

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 21

Cities and Pasturelands Allotted to Levi

Then the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites came to Eleazar the priest and to Joshua the son of Nun and to the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the people of Israel. 2 And they said to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, "The LORD commanded through Moses that we be given cities to dwell in, along with their pasturelands for our livestock." 3 So by command of the LORD the people of Israel gave to the Levites the following cities and pasturelands out of their inheritance. 4 The lot came out for the clans of the Kohathites. So those Levites who were descendants of Aaron the priest received by lot from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, thirteen cities. 5 And the rest of the Kohathites received by lot from the clans of the tribe of Ephraim, from the tribe of Dan and the half-tribe of Manasseh, ten cities. 6 The Gershonites received by lot from the clans of the tribe of Issachar, from the tribe of Asher, from the tribe of Naphtali, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, thirteen cities. 7 The Merarites according to their clans received from the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad, and the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities. 8 These cities and their pasturelands the people of Israel gave by lot to the Levites, as the LORD had commanded through Moses. 9 Out of the tribe of the people of Judah and the tribe of the people of Simeon they gave the following cities mentioned by name, 10 which went to the descendants of Aaron, one of the clans of the Kohathites who belonged to the people of Levi; since the lot fell to them first. 11 They gave them Kiriath-arba (Arba being the father of Anak), that is Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, along with the pasturelands around it. 12 But the fields of the city and its villages had been given to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as his possession. 13 And to the descendants of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron, the city of refuge for the manslayer, with its pasturelands, Libnah with its pasturelands, 14 Jattir with its pasturelands, Eshtemoa with its pasturelands, 15 Holon with its pasturelands, Debir with its pasturelands, 16 Ain with its pasturelands, Juttah with its pasturelands, Beth-shemesh with its pasturelands—nine cities out of these two tribes; 17 then out of the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon with its pasturelands, Geba with its pasturelands, 18 Anathoth with its pasturelands, and Almon with its pasturelands—four cities. 19 The cities of the descendants of Aaron, the priests, were in all thirteen cities with their pasturelands. 20 As to the rest of the Kohathites belonging to the Kohathite clans of the Levites, the cities allotted to them were out of the tribe of Ephraim. 21 To them were given Shechem, the city of refuge for the manslayer, with its pasturelands in the hill country of Ephraim, Gezer with its pasturelands, 22 Kibzaim with its pasturelands, Beth-horon with its pasturelands—four cities; 23 and out of the tribe of Dan, Elteke with its pasturelands, Gibbethon with its pasturelands, 24 Aijalon with its pasturelands, Gath-rimmon with its pasturelands—four cities; 25 and out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Taanach with its pasturelands, and Gath-rimmon with its pasturelands—two cities. 26 The cities of the clans of the rest of the Kohathites were ten in all with their pasturelands. 27 And to the Gershonites, one of the clans of the Levites, were given out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Golan in Bashan with its pasturelands, the city of refuge for the manslayer, and Beeshterah with its pasturelands—two cities; 28 and out of the tribe of Issachar, Kishion with its pasturelands, Daberath with its pasturelands, 29 Jarmuth with its pasturelands, En-gannim with its pasturelands—four cities; 30 and out of the tribe of Asher, Mishal with its pasturelands, Abdon with its pasturelands, 31 Helkath with its pasturelands, and Rehob with its pasturelands—four cities; 32 and out of the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with its pasturelands, the city of refuge for the manslayer, Hammoth-dor with its pasturelands, and Kartan with its pasturelands—three cities. 33 The cities of the several clans of the Gershonites were in all thirteen cities with their pasturelands. 34 And to the rest of the Levites, the Merarite clans, were

given out of the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with its pasturelands, Kartah with its pasturelands, 35 Dimnah with its pasturelands, Nahalal with its pasturelands—four cities; 36 and out of the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with its pasturelands, Jahaz with its pasturelands, 37 Kedemoth with its pasturelands, and Mephaath with its pasturelands—four cities; 38 and out of the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead with its pasturelands, the city of refuge for the manslayer, Mahanaim with its pasturelands, 39 Heshbon with its pasturelands, Jazer with its pasturelands—four cities in all. 40 As for the cities of the several Merarite clans, that is, the remainder of the clans of the Levites, those allotted to them were in all twelve cities. 41 The cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the people of Israel were in all forty-eight cities with their pasturelands. 42 These cities each had its pasturelands around it. So it was with all these cities. 43 Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. 44 And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. 45 Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

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.* 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)