

Chapter 18

What is the subject of Chapter 18? The beginning of the division of the rest of the land starting with the allotment of the tribe of Benjamin. Seven tribes had yet to receive their inheritance.

What were the Israelites doing in v. 1? The encampment of Israel now changes from Gilgal to Shiloh....a more central location. Here the tabernacle is set up, and here it remains until the days of Samuel.

What were Joshua's instructions to the seven tribes (vv. 3-6)? Although Israel had largely conquered the land west of the Jordan, seven tribes had not yet received their inheritance. During the gathering at Shiloh for the erection of the tabernacle and the establishment of the new center of worship, Joshua perceived a growing sense of weariness among the people. It seems that, after years of warfare, the Israelites had grown tired, and the process of distributing the land had stalled. The seven remaining tribes appeared content to remain without permanent homes, continuing a nomadic existence reminiscent of their years in the wilderness.¹

This apparent complacency deeply troubled Joshua. He sharply rebuked the tribes, asking how long they intended to delay taking possession of the land that the Lord, the God of their fathers, had given them. Joshua believed that the initiative for completing the territorial assignments now rested with the tribes themselves. To him, every day of delay risked allowing enemy forces to regroup or reestablish control.

Yet Joshua did not rush blindly into action. He insisted on careful preparation. He ordered the appointment of a commission of twenty-one men—three from each of the seven unassigned tribes—and sent them throughout the land to conduct a detailed survey. This survey would provide the basis for casting lots and completing the fair and orderly distribution of the remaining territory.

What were Joshua's instructions to the 21 men (vv. 8-10)? Write their expert observations on a scroll, then return to Shiloh where Joshua proceeded to cast lots to determine the portions of territory to be allotted to the remaining seven tribes.

What do vv. 11-28 describe? The allotment for the tribe of Benjamin.

Chapter 19

What is the subject of Chapter 19? The allotments for Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Dan and Joshua.

What is the significance of vv. 49-51? They bring to an end the division of the country. Like Caleb, Joshua received a city, Timnath-serah, within his tribal allotment of Ephraim, for being faithful to God.

Chapter 20

What does Chapter 20 describe? The establishment of the cities of refuge.

What was the purpose of the cities of refuge (v. 3)? They were designed to be a place where a manslayer might flee from the avenger of blood. A manslayer was someone who accidentally killed another person. The avenger of blood was usually a close relative of the slain person who sought to avenge the dead. If the manslayer could flee to a city of refuge, he found sanctuary there until the death of the ... high priest. Then he could return ... to his native city in safety.² These cities, providing havens for unintentional manslaughter, are discussed in detail in Numbers 35:6-34 and Deuteronomy 19:1-14.

The fact that these cities are discussed in four books of the Old Testament marks them as being of great importance. It is apparent that God wished to impress on Israel the sanctity of human life. To put an end to a person's life, even if done unintentionally, is a serious thing, and the cities of refuge underscored this emphatically.³

What was the routine to be followed when someone reported to one of the cities of refuge (vv. 4-6)? Having arrived at the gate of a refuge city, the manslayer was to present his case to the elders of that city who formed an ancient court of law (cf. [Job 29:7](#); [Deuteronomy 21:19; 22:15](#)). A provisional decision would then be made to grant him asylum till a trial could be held in the presence of the assembly. If acquitted of premeditated murder, he was returned to the city of refuge where he lived till the high priest died, after which the manslayer was free to return to his home. That could be many years later. Involuntary manslaughter was something to be carefully avoided.

Many have puzzled over the meaning of the high priest's death in relation to the change in the status of the manslayer. The best explanation may be that the change in priestly administration served as a statute of limitations ending the fugitive's exile in the city of refuge.⁴

How many cities of refuge were there and where were they located? Three were west of the Jordan and three east of the Jordan. The cities of refuge were strategically located so that no point in the land was more than thirty miles from one of them.⁵

Chapter 21

What does Chapter 21 describe? The designation of towns for the Levites.

What did the family heads of the Levites request from the Israelites (v. 2)? The last and crowning act of distribution was now described. The leaders of the tribe of Levi stepped forward and laid claim to the towns which had been promised to them by Moses (cf. [Numbers 35:1-8](#)).

How did the tribal leaders respond (v 3)? The Israelites, out of their inheritance, gave the Levites 48 towns with pasturelands, including the 6 towns of refuge.

The distribution is described according to the three main branches of the tribe of Levi corresponding to Levi's three sons—Kohath ... Gershon, and Merari.

Every tribe gave four cities except Judah and Simeon, which gave nine cities between them, and Naphtali, which gave three cities.⁶

Someone has estimated that no one in Israel lived more than 10 miles from 1 of the 48 Levite towns. Thus, every Israelite had nearby a man well-versed in the Law of Moses who could give advice and counsel on the many problems of religious, family, and political life. But the final word is a sad one. The Levites did not live up to their potential; they did not fulfill their mission. If they had, idolatry and its corrupting influence might never have spread over the land of Israel.⁷

How does this chapter end (vv. 43-45)? The LORD had fulfilled every promise to Israel. Not one word failed. The Israelites took possession of the land and the Lord gave them rest. Not one of their enemies withstood them. What a tribute to God's faithfulness!

¹ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 361.

² William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 253.

³ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 362.

⁴ Ibid., 363.

⁵ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 254.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua" in the Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 364.