

Joshua Chapter 20-24 • "Choose this day whom you will serve"

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When we were last in Joshua last week, we talked about the allotments of land. And we skipped over a lot of passages because it frankly just gave border information that may not apply very much to you or even to today, because some of those borders and towns and so forth have certainly changed.

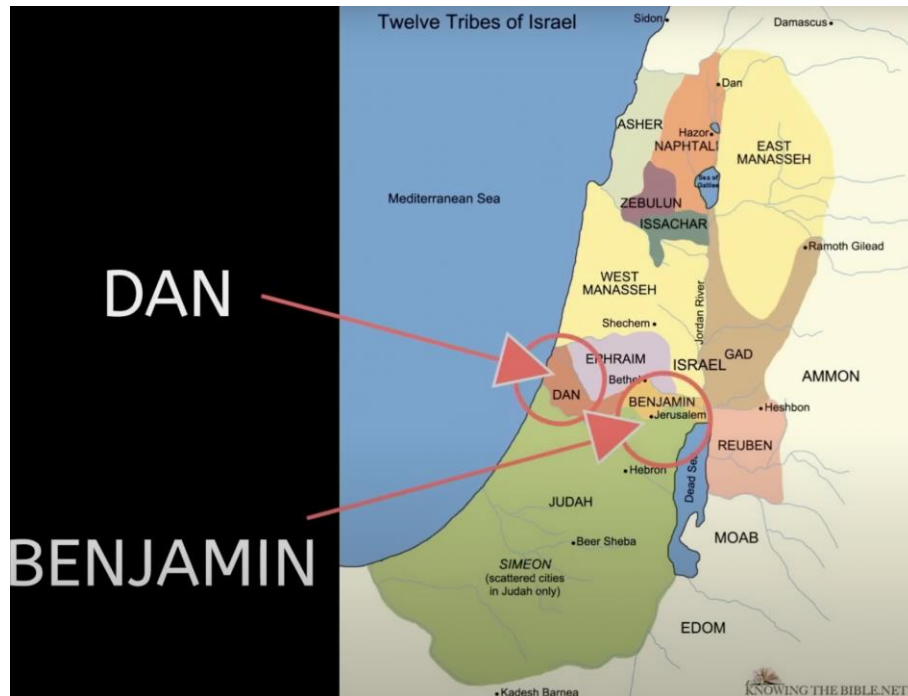
But I did want to put up a map for you tonight as we get started that just shows the tribal allotments. And we're going to run through these very quickly so that you can just see where the tribes of Israel landed.

First of all, we're going to highlight for you the tribal allotments of Judah and Benjamin. And you'll remember the Judah is that huge green area and— I'm sorry, Judah and Simeon.



And Simeon gained a tribal allotment within Judah because Judah was huge. They were given a lot of land and frankly they couldn't use it all. And so the smaller tribe of Simeon actually took up some of that land.

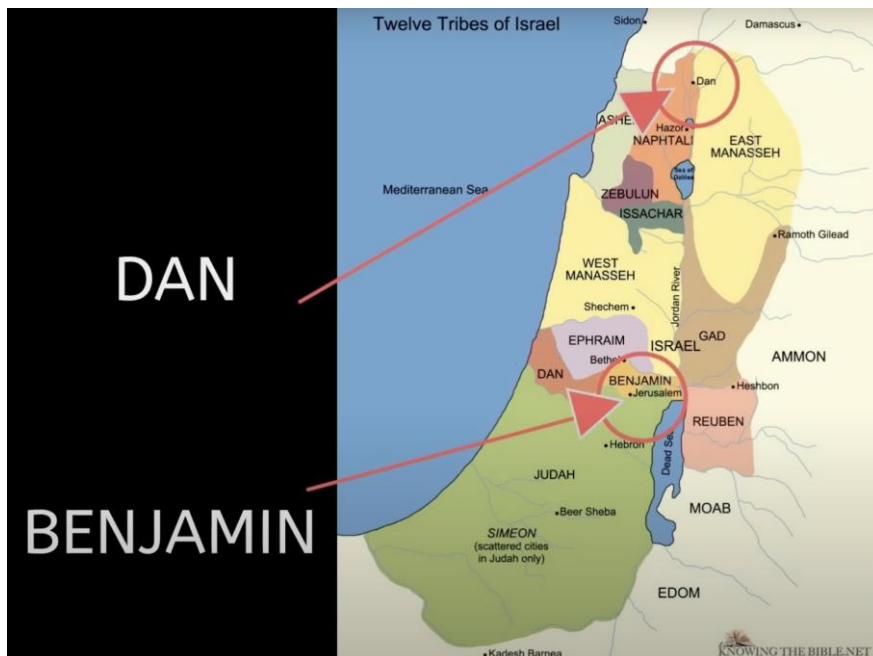
And then you have the allotments that were given to Dan and Benjamin and here's the interesting thing about today. I don't know if you heard in the news today. I got to be careful not to date these messages. They tend to stick around for a few years.



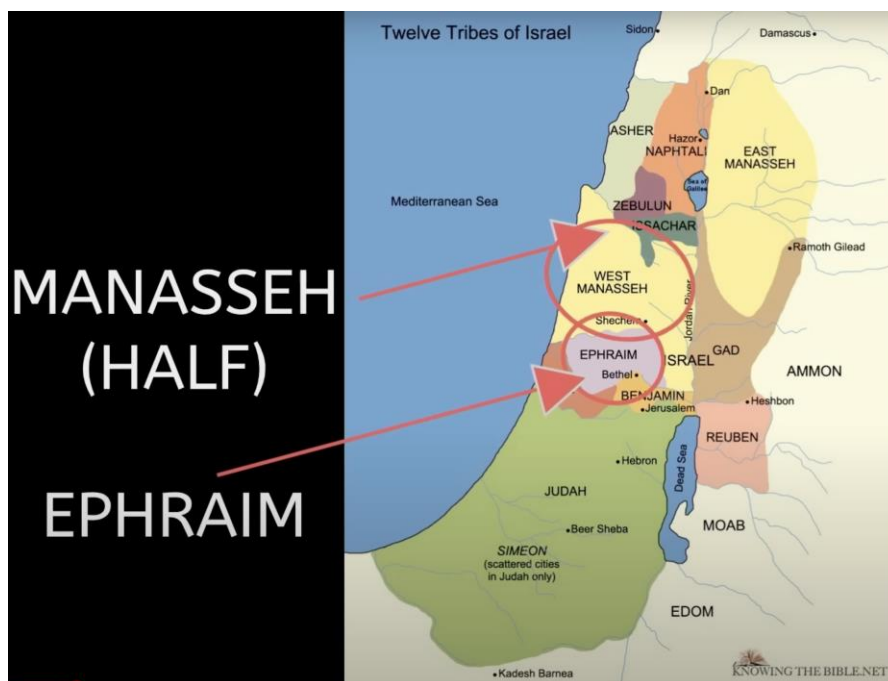
But our President made a statement about possibly the U.S. helping to take over Gaza and bring peace there. I'm not going to make any comments about whether that's good, bad, or whatever. But what's interesting about that is that Gaza, which was even referred to that in Biblical times, was the land that Dan was originally given.

Dan—but they never, the Philistines were very strong people and they didn't apparently have the kind of faith in the Lord to oust them and the Philistines stayed put, frankly. And so Dan realized they couldn't take the land that was given to them, which included the area of what we call today, the Gaza Strip.

And so let me show you here in this next slide way up. What Dan did is they migrated way to the north and they conquered a city named Laish and they named it, renamed it Dan after their, tribal leader. Well leader, a forefather. And that's basically where the tribe of Dan lived because they couldn't oust the Philistines from the land in which they'd been given.

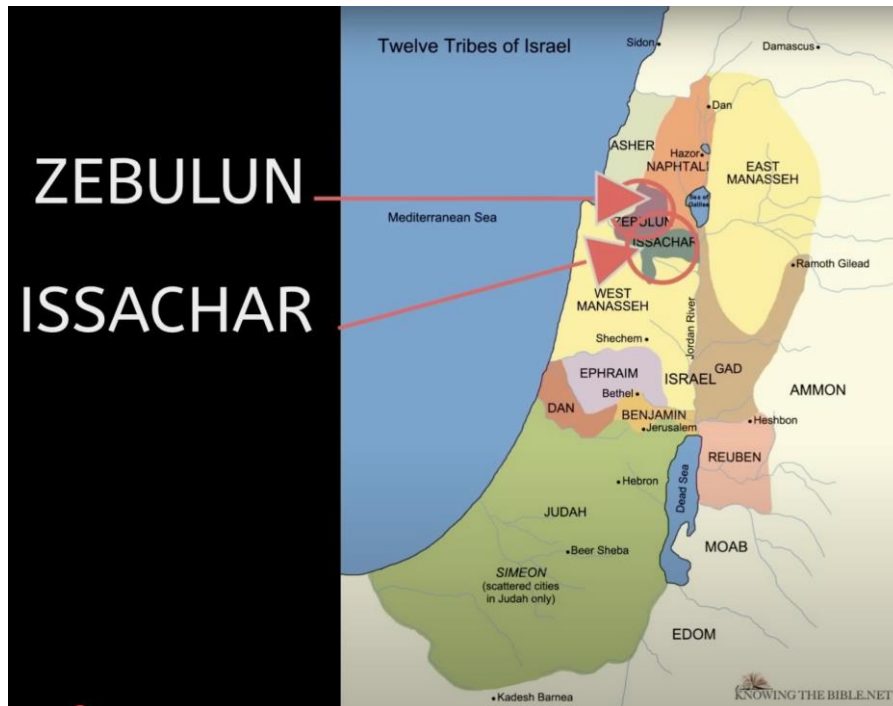


Then you've got Manasseh and Ephraim; the two sons of Joseph. Remember, Joseph was the son of Jacob. He had two sons while he was living in Egypt and his two sons received his portion of the sons of Israel. And you have them there.

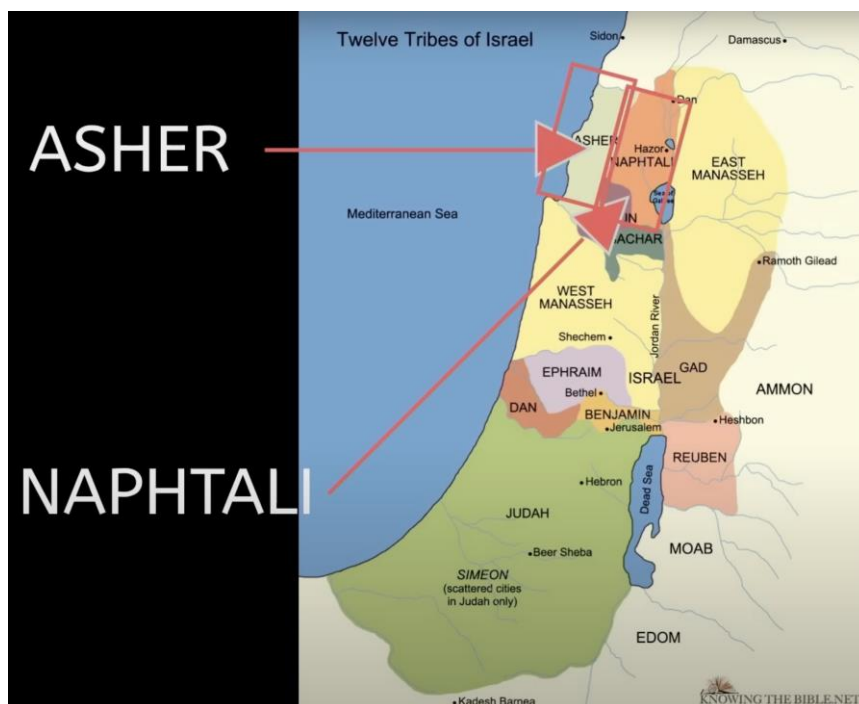


Now the Manasseh that you see the arrow pointing to is only half of the tribe. This is what we call the western half of the tribe of Manasseh. The other half we'll get to on the other side of the Jordan River.

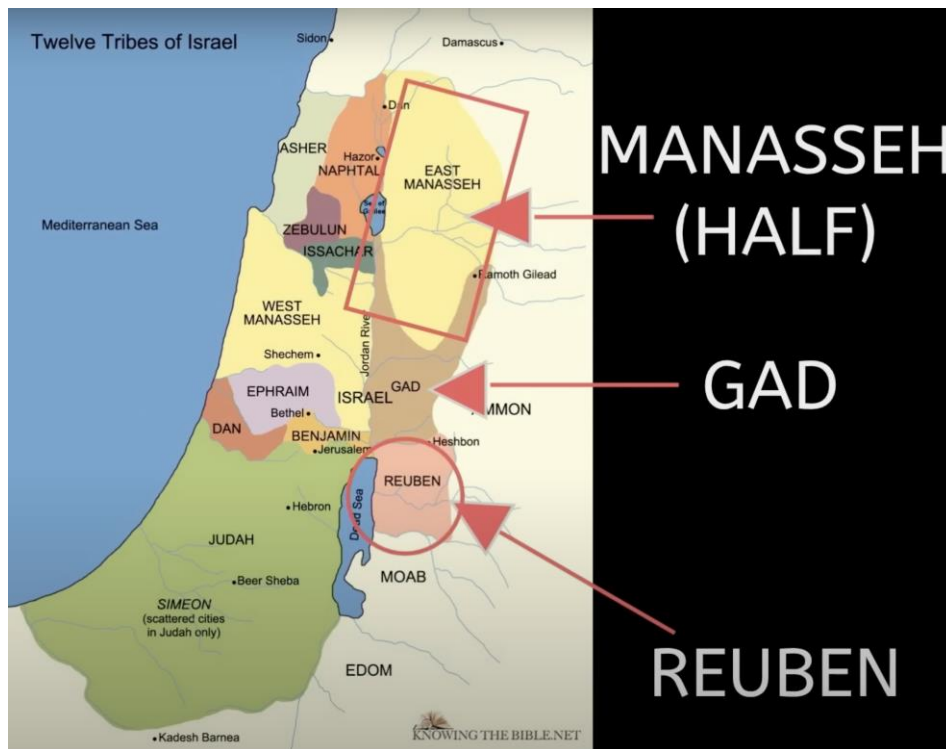
But first we deal with Zebulun and Issachar. Very small allotments that are given there in the northern part of Israel.



And then Asher and Naphtali, once again, in the north.



And then finally we go across the Jordan there and we find the other half of the tribe of Manasseh, the tribe of Gad, and the tribe of Reuben, which stayed on the east side of the Jordan River.



And that was an area, as we've mentioned many times, that was never meant to be part of the promised land. God didn't include that in the promised land, but it was given to them after the Amorite kings were defeated, and Moses gave them permission to remain in that area.

Now you have a sense of where the different tribal allotments went and we're going to pick it up now in chapter 20. Chapter 20 begins by saying, *“Then the LORD said to Joshua, ² ‘Say to the people of Israel, ‘Appoint the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, ³ that the manslayer who strikes any person without intent or unknowingly (and that means literally, accidentally) may flee there. They shall be for you a refuge from the avenger of blood.’”* (ESV)

Let me explain why this was necessary. In that culture, if you killed someone's relative, their closest relative, or even far away relative would take the right of vengeance against that person. And they could kill you. If you killed somebody, their relatives would probably come gunning for you.

And the problem was, many times, well, I don't know about many times, but occasionally a death could happen by accident. It wasn't intentional, there wasn't

a problem between the two people, but for some reason or another. We call that manslaughter in our culture. But it was a situation where back in that culture, they didn't sit around to ask questions. They didn't wait for a trial to say, did this person really mean to do this? Or was this in, they didn't care. They were just like, I'm killing you.

God gave commandments through Moses to set up in Israel cities of what, He called them cities of refuge where someone who accidentally killed someone could flee and it was a sanctuary city so that they would be protected. And this original command was through Moses. It's recorded in Exodus 21. Let me put this on the screen for you. You can see it together. It says,

Exodus 21:12-13 (ESV)

“Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee.”

“Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. (that's essentially the death sentence for murder) But if he did not lie in wait for him, (in other words, he had no intention of hurting him) but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee.”

And this is now the fulfillment. And as we keep reading in verse 4 and following, we get some more insights into how these cities worked from a judicial standpoint.

Verse 4. *“He shall flee to one of these cities and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and explain his case to the elders of that city. (and) Then they shall take him into the city and give him a place, and he shall remain with them. ⁵ And if the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not give up the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unknowingly, and did not hate him in the past. ⁶ And he shall remain in that city until he has stood before the congregation for judgment, until the death of him who is high priest at the time. Then the manslayer may return to his own town and his own home, to the town from which he fled.”*

⁷ So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah.”

There was a very famous case. In the time of David that came to the forefront concerning the manslayer.

“⁸ And beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they appointed Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland, from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh. ⁹ These were the cities designated for all the people of Israel and for the stranger sojourning among them, that anyone who killed a person without intent could flee there, so that he might not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, till he stood before the congregation.”

And you just hope that you're faster than the avenger of blood. That's it for chapter 20.

Chapter 21. This now begins to outline the setting aside of cities and pasture lands for the priests and the Levites. You'll remember that the descendants of Levi were given no tribal allotments and so they had to have a place to live. So they were given cities from within each of the tribes.

And this command is reiterated in the first 3 verses. *“Then the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites (in other words, the descendants of Levi) came to Eleazar the priest and to Joshua the son of Nun and to the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the people of Israel. ² And they said to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, “The LORD commanded through Moses that we be given cities to dwell in, along with their pasturelands for our livestock.” ³ So by command of the LORD the people of Israel gave to the Levites the following cities and pasturelands out of their inheritance.”*

Now, I'm just going to tell you that what comes here from verses 4 through 40 are just the names of all of those specific cities, and the tribes from which they were taken, and how they were given for both the Levites. And some of the specific descendants of Aaron.

Because you'll remember the Levites were those descendants of Levi who were given the ministry of supporting the line of Aaron who came from Levi, but he was a branch off Levi. And all the descendants of Aaron were the high priests, right? You couldn't be a high priest unless you were in the line of Aaron. So you have both of these groups really that need to be taken care of and they are.

We're going to skip all the way down to verse 41. And it says, *“The cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the people of Israel were in all forty-eight cities with their pasturelands.”* This is a lot of Levites and descendants of Aaron.

“⁴² These cities each had its pasturelands around it. So it was with all these cities.

⁴³ Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. ⁴⁴ And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. ⁴⁵ Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.”

I emphasize that for you verbally just to reiterate that is in keeping with the character of God. That's not unique to the people of Israel or to God when He dealt with the people of Israel. That is unique to the character of God. In other words, if He makes a promise, it will never fail to be kept. Ever. Okay? Very important thing to remember.

Now, as we get to chapter 22 we're going to read here in this chapter how the tribes that had claimed or asked for the land on the east side of the Jordan River, but who had been told to come and fight with their brothers on the west side to help them clear the land, we're now being freed up to go back home. They had left their families over on the east side of the Jordan. They had come over fully armed to help their brothers clear the land and now they are ready to return.

And it says, “At that time Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, ² and said to them, “You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you and have obeyed my voice in all that I have commanded you. ³ You have not forsaken your brothers these many days, down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the LORD your God. ⁴ And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.”

And then he gives them an exhortation. *“⁵ Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.” ⁶ So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.*

⁷ Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, (and this is, again, just explaining the split between the tribe of

Manasseh, where some stayed on one side of the Jordan, and some stayed on the other. And he says) *but (and) to the other half Joshua had given a possession beside their brothers in the land west of the Jordan. And when Joshua sent them away to their homes and blessed them,* ⁸ *he said to them, “Go back to your tents with much wealth and with very much livestock, (because you’ll remember, they took plunder from many of the cities) with silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and with much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers.”* ⁹ *So the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned home, parting from the people of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, their own land of which they had possessed themselves by command of the LORD through Moses.”*

All right, it'd be great if the chapter ended right here? But it doesn't. It actually gets into some drama. And we're going to talk about how that drama took place. And we're going to even talk at the very end here on how that drama could have been avoided.

But it says in verse 10 that, *“And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is (the Jordan River) in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size.* ¹¹ *And the people of Israel heard it said, “Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel.”* ¹² *And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh (look at this) to make war against them.”*

Why? Yeah, all they did was build an altar. What's the big deal? Well, they were told to sacrifice where the Ark of the Covenant was and right now that was at Shiloh. And they were not to just make offerings or sacrifices and altars wherever they pleased. That was pagan thinking.

And so this seemed to the rest of the nation of Israel to be an act of unfaithfulness on the part of these two and a half tribes. And so they assumed that they were being unfaithful and that they were going to have to make war against them so that the judgment didn't fall on them for what their brothers had done.

Because they'd seen many times in the past where the unfaithfulness of a few, delivered consequences that were quite serious to the whole group. So they decide that they need to go to war.

¹³ Then (verse 13) the people of Israel sent to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, ¹⁴ and with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel. ¹⁵ And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and they said to them, ¹⁶ “Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, ‘What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the LORD by building yourselves an altar this day (look at this) in rebellion against the LORD? ¹⁷ Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the LORD,”

And what they're referring to is when the Moabites brought women down to the area of Peor and lured the men into sexual immorality, and judgment fell upon the nation.

And he says or they said in verse 18 *“that you too must turn away this day from following the LORD? And if you too rebel against the LORD today then tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. ¹⁹ But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the LORD's land where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us.”*

See what they're saying? They're assuming. That the two and a half tribes that wanted to live on the other side of the Jordan, that they weren't willing to serve the Lord in that area. That they had to come over to the land of Israel to serve the Lord, and they're making all kinds of assumptions. If the land over there isn't good for you that you had to, out of rebellion, build an altar here in our land, then just bring your families over here. And live and let's not bring judgment upon the whole nation.

Verse 20. *“Did not Achan the son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity.”* And that's true. His family perished as well.

“²¹ Then the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said in answer to the heads of the families of Israel, ²² “The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows; and let Israel itself know! If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith against the LORD, do not spare us today ²³ for building an altar to turn away from following the LORD. Or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on it, may the LORD himself take vengeance. ²⁴ No, but we did it from fear that in time

to come your children might say to our children, 'What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?' ²⁵ For the LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you people of Reuben and people of Gad. You have no portion in the LORD.' So your children might make our children cease to worship the LORD. ²⁶ Therefore we said, 'Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, ²⁷ but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the service of the LORD in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, "You have no portion in the LORD."'" ²⁸ And we thought, 'If this should be said to us or to our descendants in time to come, we should say, "Behold, the copy of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you."'" ²⁹ Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD and turn away this day from following the LORD by building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering, or sacrifice, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle!"

³⁰ When Phinehas the priest and the chiefs of the congregation, the heads of the families of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh spoke, it was good in their eyes. ³¹ And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, "Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the LORD. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the LORD."

³² Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the chiefs, returned from the people of Reuben and the people of Gad in the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the people of Israel, and brought back word to them. ³³ And the report was good in the eyes of the people of Israel. And the people of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them to destroy the land where the people of Reuben and the people of Gad were settled. ³⁴ The people of Reuben and the people of Gad called the altar Witness, "For," they said, "it is a witness between us that the LORD is God.""

Doesn't it just remind you of just like church drama sometimes? I mean, it's like, couldn't this have been avoided? This really was, I mean, I can think of several ways. First of all, that it, it could have been avoided.

First of all if the two and a half tribes had simply communicated to the rest of the people of Israel about what they were doing or what they were planning to do. Even if they didn't think of it until they got to the Jordan River and started talking among themselves, they could have sent people back just to avoid this.

And say, go communicate with the rest of the community and let them know what we're doing, because they had to know that this was going to look like a breach of faith. It was going to look like an act of rebellion, so they could have just communicated.

Next, the people of Israel could have refused to assume on their part and they did make a lot of assumptions. And, this is so common, so incredibly common, that causes drama in churches today. People say things, do things, don't say things, don't do things, and everybody else makes an assumption based on that. And they don't know for sure whether it's true, but they jump to conclusions. And it just creates such difficulty.

But really, one of the big things too that could have solved this whole issue, is if the two and a half tribes that were making their way back home, simply could have refused to react out of fear.

I don't know if you noticed in verse 24, but it says right there, "*we did it from fear...*" And I don't know, I don't know about you, but when I think back on the things that I've done in my life that were predicated from a foundation of fear, it's never been good. Things I do from faith, those turn out well. When I respond out of fear, I'm afraid, so I'm going to do this. It's just not a good reason and yet it's so very, very common.

And then lastly, the two and a half tribes could have built a memorial that didn't resemble an altar. They could have just stacked a bunch of rocks up, or wood, or something that was unique in its appearance that didn't look anything like, and the rest of Israel wouldn't have cared. They probably just would have said, what's that for? And it's obviously not something we recognize and it's a pile of rocks. Well, it's a memorial. We built a memorial just to remember that we're part of the nation of Israel. Oh, okay, cool. Done. No drama.

So they just weren't thinking. And again, when we respond out of fear, we're not thinking right. We're thinking based on fear.

Okay, chapter 23. Chapter 23 and 24 actually make up Joshua's final exhortations to the people of Israel. He speaks to the leaders and the rest of the nation about the fact that they need to finish clearing the land. And he also gives them a warning in these verses not to mix with pagan cultures. And that's such a powerful message for you and me too, coming into the land of promise, don't live like the world.

Verse 1 says, “A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, ² Joshua summoned all Israel, (notice that) its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, “I am now old and well advanced in years. ³ And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you. ⁴ Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.”

And this is again, Joshua is just reiterating the promise of the Lord. Here's what's interesting, at least it's interesting to me. God gave them a promise. You will go in the land. I'll fight for you. I want you to clear the land. I want you to take all of it. All that I give you, I want you to take it, and I want you to drive the people out, and I will go before you. I will drive them out.

The interesting point is they never did possess all of the land. We've already made mention of the fact that the tribe of Dan never got to the Gaza Strip. They never got to their allotted land. They had to go somewhere else. A long way away to find a place to live.

Isn't that interesting, that there is this interesting dynamic between God's perfect will and God's permissive will? And I don't want to put too fine a point on this, but it is a reality.

God's perfect will was that they go in and clear all the land, but He permitted them, according to their own weaknesses, inabilities, and lack of faith, to not take all of the land. And so what we see here is that God has a plan for our lives and I don't mean to sound trite, because you hear that all the time. But it's true.

God has a plan for your life but He will allow us to fall short of that plan. I want you to think about that for a minute. I want you to think about your life. And I want you to ask yourself the question. Where do you think you have fallen short of God's overall plan for your life? And I think every one of us can probably come up with some kind of a response to that question. It's just between you and the Lord. It's nobody else's business. But it is an important thing to remember.

First of all, we see it in the Word. Take all the land. And Joshua talks like this is still possible for you, but they didn't do it. They didn't gain it. As I read through these verses, I was convicted in my own heart about areas that I've fallen short.

Maybe God wanted to do a whole lot more in my life than I allowed Him to do. Maybe He wanted me to take more land, figuratively speaking, in terms of the ministry that He'd given me and so forth. But I just refused. Maybe I dug my heels in. Maybe I didn't have enough faith. Maybe I couldn't route some of the enemies. Made me think. It's still making me think.

But Joshua says to them in verse 6, *“Therefore, be very strong (reminds me of the exhortation of the apostle Paul in Ephesians) to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left,⁷ that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you (look at this) or (even) make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them,⁸ but you shall cling to the LORD (that’s the second time we’ve seen that word, cling to the LORD) your God just as you have done to this day.”*

If you have a New King James or an NIV on your lap, your Bible says, *“hold fast.”* But he says instead, *“hold fast”* or *“cling to the Lord.”* I like that imagery of just hanging on, grabbing onto the Lord, and hanging on for dear life sometimes. And that's what he's telling them to do.

But I want you to see what he says as he goes on. *“⁹ For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day.¹⁰ One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.”*

I want you to notice how Joshua keeps putting the emphasis on the Lord for their success and he does it from the standpoint of faith in the Lord. And that's where it needs to stay.

But notice this in verse 11 and 12. *“Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God.¹² For if you turn back and cling (at this is the same Hebrew word that is used earlier to speak of holding fast to the Lord, but, if you turn back and cling) to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you,¹³ know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.”*

And when you read those verses and you think about it, those verses contain just as much a promise as all those wonderful promises we like to claim to say,

how the Lord is going to bless us. And yet there's an equal promise here if you turn away from God.

He says, ¹⁴ *“And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, (and that's a euphemism for dying) and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed. ¹⁵ But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the LORD your God has given you,”*

Verse 16. *“if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you.”*

I want you to note that phrase there that he uses in verse 16. He says, *“if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God,”* People, he's not just talking about sin, but he already made arrangements for sin. That's what the whole sacrificial system was about.

Yeah, God knows that we sin. God knew that His people, Israel were going to sin. He didn't have delusions that the people were going to suddenly stop sinning now that, they'd come into the promised land. He knew they were going to mess up. He knew they were going to have problems. He knew they were going to fail. That's not what he's talking about when he talks about transgressing the covenant.

And this is something that I find Christians struggle with as well when they talk about their own relationship with God. And they're constantly— people will ask me, they want to know what sin is going to put them over the edge so that they're going to lose their salvation. And I constantly tell people it's no, it's not about sin. Sin has been dealt with.

Sin has been dealt with at the cross. That's not the issue. You're not going to sin your way out of the kingdom of God because there's a perpetual forgiveness; a fountain of forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ.

We know that the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing us from sin. There's this work of grace that just, oh, it's just, I'm so thankful to God because I know as a believer that I mess up. And I make mistakes and I sin. And I'm so thankful that

I'm not going to sin my way out of the kingdom and it's the same for the nation of Israel.

What does he lay out there as a transgression of the covenant? It's not sin. It's serving other gods and bowing down to them. In other words, turning away from the Lord and turning to other gods. That's the issue. That's the problem. That's the— that is always going to be the problem. And so this helps us in our understanding of our relationship with the Lord. We're saved by grace through faith so don't let go, and don't serve other gods. And don't let it damage your faith.

Chapter 24. *“Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. ² And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. ³ Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac. ⁴ And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. ⁵ And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out.*

⁶ “Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. And the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. ⁷ And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness a long time. ⁸ Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan. They fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. ⁹ Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, ¹⁰ but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand. ¹¹ And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. ¹² And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. ¹³ I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.’

¹⁴ “Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”

So the exhortation is to fear the Lord. And fearing the Lord is all about understanding that it is He to whom we must give an account. That's what it means to fear the Lord. It doesn't mean to be terrified of Him to the point where you can't even Come to Him or talk to Him or look at Him.

It's all about understanding that He's the judge of all the earth. That I'm accountable to God who keeps really, really good records. And I will stand before Him one day. That's what it means. He says, fear the Lord and serve him with sincerity and faithfulness.

And notice he tells them to put away the gods that their father served, which is interesting this is not the last time they're going to make mention of these gods that their fathers served, and the exhortation to put them away. And it doesn't mean don't ever take them. It means get rid of them now as if they're still in their presence. And that's the crazy thing.

And then of course, this is that very famous statement that Joshua makes in verse 15. Where he says, *“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, (in other words, if it is distasteful to you, well) choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*

¹⁶ Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, ¹⁷ for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. ¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

And it's almost like Joshua at this point feels like the people, it's just coming too easy to them. And so he says in verse 19, *“But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.”* All right. I want you to stop there for a minute because we need to discuss this for just a moment.

It almost sounds like Joshua is trying to discourage the people from following the Lord. I mean, as weird as that, may sound. But what he's actually doing is

he's exposing the futility of any sort of a halfhearted and insincere attitude that might be coming from the Lord. Or coming from the people, rather. Because it almost sounds like, as he's challenging them, to serve the Lord. Be faithful to the Lord. And they're like, well, of course. Of course we're going to serve the Lord. Yeah, we're going to serve the Lord. Yeah, no problem.

And so Joshua, he's had it with their attitude. He goes, you know what? You can't serve the Lord. He's too holy. And He's a jealous God and He won't forgive your transgressions. He's reminding them that God's standards aren't just high, they're impossible.

I recently saw a video where a person who was obviously an unbeliever. At least it seemed like this person was an unbeliever, was talking to a Bible teacher. And was asking questions and saying, what does it take to get into heaven? And the guy very correctly answered, he said, perfection. And the person asked, can anyone be perfect? And the Bible teacher said, No. No one can be perfect. And so the person then said, no what's the answer? And the Bible teacher said, Mercy. Mercy and grace. And of course, they went on to have a larger conversation about how that mercy and grace comes to us through the person of Jesus Christ.

But it's an important reminder for us that heaven is never going to be attainable by human effort. Never. It never will. And so, Joshua is laying this thing out in such a way as to say. Guys, if you're somehow thinking that you're going to do this based on your own human effort, I got news for you. It's not going to happen. It's not going to happen that way. God is holy.

You remember that line that C.S. Lewis put into the Chronicles of Narnia? And particularly the first episode where the Pevensy children are talking to Mr. and Mrs. Beaver? It's a great story, but there's so much theology in there. I mean, there's just wonderful theology because C. S. Lewis was not just a writer. He was a theologian of the greatest level.

And so they're talking and they're asking about Aslan, of course, who's a picture of God, and particularly Jesus Christ. And they're talking about how Aslan is on the move. He's going to be coming back soon and so forth. And one of the Pevensy children asks the question, is he safe? And Mr. Beaver laughs and says no, no he's not safe, but he's good.

And I remember hearing that for the first time in the Chronicles of Narnia and I thought, what an incredible statement to make that is such a perfect picture of the nature and the holiness of God, coupled with his goodness. No, he's not safe.

And that's what Joshua is saying to the people. You can't serve Him. You're not able. He's not safe, you guys. He's not going to be your buddy. He's a holy God whose standards are impossible to reach for you and me so don't even try.

The point is we're saved by grace through faith and this not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast. We're saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that's what saves us.

And now that we are saved, we understand that He has given us His Holy Spirit and it is He working in and through us who now gives us the ability to will and to act according to His good purpose. Very important things to keep in mind.

I want to also take care, the statement Joshua makes here, it can sound troubling where he says, God will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. It almost sounds like the whole sacrificial system and coming to God for forgiveness, like at some point God's just simply going to say, no, I'm not going to do that anymore. He explains what he means in verse 20 about why God will not forgive them.

Look at verse 20. Here it is again. *“If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.”*

And so he's telling them, he's warning them, that the only thing that's going to stand in between you and your God, it's not going to be your sin. It is not just going to be messing up. He's provided a means of getting forgiven for all those sins. It's turning away from Him. Turning away and serving other gods. That's what's going to become the problem. That's the sticky point.

Verse 21. *“And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.”*²² *Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”*²³ You can tell, there's a little tension here.

And ²³ *He said, “Then (and look at this, they've made this bold statement, so what does he say? Well, then) put away the foreign gods that are among you,...*” Oh, that just blows me away.

*“Then put away the foreign gods that are (still) among you, (get rid of them) and incline your heart to (YAHWEH) the LORD, the God of Israel.”*²⁴ *And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.”*²⁵ *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in*

place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. ²⁶ And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. ²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.” ²⁸ So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.”

Now the final verses of the Book of Joshua deal with the death of Joshua and some closing comments. It says, “²⁹ After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being 110 years old. ³⁰ And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-erah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash.

³¹ Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel.

³² As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money.”

It sounds almost like a child would talk about it, doesn't it? Well, the reason that it sounds weird is because the original Hebrew there says, a hundred qesitah. I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing that correct, but the reason they just put money there is because this references a currency that we have absolutely no knowledge of. At some point, archaeology will probably unearth something that will give archaeologists an idea of how much a qesitah was worth, but for right now, it's an unknown value.

And it says at the end of verse 32. And “*It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.*”

And then finally “³³ And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas his son, which had been given him in the hill country of Ephraim.”

And not to end this study on a downer note but when you guys get to the Book of Judges, it starts off with, it basically picks it up from here. And it says, and they served the Lord in that generation and the next generation knew nothing of the Lord. Yeah. Which, I mean, has its own implications of the importance and responsibility of parents and grandparents to pass their faith along to children and grandchildren. And then the Book of Judges just basically is a progression from bad to worse through the course of that entire book.

But anyway, so there it is. We finished the Book of Joshua tonight. There it is. We're going to give you guys a little bit of time to fellowship before the kids are released at 8:15 if you have children over in the other building. Let's pray.

Father, thank You. This has been a great study. And Lord, we've seen so many pictures of our own lives, walking out the promises of God. Entering the figurative land of promise for us and all of the battles that take place. And all of the challenges to our faith that take place. And all of the misunderstandings and assumptions and problems and drama. All these things that can cause us to stumble.

Lord, we know that walking out the promises of God is a challenging business, but we ask that You would be with us, go before us. That You would bless and keep us in all of our ways. And that You would bring us safely to our heavenly home.

We look to you to do that, Lord, because Your Word declares that it is You who keeps us and that You will present us without fault and with great joy one day before Your throne.

Lord, may we be faithful in all of our ways.

We thank You. We praise You. We worship You in the name of Jesus, our Savior, amen.