

# JOSHUA 17

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## THE TERRITORY OF MANASSEH

Even though Manasseh was Joseph’s firstborn, the description of Manasseh’s inheritance comes after that of his brother, Ephraim, given in the previous chapter. The main boundary description of the territory is provided in verses 7–13 of chapter 17. As with Ephraim’s portion of the Josephite allotment, Manasseh was unable to completely drive out the Canaanite element from their territory, so they settled instead on making the Canaanites forced laborers (16:10; 17:12–13).

Among the Manassehite heroes mentioned by name in this chapter are Zelophehad and his daughters, Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah (verses 3–4), previously mentioned in Numbers 27:1–11; 36:1–12. Here the women arrive in the narrative to claim the inheritance promised to their deceased father.

The chapter ends with a final narrative frame: the Josephites’ complaining about the size of their territorial allotment (Joshua 17:14–18). The complaint raised in verse 14 (“Why hast thou given me but one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people”) was a legitimate one since the Josephites effectively constituted two tribes, and they were given a single land inheritance. The answer from Joshua was for them to deforest their territory to expand living space (verse 15). Of special interest is the comment made by the Josephites that “all the Canaanites that dwell in the land of the valley have chariots of iron” (verse 16). According to this, the Canaanites were using iron (Hebrew *barzel*) technology by the time Israel entered the land. Our best historical reconstructions put the time of the conquest at the transitional period between the Bronze and Iron Ages (circa 1200–1000 BC).<sup>1</sup> This otherwise offhand

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert D. Miller II, “The Judges and the Early Iron Age,” in *Ancient Israel’s History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 165–189; Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Emergence of Israel in the Land of Canaan,” in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2021), 59–91.

remark in the book of Joshua reveals a kernel of historical truth for the time of its setting: that iron was an advanced, new technology that made the Israelites initially uneasy.

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