

Joshua Chapter 21

Verses 1-41

The “Levites” were responsible for the spiritual care of Israel.

They were given 48 cities (including the six cities of refuge), scattered throughout Israel.

Meaning most Israelites would be less than a day’s journey from a Levitical city.

This shows God’s heart for placing spiritual leaders among His people.

Today, God has placed spiritual leaders in the church to equip Christians to do their part in developing a community of people who live and serve like Jesus (see Eph. 4:11-16).

Verses 1-3

“Cities to dwell in”: God had given Moses His direction to provide 48 cities for the Levites, dotted throughout Israel’s tribal allotments (Num. 35:1-8).

Six were to be the cities of refuge (Num. 35:6).

Joshua 21:1 "Then came near the heads of the fathers of the Levites unto Eleazar the priest, and unto Joshua the son of Nun, and unto the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel;"

When the land was divided to the several tribes, and everyone knew the cities that belonged to them.

And what they could and should part with to the Levites, and when the six cities of refuge was fixed.

The Levites came to put in their claim for cities of habitation, they having no share in the division of the land.

And yet it was necessary they should have habitations.

The persons that undertook to put in a claim for them were the principal men among them.

The fathers of them were Kohath, Gershon, and Merari.

The heads of those were the chief men that were then living.

These came; "Unto Eleazar the priest, and unto Joshua the son of Nun":

The high priest and chief magistrate.

"And unto the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel":

The princes appointed to divide the land with the two great personages before mentioned (see Numbers 34:17).

The Levites were to have cities to live in, but their real inheritance was the LORD.

They were to live of the offerings on the altar.

Their inheritance was not of things of the world, but of the things of God.

It was planned from the beginning that the Levites would have cities with suburbs to live in.

The last lesson spoke of some of them, because each city of refuge had to be a Levitical city.

Verses 2-3

The designation of special Levitical "cities", together with their surrounding "suburbs" (or pastureland), carries out the previous Mosaic provisions (compare Num. 35:1-8).

Since some 48 of these were established throughout the land, spiritual help would be near and available to all Israelites.

Joshua 21:2 "And they spake unto them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle."

Where the tabernacle was fixed, at or near which the above persons met to cast lots for the division of the land to the seven tribes that had not received their inheritance.

"Saying, the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle":

This command is existent in (Num. 35:2).

The cities have always belonged to them; they have just not been designated yet.

Shiloh was the place of the sanctuary at this time.

Numbers 35:2 "Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give [also] unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them."

Verses 3-42

"The children of Israel gave unto the Levites":

These 48 cities (verse 41), are for various branches of the Levite people to live in and have pasture for their livestock (verse 42).

People of the other tribes donated the areas, each site giving the Levites a vantage point from which to minister spiritually to the people nearby.

In fairness, large tribes devoted more land, smaller ones less (Num. 35:8).

Only the Kohathites were priests, with other branches of Levites assisting in various roles of ritual worship and manual labors.

Joshua 21:3 "And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs."

Knowing full well there was such a command.

They made no objection to their motion, but freely gave them cities out of the portion of inheritance allotted to them. this they did;

"At the commandment of the LORD":

And in obedience to it.

Even gave;

"These cities and their suburbs":

After mentioned: this was done by the tribes themselves.

As there were a certain number fixed by the commandment of God, they agreed among themselves how many and what cities should be given out of each tribe.

And then lots were cast for them by Joshua.

What and which cities should be appropriated to their several divisions, as the Kohathites that sprang from Aaron.

And the rest of them that did not, and the Gershonites and Merarites, as follows.

The number of the cities is 48.

The number 4 means universal, and 12 is a representative of the whole.

We see from this that, this is for all the people.

48 would mean that all of the twelve tribes are represented in this gift of the cities to the Levites.

Numbers 35:7 "[So] all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites [shall be] forty and eight cities: them [shall ye give] with their suburbs."

Joshua 21:4 "And the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites: and the children of Aaron the priest, [which were] of the Levites, had by lot out of the tribe of Judah, and out of the tribe of Simeon, and out of the tribe of Benjamin, thirteen cities."

"Kohathites":

Under God's guiding wisdom, these received 13 city areas in the vicinity of Jerusalem or at a reasonable distance within allotments of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon.

This would give them access to carry out priestly functions where God would later have the ark moved and the temple situated (2 Sam. Chapter 6).

The Kohathites were out of the tribe of Levi.

Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, were the sons of Levi.

The priests and high priest were from the Kohathites.

Moses and Joshua were not interested in earthly wealth.

They did not leave great fortunes to their children of things on this earth.

Their wealth was in heavenly things.

Moses' family would receive with the rest of the Kohathites, not of the priestly family.

The children of Aaron, which included the priesthood, received 13 cities out of the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin.

It is interesting that the priests' and high priest's family would live in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

God knew, even at this early date, that Jerusalem would be the place of the temple.

Joshua 21:5 "And the rest of the children of Kohath [had] by lot out of the families of the tribe of Ephraim, and out of the tribe of Dan, and out of the half tribe of Manasseh, ten cities."

Which did not descend from him in the line of Amram and Aaron, but of Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, who were not priests, but Levites.

"Had by lot out of the families of the tribe of Ephraim, and out of the tribe of Dan, and out of the half tribe of Manasseh, ten cities":

These other sort of Kohathites had their cities in tribes next to the other three where the Kohathites that were priests had theirs.

These were the Kohathites, who God had chosen for service to Him, but not the priesthood.

Their cities were received from the tribes of Ephraim, Dan, and Manasseh, and they received 10 cities.

Moses' descendants inherited with this group.

Joshua 21:6 "And the children of Gershon [had] by lot out of the families of the tribe of Issachar, and out of the tribe of Asher, and out of the tribe of Naphtali, and out of the half tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, thirteen cities."

These were Levites who descended from Gershon, the eldest son of Levi.

And had their cities by lot assigned them in tribes at a greater distance, not only out of Issachar, but;

"Out of the tribe of Asher, and out of the tribe of Naphtali, and out of the half tribe of Manasseh in Bashan":

Which was the other half of the tribe beyond Jordan.

"Thirteen cities":

As many as were given out of the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin.

Gershon was the firstborn son but did not receive the first cities, because the priests needed to be near Jerusalem.

It was not necessary for them to be near the temple, since they did not serve daily in the temple.

Their thirteen cities were the furthest away from Jerusalem.

Joshua 21:7 "The children of Merari by their families [had] out of the tribe of Reuben, and out of the tribe of Gad, and out of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities."

The descendants of Merari, the third son of Levi.

"Had out of the tribe of Reuben, and out of the tribe of Gad":

Which were both on the other side Jordan.

"And out of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities":

In all forty-eight, as the LORD commanded (Num. 35:7).

Reuben and Gad had their land on the east side of the Jordan River, and the land of Zebulun was in the northern area.

These twelve cities added to the 13 for the priests' families, the 10 for the other Kohathite families and the 13 for the family of Gershon, add up to 48.

Joshua 21:8 "And the children of Israel gave by lot unto the Levites these cities with their suburbs, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses."

Reaching two thousand cubits from the cities all around.

These cities did not lie all together, and so could not be described by their coasts.

But in the several tribes, and intermixed with their cities.

Which fulfilled Jacob's prophecy, that they should be divided and scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7).

As well as it was so ordered for the benefit of the several tribes.

That they might have the assistance of the priests and Levites, to instruct them in the knowledge of the laws and commandments of God, and all divine things.

"As the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses": (see Num. 35:2).

The fact that this was done by lot shows that God chose the cities.

The Israelites did not argue with the lot, because they believed it was the will of God.

Joshua 21:9 "And they gave out of the tribe of the children of Judah, and out of the tribe of the children of Simeon, these cities which are [here] mentioned by name,"

Here follows a particular account of the several cities which were given out of each tribe, and first out of this.

"And out of the tribe of the children of Simeon":

Which is joined with that of Judah, because the cities of it lay within it (Joshua 19:1).

"These cities which are here mentioned by name": (Joshua 21:13).

This is the beginning of the listing by name each of the cities given to each family by the various tribes.

This will begin with Judah and Simeon.

Joshua 21:10 "Which the children of Aaron, [being] of the families of the Kohathites, [who were] of the children of Levi, had: for theirs was the first lot".

Who descending from Kohath, in the line of Aaron, were priests.

"Who were of the children of Levi, had":

They were Levites, as descending from Levi, but were priests also.

As being of the stock of Aaron, and the cities hereafter mentioned in the said tribe fell to their portion.

"For theirs was the first lot":

For being of the line of Aaron, and priests, they had the honor and privilege to have the first lot drawn for them.

And out of the tribe for which the first lot was also drawn, the tribe of Judah.

Here they had their cities allotted them, for a reason before given.

This particular group is not for all of the Kohathites.

This is for the priests' and the high priest's cities.

They had to be near to Jerusalem, so they are out of the tribes of Judah and Simeon.

Joshua 21:11 "And they gave them the city of Arba the father of Anak, which [city is] Hebron, in the hill [country] of Judah, with the suburbs thereof round about it."

Which from him was called Kirjath-arba (Joshua 14:15).

And Anak, according to Kimchi, is not the name of a man, but a general name.

Comprehending the Anakims, a race of giants, among whom Arba was the chief and principal man, a prince and ruler over them, as Ben Melech.

"Which city is Hebron, in the hill country of Judah":

As in (Joshua 14:15; Luke 1:39).

"With the suburbs thereof round about it":

As far as two thousand cubits, which were to put their cattle in, and provision for them.

The name of the city had been changed to Hebron.

"Hebron":

Means fellowship, or alliance.

Joshua 21:12 "But the fields of the city, and the villages thereof, gave they to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for his possession."

Which lay beyond the two thousand cubits.

"Gave they to Caleb the son of Jephunneh, for his possession":

As Moses had promised, and Joshua had confirmed to him.

And now the children of Israel gave them to him, and put him in the possession of (Joshua 14:6).

And the same is to be observed of all the other cities given to the Levites.

That they and their suburbs, extending to such a distance only, were given to them.

But the fields and villages which belonged to them, continued the inheritance of the tribes in which they were.

The city of Hebron and the area around it, belonged to Caleb.

We see from this that Caleb has given up the city to the priests and high priest, and now Caleb has the area around it.

Hebron is about 20 miles out of Jerusalem.

The city had been named Kirjath-arba, and was changed to Hebron.

Joshua took Hebron, and Caleb re-took it.

Joshua 21:13 "Thus they gave to the children of Aaron the priest Hebron with her suburbs, [to be] a city of refuge for the slayer; and Libnah with her suburbs,"

The families of the Kohathites, that part of them which descended from him, and were priests.

"Hebron with her suburbs, to be a city of refuge for the slayer":

That had slain a person unawares, and without design (see Joshua 20:3).

"And Libnah with her suburbs":

A royal city, of which (see Joshua 10:29).

"Libnah":

Means whiteness.

The priests and high priest lived in Hebron, but it was also a place of refuge for the slayer.

Joshua 21:14 "And Jattir with her suburbs, and Eshtemoa with her suburbs,"

(See Joshua 15:48).

"And Eshtemoa with her suburbs": (See Joshua 15:50).

Joshua 21:15 "And Holon with her suburbs, and Debir with her suburbs,"

(See Joshua 15:51).

"And Debir with her suburbs": (See Joshua 15:49).

Joshua 21:16 "And Ain with her suburbs, and Juttah with her suburbs, [and] Beth-shemesh with her suburbs; nine cities out of those two tribes."

(See Joshua 15:32).

"And Juttah with her suburbs": (See Joshua 15:55).

"And Beth-shemesh with her suburbs":

Which is not mentioned among the cities of Judah (Joshua 15:21).

Only as in the borders of it (Joshua 21:10).

And perhaps is the same Beth-shemesh to which the ark was directed by the Philistines from Ashdod (1 Sam. 6:9).

In it formerly was a temple dedicated to the sun, from whence it had its name.

"Nine cities out of those two tribes":

And they seem all but one, which is Ain, to be of the tribe of Judah, and that originally belonged to it.

And as that tribe had the largest number of cities in its lot, the more were given out of it to the Levites, according to a rule prescribed (Num. 35:8).

The Ain in the Scripture above, is spoken of in (1 Chron.) as Ashan.

1 Chronicles 6:59 "And Ashan with her suburbs, and Beth-shemesh with her suburbs:"

Joshua 21:17 "And out of the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon with her suburbs, Geba with her suburbs,"

(See Joshua 18:25); from which came the Gibeonites.

"Geba with her suburbs":

Of which (See Joshua 18:24).

Joshua 21:18 "Anathoth with her suburbs, and Almon with her suburbs; four cities."

This is not mentioned among the cities of Benjamin (Joshua 18:11).

It lay about two or three miles north of Jerusalem.

Rauwolff speaks of it as a small village, when he travelled into those parts, and as lying on a height or eminence, and which was within twenty furlongs of Jerusalem, as Josephus writes.

"Anathoth":

Would later be the home of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1).

"And Almon with her suburbs":

This also is not mentioned among the cities of Benjamin (Joshua 18:11).

It is called Alemeth (1 Chron. 6:60).

Jarchi and Kimchi say it is the same with Bahurim (2 Samuel 3:16).

Where the Targum renders it by Almeth, and both words signify the same thing, "youth".

"Four cities":

Which were a large number for so small a tribe as little Benjamin to give.

We must remember that all of these are cities for the priests and the high priest.

They are of the family of Kohath, but a specific group of them.

Anathoth is the birthplace of Jeremiah.

Joshua 21:19 "All the cities of the children of Aaron, the priests, [were] thirteen cities with their suburbs."

Those of the Kohathites that came from him.

"Were thirteen cities with their suburbs":

And just so many are mentioned by name in (Joshua 21:11).

These thirteen cities were near Jerusalem, because Jerusalem will be the sight for the temple to be built.

The priests and the high priest work in the temple of the holy things.

We can easily see why it would be important for them to be near the temple.

Joshua 21:20 "And the families of the children of Kohath, the Levites which remained of the children of Kohath, even they had the cities of their lot out of the tribe of Ephraim."

Who were not priests.

"Which remained of the children of Kohath":

These are the children of Moses, as Jarchi says, and those that descended from Kohath in the lines of Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

"Even they had the cities of their lot out of the tribe of Ephraim":

And were as follows in the next verse.

This will now list the cities of the rest of the tribe of Kohath.

They are of the Levitical tribe, and they are in service of the LORD but they are not in daily services in the temple.

The following are cities in the land of Ephraim, given to Kohath.

Joshua 21:21 "For they gave them Shechem with her suburbs in mount Ephraim, [to be] a city of refuge for the slayer; and Gezer with her suburbs,"

Of which (see Joshua 20:7).

"To be a city of refuge for the slayer":

Which being on a mountain, was the more conspicuous, and the fitter for this purpose.

As was Hebron in the hill country of Judea (Joshua 21:11).

This is the second city of refuge mentioned.

"And Gezer with her suburbs":

A place from whence the Canaanites were not expelled (see Joshua 16:10).

It is Shechem that is the city of refuge.

"Shechem" means shoulder.

The LORD carries all of His own on His shoulders.

The Kohathites lived in the city of refuge.

The slayer would become one of the community, if they found him not guilty of murder.

Joshua 21:22 "And Kibzaim with her suburbs, and Beth-horon with her suburbs; four cities."

Which seems to, be the same with Jokneam (1 Chron. 6:68); of it we read nowhere else.

"And Beth-horon with her suburbs":

Upper Beth-horon, for there were two, an upper and a lower (see Joshua 16:3).

"Four cities":

As mentioned by name.

Joshua 21:23 And out of the tribe of Dan, Eltekeh with her suburbs, Gibbethon with her suburbs,"

(See notes on Joshua 19:44).

"Gibbethon with her suburbs":

(see Joshua 19:44).

Joshua 21:24 Aijalon with her suburbs, Gath-rimmon with her suburbs; four cities."

(See notes on Joshua 19:42).

"Gath-rimmon with her suburbs, four cities" (See Joshua 19:45).

These last cities listed here are not cities of refuge, but cities given to the Kohathites for their inheritance.

The Kohathites are one of the three families of the Levitical tribe.

The Kohathites had two divisions within them because the priests and high priests were part of them.

Joshua 21:25 "And out of the half tribe of Manasseh, Tanach with her suburbs, and Gath-rimmon with her suburbs; two cities."

Of which see (Joshua 17:10).

"And Gath-rimmon with her suburbs":

There was a city of this name in Dan (as in Joshua 21:24).

Nor was it unusual for cities to be called by the same name in different tribes.

"Two cities":

These are called Aner and Bileam in (1 Chron. 6:70).

In process of time cities changed their names.

Two cities were a proper proportion for this half tribe.

Two more were given out of the other half tribe on the other side Jordan, as appears by what follows.

The following is the same Scripture with different names.

Many scholars believe these to be the correct names for Tanach and Gath-rimmon.

1 Chronicles 6:70 "And out of the half tribe of Manasseh; Aner with her suburbs, and Bileam with her suburbs, for the family of the remnant of the sons of Kohath."

Manasseh was a divided tribe, so the two cities are for one half the tribe.

Joshua 21:26 "All the cities [were] ten with their suburbs for the families of the children of Kohath that remained."

Four out of Ephraim, four out of Dan, and two out of the half tribe of Manasseh.

Which were:

"For the families of the children of Kohath that remained":

Who were of the other branch of the Kohathites.

And who did not descend from Aaron, and were only Levites, and not priests (see Joshua 21:20).

This is speaking of the rest of the Kohathites, besides Aaron's family.

Joshua 21:27 "And unto the children of Gershon, of the families of the Levites, out of the [other] half tribe of Manasseh [they gave] Golan in Bashan with her suburbs, [to be] a city of refuge for the slayer; and Beeshterah with her suburbs; two cities."

The descendants of the second son of Levi.

"Out of the other half tribe of Manasseh":

That which was settled beyond Jordan.

"They gave Golan in Bashan with her suburbs":

To be a city of refuge for the slayer (see Joshua 20:8).

This is the third city of refuge mentioned.

"And Beeshterah with her suburbs":

Called Ashtaroth (1 Chron. 6:71).

Which had been the royal city of Og, king of Bashan, where he had his palace (Deut. 1:4).

Here seems to have been formerly a temple dedicated to the goddess Astarte.

For Beeshterah is a compound of "Beth" and "Asherah", or Astarte.

That is, the house or temple of Astarte, but now become a city of the Levites.

"Two cities":

Two more having been before given out of the other half tribe.

We remember that Gershon was the oldest of the three sons of Levi.

The sons of Gershon were in charge of the fabrics of the tabernacle.

At the census in the wilderness, there were 7,500 males numbered.

After the temple was built, it became uncertain what they did.

Some believe they prophesied.

Others believe they brought inspirational songs and recitations in the temple.

We remember from an earlier lesson that Golan was one of the six cities of refuge.

Beeshterah was the same city as the city of Ashteroth.

They changed the name.

Joshua 21:28 "And out of the tribe of Issachar, Kishon with her suburbs, Dabareh with her suburbs,"

From whence the river Kishon probably had its name.

Or the city from that.

It is the same with Kishion (Joshua 19:20).

And called Kedesh (1 Chron. 6:72).

"Dabareh with her suburbs":

The same with Daberath on the border of Zebulun (see Joshua 19:12).

Joshua 21:29 "Jarmuth with her suburbs, En-gannim with her suburbs; four cities."

Called Ramoth (1 Chron. 6:73).

Very probably the same with Remeth (Joshua 19:21).

"En-gannim with her suburbs":

Called Anem (1 Chron. 6:73).

"Four cities":

So many are mentioned by name.

These same cities are mentioned (in 1 Chronicles the 6th chapter).

Joshua 21:30 "And out of the tribe of Asher, Mishal with her suburbs, Abdon with her suburbs,"

The same with Misheal (Joshua 19:26).

Called Mashal (1 Chron. 6:74).

"Abdon with her suburbs":

Not mentioned among the cities of Asher, unless the same with Hebron (Joshua 19:28).

Joshua 21:31 "Helkath with her suburbs, and Rehob with her suburbs; four cities."

See (Joshua 19:25).

The same with Hukok in (1 Chron. 6:75).

"And Rehob with her suburbs, four cities":

See (Joshua 19:28).

It is interesting to me that of the families of Kohath, each son received his cities in the same area.

The families were not divided up among the 12 tribes.

They lived close together.

Joshua 21:32 "And out of the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, [to be] a city of refuge for the slayer; and Hammoth-dor with her suburbs, and Kartan with her suburbs; three cities."

Of which (see Joshua 20:7).

"To be a city of refuge for the slayer":

This is the fourth city of refuge mentioned.

"And Hammoth-dor with her suburbs":

The same with Hammon (1 Chron. 6:76).

And with Hammath (Joshua 19:35).

And is thought by some to be Tiberias, so called from the hot baths in or near it.

"And Kartan with her suburbs":

Called Kirjathaim (1 Chron. 6:76).

But cannot be the Kirjathaim in (Numbers 32:37); for that belonged to the tribe of Reuben, and was on the other side of Jordan.

"Three cities":

This being a lesser tribe than some others gave fewer cities, according to the rule in (Num. 35:8).

Joshua 21:33 "All the cities of the Gershonites according to their families [were] thirteen cities with their suburbs."

Which were divided among them, according to the number of their families.

"Were thirteen cities with their suburbs":

Two out of the half tribe of Manasseh beyond Jordan, four out of Issachar, four out of Asher, and three out of Naphtali.

We remember that "Kedesh" means holy.

Much of the Lord Jesus' ministry would be in Galilee.

Joshua 21:34 "And unto the families of the children of Merari, the rest of the Levites, out of the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with her suburbs, and Kartah with her suburbs,"

The descendants of the youngest son of Levi, who were all that remained of the Levites non provided cities.

"Out of the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with her suburbs":

Which lay near Carmel, and was a royal city (see note on Joshua 12:22).

"And Kartah with her suburbs":

Perhaps the same with Kattath (Joshua 19:15).

Joshua 21:35 "Dimnah with her suburbs, Nahalal with her suburbs; four cities."

Nowhere mentioned, unless the same with Rimmon (1 Chron. 6:77).

"Nahalal with her suburbs":

(See Joshua 19:15).

"Four cities":

Only two are mentioned (1 Chron. 6:77).

And they by different names.

The one is Rimmon, before observed, and the other Tabor.

Perhaps the same with Chisloth-tabor (Joshua 19:12).

The tribe of Merari was the third of the families of the tribe of Levi.

"Merari" means bitter or sad.

Joshua 21:36 "And out of the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with her suburbs, and Jahazah with her suburbs,"

Which was a city of refuge.

And the fifth of them in this account.

Though not observed as such here, but is in the Greek version (see Joshua 20:8).

"And Jahazah with her suburbs":

Called Jahaz (see Num. 21:23).

Joshua 21:37 "Kedemoth with her suburbs, and Mephaath with her suburbs; four cities."

Near to which was a wilderness of that name (see Deut. 2:26).

"And Mephaath with her suburbs":

Of which (see Joshua 13:18).

Where the two preceding cities are mentioned along with it.

"Four cities (Joshua 21:35), are not in some ancient copies of the Hebrew Bible, as is noted by the Masorites.

But are in some others, as Kimchi, and stand in the Targum, in the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, and in a manuscript referred to by Hottinger.

And the same words are to be found in (1 Chron. 6:78).

And are absolutely necessary to be retained, since without them there would be but eight cities for the Merarites, whereas they are expressly said to be twelve (Joshua 21:40).

This was on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

Bezer was one of the cities of refuge.

The name "Bezer" means fortification.

Some believe the land of the Israelites on the eastern side of the Jordan, to be a protection of Israel on that side.

Joshua 21:38 "And out of the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead with her suburbs, [to be] a city of refuge for the slayer; and Mahanaim with her suburbs,

Which also, as that of Reuben, lay on the other side of Jordan.

"Ramoth in Gilead with her suburbs":

Of which (see Joshua 20:8).

"To be a city of refuge for the slayer":

And is the sixth and last city of refuge in this account.

"And Mahanaim with her suburbs":

Here it was the angels met Jacob, which gave rise to the name of the place (Gen. 32:1).

Afterwards a city was built here, and was on the borders of the tribe of Gad, and belonged to it (Joshua 13:26).

Mention is made of it in other places (2 Sam. 2:8; 1 Kings 2:8).

Joshua 21:39 "Heshbon with her suburbs, Jazer with her suburbs; four cities in all."

Which was formerly the royal city of Sihon king of the Amorites.

And was first given to and rebuilt by the Reubenites.

But was upon the border of the tribe of Gad.

And appears from hence to have been one of their cities (Num. 21:26).

"Jazer with her suburbs":

Sometimes called Jaazer, another city in the same country, and near Heshbon (see Num. 21:32).

"Four cities in all":

Which were Ramoth-gilead, Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer.

Joshua 21:40 "So all the cities for the children of Merari by their families, which were remaining of the families of the Levites, were [by] their lot twelve cities."

Which were distributed by lot to them, according to the number of their families, and were sufficient for them.

"Which were remaining of the families of the Levites":

The last division of them, besides those of the Kohathites, Levites, and the Gershonites.

"Were by their lot twelve cities":

Four out of the tribe of Zebulun, four out of the tribe of Reuben, and four out of the tribe of Gad, whose names are before given.

"Ramoth" means exaltation.

Gad also is on the eastern side of Jordan.

Merari received altogether 12 cities.

Joshua 21:41 "All the cities of the Levites within the possession of the children of Israel [were] forty and eight cities with their suburbs."

As comprised in one sum total.

"Were forty and eight cities with their suburbs":

Which is just the number that Moses from the mouth of God ordered to be given unto them.

Before they entered into the land, and before they were in possession of one city in it (Num. 35:7).

Which, as it is a proof of the omniscience, prescience, and predetermination of God.

So, of the sure and true prediction of Moses, who could not be otherwise certain than from the LORD of the Israelites being able to give so many cities to them, out of each of their tribes.

And it is to be observed, that this tribe of Levi, though it had no share in the division of the land, yet had more cities by lot given to it than any other, excepting the tribe of Judah.

Though indeed, in the account of some of the tribes, all the cities in them are not mentioned.

And besides, they had only the cities they had with their suburbs round about them, but not the lands belonging to them, nor the villages.

However, this shows that a large and liberal maintenance of the ministers of the LORD, that serve in his sanctuary should be allowed and made for them.

As in the legal, so under the Gospel dispensation.

Joshua 21:42 "These cities were every one with their suburbs round about them: thus [were] all these cities."

Which reached to the space of two thousand cubits on every side.

And such a space was assigned to every one of the above cities for their cattle, to keep them in and lay up provision for them.

"Thus were all these cities":

Six of them cities of refuge, and forty-two for the priests and Levites to dwell in.

And for the generous use of their herds and flocks.

The suburb was the area just outside the city, large enough to take care of their cattle.

The Levites were not to be farmers, or herdsman. They were to work in the service of the LORD.

Their income was from the gifts and offerings in the temple.

The 48 cities are not all of the cities in these areas.

In fact, they are but a small portion of the cities these Israelites received.

We must, also remember the Israelites did not build these cities, they were gifts from God to them.

Verses 43-45

God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:13-14; 18-21) had been realized, but only in accordance with the terms that God had stipulated, that the Israelites would by faith take possession of their own inheritance (compare 14:12-15).

These verses do not, as some suggest, exhaust God's pledge to Abraham.

The promise of the land is part and parcel of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham (compare Gen. 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3; 28:4; 50:24), but realization of the promise in any one era depended on an active appropriation of it by faith (compare 1:5-9; 13:1-6; 17:12-18; 23:3-13).

"And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land":

This sums up God's fulfillment of His covenant promise to give Abraham's people the Land (Gen. 12:7; Joshua 1:2, 5-9).

God also kept His Word in giving the people rest (Deut. 12:9-10).

In a valid sense, the Canaanites were in check, under military conquest as God had pledged (Joshua 1:5), not posing an immediate threat.

Not every enemy had been driven out, however, leaving some to stir up trouble later.

But God's people failed to exercise their responsibility and possess their land to the full degree in various areas.

These verses provide a magnificent summary of all that takes place in the Book of Joshua.

The focus is on the LORD's power to fulfill His promises and give the Israelites peace and "rest" (1:13, 15).

"There stood not a man ... before them ... had spoken" of the LORD's "all came to pass".

Joshua 21:43 "And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein."

It was all given them by lot, whether subdued or not.

And the far greater part was actually put into their hands, so they had as much as they could for the present occupation and cultivation.

And such as were in the hands of the Canaanites, were subject to pay tribute to them.

And it was owing to their own slothfulness and sluggishness that they did not possess more hereafter.

Though it was the will of God that their enemies should be driven out little by little, until the Israelites were so increased as to occupy the whole land.

Lest any part of the land should lie waste and become barren, and lest the wild beasts of the field should multiply upon them.

"And they possessed it, and dwelt therein":

Each according to their lot in the several places assigned them.

As many cities as they could at present people, and as much land as they could now manage.

The Israelites received cities they did not build, and vineyards they did not plant.

The LORD did just as He had promised Abraham.

He gave them the land of milk and honey.

God had told them to remove all the people from the land, but they did not do that entirely.

The land was theirs for as long as they obeyed the will of God.

They will soon find out that God wanted all of the Canaanites removed to keep the Israelites from worshipping other gods.

Joshua 21:44 "And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand."

Not only from their travels, with which they had been fatigued forty years in the wilderness.

But from wars with the Canaanites they had been engaged in for some years past.

"According to all that he swore unto their fathers":

Not only to give them the land, but peace, rest, and safety in it.

"And there stood not a man of all their enemies before them":

For whenever any rose up to oppose them, they were immediately cut off.

This is to be understood while Joshua was living.

For afterwards, sinning against God, they were again and again delivered up into the hands of their enemies.

"The LORD delivered all their enemies into their hands":

That is, that made war with them.

The LORD delivered them into their hand, and they should have taken them over completely but they failed the LORD in that point.

In Hebrews, it speaks of a rest that comes to the people of God, after they have obeyed the will of God and completed their work.

Their enemies feared their God.

Joshua 21:45 "There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass."

Not only every good thing in general, but every part and particular of that good thing.

That, with all that was included in it, or were appendages to it, or circumstances of it.

"Which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel":

As of their deliverance out of Egypt, and passage through the Red sea and wilderness, with all conveniences for them therein.

So of their passage through Jordan, success of their arms, the conquest of their enemies, possession of their land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

"All came to pass":

Exactly, precisely, and punctually, even everything relative to their temporal and spiritual good.

So all that God promises to his spiritual Israel, with respect to their present comfort or everlasting happiness.

All is exactly fulfilled, all his promises in Christ are yea and amen.

This is just saying that God kept His Word to the minutest detail.

His promise to Abraham was fulfilled in these Israelites.

Christians, we can assure ourselves of the faithfulness of God to keep every promise He made to us as well.

God not only will not lie, but cannot, because He is Truth.

Joshua Chapter 21 Questions

1. Who was the priest in verse 1?
2. What was the inheritance of the Levi?

3. The city of refuge had to be a _____ city.
4. Where were the priest and Joshua, when they met with the Levites?
5. How many cities were the Levites to get?
6. What does the number 4 mean?
7. What does the number 12 mean?
8. Which of the three sons won the first lot?
9. How many cities did the sons of Aaron receive?
10. Where were their cities taken from?
11. Who were the three sons of Levi?
12. Where would Moses' family inherit with?
13. Why was it necessary for the priests to receive their cities from Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin?
14. Where did the rest of the Kohathites receive their cities from?
15. Where were Gershon's cities taken from?
16. Where were Merari's cities taken from?
17. What does the fact that the cities were chosen by lot show?
18. What cities did Aaron's family receive?
19. What cities did the rest of the Kohathites receive?
20. "Hebron" means what?
21. What were some of the cities Gershon received?
22. What was the job of Gershon's family after the temple was built?
23. What cities did Merari receive?
24. The Israelites received cities, which they did not _____, and vineyards, they did not _____.
25. How did they disobey God?
26. What book in the Bible speaks of a rest for those who do the will of God?

27. What lesson of assurance can Christians receive from this lesson?