



Study Guide: Joshua – Chapter 17

Study Guide: Joshua – Chapter 17

This study guide provides an educational overview of Joshua Chapter 17 using a verse-by-verse structure, theological context, and application-oriented insights grounded in Scripture.

Introduction

Joshua Chapter 17 continues the detailed allotment of land to the tribes of Israel, focusing specifically on the inheritance of the tribe of Joseph, which is divided between the two half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. This chapter contributes to the broader narrative of Israel's settlement in Canaan by highlighting the challenges and negotiations involved in distributing the promised land fairly among the tribes. Readers should watch for the tension between the size of the tribe and the adequacy of their inheritance, as well as the faith and initiative shown by the descendants of Joseph in claiming their portion.

Context

Joshua 17 is situated within the larger framework of the conquest and division of Canaan, following the death of Moses and under Joshua's leadership. The immediate literary context includes the preceding chapter's allotment to the tribe of Manasseh and the subsequent chapters detailing other tribal inheritances. Historically, this chapter takes place after the military campaigns that secured the land, during the period when Israel is establishing itself as a nation in the Promised Land. The key figures are the tribal leaders and Joshua, who oversees the distribution. The covenantal backdrop is God's promise to Abraham and his descendants, reaffirmed to Moses, that the land of Canaan would be their inheritance.

Outline

The chapter can be divided into three main movements. First, the allotment of land to the descendants of Joseph, specifically Ephraim and Manasseh, is described, including the boundaries and the size of their inheritance. Second, the daughters of Zelophehad present their claim for an inheritance, which Joshua grants, reflecting the ongoing recognition of family rights within the tribal system. Third, the tribe of Joseph voices a concern about the adequacy of their land due to their large population and requests additional territory,



leading to a directive to clear forested areas to expand their inheritance. These movements reveal both the administrative process and the dynamic nature of land distribution among Israel.

Verse-by-Verse Study

Verses 1–3: The chapter opens with the allotment to the tribe of Joseph, beginning with the descendants of Manasseh. Their land is described as being on the east side of the Jordan, with boundaries extending from the wilderness to the sea, including the territory of the Amorites. This introduction sets the stage for the detailed division of Joseph's inheritance.

Verses 4–6: Attention shifts to the daughters of Zelophehad, who remind Joshua of their father's claim to an inheritance despite his lack of sons. Joshua grants their request, giving them land among their father's brothers, affirming the principle of inheritance rights for daughters in the absence of male heirs.

Verses 7–13: The focus moves to the tribe of Ephraim, the other half-tribe of Joseph. Their territory is outlined, including boundaries that border the inheritance of Manasseh and other tribes. The description emphasizes the size and fertility of the land, highlighting its significance for Ephraim's future.

Verses 14–18: The chapter concludes with a report from the descendants of Joseph, who express concern that their allotted land is insufficient for their growing population. They request additional territory, specifically the forested hill country of the Perizzites, which they are confident they can clear and cultivate. Joshua responds by encouraging them to clear the land themselves, indicating a partnership between divine provision and human effort in securing their inheritance.

Key Themes

One key theme is the fulfillment of God's promise through the careful and equitable distribution of land, demonstrating faithfulness to the covenant. Another theme is the recognition of family rights and justice, as seen in the daughters of Zelophehad's successful claim. The chapter also highlights the tension between divine provision and human responsibility, with the tribe of Joseph needing to actively clear land to accommodate their growth. Finally, the theme of inheritance as a tangible expression of God's blessing and identity for Israel is central throughout the chapter.



Cross-References

Numbers 26 and 27 provide important background on the census and the daughters of Zelophehad's claim, clarifying the legal and familial principles at work in Joshua 17. The promise to Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17 frames the overall significance of land inheritance. Deuteronomy 3:13 and 4:41-43 offer context on the territories east of the Jordan, which are relevant to Manasseh's allotment. Finally, Judges 1 reflects on the ongoing challenges of fully possessing the land, echoing the concerns expressed by Joseph's descendants in this chapter.

Application

Modern disciples can learn from Joshua 17 the importance of trusting God's provision while actively engaging in the work required to claim their spiritual inheritance. The example of the daughters of Zelophehad encourages believers to advocate for justice and rightful claims within the community. The chapter also challenges Christians to recognize that God's blessings often come with responsibilities, such as cultivating and stewarding what has been entrusted to them. Finally, it invites reflection on how faith communities can support growth and expansion through cooperation and initiative.

Summary

Joshua 17 details the allotment of land to the tribe of Joseph, emphasizing both the fulfillment of God's promises and the practical challenges faced by the Israelites in settling the land. The chapter balances divine provision with human responsibility, highlights the affirmation of inheritance rights through the daughters of Zelophehad, and illustrates the dynamic process of claiming and cultivating the Promised Land. It serves as a vital link in Israel's transition from conquest to settlement, underscoring themes of faith, justice, and stewardship within the covenant community.