

Chapter 12

Who do vv. 1-6 describe? The Canaanite kings from the east (east of the Jordan river), Sihon and Og, who were defeated by the Israelites (under Moses). (cf. Numbers 21:21-35; Deuteronomy 2:26-37; 3:1-17).

How did Moses apportion their land (v. 6)? This territory was assigned to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh (Numbers 32; cf. 13:8-13).

Who do vv. 7-24 describe? The 31 Canaanite kings from the west (west of the Jordan river) who were defeated by Joshua and the Israelites.

Chapter 13

At the end of the seven-year period of conquest, Israel occupied very little of the Promised Land; very large areas remained for them to possess (v. 1). Consequently, dividing all the land among the tribes required great faith that God would eventually give His people all of it. Joshua had removed the significant military threats to Israel's existence. From now on, each tribe was responsible to conquer and colonize its own designated territory.¹

This was a climactic moment in the life of the young nation. After centuries in Egyptian bondage, decades in the barren wilderness, and years of hard fighting in Canaan, the hour had arrived when the Israelites could at last settle down to build homes, cultivate the soil, raise families, and live in peace in their own land. The days of land allotment were a happy time for Israel.² Chapters 13-21 describe the division of the Promised Land.

What do vv. 1-5 refer to? The remaining large areas of land west of the Jordan River that needed to be taken over.

How was this land to be apportioned (vv. 6-7)? Once the Lord had driven His enemies out of the mountain regions, this territory was to be assigned to the remaining 9 tribes and the half tribe of Manasseh.

What do vv. 8-13 describe? The division of the land east of the Jordan River (12:6) Joshua recognized and confirmed what had already been done by Moses on the east side of the Jordan. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, possessing large herds of cattle, were anxious to settle in the rich grazing lands of the Transjordan. But only after their men agreed to fight alongside their brothers to win Canaan proper did Moses agree to give them their land (Numbers 32).³

What does v. 14 describe? The tribe of Levi received no specific territory of land as did the other tribes (cf. v. 33; 14:3-4; 18:7). Instead, the Levites received 48 towns with pastureland for their flocks and herds (14:4; 21:41) as Moses had specified (Numbers 35:1-5).⁴ The Levites received a special relationship with God rather than a tract of land.

Dropping Levi from the tribes leaves only eleven tribes. But Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are included in Joseph's place, and that raises the number to twelve again. The reason Joseph's sons are included is that they were adopted by Jacob as his own sons before his death (Genesis 48:5).⁵

What do vv. 15-24 describe? The inheritance of the tribe of Reuben, clan by clan, that Moses had given them.

What do vv. 25-28 describe? The inheritance of the tribe of Gad, clan by clan, that Moses had given them.

What do vv. 29-32 describe? The inheritance of the half-tribe of Manasseh, clan by clan, that Moses had given them.

What repeated promise did God make (v. 33)? By contrast with the inheritance of these tribes, it is twice emphasized in this chapter (vv. 14, 33) and twice later (14:3–4; 18:7), that the tribe of Levi received no inheritance from Moses. At first this may seem puzzling, but closer examination reveals that in lieu of territorial possessions, the tribe of Levi was allotted the sacrifices or offerings (13:14), the priesthood (18:7), and the LORD Himself (13:33). Who could have dreamed of a greater inheritance? ⁶

Chapter 14

What do vv. 1-5 describe? With the recording of the allotments by Moses in Transjordan completed, the account turns to the distribution of the land in Canaan west of the Jordan River to the remaining nine-and-a-half tribes. Eleazar the high priest, Joshua, and the heads of the tribes took the leadership in dividing this portion of the land (v. 1).

The method by which the allocations in Canaan were to be made was specified: the land was to be assigned by lot (14:2; 18:8; 19:51). The LORD had instructed Moses that each tribe was to receive territory proportionate to its population with the casting of lots to determine its location (Numbers 26:52–56).

According to Jewish tradition the name of a tribe was drawn from one urn and simultaneously the boundary lines of a territory from another. This method designated each tribal inheritance. But blind chance did not decide the tribal location, for God was superintending the whole procedure (cf. Proverbs 16:33).⁷

What do vv. 6-15 describe? When the time came to cast lots for the land, the tribe of Judah gathered first at Gilgal. Before the lots were cast, Caleb stepped forward to remind Joshua of a promise the Lord had made to him forty-five years earlier: *“I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the Lord wholeheartedly”* (Deuteronomy 1:36).

Now eighty-five years old, with his life ebbing away, Caleb stood before General Joshua—his old friend and fellow spy (Numbers 14:6)—and reviewed the defining moments of his life. He recalled that unforgettable day at Kadesh Barnea when Moses sent twelve spies into Canaan (Numbers 13:2), ten of whom praised the land but shrank back in fear, concluding Israel could not conquer it (Numbers 13:27–29, 31–33). Caleb dared to disagree (Numbers 13:30), and when the people’s fear threatened national rebellion, Joshua joined him in urging Israel to trust the Lord for victory (Numbers 14:6–9). Alas, Joshua and Caleb’s courageous stance was rejected by the rest of the non-trusting Jews and God punished them by assigning them a forty-year sentence of wandering in the desert.

Because Caleb stood firm against the unbelief of both the spies and the people, God singled him out for blessing and promised him a special inheritance (Numbers 14:24; Deuteronomy 1:36). Now, as the land was being apportioned, Caleb made his request—rooted in a lifetime of wholehearted faithfulness through both the wilderness wanderings and the Conquest. Joshua honored Caleb’s request and gave him Hebron as his inheritance.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Joshua, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 112. .

² Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua” in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 355.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ William MacDonald, Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 249.

⁶ Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua” in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 356.

⁷ Ibid.