

A NATION POSSESSES - LIFE IN THE LAND

Study 1

GO IN TO POSSESS



Joshua chapter 18

This chapter contains a great challenge. We have noticed in our studies that Joshua and the Children of Israel had conquered the territory God had promised them. It was theirs to possess for themselves. They were there to enjoy the spoils of VICTORY. Some of the tribes were keen to enter in to their possessions. We have already noticed how Caleb wanted all he could get. He felt that he was able to enjoy everything that was given him. The tribe of JUDAH was given their possessions. (**chapter 15**) The tribe of JOSEPH was also given theirs and was able to enter into the enjoyment of them. (**chapters 16-17**) You will notice that the LEVITES had no definite part in the inheritance of the land. They were the priestly tribe and God said that **“The priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance.” (18: 7)** Of course, God made sure they were looked after, by commanding that each tribe should contribute towards the care of the priestly tribe. How lovely it was that God wanted this tribe to enjoy Him as their inheritance!

Here in **chapter 18** we see all the tribes gathered together at SHILOH. This was to be, for a long time to come, the religious centre of the Nation. You will notice in **verse 1** that the TABERNACLE was set up there, thus marking it out as the place where the people knew they could meet with God. It was the centre of Israel's worship. For 40 years in the wilderness the Tabernacle had moved with them. You can read about these movements in the book of Numbers. There was no real rest while the Nation wandered. The people never knew when next they would have to take their tents down and follow the moving cloud which was over the Tabernacle.

But now the land was subdued before them, meaning that the fighting was over and the way was open for them to enter into their possessions. Why was it then, that Joshua had to ask the question he did, in **verse 3** of this chapter? Enjoyment and wealth lay ahead. It seems they were content to treat their inheritance as if it were behind a shop window; to be seen but not possessed. **“How long will you neglect to go?”**, Joshua asks. Could it be laziness and apathy that kept them back?

What a lesson and great CHALLENGE this is to us! God has so many great and wonderful blessings to give us. Since we have the Lord Jesus as Saviour ALL things are ours. (**See Romans 8: 32**) The Christian's 'Land of Promise' is not made up of springs and rivers, fields and crops; the natural produce of a fruitful land. **Ephesians**

1: 3 speaks of the Christian's possessions as **EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING in the heavenly places in Christ**. As Christians, it is easy to sit back, take things easy, and never enter into the real fullness of life as Christ intended we should. Each day is important in a Christian's life, for through daily prayer and Bible reading you will begin to possess something of the wonderful blessings God gives. A lazy Christian will possibly know that the good things are there, but will never enjoy them. Let the words of Joshua then be a challenge to you as you think of your own Christian life. The REMEDY for the situation was given in three things the people had to do if this wealth was to be a real joy:-

1. “ARISE” - verse 4. Three men out of each tribe were to rouse themselves and inspect the land. In other words, they had to 'get up and go'. Sometimes when we should be up and getting on with a job, we have a 'lie in' and miss the opportunity. We need to discipline ourselves and get up. Look at **Ephesians 5: 14** and you will see that Paul felt there was a danger of Christians being spiritually asleep. They needed to 'awake' and 'arise'. Be careful that indifference and carelessness do not spoil your enjoyment of Christian things. There may be some days perhaps when we do not feel like reading the Bible or praying. On these occasions we must discipline ourselves to 'enter in' for these are the days when we stand most in need of spiritual exercise. So wake up and take notice!

2. “GO THROUGH THE LAND” - verse 4. Here is the second step towards enjoyment. Inspection of the inheritance. Can you imagine a farmer buying a farm with buildings, fields, crops and cattle, and never once walking round to see all that belonged to him? It would be absolutely crazy! Rather he would stand amid his possessions and say: 'I am going to enjoy this and get from it all it has to offer'. Thus it is with Christians who really want to know the value of those great blessings which are theirs in Christ. Just as Joshua said to the tribes that were slack: **“go through the land”**, so you need to search out in your Bible reading every day, those truths which will reveal all that God has given you in the Lord Jesus. As you discover these you will become a more joyful and praising Christian!

3. “DESCRIBE IT” - verse 8. Now we have the third step towards enjoying the possession of the inheritance. Joshua told them to record what they found so that they would not forget the benefits that were theirs. We read in **verse 9** that they wrote their findings in a book, in seven parts, and then came again to Joshua. They would now KNOW what should be theirs. As those who love the Lord Jesus, we enjoy the things that He gives, and it is good to talk about them. If we 'describe' them and share the meaning of them with others, we shall also appreciate them more ourselves. For others will begin to enjoy them with us and thus the enjoyment of them will be multiplied to us.

Study 2

CITIES OF REFUGE



Joshua chapter 20

I wonder if you have read through **chapter 19**? Although it consists mainly of names and places, it is important. It records in detail the division of the land among the tribes, which brought possession to completion. Read it carefully and you will find how carefully everything is covered. When you come to **vs. 50-51**, it is clear that even Joshua, the leader, and Eleazer, the priest, were not forgotten. **“According to the word of the Lord”**, they received their possessions. Now the divisions could be recorded, for all was shared out. **“So they made an end of dividing the country”**. (19: 51)

The chapter we are studying tells us of a wonderful provision God made for the nation of Israel, now that they were established in the land. Six cities were to be set apart as cities of refuge. Three were on one side of Jordan and three were on the other. On the west of the river, Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron were the cities named for refuge. On the east side where the two and one half tribes had stayed, Golan, Ramoth-Gilead and Bezer were set aside for this purpose. If you look at a map for this period you will notice how well-placed these cities were to cover all the tribes of the nation. Kedesh and Golan were in the North, Hebron and Bezer were in the South, and Shechem and Ramoth-Gilead were in the centre. We shall see why these cities had to hold strategic positions in the land when we look at the reasons for which they were appointed. But already we can learn, that when God is providing for the safety of His people, He does the job carefully and well. This is always how God works.

WHY were these cities of refuge provided? Well, first we must think of the Jewish law regarding murder, because the provision of the places of refuge were linked with the act of murder in the land. Think of three points in connection with murder -

1. *The murderer must be put to death (Numbers 35: 16- 21).*
2. *The punishment was to be carried out by the relative who was nearest to the murder victim. He was known as the “avenger of blood”. (Numbers 35: 25) Thus he was to seek out and destroy without mercy the one who had committed the crime.*
3. *Provision was made for the one who committed murder by accident. The “slayer” could flee to one of the cities of refuge and be safe.*

We live in days when the death penalty has been abolished and perhaps you feel that the Jewish code of law is harsh and cruel. But God was showing Himself to the nation, His people, as a God who is pure and holy. They had to learn this and therefore justice had to be done. There could be no compromise and the **“avenger of blood”** was merely carrying out God’s law when he slew the murderer. The cities of refuge were provided to show that God was not only just, but also merciful. It is evident that a murderer who accidentally killed someone could get to such cities as soon as possible. During the time he was there he could appeal to the laws of his land for justice to be done. The cities of refuge were all cities in which priests lived.

If the refugee’s case was sincere and found to be true, a shelter would be provided until the **“avenger of blood”** came. Then the case would be brought before the elders of the city for judgment. Two results were possible - if the **“slayer”** was found to be guilty of murder with intent, he was put to death, but if he was found innocent, then living quarters were given him within the city, and there he must stay until the High Priest died. Following this, he could return to his own home without fear of death. There are some very helpful things that we can learn about God and our lives from the provision of these cities.

1. God wanted to PROTECT those who were in danger from harm and death. Even though they had killed, mercy was shown because they had done it unwittingly. This shows us how much greater is God’s love than human sin and failure. We so often sin unwittingly, yet through the Lord Jesus we can be forgiven and find a refuge in Him.

2. Each city of refuge was within easy reach of the slayer. It was estimated that no place was more than a half-day’s journey away from one of these cities. How kind this shows God to be. The Bible tells us that the Lord is near to all who call upon Him. (**Psalm 145: 18**) Even though we sin, He is never far away. He is a near refuge for the needy Christian.

3. The gates of the cities were always to be open to receive the **“slayer”**. Day and night this way of deliverance was available. Those in trouble could never complain that they could not find a welcome in the city. How true this is of the Lord Jesus! He is always available to meet the needs of those who turn to Him for refuge. We can trust in Him at all times.

4. The cities of refuge were open for all. There was no distinction made. Even the stranger, someone of a different race who lived among the Israelites, could find the same refuge as a Jew. We can end our lesson on this very encouraging note. When we need strength and security or salvation from our sins we can be sure that there is no respect of persons with God. All can find a refuge in the Saviour who died and rose again from the dead. (**John 6 : 37**)

Study 3

LIFE IN THE LAND



Joshua chapter 21: 43-45 & chapter 22

We are coming near to the end of our studies in the book of Joshua. Through the varied fortunes of battle, including failures which at times came close to disaster, Israel eventually entered into their possession of the land. This is often true of us as Christians, for our experiences are frequently spoiled by failure. We want to enjoy a victorious Christian life and we know that this is possible, yet we fail to realise much of what we desire. But we must not be discouraged if failure comes. Let us look first of all at **chapter 21: 43-45**. These verses offer us great encouragement for they tell us three great facts:

1. **Verse 43. “The Lord GAVE to Israel all the land.”** It was His gift to them. Behind all their victories was the glorious fact that from the earliest times God intended that

His people should have the land. Remember, none of the nations in Canaan knew this. But Joshua did and as life began in Canaan he must have rejoiced that the Lord's purpose had at last been fulfilled. Notice **"they took possession of it and dwelt in it."** Israel could never say that they had achieved victory on their own. The Lord gave them the land. The lesson here is clear to us as we take stock of our blessings in the Christian life. We can never say we have possessed them in our own strength. The Lord Jesus in **John 15: 5** says: **"Without Me you can do nothing."** He not only gives us the good things, but He gives us the power to enter into the enjoyment of them, too. 'Life in the Land' for us means receiving all the spiritual blessings which make our lives pure, strong and enjoyable. These come from the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

2. **Verse 44. "The Lord GAVE them rest."** We noticed in our earlier lessons that Canaan meant CONFLICT for the people of Israel. As they looked back over their 'step by step' conquests, they could talk about the victory of Jericho; remember their defeat at Ai and muse on the deception by the Gibeonites. These varying fortunes were all stepping stones to total possession. They might at times have wondered if victory was possible at all. But now as they lived among their inheritance, they could look back to the promise of the Lord. None of their enemies would stand before them, all would be delivered into their hands. 'Life in the Land' meant peace for them because the Lord in whom they trusted had given them the victory. Sad to record, they soon allowed their enemies to gain control again. As Christians, we can have the same knowledge of victory that these people had. The Lord Jesus does not promise an easy conquest of all our spiritual enemies. In fact, it is clear that the Christian warfare is a lifelong battle. Yet we can say with Paul: **"If God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8: 31. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (Romans 8: 37)** 'Life in the land' for us means enjoying the peace and rest of victory which the Lord Jesus gives through our daily lives. Yet we do well to be aware of some of the 'enemies' we have to contend with, so read **Colossians 3: 5-15**.

3. **Verse 45.** All that the Lord PROMISED came to pass. If you want proof of this, read the early chapters of Joshua again. Remember, that they came to Jordan a disorganised, grumbling people who had wandered for years in the wilderness. They had no land of their own but they had the promise of God. This promise not only covered their ability to cope with their enemies, but the extent of their possessions as well. It was the 'key' to their inheritance. Notice that not one "GOOD THING" failed of all the Lord had spoken. They could look back on a campaign that had succeeded just because God had promised it should do so. It is very important to understand that when God promises something He always keeps His word. This cannot always be said of even the best of men, for it is not always possible to keep the promises we make, even though we may want to. Paul says something very good about God's promises in **2 Corinthians 1: 20**. He had obviously proved the truth of what he said. God had never let him down, and He will never break His promises to us. Like Israel, we can enjoy the goodness of the Lord in this knowledge. 'Life in the land' was not always easy-going and satisfying; problems still came along. **Chapter 22** tells of a problem

which arose in the relationships between the tribes. It came about because of a misunderstanding between tribes on the East and West sides of Jordan. The two and one half tribes on the East side built an altar as a 'witness' to the goodness of God. Without enquiring into their motives they were judged by the rest of Israel as 'rebellious against God'; as setting up their own altar in opposition to Shiloh. The outcome could have been very serious, for in **verse 12** you will notice that there was even danger of war between them. However, a deputation was sent; Phinehas, son of the priest, and the heads of the ten tribes, to enquire into their 'iniquity'. The true facts were revealed and harmony was eventually restored. There is a very practical lesson here for us to learn. We should not be too quick to judge other Christians, on purely 'outward appearance', without first enquiring into the true motives behind their actions. How often in the past we have had to admit that things are not always what they appear to be on the surface. Never 'jump to conclusions' without being in full possession of the facts - it will almost certainly lead to 'war'.

Notice too, that although this deputation drew the wrong conclusions, their accusations were made to the right people. They spoke to those who were directly involved, not merely inquisitive bystanders. They didn't gossip about 'what might be', but got right to the heart of the matter. What was the result? Harmony was restored and the Lord's Name was praised. Notice **verse 31, "This day we perceive that the Lord is among us."** This was the most important factor of their life in Canaan. Everything else was of lesser importance to them; God's presence meant everything to them.

We conclude our lesson on this note: whatever else we enjoy in our lives as Christians, we must always give the Lord Jesus first place. He has said, as He did to the Israelites, that He will be with us always. (**Matthew 28 : 20**) And He will surely keep His promise.

Study 4

THE FINAL CHARGE

Read Joshua chapters 23 & 24

Our studies in the book of Joshua end with a look at the two final addresses that this great warrior gave to the people. Can you imagine him, white-haired, with a sunburnt, wrinkled face - yet wily, strong and determined, even in his old age? You will notice that **chapter 23** gives his address to the elders, heads of the families, judges and officers (**verse 2**). It was his closing charge to the leaders of the people. **Chapter 24** tells us that when Joshua spoke this time, not only were the leaders present, but also all the people. (**verses 1-2**) Notice that **chapter 24: 29-33** is a postscript to the book - an historical note that brings the book to a conclusion and also prepares the way for the book of Judges.

We can look at these two chapters in three ways and shall see what Joshua said about Israel's PAST; their PRESENT and finally their FUTURE.

1. **PAST.** Joshua looked back over the nation's history. Remember, the entry into Canaan marked a vital milestone in the growth of Israel. In **Chapter 23** he looks at things

from God's point of view. Notice how many times he uses the expression **"the Lord your God"**. - I have counted 13 times. Joshua is reminding them that God is the God of their history. They would not be the nation they were if God had not kept them and been loyal to them. He is a wonderful God, and is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Looking back into the past, Joshua also reminded them of their origins as God's people. In **chapter 24: 1-13** he begins with Abraham and gives a very brief summary of events, ending with their possession of the land. These 'stepping stones' to the land all told them of the wonderful works of God on their behalf. How long have you been a Christian? It may be days, months or even years. If you look back over your Christian life, you will have come to the same conclusions as Joshua and Israel, as you remember the Lord's great goodness. Have you thanked Him for all He has done?

2. PRESENT. When Joshua is dealing with the up-to-date affairs of life in the land he takes a very serious line. You see, he was an old man and he was soon to die. He wanted to make sure that the people understood the kind of life they should live as the people of God. So he sets before them the CAUSE of failure and defeat in **chapter 23: 11-16**, telling them what would cause them to sin against God. They were not to go back and seek after the things of other nations. Their gods and their worship were to be left absolutely alone, and on no account could marriages between their people and the Israelites be permitted. If these safeguards were neglected any evil was possible. The COURSE Israel had to take was one of clear separation from these things. They must always love and honour only God, otherwise judgment and destruction would surely follow. So **chapter 24: 15** sums up what the present lifestyle for Israel must be. Read this verse very carefully and you will see what a high standard God demanded for those who were His people. Joshua gives the people the CHOICE, **(24: 15) "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."** At this point he challenges them to make up their minds; they must either choose God or other god's. This is a clear choice. There were only two real possibilities, either God or idolatry. Joshua declared that he and his house would serve the Lord. **(verse 15)** The people also said, **"we will serve the Lord."** **(verse 21)** So Joshua set up the stone of witness; they had made their choice. Here is a lesson for us to learn. God must be first and last and always in our lives. Put away wrong things - things that take God's place, and make sure that everything evil is refused admittance. If only the nation of Israel had carried their words through into actions they would have been a tremendous people. Remember, if you obey God and put Him first, He will make you happy and useful in your Christian life.

3. FUTURE. For Joshua, life was coming to an end. In **chapter 23: 14** we read the rather sad words telling us that he knew this. But for the nation of Israel, their future lay before them and they must go on. **Chapter 24: 25-28** records the covenant made by Joshua with the people. Notice he writes the words in a book; the law of God and the stone is set up as a witness in their land. They were to build their national life upon the laws of God. What a great future lay ahead! Today we see Israel back in

the land of Palestine. They are once again building their nation - but, sad to say, without God. Yet the land is theirs and they are only enjoying what God had promised them. But one day they will enjoy this to the full, for Israel has a glorious future, when the Lord Jesus, their Messiah, will come to reign again as King. I hope you have enjoyed these studies. Make sure you go over again the practical lessons we have noticed and that you put them into effect in your Christian life.

Questions

Lesson 1 - GO IN TO POSSESS

1. What was different about the Levites and their part in the land of Canaan?
2. What was set up at Shiloh, and what did this mean to the people of Israel?
3. Why did Joshua have to ask the questions he did in **chapter 18: 3**?
4. What two things have we mentioned that can 'spoil your enjoyment' of Christian things?
5. How can we as Christians 'inspect' the things that God has given us?

Lesson 2 - CITIES OF REFUGE

1. Why were the cities of refuge provided?
2. What was God trying to teach the people about Himself through the Jewish code of law and these cities of refuge?
3. Who was the **"avenger of blood"**?
4. Why were the positions of the cities of refuge chosen so carefully by God?
5. What similarities do you see between the cities of refuge and the Lord Jesus Christ?

Lesson 3 - LIFE IN THE LAND

1. What was it that Joshua knew, but the inhabitants of Canaan did not?
2. From **Colossians 3: 5-15** give six of the enemies which we have to conquer in our Christian lives.
3. What was the 'key' that gained entry for Israel into their inheritance?
4. What link do you see between the last part of **1 Samuel 16: 7** and today's lesson?
5. What was the most important factor for Israel in their life in Canaan?

Lesson 4 - THE FINAL CHARGE

1. Of what did the 'stepping stones' in Israel's history remind them?
2. What did Joshua want the people to understand regarding their present life-style?
3. Give two things which Joshua told the people they must NOT do.
4. a) What was the choice laid before Israel?
b) On what were they to build their future life?
5. Give two definite lessons which you have learnt from your studies in the Book of Joshua.