

Joshua Chapter 17

Verses 1-18

“Manasseh”:

The other half-tribe of Manasseh, distinct from the half (in 16:4), received its portion of the split inheritance west of the Jordan to the north and east near the Lake of Chinneroth (Galilee).

Joshua 17:1 "There was also a lot for the tribe of Manasseh; for he [was] the firstborn of Joseph; [to wit], for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead: because he was a man of war, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan."

As well as for the tribe of Ephraim.

"For he was the firstborn of Joseph":

And therefore, ought to have his part and share in the lot of the children of Joseph.

Though Ephraim was preferred before him in the blessing of Jacob.

Some think this is given as a reason why he had a double portion, one on the other side Jordan, and another in the land of Canaan.

"To wit, for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead":

Who was the only son of Manasseh.

And so through him, and by his son Gilead, the whole tribe sprung from that patriarch.

And;

"Because he was a man of war, therefore he had Gilead and Bashan":

Which were given to his posterity by Moses, and lay on the other side of the Jordan (see Deut. 3:13).

This Machir very likely had shown his warlike disposition and courage in Egypt, and had fought under the kings there against the common enemy of that country.

For it is highly probable he was dead before the children of Israel came out from there, but the same warlike spirit continued in his posterity.

They had their part assigned them on the other side of the Jordan.

To defend that country, while the tribes of Reuben and Gad attended to the care of their flocks and herds.

Now we see that Manasseh's descendants were allotted land just north of Ephraim.

Machir's descendants represented the tribe of Manasseh, because he was the firstborn son.

Manasseh had also been the firstborn.

Machir's son was Gilead.

The land of Gilead was named for him.

This first allotment is not for the entire tribe, but for the descendants of Machir.

Joshua 17:2 "There was also [a lot] for the rest of the children of Manasseh by their families; for the children of Abi-ezer, and for the children of Helek, and for the children of Asriel, and for the children of Shechem, and for the children of Hephher, and for the children of Shemida: these [were] the male children of Manasseh the son of Joseph by their families."

For such that had no part in Gilead and Bashan on the other side Jordan.

Even for the other half tribe, whose families are particularly mentioned, as follows.

"For the children of Abi-ezer":

Who is called Jeezer in (Num. 26:30).

And was a son of Gilead, the son of Machir, as the rest that follow were.

"And for the children of Helek, and for the children of Asriel, and for the children of Shechem, and for the children of Hephher, and for the children of Shemida":

Hence the families of the Jeezerites, Helekites, Asrielites, Shechemites, Hephherites, and Shemidaite, mentioned in (Num. 26:30).

And for which families was the lot here spoken of.

"These were the male children of Manasseh the son of Joseph by their families":

Which is observed for the sake of, and to lead unto what follows.

Otherwise in common none but males inherited.

But the following is an excepted and remarkable case.

Gideon was the descendent of Abi-ezer, making Gideon of the tribe of Manasseh.

Judges 6:11 "And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which [was] in Ophrah, that [pertained] unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide [it] from the Midianites."

The city of Shechem was named for this son of Manasseh.

The male children were listed above, and each inherited land.

The reason female children are not mentioned, is because they receive land by their husband's inheritance when they marry.

Verses 3-6

"Zelophehad":

In Manasseh's tribe, this man had no sons as heirs, but his 5 daughters received the inheritance.

Women did not traditionally inherit land, but Moses gave these five women land because they had no brothers to inherit the property.

This provision was then added to the law and applied to similar situations in the future.

God led Moses to give this right to women (Num. 27:1-11, cited in verse 4).

Joshua 17:3 "But Zelophehad, the son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons, but daughters: and these [are] the names of his daughters, Mahlah, and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah."

The descent of this man is particularly given, to show the truth and reality of it.

Upon which his daughters made their request, and that granted and now claimed.

"And these are the names of his daughters, Mahlah, and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah":

By the same names, and in the same order they are called in (Num. 26:33; see also 27:1-11).

The order is a little different in (Num. 36:11).

In a case where there are no sons, the father's inheritance goes to his daughters.

There was a restriction that they must marry within their own tribe, so the land inheritance would not go to another tribe.

Joshua 17:4 "And they came near before Eleazar the priest, and before Joshua the son of Nun, and before the princes, saying, The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brethren. Therefore according to the commandment of the LORD he gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father."

The ten princes, who, with Eleazar and Joshua, were appointed to divide the land (Num. 34:17).

And were now met together for that purpose (Joshua 14:1).

"Saying, the LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brethren":

Those of the same tribe with them.

For upon their application to Moses he inquired of the LORD, who ordered him to grant their request (Num. 27:1).

"Therefore according to the commandment of the LORD he gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father":

That is, to the half tribe of Manasseh.

We see from the following Scriptures that this has been settled for a long time.

Numbers 27:4 "Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son?

Give unto us [therefore] a possession among the brethren of our father."

Numbers 27:6-7 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying," "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them."

Eleazar and Joshua could not deny them, and they received their father's inheritance.

Joshua 17:5 "And there fell ten portions to Manasseh, beside the land of Gilead and Bashan, which [were] on the other side Jordan;"

The lot which fell to the half tribe of Manasseh was divided into ten parts.

According to the Jewish writers, the six families before mentioned had six parts, and the daughters of Zelophehad had four parts.

One on the account of Zelophehad their father, two on the account of their grandfather Hephher, who they say was the firstborn.

And one on account of their uncle, their father's brother, who died in the wilderness without children.

So Jarchi and Kimchi relate from the Talmud.

But the true case seems to be this, there were six portions for the six families.

But there being no sons in Hephher's family, his part was divided into five, and given to the five daughters of Zelophehad.

"Beside the land of Gilead and Bashan, which were on the other side Jordan":

Which were given to the other half tribe, as before observed (Joshua 13:29).

The ten portions include the five portions given to the daughters of Zelophehad.

Joshua 17:6 "Because the daughters of Manasseh had an inheritance among his sons: and the rest of Manasseh's sons had the land of Gilead."

Which occasioned such a number of portions.

The daughters of Zelophehad are meant, who descended from Manasseh.

"And the rest of Manasseh sons, had the land of Gilead":

That is, those besides the six families before expressed.

Namely, the two families of the Machirites and Gileadites (Num. 26:29).

We must remember that Manasseh had a half tribe on each side of the Jordan River.

The descendants of Machir are spoken of as the sons here.

Joshua 17:7 "And the coast of Manasseh was from Asher to Michmethah, that [lieth] before Shechem; and the border went along on the right hand unto the inhabitants of Entappuah."

Not from the border of the tribe of Asher, as Kimchi.

For that was at too great a distance.

But a city of the tribe of Manasseh.

And in Jerom's time a village of this name was shown fifteen miles from Neapolis or Shechem, as you go from thence to Scythopolis, near the public road.

"To Michmethah, that lieth before Shechem":

The same place mentioned in the description of the border of Ephraim (see note on Joshua 16:6).

"And the border went along on the right hand unto the inhabitants of En-tappuah":

That is, leaving this place, and its inhabitants to the right, which was a place in the land of that name, next mentioned.

And seems to be so called from a fountain in it, or near it, as well as from a multitude of apples growing there.

And with which perhaps the country abounded, of which in (Joshua 17:8).

This Asher is a place and not the tribe of Asher.

Sichem was the earliest known name used for Shechem.

When Jesus left the Jews, He went to Shechem.

The land of Shechem was a fertile, green land.

Joshua 17:8 "[Now] Manasseh had the land of Tappuah: but Tappuah on the border of Manasseh [belonged] to the children of Ephraim;"

The whole territory that went by that name, from a city of note in it, next mentioned.

All the fields and villages in it belonged to the tribe of Manasseh.

"But Tappuah on the border of Manasseh belonged to the children of Ephraim":

And was one of those separate cities they had among the inheritance of the children of Manasseh.

Though it seems they had only the city, not the territory adjacent to it, and which was named from it.

We read earlier how, a place that was actually located in Manasseh's inherited land, might belong to Ephraim.

That is the case here.

Joshua 17:9 "And the coast descended unto the river Kanah, southward of the river: these cities of Ephraim [are] among the cities of Manasseh: the coast of Manasseh also [was] on the north side of the river, and the outgoings of it were at the sea:"

The same mentioned in the account of the coast of Ephraim (Joshua 16:8).

Which was north of that river, as Manasseh was to the south of it.

"These cities of Ephraim are among the cities of Manasseh":

That is, the cities before mentioned, Asher, Michmethah, En-tappuah, and Tappuah.

Though they were in the tribe of Manasseh, yet they were inhabited by the Ephraimites.

"The coast of Manasseh also was on the north side of the river":

Of the river Kanah, as well as on the south of it.

It had cities there, though possessed by the tribe of Ephraim.

"And the outgoings of it were at the sea":

The Mediterranean sea.

We read about the Kanah earlier in this lesson.

The cities southward of Kana belonged to Ephraim.

We know from earlier in the lesson that Ephraim had cities in the northern area from this brook of separation as well.

The land extended to the Mediterranean.

Joshua 17:10 "Southward [it was] Ephraim's, and northward [it was] Manasseh's, and the sea is his border; and they met together in Asher on the north, and in Issachar on the east."

As Ephraim lay to the south of Manasseh, Manasseh lay to the north of Ephraim.

"And the sea is his border":

The Mediterranean sea was their boundary on the west.

"And they met together in Asher on the north":

That is, on the northwest towards the Mediterranean sea, as at Mount Carmel.

"And in Issachar on the east":

Towards Jordan.

This is just saying that, Issachar's land was east of them near the Jordan River, and Asher's inheritance was to the north.

Joshua 17:11 "And Manasseh had in Issachar and in Asher Beth-shean and her towns, and Ibleam and her towns, and the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, and the inhabitants of En-dor and her towns, and the inhabitants of Taanach and her towns, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns, [even] three countries."

In like manner as Ephraim had some cities in the tribe of Manasseh.

And, as it was not unusual, when the place allotted to any tribe was too narrow for it, and the next too large, to give away part from the larger to the less portion.

"And Ibleam and her towns":

It seems to be the same with Bileam, by a transposition of the two first letters (1 Chron. 6:70).

And was a place not far from Megiddo, after mentioned, as appears from (2 Kings 9:27).

"And the inhabitants of Dor and her towns":

This had been a royal city (see Joshua 11:2; 12:23).

"And the inhabitants of Endor and her towns":

This place became famous for a witch there in the times of Saul (1 Sam. 28:7).

In the times of Jerom it was a large village near Mount Tabor, four miles to the south, which he calls Aeudor, or in Jezreel.

And elsewhere he speaks of Endor, as near the town of Nain, where our Lord raised the widow's son the dead, and is about.

"And the inhabitants of Taanach and her towns.

This had been a royal city (see Joshua 12:22).

"And the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns":

This was another royal city mentioned with the former (see Joshua 12:21).

There;

"Even three countries":

The three last cities, with their towns, that are mentioned, Endor, Taanach, and Megiddo.

All which perhaps belonged to Dor.

Just as Ephraim had cities in Manasseh's land, Manasseh had towns in Issachar's land and in Asher's land.

The towns are listed in the verse above.

Megiddo is a famous sight where many believe the battle of Armageddon will be fought.

Verses 12-18

“Children of Manasseh”:

Tribesmen of Manasseh complained that Joshua did not allot them land sufficient to their numbers and that the Canaanites were too tough for them to drive out altogether.

He permitted them extra land in forested hills that they could clear.

Joshua told them that they could drive out the Canaanites for God had promised to be with them in victory against chariots (Deut. 20:1).

Clearly, the “children of Manasseh” had conquered the Canaanites because they put them to “forced labor”.

But for some reason, perhaps a lack of resolve, they “did not utterly drive them out”.

Joshua 17:12 "Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out [the inhabitants of] those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land."

Mentioned in (Joshua 17:11); they had not strength at first to do it.

Or either were negligent and slothful, and suffered them to dwell among them, and did not take the advantage they might have done.

And afterwards it was too late, they became too strong and numerous for them, at least for a time.

"But the Canaanites would dwell in that land”:

Whether they would or not.

We see again the mixed multitude.

The Israelites could not drive out the Canaanites.

The Canaanites were under the rule of Manasseh, but lived with them.

Joshua 17:13 "Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out."

Increased in numbers, and became superior to the Canaanites.

Not only those of the tribe of Manasseh, but of the other tribes also.

"That they put the Canaanites to tribute":

They did not take away their lives, as they were commanded to do, but made them tributaries (collected a tax), to them.

Which seems to arise from a covetous disposition, and done for the sake of gain.

"But did not utterly drive them out":

Which they were ordered to do, and could now have done; for if they were able to make them pay tribute to them, they had power sufficient to drive them out, or destroy them.

And therefore, broke the commandment of God (Deut. 7:1).

When the Hebrews got strong enough they made the Canaanites pay taxes to them.

Verses 14-18

Unlike Caleb (14:6-15), the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, "the children of Joseph", were initially unwilling to take the land that had been given to them.

Yet as the Israelites obeyed God in faith, even "iron chariots" were no obstacle to them (Deut. 20:1).

Sometimes it takes courage and initiative to claim God's promises.

The fearful complaints of the "children of Joseph's" form a strong contrast with Caleb's faithful request (14:6-15).

God's inheritance is often conditioned upon faith.

Joshua 17:14 "And the children of Joseph spake unto Joshua, saying, Why hast thou given me [but] one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I [am] a great people, forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto?"

Which some understand of the children of Manasseh only.

And indeed, the complaint and arguments used, as well as some circumstances in the account, best agree with them.

Yet certain it is, that the children of Ephraim accompanied the children of Manasseh, and were present at this interview, as appears from (Joshua 17:17).

And if they did not join with them in the request and complaint expressly, they countenanced and encouraged the same by their presence.

"Saying, why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit":

This seems to suit better with one than both.

For there was a lot for the tribe of Manasseh also, as well as for Ephraim (Joshua 17:1).

By which it should seem that there were two, and if both made this expostulation, it was not fact.

But it may be, that the inheritance which came to them by lot was not as yet divided.

And so they called it one lot and one portion, and then it might with propriety be said by them both.

And their sense be, that the lot or portion assigned them was only sufficient for one of them, and not for both.

"Seeing I am a great people":

As especially both tribes put together were.

"Forasmuch as the LORD hath blessed me hitherto?"

This best agrees with the tribe of Manasseh, which, since their coming out of Egypt, was increased twenty thousand five hundred.

Whereas the tribe of Ephraim was decreased (compare Numbers 1:33 with 26:34).

Now it might have been expected by them, that as Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim, that he would have favored their cause on that account.

And that they should have obtained the grant of an addition by that means.

But Joshua was impartial in his administration, and showed no favor and affection on that score, as appears by what follows.

The children of Joseph here, are speaking of the families of Ephraim and Manasseh.

They truly were a large nation together.

Their complaint to Joshua is, because of their large numbers living in a small portion of land.

The LORD had intended for them to have a portion large enough for two tribes.

Joshua 17:15 "And Joshua answered them, If thou [be] a great people, [then] get thee up to the wood [country], and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants, if mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee."

By retorting their own argument upon them.

"If thou be a great people":

Which he does not deny, as they were for numbers and power.

"Then get thee up to the wood country":

Which was near them, and within their borders, and lay on hills and mountains.

Perhaps the mountains of Gilboa, and therefore are bid to go up.

"And cut down for thyself there":

Cut down the trees of the wood, clear the ground of them.

And so make it habitable, and by that means enlarge the places of their habitation.

"In the land of the Perizzites, and of the giants":

Or Rephaim; the former of these were one of the seven nations of the Canaanites.

Who from their name seem to have dwelt not in the cities, and walled towns, but in villages, and scattered houses, in desert places, and among the woods.

Where also the giants had retired and dwelt after Joshua had driven them out of the cities.

And by driving these out of their present habitations, they would gain more room to dwell in, and would find their lot sufficient for them.

"If Mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee":

Either meaning all Ephraim, and even the whole lot of the sons of Joseph, or rather the mount particularly so called.

For the words may be rendered, "for Mount Ephraim hastens for thee"; was clear or open for thee.

Ready to be delivered to thee, and thou mayest possess it at once.

If they are as strong as they say they are, they should have no difficulty in overpowering the Perizzites who have control of the mountain.

This vast forest of central Palestine would be quite a prize.

The giants in the land were remnants of the larger tribes.

Mount Ephraim is where Deborah will be from.

Joshua 17:16 "And the children of Joseph said, The hill is not enough for us: and all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron, [both they] who [are] of Beth-shean and her towns, and [they] who [are] of the valley of Jezreel."

Meaning either Mount Ephraim, and all included in it.

Or it may be rather the wood country on the hills and mountains they were bid to go up to.

Signifying, that if they could gain that out of the hands of the Perizzites and giants, and clear it of the wood, and make it habitable, even that would not be sufficient for them.

Or that hill and mountain cannot be "found by us" or obtained and possessed by us.

We are not able to get it into our hands; there being a valley between us and that.

"And all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron":

Not chariots made of iron, but chariots with iron scythes fastened to the sides, or axle trees of them.

Which when driven with great force and fury, would cut down the infantry in battle, as grass is cut down with scythes (see Judges 4:2).

"Both they who are of Beth-shean and her towns, and they who are of the valley of Jezreel":

Both which belonged to the tribe of Manasseh.

Or were on the borders of it, though as yet they had not got possession (see Joshua 17:11).

And this circumstance seems to favor the notion, that tribe of Manasseh were at least chiefly concerned in this address.

They want the land, but are fearful of the enemy that holds the land now.

We see that Joshua has given them an option to take the land, and they are hesitating.

God had warned over and over, to not fear the enemy.

They must not look at the strength of the enemy.

They should realize that God is with them and they could take the land.

Joshua 17:17 "And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, [even] to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou [art] a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot [only]:"

From whence it is clear that some of both were present.

And they being brethren, and their interests united, and their cities intermixed, it would be to their mutual advantage to have an enlargement.

Which the tribe of Manasseh wanted more especially.

More of their cities that fell to their lot being in the hands of the Canaanites, than of any other.

"Saying, thou art a great people, and hast great power":

Were very numerous, and so able to contend with the Canaanites, and make themselves more room".

Or only have what they were possessed of, but should have more.

And, as they wanted more, they were able enough to get more.

And if they exerted their power, relying on the providence of God, through his blessing on their endeavors, they would certainly have an increase of their portion.

Joshua 17:18 "But the mountain shall be thine; for it [is] a wood, and thou shalt cut it down: and the outgoings of it shall be thine: for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, [and] though they [be] strong."

Or "for" it shall be thine.

Thou shalt get the possession of it, though attended with difficulties that seem impossible.

“For”:

Or "if, though".

“It is a wood”:

The habitation of the Perizzites, and giants, and so dangerous to go unto it. And full of trees, and so seems unprofitable and useless.

"And thou shalt cut it down":

Both the inhabitants of it, and the trees of it, and clear it of both.

And make it both safe and spacious to dwell in, which would be a fine addition for them.

"And the outgoings of it shall be thine":

All it produces when cultivated, and all the parts adjacent to it.

"For thou shall drive out the Canaanites":

This Joshua assures them of, to encourage them to attempt it.

"Though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong”:

Be not afraid of their chariots, though terrible.

Nor of their giants and mighty men, God will be on your side, and you have nothing to fear from them (see Joshua 11:4).

Whether the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh took this advice of Joshua is not said.

Joshua does not listen to the excuses of Ephraim's and Manasseh's descendants.

They will be required to take the land they want.

When the trees of this land are cut, there will be plenty of land for Ephraim and Manasseh.

They will also get the benefit of the trees they cut.

Joshua is also telling them to go beyond the wooded area, and take the land on the other side.

They should know from past experience that no weapon formed against God's people would prosper.

God would be with them, and they would win the battle.

It appears that Ephraim and Manasseh did not have enough faith in God to drive all the Canaanites out.

They instead made a treaty with them.

They would have trouble for years to come with the remnant of the Canaanites they did not run out.

Joshua Chapter 17 Questions

1. Whose descendants represented Manasseh?
2. Gideon was the descendent of _____.
3. Who was Shechem named for?
4. Which son of Hepher had no sons?
5. Give the daughters' names.
6. Who would his inheritance go to?
7. How many portions fell to Manasseh?
8. _____ was the earliest known name of Shechem.
9. _____ owned the land of Tappuah, but _____ owned the town of Tappuah.
10. Where was Issachar's land located?
11. Manasseh had towns in whose lands?
12. Did they kill the Canaanites?
13. What complaint did they make to Joshua?
14. How did Joshua answer them?
15. Why were the children of Joseph afraid of the Canaanites in the valley?
16. What did Joshua do about this?
17. What happened in this conflict?