

Two Year Bible Trek  
Week 17  
Joshua 13-24

**Key Concepts:** The key concept in this section is that God will take care of all of God's people and that no one tribe or group will be favored over another.

**Stories:** The stories include the allotment of the land east of the Jordan (13), a special gift to Caleb (14), the allotment of land to Judah (15), the allotment of land to the tribes of Joseph (16-17), the allotment to the other tribes (18-19), the appointment of cities of refuge (20), the allotment of cities to the Levites (21), the return home of the tribes whose territory is on the Eastern side of the Jordan (22), Joshua's final address (23), and the renewal of the covenant at Shechem (24).

**Brief Summary:** as has been noted by numerous scholars (including Creach in *Joshua: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, John Knox Press, 1989) and readers, this portion of Joshua is often overlooked because it appears to be no more than a long list of towns and territories. While that observation is indeed true as you will find when you read it, there are several important theological concepts which will be derived from what transpires in these chapters.

The first concept is that the land which has been conquered is not divided according to the power or prestige of the individual tribes. It is divided according to the casting of lots which is believed to be directed by God. This is made clear in 14:1-2, as well as at the beginning of each section of land division where we read that each tribe was given its "lot." This concept is critical for creating a society in which all persons are judged to be equal, which is at the heart of the Law. If the lands were divided based on power and privilege it would mean that some tribes were better than others.

The second concept is that the land is given as an inheritance to the tribes, and is not to be bought or sold to individuals as a lasting possession. In other words there is no sense of "private property" in the way in which we view it today. While individual plots of land could change hands, ultimately it all belonged first to the tribe and then to God. This becomes a reminder to the people that when the year of Jubilee comes, all land must be returned to its original owners and tribes. This concept will become important throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

The Third concept is that there needs to be a place where the individuals can flee when they have shed the blood of another either accidentally or in self-defense. The code of the ancient near east was that regardless of the reason blood was shed, revenge must be undertaken to settle the "blood debt." Such vengeance would not be justice and so in the Torah it is made clear that cities of refuge be established. We witness Joshua carrying out this command.

The fourth concept has to do with care for the religious leaders, meaning the Levites. As the land was divided there was no territory given to the Levites. In order to care for them however, Joshua sets aside a number of cities in which they could live and prosper. It should be noted that the Levitical cities are also the cities of refuge...thus the Levites probably insured the protection of those seeking refuge.

The final theme is that of Torah faithfulness. The people are warned that they must continually choose to be obedient to God through obedience to the law. Joshua understands that there will be great temptation to forget the covenant...so the people must continually renew their commitment to God.

1. What do you think of the idea that the land was divided by casting lots?
2. How does Israel's view of ownership of property help you rethink your view of the concept of private property?
3. How do you make regular commitments of your faithfulness to God?