

## **Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 18, Patterns of Land Distribution, Excursus**

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 18, Patterns of Land Distribution, Excursus.

I just concluded looking at the chapters where the land distribution is in chapters 13 to 19.

I wanted to get a sense from the details in those chapters. So, I'm making available a document entitled Patterns in the Land Distribution Lists that gets into much more detail on this. But if you have it, you can look at it.

And I kind of, we come to the point, but if you get into them, we will see as we did a bit in a previous segment, that there are differences among them. And so they include, number one, the boundary lists that we talked about. They include the city lists that are there.

They include notices of cities or territories that remain to be conquered. They include stories of individuals or groups asking for and receiving their inheritance, like Caleb or the daughters of Zelophehad, Joshua. And then some other miscellaneous patterns that are there.

So, I'd like to just kind of take us through, look at some of those patterns, and then say, is there some significance there? So, the first thing we'll say is that there are the descriptions of the territories of the peoples of the tribes are given in terms of the boundaries, but also the cities that populate the territories. So, I have a chart in the document there where you see the tribes listed on the left, and the second column tells about their inheritance, the passage in Joshua that tells about where they're inherited. Then it teases out that passage, and the third column is the specific boundary lists for that tribe, and the fourth column is the specific verses that tell about the city lists.

And you'll see that sometimes there are no cities mentioned for some of the tribes. For others, like Levi, there's no boundary list because they receive cities, but there's no discrete territory. Interestingly, the tribe of Simeon ends up kind of related to the tribe of Judah, and that shows up in these lists.

There's a list for Simeon in chapter 19 where it gives the cities that they inherited, but there's no boundary list for Simeon, and it's clear that their cities are in the territory of Judah. So, there is that going on there. Secondly, there's the list of the

cities and territories remaining to be conquered, and we see that begin with in chapter 13 for the Israelites in general.

We've looked at that in the previous segment for the reference in Judah, that they were not able to drive out the Jebusites at the end of the chapter, but there's another grouping of them about Manasseh and Ephraim and Dan. I've also included in that second chart, which is on page four of the document, the list of both of Joshua and Judges. So, in Judges, you see even more that the tribes were not able to drive them out, and it tells the people that they were not able to do that.

There's a third section, a third grouping of stories that one commentator has called land grant narratives, where there are these little stories about individuals or groups that ask for the land and they're given the land. So, it's the grant of the land, land grant narratives, and there's kind of a pattern there. There's the confrontation that establishes the setting, and the characters, and then the would-be grantees present their case, make a request, then the land is granted.

And then there's a summary of the episode, and you find that with Caleb in chapter 14, Caleb's daughter actually in chapter 15. Her name is Aksah. The daughters of Zelophehad, chapter 17, that we've looked at in the previous segment.

Joseph, the tribes of Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh, when they greedily said we need more. And then the Levites in actually chapter 21 that we haven't looked at yet. And then there's some other miscellaneous patterns that are presented, especially in chapters 18 and 19, kind of the last seven tribes in a regular fashion.

There's kind of a pattern to those. But what I'd like to do to conclude is to try to make some sense out of that. So, I'm going to read you some things here.

So, the question is, what is significant to the patterns here? And I think there are some answers there. First of all, these lists are the heart of the book. We often think of the Book of Joshua as the battles, but those only occupy five chapters, or six chapters, six to 11.

There are many more chapters that talk about the distribution of the land. And in a way, sometimes I've wondered to myself, you know, why couldn't God have inspired the author Joshua just to say something like, Joshua lived happily ever after, I could be done with that in half a chapter, and it wouldn't take me so long to slog through all these chapters of the lists. Especially when I was growing up reading the Bible, these lists were really tough to read through.

But I think the reason that the lists are here and the details are here is in a sense, this is the raw data that sort of proves, quote, unquote, the fulfillment of God's promises.

For centuries, Israel had been looking ahead to get to this place. And now that we've got here, it's not enough just to say, okay, it's done, let's move on.

Rather, as we ourselves as humans do, when there's a great event long anticipated, and we get there and we have a great celebration, and afterward we want to savor it, and we want to celebrate it, and we stop talking before we move on. We just enjoy that. And so, the detail of these lists are for the people to celebrate that, I think.

It's like even a good book that you read when you're getting to the end, you don't want it to end. You want to keep savoring it. So, for example, think of the modern day, probably the most significant commercial transaction that most Americans do is to buy a house.

There are several different ways of identifying the house. Its location, for some people, it may just be called the Gillingham place. That's where the Gillinghams live.

For other people, it's the big white frame house on the corner with three stories, the big porch. For others, it's the place with the bird feeders in the yard. For other people, it's the place where all those nice children are.

For other people, it's known by its postal address, 3 West Maple Street. So, there are different ways of describing all of that. But in the eyes of the law, there's another way to describe that.

And it will contain terminology like this. This is fictional terminology, but if you've ever bought a house and you have the deed to your house, it's going to give a description of your property in terms like this. Lot number 56 in block number 212 in Uptown, U.S. number 3, southeast corner of the house, section 18, township 34 north, range 8, east of the 6th principal meridian according to the platinum record on such and such a date, is document number such and such in book 42 of Platts, page 29 in Lincoln County.

I got that from a deed of a house that I had owned years ago. And that language isn't interpretable to me, certainly, and to most people, I think. But when the time comes to buy or sell a house, it's of utmost importance that somebody knows that language and somebody knows that land.

And the surveyors and the title company and others know that. And I'm glad that my lawyer, my survey company at least, understands that and knows what it is very precisely. And in a sense, these lists in Joshua are sort of like that.

And so, every tribe can look at these lists and say, here's our piece of the land. And we have legal title to it. Here it is in the archives.

It's been recorded. And that's what belongs to us. These are the records.

And I think that's an important part of it. We might even wonder, and think about this through a military lens, although that's not the major focus. But think about this, Israel had waged several different campaigns against the Canaanites.

They had shed a lot of blood. They had trampled up and down the hills and the mountains and the valleys there. And they had intimate connections with the land of Canaan.

I had a person describe to me who had had a military background. He said, quote, to a soldier who has fought for every hill and town, maybe street to street and house to house, fighting and who shed some blood on those hills and in those towns and maybe lost a friend or a loved one in the battles, you bet that the details are important and to be celebrated. It is a celebration of victory hard won and dearly paid for.

And so those descriptions, whether, well, to us in the 21st century, they may not be really intelligible to certainly the original audience. They would have been very significant. The fact that God had the preserved and inspired scripture would challenge us to go back and try to understand why that was and why they were significant.

There are regularities in the patterns that we've talked about. And I think the good thing about that is that every tribe could see here's our borders, here's our cities, and we're getting our piece of the land just like everybody else is. And yet, of course, there are also differences.

And so, to the modern day, we might think of a simple country bungalow, a two or three-room house would be very different from a big mansion with dozens and dozens of rooms, bathrooms, and so on. And the description, the survey description of the little house versus the big mansion would be very different. But all of that is significant.

So, we see some tribes and some individuals standing out in a way above the others, Judah, Manasseh, Ephraim, Joseph, Caleb, etc. And that affirms their significance as well. So it seems to me that despite their seeming impenetrability, the lists in Joshua when we spend time looking through them, we don't memorize and remember the names of every single town and city.

But do we see the patterns there? We can recognize that they are indeed the core of the book. They are the legal data supporting the tribes' claims to their territories,

validating God's experience, and God's faithfulness to them. There's a deep sense of rootedness to the people in this land.

This idea of land ownership or rootedness in the land is one of the most fundamental principles of human society. We find that almost anywhere in the world. And so in this most deeply geographically oriented book of all books in the Bible, it seems to me that with this kind of understanding, these truths would shine forth very clearly.

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