

# Land, Real Land

## Joshua 13:8-14:5

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, October 15th 2023

### I. Introduction

From Genesis 1 to the last chapter of Revelation, God shows how important land and water are for mankind. I've never heard anyone preach on it, but you see it everywhere in the Bible. And we will be touching on the importance of water in chapter 15 - a subject that Elijah Dirksen now knows a lot about - and appreciates. But land is important too. During the previous forty years, Israel had wandered around without land. And because they had been a nomadic people wandering in a desolate wilderness, God had to miraculously provide for them. They knew what it meant to be landless.

Numerous statements show that they had been deprived of the land because of disobedience. Land and water are stated repeatedly to be foundational to dominion. And we will be seeing that even those who move to cities have a symbiotic relationship to the surrounding land and water, and God gave property rights *within* cities. The socialistic idea that all land must be held in common is absolutely destructive to dominion success. So this morning I would like to at least introduce you to a theology of land. This sermon is going to be flying at a little bit higher altitude, and perhaps future sermons can get into more detail.

### II. The importance of land (Josh 1-21)

The first thing that I want to emphasize is *how* important the land is to God's plan. Just knowing the amount of space that this book devotes to the subject of land shows that it must be a *very* important topic for God. The word "land" occurs 75 times, but the concept of land is everywhere. Several scholars have pointed out that the book can actually be structured by four verbs related to the land - which means that the whole book is about land.<sup>1</sup>

1. The first Hebrew word is עָבַר - ('ābur), and it means to "cross over." Chapters 1-5 use that word to describe Israel crossing over to the land. But the focus was still on the land.
2. The Hebrew word לָקַח (laqach) is used in chapters 6-11 for Israel *taking* the land.

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<sup>1</sup> For an interesting example, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 107.

3. The Hebrew word *chalaq* (חלק) is used in chapters 12-22 for Israel *dividing* or apportioning the land.
4. And the Hebrew word *abad* (עבד) is used in chapters 23-24 for Israel *servicing* the Lord in the land. If they served faithfully God promised to bless the land, but if they served unfaithfully God promised to curse the land and eventually to evict them from the land.

In terms of the importance of land, Martens speaks of land being part of God's triangle of completeness, with the three parts being God's presence, the people of God, and God's land. Another author, Brueggemann, claims that the land is a "central, if not *the* central theme in biblical faith."<sup>2</sup> That may seem like a huge overstatement, but if you skim-read Genesis to Revelation, you will be astounded at how much the Bible talks about the land. We tend to just skim over those verses because we think they are window dressing. But they are not. Jesus commanded us to live by every word of the Bible in Matthew 4:4 - and that includes the less exciting passages like this one. So the first lesson is that we need to treat the land as important.

Keep that in mind the next time you are talking with a Full Preterist and he tries to spiritualize away the meaning of the New Heavens and the New Earth and he tries to convince you that we don't need these bodies and our home is in a non-physical heaven. They are overturning an incredibly central theme of the Bible.

God created this physical creation in Genesis 1 and called it all very good. Yes, the physical is very good. Granted, sin's curse negatively impacted the land with thorns, thistles, deserts, infertility, and the curse eventually resulted in the land casting its inhabitants out. The redemption of Jesus was prefigured by blood redemption being applied to the land. And the cross begins the reversal of the curse. Even the Sermon on the Mount says that the meek shall inherit the earth. And of course, the New Testament ends with Christ's redemption restoring *everything* impacted by the fall of Adam into sin - including a beautiful earth with real land. So we aren't going to skip over all these chapters like so many sermon series do and treat them as being irrelevant to us. They are not. We are going to try to apply chapters 13-22 to our own lives and hopefully gain a new appreciation for the land that God has given to us.

### III. The importance of cities

But lest we get the idea that everyone should be a farmer, I want to point out that God considered cities to be even *more* important to the well-being of the nation than the land around the cities was. Where land is mentioned 75 times in Joshua, cities are mentioned 130 times and villages another 31 times. The word "cities" occurs 10 times just in this little

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002, p. 3.

section that we read today. For example, verse 30 mentions 60 cities in Bashan that they inherited and would inhabit. Those cities were a gift from God. You see, not everyone would be gifted to work on a farm. God's plan was for each tribe to have its cities teeming with people. Verse 23 says, "...This was the inheritance of the children of Reuben according to their families, the cities and their villages." It's an inheritance. It's a gift of God. And that concept is repeated for each tribe.

But I especially want to comment on the Levitical cities where some of the pastors lived. Those Levites were given not only the city but some pastures around the cities. Chapter 14:4 says, "For the children of Joseph were two tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim. And they gave no part to the Levites in the land, except cities to dwell in, with their pasture-lands (migrash) for their livestock and their property." The pastors had property within cities and parcels of land outside the cities for gardens, but God expected them to work full time as pastors and only part time as gardeners.

So why were the *cities* seen as being so important? Cities have been given a bad rap in some Christian circles, so it is important to point out that God valued them. They weren't valued only because they were more easily defended. That is obviously true - at least with the walled cities. But there is much more to it than that.

From the early chapters of Genesis to the book of Revelation, cities are seen as being the *primary* centers of cultural development and as providing the *primary* means for expanding the cultural mandate. That's not an exaggeration. Cities are ultra important. A biblical theology of cities shows that if the cities prospered, the whole land prospered.

On Tuesday Pastor Gary shared a verse with me that he had memorized when he knew he would have to move to the city - and he really didn't want to. And it helped him to come to appreciate the city. It was Jeremiah 29:7, which says, "And seek the welfare of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its welfare you will have welfare." And the word "welfare" is "shalom" and is translated in several different ways, all of which speak to wholeness and blessing. Now, it is true that the Bible *also* warns that cities can result in promoting a culture of concentrated evil as well. And we are seeing that in some of the cities of America, aren't we? But in a righteous society, cities can result in unparalleled good.

This is because cities have a concentration of people who make money through other means than simply farming, and through specialization of labor they produce goods that benefit the farmers and benefit the nation as a whole. And so long as the free market is freely functioning and you don't have a tyrant who is trying to manage the economy, everyone prospers. When tyrants start managing what can and cannot happen, the city stagnates and the country suffers. And I will illustrate with just one example. Numerous industries such as garment making, leather works, traders, and blacksmithing prospered during the time of Joshua and the next generation. And I'll just give one example of how the government intruding itself into just one trade can have a negative rippling impact throughout the economy: 1 Samuel 13:19 says, "Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, 'Lest the Hebrews make swords or

spears.” The government was intruding to provide itself safety, but the absence of blacksmiths disrupted numerous other industries, including farmers.

Anyway, entire books have been written by Christians and non-Christians describing this amazing relationship between city and land that God set up. William, Josh, and I have been discussing one such book. I won't get into all that today other than to say that we should value farmers who excel in their skill and farmers definitely need to value the specialization that can happen within cities. God ordained this reciprocal relationship.

#### IV. God owns the land and he entrusts it to people as a stewardship trust

But the next point is a critical one to lay hold of if we are to have a biblical theology of land and cities. *God* owns the land, the cities, and the people in it and He entrusts the land to people as a stewardship trust. If there is one thing that the book of Joshua teaches *clearly*, it is that humans are tenants of His land and can be dispossessed when they are unfaithful in taking good stewardship. Verse 26 speaks of the land as being an inheritance, and the word “inheritance” occurs 17 times in our section. It was an inheritance from God to them. Likewise, the Hebrew word *natan* (נתן) is used to speak of the land being given or entrusted to people 37 times in just this section of the book. And chapter 14:5 shows that God is in charge of how the land is handled. It says, “As the LORD had commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did; and they divided the land.” “As the LORD had commanded Moses.” That God owns the land and entrusts it to His people as a stewardship trust is a clear testimony of our passage. And that He had the right to dispossess the Canaanites is also clear.

So, what difference does this make? Well, it means that God expects us to care for our land. He doesn't want it overused (as illustrated by His laws governing the resting the land), and He doesn't want the land burned out (as is illustrated by His comments about fertilizer), and He doesn't want it to be unused so that it returns to a wilderness state (something that is consistently seen as a curse), and He doesn't want us polluting the land. Instead, He wants us to improve upon the land - to take dominion of it. When we see our house and our land as belonging to God, we treat it differently. We improve it and don't let it get dilapidated.

Some of you have been following the pictures of the Noor's trip to Egypt, and you may have noticed the garbage in certain areas. Even among Christians, your worldview affects how you treat your environment. If you live in a communist country where no one truly owns the land and they are not accountable to God for how they use it, they abuse the land. Pollution of the land is rampant in communist countries. But it isn't just communist countries. Anywhere that people don't value the land as a God-given trust, you see abandoned cars, garbage thrown out of windows, and trash. In contrast, when you see everyone's land as ultimately belonging to God, you are not going to toss things out the window of your car and not care.

But there are other implications of seeing our gardens, farms, and houses as a stewardship trust. One book that traces the redemptive historical development of the concept of land through the Bible<sup>3</sup> points to Scriptures that show land ownership to have responsibilities of hospitality, care for widows, orphans, and the poor. When you have the privilege of ownership of land, you use it for the benefit of the landless. The land, the cities, and the houses were tools to serve the Lord, and when He blesses us with those things, He wants us to bless others. Leviticus 23:22 is just one of dozens of examples written into God's law on this principle. It says, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God." So the third lesson is stewardship.

## V. The importance of storing title

The next thing that I see in this section is the importance of storing title deed to the properties you own and preserving them for the next generation. He devotes eleven chapters to nailing down the exact location of each property, which tribes belonged to which territories, and within each territory, which families owned which lands and houses. Six times it mentions families that got their inheritance. These chapters amount to a legal property boundary description and title deed that was preserved.

An interesting example of property deeds being an act of faith is in Jeremiah 32, where Jeremiah bought land that was already occupied by the Babylonians, and then hid the title deed in a sealed pot so that when the Israelites came back into the land, this paperwork would be able to prove his ownership that would be passed on. Thinking longterm about property is an important aspect of faith. It's yet another example of how much God values the land.<sup>4</sup> Do you have a multi-generational perspective on land?

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<sup>3</sup> I don't recommend the book because of liberal presuppositions, but it did have some accurate information.

<sup>4</sup> David Jackman says, "For us in the western world the title deeds to the property we own or the lease agreement on the home we rent are hugely important legal items. They may make for mundane and rather boring reading, but we make sure that they are carefully stored and preserved as indisputable proof of what is rightly ours. That gives us some perspective on why these chapters mattered so much to Israel and to each tribe, clan, and family group. Here are the title deeds to the family inheritance, written down and authorized by their appearance in the Holy Scriptures, the reference point of indisputable authority for any controversies that might occur in the generations to come." David Jackman, *Joshua: People of God's Purpose*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 137.

## VI. The importance of borders

Let's move next to the importance of borders. This is a super controversial subject and I won't pretend to have the final answer to the controversy, or even a very adequate answer. My original sermon was going to spend about 15 minutes trying to give much more detailed proof, but it just seemed too involved. So I will try to be brief and introduce you to the subject.

Verse 6 indicates that it wasn't just individuals who got a plot of land, but the nation as a whole was given what is called an "inheritance" - the whole territory. The Hebrew word for "inheritance" (נַחֲלָה - *nachalah*) is defined by the dictionary as "inalienable, hereditary property." It's the same word that is used for families receiving an inheritance of land. That may seem puzzling that a nation as a whole receives an inheritance of hereditary property - especially when this chapter speaks about *private* property and Ezekiel distinguishes between the prince's own personal property from the land of the nation as a whole. They are different. And Ezekiel also makes clear that the prince was not allowed to evict people from their own private property. And some people scratch their heads over what seems like conflicting evidence. It is not. The bottom line is that the state has a different kind of ownership than the private citizen, but it still has an inheritance of land. And we need to try to come to grips with that concept if we are to deal more adequately with the issue of border control.

Verse 7 says, "Now therefore, divide this land as an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh," and it uses the same Hebrew word for "inalienable, hereditary property" that was used of the nation as a whole. So a nation owns a territory and a state owns a territory.

Why do I bring this up? Because the same laws against trespassing on an individual's property are also applied by God to trespassing on a nation's land without permission. And we will get to that in a bit. But first, a bit more data that hopefully will clear things up.

Verse 10 mentions the border of Ammon, verse 11 the border of the Geshurites and Maachathites. God was going to expand Israel's borders to include the land of the Geshurites and Maachathites, but He was not going to let them expand into the land that belonged to Syria (or what is called Aram on your map), or into the land of Ammon, Moab, or Edom. Israel was not allowed to go across their borders. What would happen if those countries tried to change a border or tried to cross the border without permission? Several passages indicate that it would be treated as an act of war. Jeremiah 49:1-2 condemns Ammon for incorporating some of tribe of Gad's land into their own country. The Hebrew word *yarash* (יָרַשׁ) indicates that this was a form of theft. What's interesting about that is that nothing was stolen from the private citizens. It was simply territory taken from the tribe of Gad. Zephaniah 2:8 condemns Moab over a similar border dispute. How can one nation steal land from another nation if the nation does not own land in any sense of the term "own." If God considers it theft, *something was obviously being stolen from the state.*

And as mentioned, our chapter does indicate that each tribe *owned* an inheritance. They also owned borders. This chapter uses exactly the same Hebrew word (*gebule* - גְּבוּל) that is

used for an individual's property boundaries (Gen. 23:17; Duet. 7:17; Prov. 15:25) to also describe the borders for tribes (13:9; etc) and nations (v. 7; see Gen. 10:19; Ex. 23:31; 34:24; Numb. 20:16; 21:13,15; 22:36; 33:44; etc.). That word is sometimes translated as "territory." Likewise, I have a number of passages that speak of "the city's property" (Ezek. 45:6,7; 48:20,21,22) and in context the "city's property" is 100% made up of private property. So there is a sense in which the individual families owned their own property and there is another sense in which the civil governments of those cities owned a geographic area that included those private properties without owning the private properties themselves. The same is true of states. Joshua says, "Manasseh's territory was adjoining Asher on the north and Issachar on the east." The tribe owned it in some sense.

Now, here's an interesting contrast. Individual Levites had an inheritance of property, but not the tribal unit as a whole. But when it came to the other tribes both the citizens and the corporate tribe owned something. So Mannasseh's territory can't be said to be the property of a whole bunch of individuals. Levite individuals owned property, but not the tribe. The citizens of Mannasseh owned property, but so did the corporate state of Mannasseh. So there is a contrast between the tribe of Levi and the other tribes. Levi did not corporately own property, but the other tribes did. So it is clear that for one tribal unit (equivalent to one of our states) to intrude into the geographical area of the next tribe was considered a form of theft. It would be overstepping their jurisdiction.

And for skeptics, there are many other passages that say the same thing - that states owned at least *something* with respect to the land within certain borders. The Bible repeatedly calls the entire land the king's land, or "his land" (Gen. 6:1,11; 7:2; etc.), or "your land" (Numb. 21:22; 22:13; etc). He possessed it in *some* sense.

Besides the artificial lines made of fences and stones that divided between family properties, Joshua mentions 51 geographical features that helped to obviously provide border lines - like mountain ridges, streams, and the Jordon River.<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew word for borders is used 205 times. It's obviously a very important topic.

So how does a nation protect its borders? Some people have a philosophy of open borders where anyone other than armies can come and go at will. There does seem to be *some* evidence for that, and we will discuss that. But I think the Biblical position is a little bit

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<sup>5</sup> "The description of the boundaries between the Twelve Tribes in the Book of Joshua mentions 51 geographical features which include 15 types of landscape and outstanding reliefs, in addition to many settlement names, some of which were taken from names of individuals in the tribe. The geographical features include mountains, their peaks, flanks, edges and slopes; rolling country, plateaus, valleys and plains, rivers, springs, waterfalls, seas and bays, cliffs and wildernesses. Most of the features are continental with only a few mentioning marine or river features, such as springs, waterfalls, bays and seas: the Mediterranean, the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The sea constitutes the main natural boundary of the country, as we find in Jeremiah 5:22." Menashe Har-El, *Understanding the Twelve Tribes: Boundaries & Surrounding Nations, Understanding the Bible* (Carta Jerusalem, 2019), 9.

more nuanced. Is it only armies marching a mile wide that are kept from crossing a border? What about an army of 100,000 crossing single file? What about an army that comes across 25 or 50 at a time over a period of months? How do you determine if it is an army or not? It appears that many of the illegal immigrants into America are connected with radical muslim terrorist cells. Though they came across over an extended period of time, they do appear to be part of a hostile army. They are a threat to America.

Because of this, some want to build a wall that could keep everyone out. But walls also imprison everyone in. What does the Bible say about these borders? There are many passages that indicate that the Bible allowed trade between countries, and there was a lot of fairly unrestricted travel that happened back and forth. Even in chapter 8 of Joshua there were many strangers who were benefiting from God's economy. I won't give the entire answer away in this sermon, but will only mention a few hints:

First, God wanted borders maintained and not encroached upon. Several passages indicate that these borders were intended to separate the nation from others. For example, Deuteronomy 32:8 says, "When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples." Those three different synonyms for separation make a strong case for keeping citizenship separate. It was God's purpose to separate the sons of Adam into distinct groups with boundaries around them. Acts 17:26 says, "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings."

Second, God commanded Israel not to trespass on the territory of various nations. In two cases they asked permission to use the highway to go through the country, but when permission was denied, they honored that denial. There was a recognition of state territorial rights.

Third, Psalm 147:14 indicates that even during peacetime there is a need for borders. It isn't just to keep out armies. Indeed, Isaiah 19 and Isaiah 60 both predict a time in our future when there will be a completely converted world. Yet it says that there will still be borders of discrete nations (Is. 19:19; 60:18).

Fourth, Joshua mentions the strategic fortress cities that guarded virtually every road that went into and out of the country. Solomon rebuilt and expanded upon this network that served as a watchdog on the borders. Let me quote from Howard Vos. He says,

Solomon's system of fortresses created a formidable barrier for would-be invaders. Hazor guarded a strategic point north of the Sea of Galilee; Megiddo stood at the base of the Plain of Esdraelon; Beth-horon blocked the pass to Jerusalem by way of Aijalon; Baalath stood on the highway from Jerusalem to the port of Joppa; Gezer protected the main road and entrance to the valley of Sorek; Tamar on the southern border could defend caravans from Ezion-geber. No fortress stood east of Jerusalem, the valley of the Jordan being considered a



sufficient barrier. Excavations at Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer reveal significant Solomonic construction at each place.<sup>6</sup>

So all of those protected borders against armies.

What about individuals, free trade, and tourist travel? That God allowed foreigners to travel into and out of Israel's borders and even allowed them to live in Israel and to work in Israel is also clear from the law itself - that is, they could become residents if they embraced the Biblical religion. Entry into and exiting from the country did have conditions. There were checkpoints, but most honest travelers who were not going to be permanent residents were allowed in and out. Let me give you some sample evidence.

1. First, there were social laws such as the gleaning laws of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy that protected the foreigner in the land. They had to ask permission of the landowner to glean (which is an important point), but God commanded the landowners to be generous and to bless these Gentile sojourners. The Hebrew word for "sojourners" is *gerim*. They were the foreigners who became permanent residents. Well, that means that the law expected these sojourners to be present from time to time.
2. Second, there were judicial laws that explicitly say that judges were to give justice to the sojourner when a dispute might arise between him and an Israelite.
3. Third, there were religious laws that welcomed the foreigner to certain worship services. We have already seen those in Joshua 8, but the Sabbath law clearly applied to both Israelite and sojourner (Ex. 20:8-10; Deut. 5:14). Likewise the foreigner could join in the festivities at the Festival of Weeks.
4. Fourth, Ezekiel 47:22-23 allowed foreigners to become full time residents. Faith was required to own land and be a citizen, but God allowed non-citizens to rent.
5. Fifth, the Bible distinguished between *gerim* (who were sojourners who were residents) and two other Hebrew words (*nokri* and *zar*), who were either transient workers or travelers.

Tremper Longman points out that the *gerim* were immigrants who had not only been permitted by the government to enter (just like the *nokri* and *zar* temporary travelers were) but had also become Gentile converts, adopting Israel's God and His law without becoming Jews. That is an extremely important point. The *gerim* were converted Gentiles who worshiped with Israel and had permits to be permanent residents. They are not equivalent at all to the undocumented illegal aliens of today who do not share America's values at all. These *gerim* did share Israel's values - as was clear from Joshua 8. So Israel

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Frederic Vos, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs: How the People of the Bible Really Lived* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 173-174.

allowed full integration of the gerim who had entered the land legally. Tremper Longman says of these gerim,

They should receive the full judicial and social rights and responsibilities of native-born citizens and should be invited to fully participate in the church's worship and life. At present, this view is reflected in the public policy of the United States, where only the right to vote is withheld until full citizenship... Christians should be the last people who fear immigration, even with its attendant risks to our own physical and economic well-being... the "bad actors" who *should* be refused entry into our country should not be used as an excuse to restrict others from coming.<sup>7</sup>

But immigration is different than ignoring border control. Tremper Longman appeals to a number of texts including the Levitical cities of refuge, to show that there needs to be some provision for citizens of other states and countries fleeing injustice and finding sanctuary within a Christian nation. But the very fact that a city of refuge could refuse entry to a criminal shows border control of that city. I think David Dykstra had brought this up in a debate earlier. I think it is a very valid point. And Tremper Longman fills that concept out a bit more.

So if the Levitical cities had border control, it's not much of a stretch to apply the same principles to a state. And several passages *seem* to apply those same principles to the country as a whole. For example, Deuteronomy 27:19 says that Israel is cursed if it denies a foreigner justice. That implies foreigners escaping from injustice. But that mandate of justice also implies that Israel must reject entry to a criminal - just like a city of refuge would. To allow immigration of criminals or people hostile to a country's values is an injustice to the citizens. Jeremiah 22:3 is another passage that calls upon the nation to rescue the foreigner seeking to escape injustice.

I've had to hugely reduce all of the Biblical evidence for this sermon, but the bottom line is that the Bible's position is somewhere in between the two typical arguments that you hear on border control. A nation does have a right to exclude people it considers criminals or people with a worldview that would undermine our Christian heritage, but it should be a safe harbor for upright *believers* seeking to escape tyranny. Immigration of Christians is a one-to-one application from the gerim laws that provided sanctuary for them. Now, unbelievers could also travel in and out of Israel, but they weren't given resident status. Unbelievers were not given resident status because their lack of a good worldview would undermine the nation. Only those who embraced Israel's values could become citizens. In stark contrast, the Biden administration has allowed a flood of people to immigrate here who are hostiles to this country's Christian foundations and yet they have tried to deport the Romeike family, a Christian family who was trying to escape the ungodly laws of

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<sup>7</sup> Tremper Longman III, *The Bible and the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 195–211.

Germany against homeschooling. That is an ungodly immigration policy. It's the exact opposite of the Bible's.

Of course, our government has complicated the equation by offering welfare and other handouts that attract the wrong kind of immigrants. That is totally different from the gleaning laws which were privately given to people who had a good work ethic.

So I think both sides of the debate agree that our immigration policy needs fixing. But doing away with border control is not the solution. This is a chapter that highlights the importance of borders. They are ultra important.

## VII. The Levites' inheritance

I've already touched on the next point - that the tribe of Levi did not have a tribal allotment, which meant that they did not have their own state government. There was a civil state governing a civil territory for all other tribes, but no civil state for Levites. The Levites who served in the temple had cities, but the other Levites were scattered in every town and city of Israel. Almost all Levites were private citizens under the jurisdiction of some other state.

They were able to own property, but their source of income was from the tithes of the people in the synagogues. The text here says that God was their inheritance and the sacrifices were their inheritance, but other passages gave them a double portion through the tithes. Lack of farmland or other livelihoods made them economically vulnerable, but it was a trust issue. And Isaiah 66 and other passages compares us pastors to those Levites. As Hinlicky words it, this ensured "the priority of theology over geography."<sup>8</sup> And I think that is a good way of wording it. God wanted the pastors of the synagogues to be financially freed up to not have to take another job.

## VIII. The importance of helping those who have not yet possessed their possessions

I'll barely touch on the next point. A close analysis of this section will show some tribes had spots *within other tribes*. That should seem weird. And several of the tribes do not yet have what was given to them. You can see that in the dark outline in the first map. In Judges we find that the other tribes offered to help these tribes continue the conquest. In the meantime, they squeezed into a smaller space. To me this shows two things by way of application:

First, it's good to learn to adjust to less than the ideal when God's providence calls for it. Some of you have had to learn to get by with less. Sometimes the family size outgrows the

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<sup>8</sup> Paul R. Hinlicky, Joshua, ed. R. R. Reno, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 194.

house size, and you learn to be creative. In our early years we had two triple bunks in one room. God calls us to adapt to His providences rather than overextending ourselves.

Second, God forced them to act like a body working together in the first 12 chapters, and this remaining land that needed to be conquered will force them to continue to act like a body by helping some of these downsized tribes to expand their borders to what God had originally promised. The people who already had their land could have been selfish and left the others to fend for themselves. But they didn't. You can see in verses 2, 11, and 13 that the Geshurites and Maachathites still occupied land within Israel's current borders. This would be remedied, but only because those who already had all their land helped those who didn't. It took sacrifice, but it showed beautiful bodylife. And I think our congregation exemplifies this generosity in many ways - the gifts that go back and forth. The roofing party for the Lanes is another example of this. I praise God for that.

### IX. The execution of Balaam (v. 22)

But there is one more lesson that I want to highlight from this section. It is the mention of the execution of Balaam in verse 22. That execution happened way back in Numbers 31:8, so why is it brought up here? Some liberal commentaries claim that it doesn't fit. But it does. I think it is put here for the same reason the story was repeated in Nehemiah, Micah, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. Here's the point of the story. When God blesses us with property and riches it is easy to become comfortable, to let down our guard, and to succumb to the temptations of the world like Israel did in the book of Numbers. Back in Numbers king Balak had hired Balaam to curse Israel. God wouldn't let Balaam curse Israel. Instead, God actually forced Balaam to bless Israel. But because Balaam loved what 2 Peter calls the wages of unrighteousness and what Jude calls greed, he wanted the king's money, so he told Balak how he could render Israel powerless and under God's judgment. He told Balak to send women to Israel to seduce the men. And it worked. The men committed adultery and God removed His blessing. So Joshua inserts this warning here because riches and property and comfort can make God's people relax and put down their guard.

And this is a great point to end on. This chapter shows that God loves to bless His people with property and riches. There is nothing wrong with that. But we always need to be on guard when we become more self-sufficient. It was when the kings Solomon, Uzziah, and Hezekiah became strong, wealthy, famous, and comfortable that pride crept in. As a result of that pride, their guard was let down, and they sinned against God. And God removed His blessing. It's a formula that always happens. It's a warning that continues to apply to us. If we start getting soft spiritually and we no longer engage in spiritual disciplines, we can become vulnerable to temptation.

So rejoice in God's tangible gifts of land, houses, cities, technology, and wealth. But make sure to always use those things as a stewardship trust for God. Don't let your blessings become a curse. Amen.