, trusting Jesus with absolutely everything is a decision you will never regret. The Promised Land is the place of great spiritual blessing this side of Heaven! Jesus said, "I have come that [you] may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10)!

ⁱ Howard, D. M., Jr. (1998). *Joshua* (Vol. 5, p. 298). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Satterthwaite, P., & McConville, G. (2007). *Exploring the Old Testament: The Histories* (Vol. 2, p. 53). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

ⁱⁱⁱ Howard, D. M., Jr. (1998). *Joshua* (Vol. 5, p. 355). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{iv} Campbell, D. K. (1985). Joshua. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 361). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^v Howard, D. M., Jr. (2001). *Vol. 5: Joshua* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (384). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{vi} Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 1366). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

^{vii} Tozer, A. W. (2001). *Tozer on Christian Leadership: A 366-Day Devotional*. Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread.