

Chapter 15

What does Chapter 15 describe? Chapter 15 records the clan-by-clan allotment of land to the tribe of Judah. After granting Caleb's request (Chapter 14), Joshua resumed the task of distributing the land west of the Jordan among the remaining nine and one-half tribes. Judah, chosen first and being the largest tribe, received the most extensive inheritance. This chapter carefully outlines the boundaries of Judah's entire tribal territory.

The irregular and often difficult-to-trace boundaries of the tribes arose because the land was not divided along neat geographical lines. Instead, the casting of lots assigned groups of cities—often loosely connected—to each tribe. These cities functioned as the centers of small principalities or districts, which explains both the unusual shape of the territories and the complexity of their borders.

What do vv. 13-19 describe? Included within Judah's inheritance was Hebron (also called Kiriath Arba; cf. 14:15), which Joshua granted to Caleb. That seasoned warrior drove out the three Anakites and secured the city. Caleb then turned his attention to the nearby city of Debir, promising his daughter to the one who would attack and capture it. His courageous nephew Othniel accepted the challenge, conquered the city, and was given Caleb's daughter in marriage (cf. [Judges 1:10-15, 20](#)). Othniel would later rise to prominence as one of Israel's judges, delivering the nation during a time of oppression ([Judges 3:9-11](#)).

What do vv. 20-63 describe? With the tribal boundaries of Judah determined, the towns of Judah are next listed according to their locations. Judah inherited well over 100 cities and seems to have occupied them with little or no difficulty with the significant exception of Jerusalem. Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem.¹ The city of Jerusalem remained an island of Canaanite presence...an ominous and foreboding note.

Chapter 16

What does Chapter 16 describe? The general boundaries of Joseph's territory are given in vv. 1-4. This was, of course, divided between Ephraim and half of the tribe of Manasseh which settled west of the Jordan.² The other half of the tribe of Manasseh settled on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

What do vv. 5-10 describe? The allotment specifically inherited by Ephraim. Joseph's allotment was split between his two sons – Ephraim and Manasseh.

Because Joseph kept the whole family alive during the famine in Egypt, the patriarch Jacob ordained that Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, should be made founders and heads of tribes with their uncles (cf. [Genesis 48:5](#)). Their territory in Canaan was in many respects the most beautiful and fertile.³

What was the mistake made by the Ephraimites (v. 10)? They failed to drive out the Canaanite inhabitants of Gezer. Which appears to be a common refrain (15:63; 17:13).

Chapter 17

What does Chapter 17 describe? The allotment for the tribe of Manasseh.

What was unique about their allotment (vv. 1-2; 7-11)? The territory of Manasseh, Joseph's firstborn son, was divided among Manasseh's sons. The eastern half tribe of Manasseh, which settled east of the Jordan, was given to Makir, Manasseh's firstborn son, justified here by Manasseh's status as

the first-born (of Joseph) who receives a double portion (Deuteronomy 21:17). This was the former territory of Og, king of Bashan, whom Moses had defeated (12:2-5). This territory became known as Gilead and Bashan.

The portion of Manasseh's territory west of the Jordan River was given to Manasseh's other sons. It extended north to the valley of Jezreel. Manasseh is the only tribe to have settled both east and west of the Jordan.

What were the unusual circumstances of vv. 3-6? Special note is taken of the five daughters of Zelophehad, a great-great grandson of Manasseh. Because their father died without sons, they, as the Lord had declared in this and other such cases, should receive the inheritance (cf. Numbers 27:1-11). This was done to ensure that the house of Zelophehad would have a portion of the land even though there were no male heirs. They now went to the high priest Eleazar (Aaron's son, (Joshua 24:33)) who, along with Joshua and the tribal leaders, oversaw the allotments to the tribes (cf. 19:51). These five women claimed and received their portion of land within the territory of Manasseh. However, the daughters had to marry within their own tribe so that the land which belonged to Manasseh would not be absorbed by another tribe through intermarriage (Numbers 36:1-13).⁴ This incident is significant, for it shows a concern for the rights of women at a time when most societies regarded them as mere chattel.⁵

What was the mistake of vv. 12-13? The men of Manasseh failed to completely drive out the Canaanites who were living in the land.

What was the complaint lodged by the people of Joseph (v. 14)? They claimed that their allotment was too small in light of their large population.

What was the solution offered by Joshua (v. 15)? With tact and firmness Joshua challenged them first to clear the trees and settle in the forested hill country (v. 15). He suggested that they combine their energies to drive out the Canaanites (v. 18).

What was the response of the people of Joseph (v. 16)? This was not what they wanted to hear. They insisted that the hill country was not sufficient for them and that the Canaanites in the region possessed iron chariots.....probably chariots of wood covered with iron.

How did Joshua settle the argument (vv. 17-18)? Again, Joshua reminded his fellow tribesmen that they were numerous and very powerful and fully capable of expanding their territory by clearing the hill country and driving out the enemy Canaanites. While there is some similarity between this section and the one recording Caleb's request (14:6-15), their outlooks were opposite. Caleb's request was motivated by faith, whereas that of the Josephites stemmed from fear. The purpose, however, of this episode may well be to alert the Israelites to the fact that the tribes had to act in courageous faith if they were to possess the Promised Land fully.⁶

¹ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 358.

² William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 251.

³ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 358.

⁴ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 252.

⁵ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 360.

⁶ Ibid.