

Enjoying God's Blessings

Josh 18–19; Eph 1:3–14

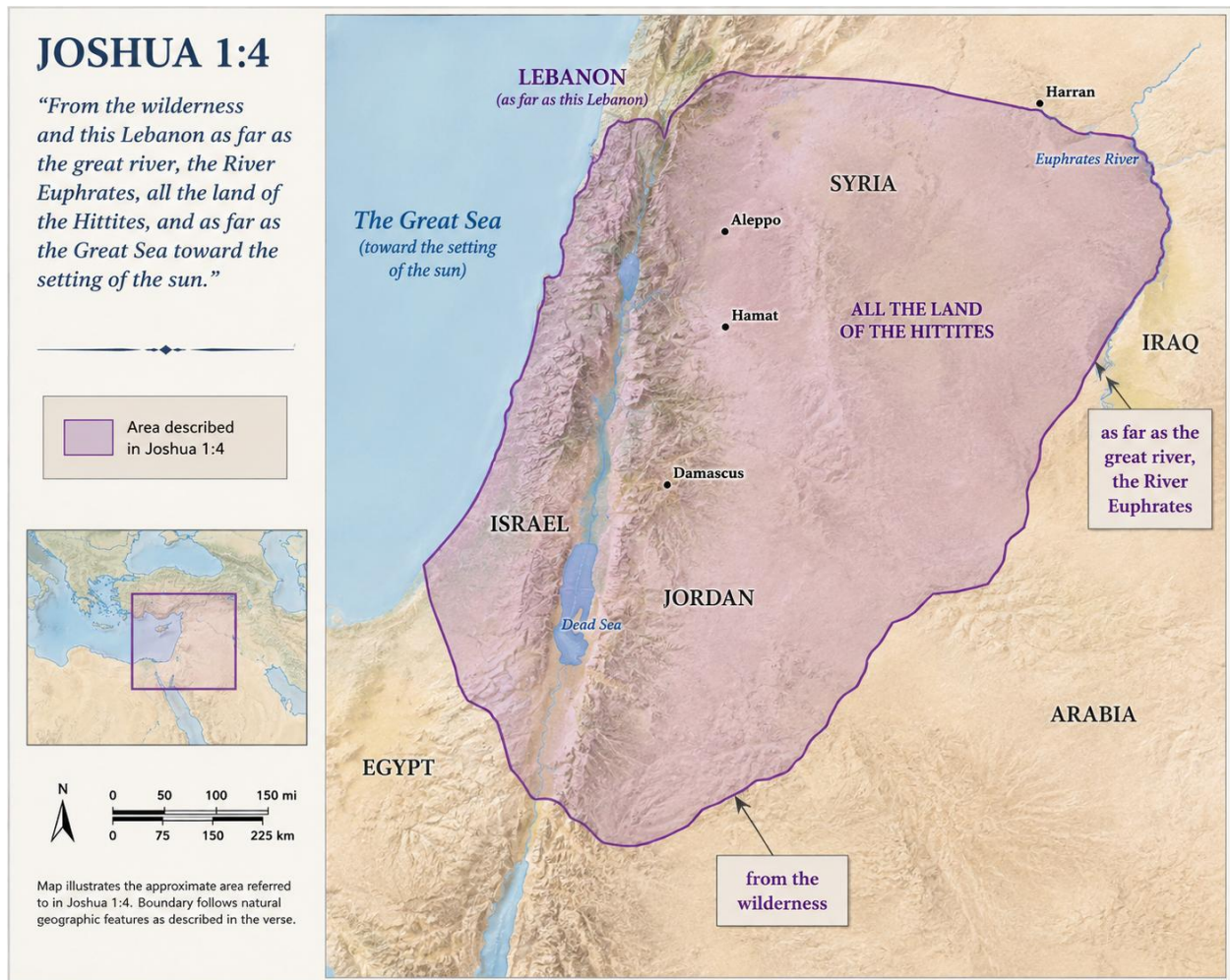
Rev. Jason Forbes

Being a Christian has provided some of the most amazing experiences I've had. I really wouldn't want to be going through life without knowing Jesus. But at the same time, I have a bit of a confession to make. Sometimes the Christian life feels smaller than I expect. Even disappointing. What I mean is this: I hear about the promises of God in the Bible. I hear Christians speak about God's love and faithfulness. Yet sometimes those promises don't seem to match my experience of life. I expect I'm not the only one. We go to church and worship God, we set time apart to pray and have devotions, we look to serve others, and sometimes we wonder, does God see any of it? Especially when the challenges keep coming - the health diagnosis, the car repair, the relationship breakdown.

Meanwhile, we look over the fence to our neighbour who has nothing to do with God, they wouldn't know what a church was even if they stumbled into one, and yet they seem to go from strength to strength to strength.

How do we understand situations such as these? How do we respond?

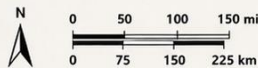
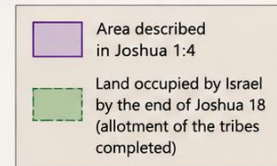
This is the issue that God's people, the Israelites, faced in Joshua. The Israelites knew God's promises were true. They had crossed the Jordan. Jericho had fallen. Much of the land had been conquered. Yet there remained a gap between what God had promised and what they were actually experiencing. If we were to map the territory promised in chapter one, it would look a little like this:



This is a really big area. This is what God has promised them. And yet they have only taken this much:

JOSHUA 1:4

"From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun."

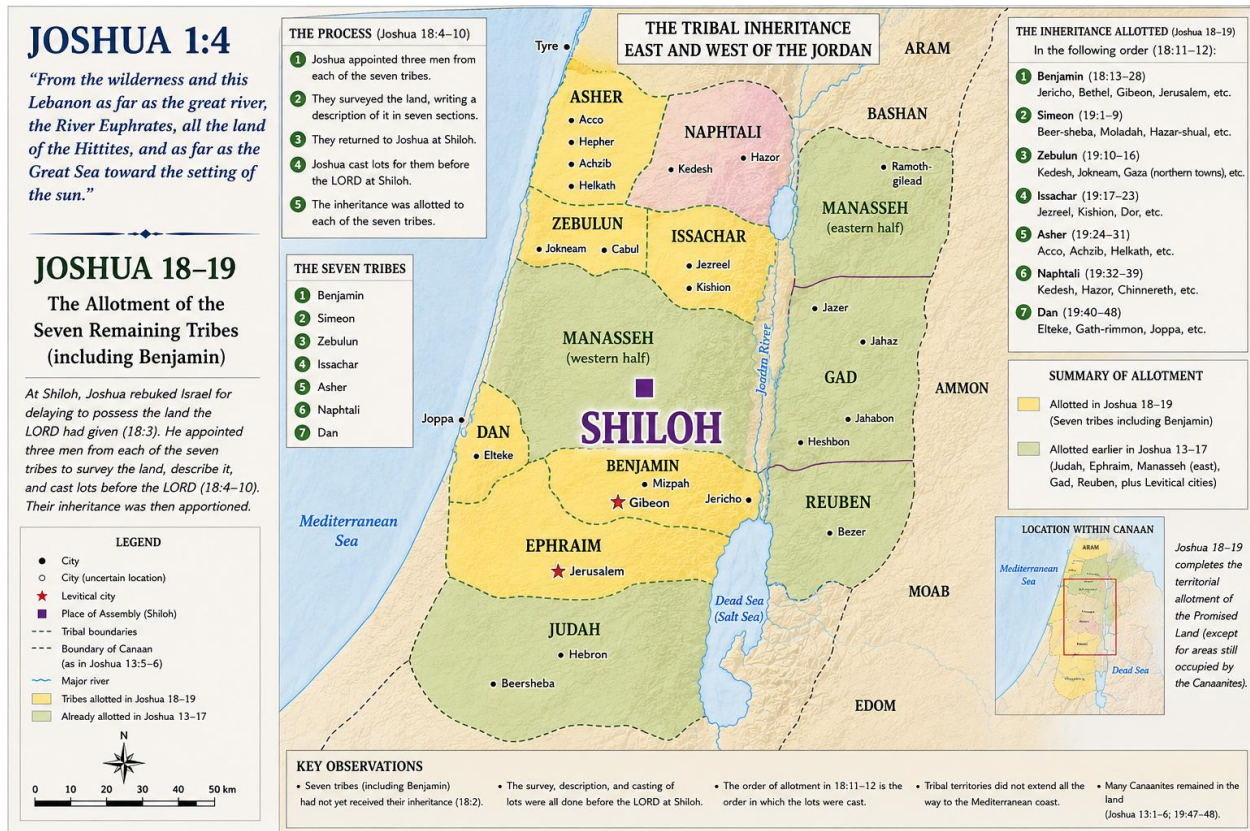


Map illustrates the approximate area referred to in Joshua 1:4. Boundary follows natural geographic features as described in the verse.



Barely half the land. What God has promised is not matching up with their expectations. Seven of the tribes of Israel have yet to receive an allotment of land.

So, Joshua gathers the whole of Israel at Shiloh, which is about in the middle of the area that they have taken to address this issue of why they haven't taken or the land that has been promised (vv. 1–2).



Joshua's words (Josh 18:3) can be summarized in perhaps a not so sensitive, "what is wrong with you people!?" God has given them the land; all they have to do is take it!

This is how serious Joshua is taking God's promise. Even though they haven't taken possession of all the land, he surveys the land and divides it up among the tribes as though they have taken possession of it (18:8-19:51). That's how confident Joshua is.

So, what is wrong with these people? The problem is they haven't understood the purpose of God's relationship with them. They think that their relationship with God is all about land. It's not. God's

relationship with Israel was never about land. It included land, no doubt. But that wasn't the purpose.

The purpose of God's relationship with Israel was covenant. We don't really use the word covenant today. We sometimes compare covenant to a contract. And a covenant is kind of a contract in the sense that it's legally binding. But a covenant is more than a legal agreement. It is a relationship built on mutual commitment.

That's why we sometimes talk about the covenant of marriage. Yes, there are legal obligations to marriage. But marriage is more than legal obligations. Marriage recognizes the commitment that two people make to each other.

God committed Himself to Israel first. He rescued them from Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness, and gave them the land. Only then did He call them to covenant faithfulness. That is the covenant relationship they are in. Yet, on the whole, this has seldom been understood.

Achan didn't understand the full extent of God's blessings to his people (7:10–26). It could be that he thought that all there was to God's promises to was Jericho. So he took some of the loot for himself instead of devoting it to God. Jericho was only the beginning! God's promises to Israel were so much more extensive than one city.

The five kings didn't understand who God was (10). They thought they were going against an upstart nation. They didn't understand they were going against the highest God who was committed to his people.

You know who did understand God's blessings? The Gibeonites (9).

Now it is true that the Gibeonites deceived Israel, which probably isn't the best start to a relationship. But they understood that this wasn't just about Israel. It was also about God, and they knew it was far better to be under his blessing, even if it meant serving Israel.

Caleb trusted in God's promises for 45 years, even though he wasn't descendent of Israel. Because he trusted in God's promises, he became part of Israel, asked for an inheritance and received one (14:6–15).

The Daughters of Zelophehad trusted God's justice (17). Even though the inheritance was passed on through the male line, these women reminded Joshua of what God had said to Moses and received their inheritance (cf. Num 26:6–7; 26:2).

Perhaps the greatest surprise of all is Rehab - a prostitute. She wasn't an Israelite. She wasn't there at Mt Sinai. She hadn't crossed the Red Sea. She hasn't wandered through the wilderness. Yet she understood that God had committed himself to Israel... And that changed everything.

The text is clear. God's relationship with Israel is about covenant.

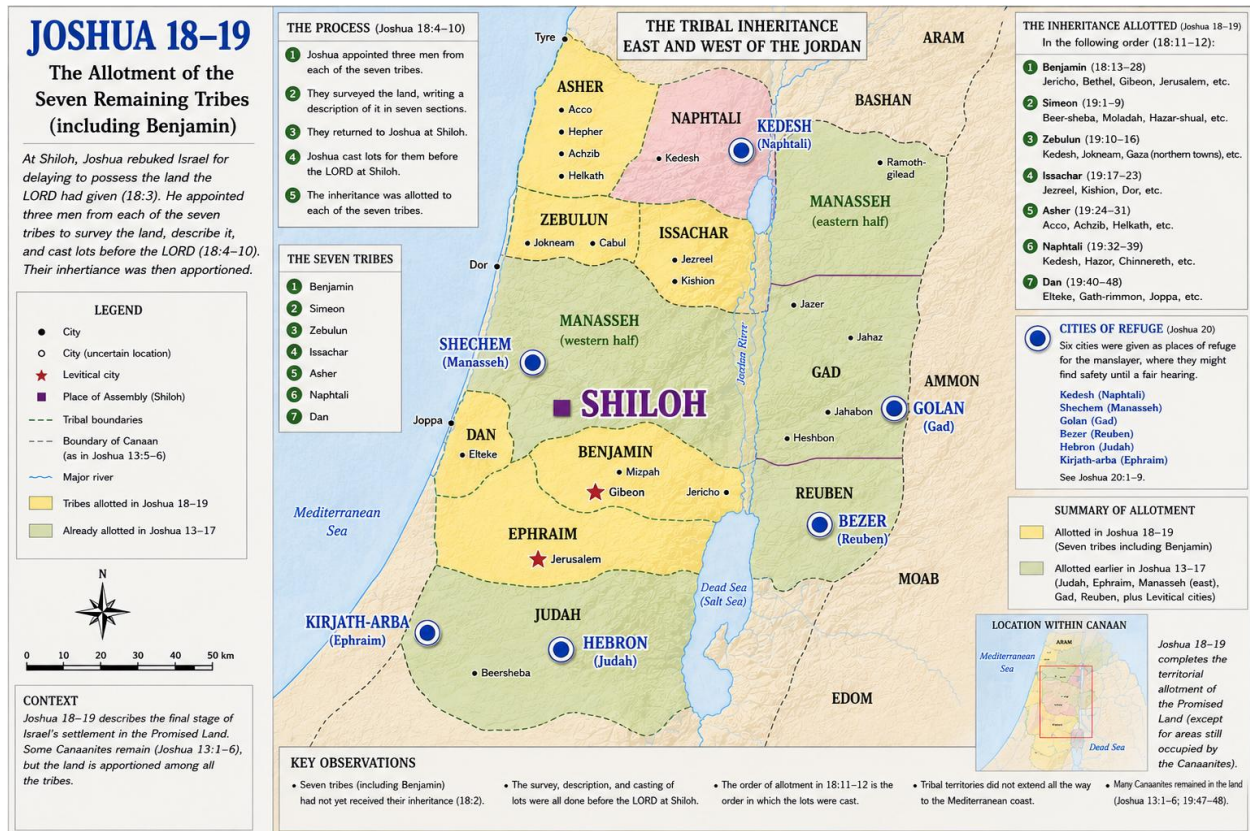
Joshua isn't ultimately dividing humanity into Israelites and Canaanites.

He's dividing humanity into those who trust God's covenant and those who resist it. It's understandable that when we think of Joshua, we think of Jericho and the battles. But what's striking is that Joshua itself doesn't end there. Once the battles are over, the book slows right down. It asks a different question: *What was all this for?*

So, what is the point of being in covenant with God? You might expect Joshua, after dividing up the land, to finish the book. Instead, he immediately starts talking about cities of refuge (20).

Now, I don't want to unpack Cities of Refuge too much. But I want to make two observations:

1. These cities of refuge are about justice. They ensured that justice was not driven by retaliation. Before someone could be punished, the facts had to be established.
2. These cities of refuge were accessible. Looking at the map, you can see that these cities were everywhere. Justice wasn't just for the elites of society. Justice was for everyone. God didn't place one city of refuge in the middle of the country and tell people to make the journey if they could. He scattered them throughout the land. Justice was to be woven into the ordinary life of God's people.



One of the clearest purposes of God's covenant with Israel was that His character would be displayed through His people. In the case of Joshua, this meant emphasizing God's justice. This is what Israel had to understand.

Joshua isn't urging Israel to possess the land simply because God wants them to own more territory. He's urging them to possess the land because the land is where God's covenant people are to reflect God's character.

So how does all this apply to us?

Like the people in Joshua's day, we have received an inheritance, entered into a covenant, been gathered into worship, and become part of a community that is called to display God's character.

But that was only part of who God is. We have received a much fuller revelation of God. The Apostle Paul writes in the Letter to Ephesians,

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” (Eph 1:3)

Every spiritual blessing!

Joshua spoke about an inheritance of land. Paul speaks about every spiritual blessing in Christ. In addition to a covenant, justice, worship, and a community, God has chosen us for the purpose of being holy and blameless. He has adopted us as his sons and daughters. He has redeemed us through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and his giving us forgiveness as part of his grace. He has made known to us his plans for humanity to bring everything under the headship of Christ (vv. 4–10).

On top of this, we have been given his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, as a guarantee that we will receive these blessings in full on the Day of Redemption (vv. 13–14).

I wish I had the time to unpack what all these blessings are, but that's another sermon. What I want us to understand is the blessings that we

have in Christ are huge. Remember how vast God's promise of land looked on the map? Paul's point is that, in Christ, what God has given us is greater still!

Why has God done this? So that we can be comfortable and affluent? So that we will never know a day of sickness? So that all our relationships will be positive ones? So that we will always have money in the bank? So that people will know how wonderful our lives are? No. Paul tells us why: 'to the praise of His glory.' (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). God has blessed us so richly that our lives would become a display of His glory.

Earlier, I suggested that Joshua words to the Israelite were to the effect of "what is wrong with you people?" Well, what was wrong with these people was they thought too small of God and his blessings. They settled for far less than God intended.

So, when I am dissatisfied with the Christian life, perhaps I need to ask, what is wrong with me? What is wrong with us? Have we let God's blessings slip out of our sight? Are we hearing too much from the world that life is all about us, and we are bringing that into our relationship with God?

Because the Christian life is not about you. It's true that God loves us and cares for us and blesses us, and much more than what we're able

to know. But our relationship with God isn't about us. It's about God and his character being reflected in us.

Joshua sent men out to survey the land so that all Israel could enjoy God's blessing (Josh 18:8). Joshua wanted Israel to see the inheritance that already belonged to them. Paul does something remarkably similar. He surveys the blessings we have in Christ so that we might appreciate what God has already given us.

Just think about his blessings of forgiveness. What would be a good way of enjoying that blessing? One of the ways we enjoy God's forgiveness is by extending that forgiveness to others. That can be hard. Particularly when we've been badly hurt. I know. But remember, who's to be glorified? Us or God.

If our concern is to glorify God, we will enjoy his blessing by finding a way to forgive. It's the same with every other blessing. The best way to enjoy it is to do it. You have been given his blessing. Enjoy it!

Israel was given a tremendous blessing from God, but they never enjoyed it in full because they didn't understand the full extent of God's blessings and became dissatisfied. We have been given a much greater blessing.

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ—to the praise of His glory. The way we enjoy those blessings is not merely by possessing them but by living them, so that His glory is seen in us.