**Joshua**

Chapter 21

*Towns for the Levites*

**Now the family heads of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the other tribal families of Israel 2 at Shiloh in Canaan and said to them, “The Lord commanded through Moses that you give us towns to live in, with pasturelands for our livestock.” 3 So, as the Lord had commanded, the Israelites gave the Levites the following towns and pasturelands out of their own inheritance: 4 The first lot came out for the Kohathites, clan by clan. The Levites who were descendants of Aaron the priest were allotted thirteen towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin. 5 The rest of Kohath’s descendants were allotted ten towns from the clans of the tribes of Ephraim, Dan and half of Manasseh. 6 The descendants of Gershon were allotted thirteen towns from the clans of the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan. 7 The descendants of Merari, clan by clan, received twelve towns from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun. 8 So the Israelites allotted to the Levites these towns and their pasturelands, as the Lord had commanded through Moses. 9 From the tribes of Judah and Simeon they allotted the following towns by name 10 (these towns were assigned to the descendants of Aaron who were from the Kohathite clans of the Levites, because the first lot fell to them): 11 They gave them Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), with its surrounding pastureland, in the hill country of Judah. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) 12 But the fields and villages around the city they had given to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his possession. 13 So to the descendants of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron (a city of refuge for one accused of murder), Libnah, 14 Jattir, Eshtemoa, 15 Holon, Debir, 16 Ain, Juttah and Beth Shemesh, together with their pasturelands—nine towns from these two tribes. 17 And from the tribe of Benjamin they gave them Gibeon, Geba, 18 Anathoth and Almon, together with their pasturelands—four towns. 19 All the towns for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were thirteen, together with their pasturelands. 20 The rest of the Kohathite clans of the Levites were allotted towns from the tribe of Ephraim: 21 In the hill country of Ephraim they were given Shechem (a city of refuge for one accused of murder) and Gezer, 22 Kibzaim and Beth Horon, together with their pasturelands—four towns. 23 Also from the tribe of Dan they received Eltekeh, Gibbethon, 24 Aijalon and Gath Rimmon, together with their pasturelands—four towns. 25 From half the tribe of Manasseh they received Taanach and Gath Rimmon, together with their pasturelands—two towns. 26 All these ten towns and their pasturelands were given to the rest of the Kohathite clans. 27 The Levite clans of the Gershonites were given: from the half-tribe of Manasseh, Golan in Bashan (a city of refuge for one accused of murder) and Be Eshtarah, together with their pasturelands—two towns;**

**28 from the tribe of Issachar, Kishion, Daberath, 29 Jarmuth and En Gannim, together**

**with their pasturelands—four towns; 30 from the tribe of Asher, Mishal, Abdon, 31**

**Helkath and Rehob, together with their pasturelands—four towns; 32 from the tribe of**

**Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee (a city of refuge for one accused of murder), Hammoth Dor**

**and Kartan, together with their pasturelands—three towns. 33 All the towns of the**

**Gershonite clans were thirteen, together with their pasturelands. 34 The Merarite clans (the**

**rest of the Levites) were given: from the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam, Kartah, 35 Dimnah and**

**Nahalal, together with their pasturelands—four towns; 36from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer,**

**Jahaz, 37 Kedemoth and Mephaath, together with their pasturelands—four towns; 38 from**

**the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead (a city of refuge for one accused of murder),**

**Mahanaim, 39 Heshbon and Jazer, together with their pasturelands—four towns in all. 40**

**All the towns allotted to the Merarite clans, who were the rest of the Levites, were twelve.**

**41 The towns of the Levites in the territory held by the Israelites were forty-eight in all, together with their pasturelands. 42 Each of these towns had pasturelands surrounding it; this was true for all these towns. 43 So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. 44 The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. 45 Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.**

**21:1–45** Finally the Levites are allotted their towns and adjoining pasturelands—with the priestly families being given precedence (see v. 10). (CSB)

**Ch 21** In his curse on Simeon and Levi for their fierce anger, Jacob prophesied that Levi would be scattered and dispersed in Israel (Gn 49:5–7). Those words are fulfilled as the Levites receive their cities scattered among the 12 tribes. The Levites living in their 48 cities (v 41) throughout the land serve as roving teachers of God’s people as they watch over the Word and covenant of the Lord (cf Dt 33:8–11; 2Ch 17:8–9). See note, 20:7–8. At the tabernacle, and later at the temple, the priestly Levites from the line of Aaron offered the sacrifices that pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus. (TLSB)

**21:1** *heads of the fathers’ houses*. Chiefs of the various clans within a tribe. (TLSB)

**21:2** Cf Nu 35:1–8. (TLSB)

**21:3–40** Cities for the Levites come proportionately from the inheritance of the other tribes. Larger tribes give up more cities than the smaller tribes (Nu 35:8). (TLSB)

**21:4** *Kohathites.* The three sons of Levi were Kohath, Gershon and Merari (Ex 6:16; Nu 3:17). (CSB)

Kohath was one of Levi’s three sons. (The other sons were Gershon and Merari.) Moses and Aaron were from Kohath’s line. Aaron’s line of Kohathites was the priestly line. Aaron’s line thus receives cities near the future site of the temple, where they will serve, namely, Jerusalem. The nonpriestly Kohathites (v 5) did not need to receive cities near Jerusalem because they would not necessarily serve at the temple each day. (TLSB)

*Judah, Simeon and Benjamin.* Tribal areas close to Jerusalem, which would later be the site of the temple. The remaining Kohathites received cities in adjoining tribes. (CSB)

**21:11** *Hebron.* Caleb’s city (14:13–15). The priests and Levites were to be given space in their assigned cities along with the other inhabitants. (CSB)

**21:27** *Gershonites.* Received cities in the northern tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Issachar. (CSB)

**21:34** *Merarite clans.* Their 12 cities were scattered over Reuben, Gad and Zebulun. (CSB)

**21:43–45** A concluding summary statement of how the Lord had fulfilled his sworn promise to give Israel this land (see Ge 15:18–21). The occupation of the land was not yet complete (see 23:4–5; Jdg 1–2), but the national campaign was over and Israel was finally established in the promised land. No power was left in Canaan that could threaten to dislodge her. (CSB)

Encapsulates the theme of Jsh: the Lord is faithful and fulfills His promise to give the land. A tone of praise and thanksgiving resonates as the author reflects Joshua’s own words (23:14; cf Jesus’ words in Mt 5:18). (TLSB)

**21:43** *the Lord* *gave to Israel all the land*. Israel has an expanse of land from Mount Hermon to the Negeb and from the Great Sea to the Arabian Desert. (TLSB)

**21:44** *rest on every side.* See note on 1:13. (CSB)

Cf 1:15; Dt 3:20. The Lord has given Israel “rest” by defeating their enemies, providing security, and giving them land after 40 years of wandering. This rest anticipates the more valuable rest found only in Jesus and received through faith (Heb 4:3, 8; see note, Jsh 1:12–13.) (TLSB)

*Not one of all their enemies had withstood them*. Sure to His promises, the Lord provided complete victory over enemies, as Israel acted in faith. Without faith in Him, Israel would experience defeat, as ch 7 demonstrated. Even that initial defeat was erased by the victory of ch 8 as Israel repented. Jsh 13:1–7; 15:63 show that even land given by the Lord and allotted to Israel needs the continuing faithful action of His covenant people. Failure to rest on the Lord’s promises of victory would lead to future defeat. Yet, that does not detract from the Lord’s complete victory to date. (TLSB)

**21:45** *had failed*. Lit, “had fallen.” The promises of the land are God’s promises to Joshua in 1:2–6 and, still earlier, His original promise to Abraham (Gn 12:2–3; 13:14–17). (TLSB)

**Ch 21** The Lord provides for the tribe of Levi, and with that, the author proclaims with praise that the Lord has kept all of His promises. We are not to become attached to the things of this world as though they have lasting value. The Lord provided the Levites with earthly cities that anticipated a better city, a heavenly one (Heb 11:16). Likewise, He promises that as we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness through Christ, He will grant us what we need for this life (Mt 6:33). • Heavenly Father, release us from worries and undue attachment to earthly things, so we might find our true joy in You and the enduring city awaiting us through Christ. Amen. (TLSB)