

Memory Verse

“So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it.” (Joshua 21:43)

| Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word] | Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature] | Good Works [Behavior] |
|--|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn the spiritual significance of the division of the promised land. 2. Understand how God Himself is our city of refuge. 3. Learn the key messages from Joshua’s farewell, especially regarding God’s presence, power, and promises. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God is faithful 2. God is just. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To receive our spiritual inheritance, we must conquer our spiritual enemies. 2. We must firm up our faith to avoid being influenced by the world. |

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Division of the Land
- B. The Cities of Levites
- C. Joshua’s Farewell and Death

Life Application

1. Conquering Our Spiritual Enemies
2. Firming Up Our Faith in God

Memory Verse

Conclusion: We must put in effort to receive our spiritual inheritance, just as God wanted the Israelites to go in and conquer the enemies in the promised land. God will be there fighting for us, so we must continue to have faith in Him and trust that He will help us to conquer any spiritual enemy.

Introduction

After many years of battling, Joshua and the Israelites were able to conquer a great portion of the land of Canaan. However, Joshua was getting old (Josh 13:1–7), so God commanded him to divide the land among the Israelites by drawing lots. It is important to remember that although they began to settle throughout it, enemies still dwelt in the land. After it was divided, each tribe was still expected to conquer the remaining enemies. Today, we'll be examining the division of the land in more detail to understand God's faithfulness, and to learn what we need to do to receive the inheritance promised to us.

A. Division of the Land

After they conquered much of the land, it was divided by drawing lots (Josh 14:2). The Hebrew word for "lot," *gôrāl*, comes from a root word that means, "rough (as stone)."¹ We don't know exactly what the process of drawing lots was like, but from the etymology of the word, historians have thought of it as throwing sticks or stones with markings on them. These markings would then be interpreted to determine the will of God. The process may sound like chance, but it was used frequently throughout the Old Testament to show God's decision or judgment, such as when they drew lots to discover Achan's sin. Let's go over the division of the land among the Israelites, and the significance of its division.

See Figure 01: Division of the Promised Land (Bible Journey). Note that Figure 02: Division of the Promised Land (Library of Congress) offers a more detailed view, although due to its size, you may want to access the image on the original site.

1. East of the Jordan River

There were two and a half tribes that were given land east of the Jordan River: Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. Although this land was not a part of the land promised by God (Num 24:1–12), the tribes saw that the land was good, so they had asked Moses to give it to them as their inheritance. Moses granted their request (Josh 13:8, 15, 24, 29), under the condition that they help the other tribes conquer the land.

There are no shortcuts

Although the land was well-watered and spacious, the land to the east also lacked the defense of the Jordan River. As a result, the tribes who dwelt there were the first tribes to be taken by Assyria during the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Their choice to take the easy route only resulted in a quicker downfall. Although we often want to choose the easy route in our lives, such compromises often have negative consequences in our faith. Decisions that seem insignificant at first will, over time, make us spiritually vulnerable to sin.

2. West of the Jordan River

While the land east of the Jordan river had already been granted by request, the land west of the river was instead divided by lots. Through this, they were remarkably given land according to their size and need, showing God's hand in their drawing of lots.

Fight to receive our inheritance

Although the lands were assigned to each tribe, they still needed to conquer and drive out their

¹ *Blue Letter Bible*, s.v. "gôrāl," accessed October, 2021, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1486/nkjv/wlc/0-1/>.

enemies still dwelling there. Not only were they to drive out anyone still dwelling in their assigned lands, but each tribe also had to work to receive any land beyond their allotment. The tribe of Dan expanded their territory in this way (Josh 19:47), and when the people of Ephraim and Manasseh requested more land, Joshua commanded them to take it for themselves. Let's read Joshua 17:14–18.

From the moment they crossed the Jordan River, we can see that God required His people to put forth their own effort. He did not simply give the Israelites the land, but instead promised to drive out their enemies with them (Josh 13:6). Although God has already promised us our spiritual inheritance, we must also do our part to receive it. We have received the true gospel and a place in His heavenly kingdom. But to receive this promise, we need to fight a spiritual battle. Like the Israelites, we must drive out any sin from our lives and stand firm against the negative influences of this world. This may seem an impossible task at times, but just as the Lord promised victory for the Israelites, He will also help us to attain victory, as long as we keep Him by our side.

3. The Cities of the Levites

The Levites did not receive an inheritance of land like the other tribes. The Bible states many times that “the tribe of Levi Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD God of Israel was their inheritance, as He had said to them” (Josh 13:33). Instead, they were given cities throughout the land of Canaan for them to dwell in, and they received a portion of the offerings that the other tribes gave to God. Although they did not receive land to work or call their own, their abundance would come from God, as long as they carried out their duties of pastoring the people. In all, they received forty-eight cities to dwell in throughout Israel. Among these cities were what God named “cities of refuge.”

God is our inheritance

The Bible states that we are the new priesthood (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; Tit 2:14), and like the Levites, our inheritance is in the Lord. Let's read Acts 20:32. “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

B. Cities of Refuge

Let's read Joshua 20. Even before they entered the promised land, God had given Moses directions regarding the cities of refuge (Num 35:6). They were clearly an important aspect of Israel that God wanted to put into place. When they finally divided the land, Joshua and the Israelites followed God's instructions and, of the forty-eight cities given to the Levites, designated six as cities of refuge.

1. The Old Testament Cities of Refuge

a. Location

The cities of refuge were spread throughout the land of Canaan, with three located on the east of the Jordan River and three on the west.

| City | Meaning | Teaching |
|---------------------|-------------|---|
| Kedesh (in Galilee) | “Holy” | God is holy, and we also need to be holy. |
| Shechem | “Shoulders” | Jesus Christ carries our burdens and sins on His shoulders. |
| Hebron | “United” | Salvation allows us to be united to God once again. |
| Bezer | “Strength” | Jesus Christ is strong, and we can rely on Him. |

| | | |
|--------|-------------|---|
| Ramoth | “Raised up” | Jesus Christ is raised up, and He is the One on high. |
| Golan | “Joy” | In Jesus Christ, we are able to find true joy. |

b. Purpose

The cities served as a refuge for those who had accidentally or unintentionally killed someone (Num 36:22–25; Josh 20:3–5; Deut 19:3–5). However, any who murdered another intentionally were not permitted to enter (Deut 19:11–13). They were not only for the Israelites, but also served as refuge for any aliens or foreigners residing among them (Num 35:14–15; Josh 20:9).

c. A path free of obstacles

The Lord commanded the Israelites to ensure that the paths to the cities of refuge were to be free of obstacles (Deut 19:3, 6), so that any who were trying to make their way there would not be hindered and possibly caught.

d. Death of the high priest

Any who took shelter in these cities had to remain within its walls until the death of the current high priest. Only then was he free to return home (Josh 20:6; Num 35:25, 28).

2. The New Testament City of Refuge²

The Old Testament laws were a shadow of the good things to come, and the cities of refuge were no different (Heb 10:1). In the Old Testament, they were for the purpose of protecting one’s physical life. But like other Mosaic laws, they were an incomplete and temporary version of what was to come, because they could not save what was most important: our spiritual lives. This is why Jesus Christ was necessary. All of us are born into sin (Rom 3:23), and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). So, God sent Jesus Christ to save us from perishing (2 Pet 3:9). He made atonement for our sins, and through His blood, gave us true refuge (Heb 6:18).

a. The refuge of the true church

We need to find refuge in the body of Christ, which is the true church (Eph 1:23), which was purchased with the blood of Jesus (Acts 17:28) to save the ignorant from death (Eph 4:17–18). When we recognize Jesus as our Savior, we flee to the church, our refuge. After belief, “through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5), our sins are washed away. Without this washing of regeneration, we will experience eternal death, so it is important that we enter into this refuge.

b. A path free of obstacles

The gates to the cities of refuge in the Old Testament were always open to provide refuge for anyone who killed his neighbor unintentionally. What does this mean for us today? The Bible tells us that the church is “called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken” (Isa 62:11–12). It is important to teach unbelievers the power and consequence of sin, so that they can understand the need to come to church and receive redemption. The refuge of the true church is the only place where we can escape death and receive a heavenly inheritance (Gal 3:26–29).

c. Jesus Christ, our eternal High Priest

The Levitical priesthood was upheld by generations of successors who had to continually offer sacrifices. But our new High Priest, Jesus Christ, only had to make one sacrifice (Heb 3:1; 9:11–14). He offered Himself once for all, bore the sins of mankind, and shed His blood so that with His death, He could free us from sin (Heb 2:14–15). Unlike the Levites, however,

² If you would like additional details regarding these teachings, please see: <https://joy.org.tw/goodnews.asp?num=882> (Chinese only).

He is a “priest forever” (Heb 7:21) who never dies. Because of this, “He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). As our great High Priest and intercessor, He is now our city of refuge, allowing us to “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

The cities of refuge established in the Old Testament are just a shadow of the refuge in the New Testament: the true church, which is the body of Christ. Through His saving grace, the Lord redeems anyone who enters the church with faith and saves them from death.

C. Joshua’s Farewell and Death

After dividing the land, the Lord gave them rest and none of their enemies were able to stand against them (Josh 21:43–45). All of the things that God had promised came to pass, and when Joshua advanced in age, he called all of the Israelites to him for a last farewell message. Let’s read Joshua 23:3–13. There are three key messages that Joshua conveyed in this passage:

1. Keep God’s laws and commandments

“Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left[.]” (Josh 23:6)

Joshua wanted the Israelites to remember to keep God’s laws and commandments. This included the rejection of idol-worshipping and avoiding intermarriage with Canaanites still living among them. Joshua understood that if they were to intermarry, the Israelites would be influenced by Canaanite culture and religious practices.

2. Their success was from God

“For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; [...] for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.” (Josh 23:9–10)

Like his predecessor, Joshua had a thorough understanding of the reason they were able to receive the land. It was not their own abilities that had led them to this point. This success came under the condition that the Israelites study His law and obey His commands with strength and courage (Josh 1:7–9). God had led them to victory over their enemies and had fulfilled His promise to give them the promised land as their inheritance because they followed these requirements. It was not their own strength but God’s power that had given them success.

3. Do not cling to the remnants

“But [the Canaanites] shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes [.]” (Josh 23:13)

Joshua was aware of the potential pitfalls that Canaanite culture presented to the Israelites. More importantly, he understood the consequences that they would face if they allowed themselves to be influenced. If they instead “served other gods, and bowed down to them,” (Josh 23:16) and “[clung] to the remnants of these nations” (Josh 23:12), God would no longer drive out their enemies. They would instead perish, and God’s promises would be taken from them. The matter was serious enough that Joshua’s very last words were a warning of what would happen if they were to transgress against the covenant of God (Josh 23:16; 24:20, 27).

After his final warning, Joshua died at the age of 110, and he was buried in the land that had been given to him, at Timnath Serah, among the mountains of Ephraim. During his lifetime, the Israelites continued to worship and serve God, a testament to the respect that they held towards him.

Check for Understanding

- 1. What key lessons can we learn from the division of the land?**
 - a. There are no shortcuts – Compromises often have negative consequences in our faith, and decisions that seem insignificant at first will, over time, make us spiritually vulnerable to sin.
 - b. Fight to receive our inheritance – God required His people to put forth their own effort, and we must also do our part to receive our inheritance.
 - c. God is our inheritance – We are the new high priests, and like the Levites, our inheritance is in the Lord.
- 2. What was the purpose of the cities of refuge, and who was permitted to take refuge?** They served as a refuge for those who had accidentally or unintentionally killed someone. They served as refuge not just for the Israelites, but also for any aliens or foreigners residing among them.
- 3. In what way is the True Jesus Church the New Testament “city of refuge”?** The body of Christ is the true church, purchased with the blood of Jesus to save the ignorant from death. When we recognize Jesus as our Savior, we flee to the church, our refuge. After belief, our sins are washed away, and we are saved from death.
- 4. Why was Joshua so concerned about the influence of the Canaanites upon the Israelites?** He understood the consequences that they would face if they allowed themselves to be influenced. If they failed to keep God’s commandments and instead “[clung] to the remnants of these nations,” God would no longer drive out their enemies, and they would instead perish.

Life Application

1. Conquering Our Spiritual Enemies

As children of God, we know that there is a spiritual inheritance waiting for us in heaven. This inheritance is eternal life and a portion in the kingdom of God. But to receive it, we must first conquer the spiritual enemies that we face in our life on this earth. Who or what are these spiritual enemies that we face? Look up the following verses and write down the enemy that the Bible warns us of.

- 1 Peter 5:8 – *The Devil*
- Colossians 1:21 – *Evil thoughts*
- 1 John 2:16 – *Physical desires (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life)*

From these verses, we can see that the spiritual enemies we battle reside within ourselves. Take a moment to think of two or three “enemies” that you face and share them with the class. For example, are you always looking at your cell phone? Do you prioritize social media to the point of neglecting your studies or family? Do you use crude language or dress provocatively in order to “fit in” or because it makes you feel good? (*Allow students to share and discuss. Examples may be: laziness, material wealth, anxiety, peer pressure, lustful thoughts, love of games, social media “likes,” popularity, etc.*)

There may be many things that we are currently battling, and many of them are challenging, especially because we often don’t feel a need to change any bad habits, or because we lack the strength to overcome them on our own. Read 1 John 5:4. “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” Jesus Christ has promised to help us in any challenges that we face, but we must be willing to change ourselves first.

Consider the spiritual battles that were shared before. What prevents us from changing these habits or thoughts? Why is it so difficult to pull ourselves away from these enemies? Try to discover the root cause, and then discuss ways to address these causes. How can we face these battles? What kind of steps can we take?

2. Firming Up Our Faith in God

Our faith in Jesus Christ enables us to overcome the world and any spiritual enemies that we may encounter in our lives. When we truly believe in Jesus Christ and rely on His power, then we have the key to be victorious over our spiritual enemies. Joshua knew that to keep their faith, the Israelites had to: (1) Keep God's commands; (2) Remember God's providence and power; and (3) Break away from sin by choosing not to "cling" to any remnants of sin.

From these, we can see that faith requires maintenance, upkeep, and active persistence. Joshua understood that the Israelites' faith would waver if they allowed themselves to be influenced by Canaanite culture, and they would eventually fall away. In the same way, when we are surrounded by worldly values, it is often difficult for us to identify negative influences on our spiritual lives.

What worldly values differ greatly from God's values? For example, dating even from a young age is such a common thing that no one thinks twice about it. Even many young members fall into the mentality that dating is okay as long as it doesn't go "too far." However, too often this compromise leads these young members to commit sexual immorality when they are caught up in the heat or impulse of the moment.

In groups or as a class, brainstorm topics or subjects that may influence the way you think, or that are contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Once you have collected a list, write them down in your notebook and rate or rank them according to how prone you are to each. *(Allow students to brainstorm. Examples may be: dating, sexual interactions, certain speech or behavior, manner of dress, family values, divorce, gender, orientation, etc. Try to draw out topics that you know are relevant to the individual students.)*

To counter these influences, it is important to take steps to defend ourselves. To do so, we must:

- a. Equip ourselves with the word of God by making sure we are reading the Bible daily and meditating on His word.
- b. Fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit by praying every day.
- c. Learn ways to calm our hearts when we are feeling negative emotions, such as memorizing verses or hymns.
- d. Attend weekly services and Bible studies to root ourselves further in the truth and deepen our understanding of and relationship with God.

Although we may do these things already, it is important for us to always remind ourselves of how important these actions are. Over time, they are bound to feel more like a routine than an intentional action, so it is important that we continue to find ways to renew ourselves in the Spirit and in God's word without falling into a lull in our faith. Instead of doing these simply out of habit, remember that these are ways to equip ourselves so that we can overcome our spiritual enemies.

Memory Verse

"So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it." (Joshua 21:43)

Meaning

1. From this verse, we can see that there are two parts in receiving the land. First, the Lord was the one who gave it to them to dwell in. He had promised this land, and He was faithful to fulfill this promise. Second, they had to go into the land and possess it by driving out their enemies.
2. Today, we have also been given an inheritance in heaven. This is God's promise, but we must strive to continue keeping His commandments so that we are able to receive it.

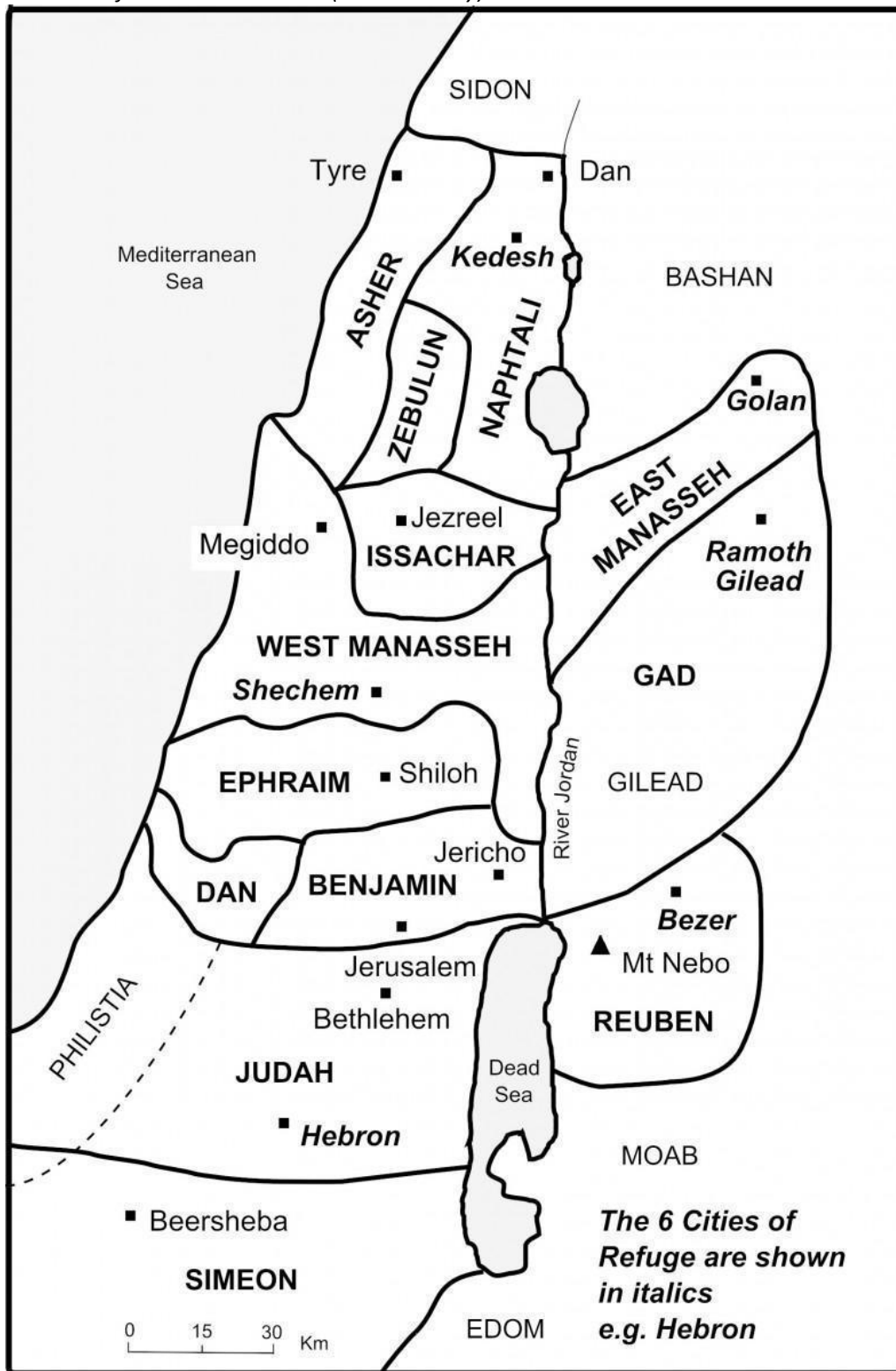
Conclusion

Though we are blessed because our spiritual inheritance was given to us freely by the mercy of God, it is important that we must put in effort to take it for ourselves, just as God wanted the Israelites to go in and conquer the enemies that were dwelling in the promised land. Lastly, it is important to remember that we are not alone in this fight. God will be there fighting for us, as long as we continue to have faith in Him and trust that He will help us to conquer any spiritual enemy.

Lesson 12 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What were the two parts to the Israelites' possession of the promised land?
First, the Lord was the one who gave it to them to dwell in. Second, to receive the land, they had to go into it and possess it by driving out their enemies.
2. "Therefore be very _____ to _____ and to _____ all that is _____ in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn _____ from it to the right hand or to the left." (Joshua 23:6)
courageous, keep, do, written, aside
3. Name at least one key lesson that we can learn from the division of the land and briefly explain.
 - a. *There are no shortcuts – Compromises often have negative consequences in our faith, and decisions that seem insignificant at first will, over time, make us spiritually vulnerable to sin.*
 - b. *Fight to receive our inheritance – God required His people to put forth their own effort, and we must also do our part to receive our inheritance.*
 - c. *God is our inheritance – We are the new high priests, and like the Levites, our inheritance is in the Lord.*
4. How were the Old Testament cities of refuge a shadow of the New Testament city of refuge?
The true church, the body of Christ, is the New Testament city of refuge. Through His saving grace, the Lord redeems anyone who enters the church with faith and saves them from death.
5. What three messages did Joshua convey in his farewell to the Israelites?
 - a. *To keep God's laws and commandments.*
 - b. *To remember that it was God who had given them success.*
 - c. *To avoid clinging to the remnants of the Canaanites.*
6. After today's discussion, what are steps that you can take to overcome your spiritual enemies?
Answers will vary according to class discussion.

Figure 01: Division of the Promised Land (Bible Journey)³



³ Taylor, Chris & Jenifer. *Map 49: The Boundaries of the Twelve Tribes*. Accessed October, 2021, <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney2/27-the-israelites-move-into-canaan/canaan-is-divided-among-the-twelve-tribes/>

Figure 02: Division of the Promised Land (Library of Congress)⁴



⁴ Bowles, John. A map of the Land of Canaan or Holy Land, as divided among the twelve tribes which God promised to Abraham and his seed. London: John Bowles, 1760. Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016586537/>.