

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The Levites apply to Eleazar, Joshua, and the elders, for the cities to dwell in which Moses had promised, Joshua 21:1, Joshua 21:2. Their request is granted, Joshua 21:3. The priests receive thirteen cities out of the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, Joshua 21:4. The Levites receive ten cities out of the tribes of Ephraim, Dan, and the half tribe of Manasseh, Joshua 21:5; and thirteen out of the other half tribe of Manasseh, and the tribes of Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali, Joshua 21:6. The children of Merari had twelve cities out of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun, Joshua 21:7. The names of the cities given out of the tribes of Judah and Simeon, Joshua 21:8-16. Those granted out of the tribe of Benjamin, Joshua 21:17-19. Out of Ephraim, Joshua 21:20-22. Those out of Dan, Joshua 21:23, Joshua 21:24. Those out of both the halves of the tribe of Manasseh, Joshua 21:25-27. Those out of the tribe of Issachar, Joshua 21:28, Joshua 21:29. Those out of Asher, Joshua 21:30, Joshua 21:31. Those out of Naphtali, Joshua 21:32. These were the cities of the Gershonites, Joshua 21:33. The cities of the Merarites, Joshua 21:34-40. The sum of the cities given to the Levites, forty-eight, Joshua 21:41, Joshua 21:42. The exact fulfillment of all God's promises, Joshua 21:43-45.

Verse 1

The heads of the fathers of the Levites - The Levites were composed of three brand families, the Gershonites, Koathites, and Merarites, independently of the family of Aaron, who might be said to form a fourth. To none of these had God assigned any portion in the division of the land. But in this general division it must have been evidently intended that the different tribes were to furnish them with habitations; and this was according to a positive command of God, Numbers 35:2, etc. Finding now that each tribe had its inheritance appointed to it, the heads of the Levites came before Eleazar, Joshua, and the chiefs of the tribes who had been employed in dividing the land, and requested that cities and suburbs should be granted them according to the Divine command.

Verse 3

And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites - They cheerfully obeyed the Divine command, and cities for habitations were appointed to them out of the different tribes by lot, that it might as fully appear that God designed them their habitations, as he designed the others their inheritances.

Verse 4

Out of the tribe of Judah - Simeon, and - Benjamin, thirteen cities - These tribes furnished more habitations to the Levites in proportion than any of the other tribes, because they possessed a more extensive inheritance; and Moses had commanded, Numbers 35:8, From them that have many, ye shall give many; and from them that have few, ye shall give few: every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites, according to his inheritance. It is worthy of remark, that the principal part of this tribe, whose business was to minister at the sanctuary, which sanctuary was afterwards to be established in Jerusalem, had their appointment nearest to that city; so that they were always within reach of the sacred work which God had appointed them.

Verse 5

And the rest of the children of Kohath - That is, the remaining part of that family that were not priests, for those who were priests had their lot in the preceding tribes. Those, therefore, of the family of Kohath, who were simply Levites, and not of the priests or Aaron's family, (see Joshua 21:10), had their habitations in Ephraim, Dan, and the half tribe of Manasseh. It has been asked in what sense did the Levites possess those cities, seeing they had no inheritance? To which it may be answered that it is not likely the Levites had the exclusive property of the cities in which they dwelt, for it is evident that the other Israelites dwelt among them. We know, says Calmet, by history, that the cities of the Levites were almost entirely filled with Israelites of other tribes. For instance, Gibeah of Benjamin, which is here given to the Levites, Joshua 21:17, was always peopled by the Benjamites, as appears from the history of the Levite, whose wife was so horribly abused by them; Judges 19:22-27. Saul and all his family dwelt in the same city; and David and his court spent the first years of his reign at Hebron, which was also a city of the Levites, Joshua 21:10. It appears, therefore, that they had no other property in those cities than merely the right to certain houses, which they might sell, but always with the right of perpetual redemption, for they could finally alienate nothing; and if the possessor of such a house, having sold it, did not redeem it at the year of jubilee, it reverted to the Levites. And as to their lands for their cattle, which extended two thousand cubits without the city, these they were not permitted to sell: they were considered as the Lord's property. See Leviticus 25:32-34 (note), and the notes there. It is therefore very likely that, in the first instance, the Levites had simply the right to choose, in all the cities assigned them, the houses in which they were to dwell, and that those of the tribe to which the city belonged occupied all the other dwellings. There is also reason to believe that in process of time, when the families of the Levites increased,

they had more dwellings assigned to them, which were probably built at the public expense. We may also observe that the Levites were not absolutely bound to live in these and no other cities: for when the tabernacle was at Nob, priests and Levites dwelt there, see 1 Samuel 21:1, etc.; and when the worship of God was established at Jerusalem, multitudes both of priests and Levites dwelt there, though it was no Levitical city: as did the courses of priests afterwards at Jericho. This was a circumstance which Moses had foreseen, and for which he had provided. See Deuteronomy 18:6, etc.

Verse 11

The city of Arba - See the note on Joshua 14:15.

Verse 12

The fields of the city - gave they to Caleb - This was an exclusive privilege to him and his family, with which the grant to the Levites did not interfere. See the notes on Joshua 14:14.

Verse 18

Anathoth - Celebrated as the birthplace of Jeremiah, about three miles northward of Jerusalem, according to St. Jerome.

Verse 19

Thirteen cities with their suburbs - At the time mentioned here certainly thirteen cities were too large a proportion for the priests, as they and their families amounted to a very small number: but this ample provision was made in reference to their great increase in after times, when they formed twenty-four courses, as in the days of David.

Verse 22

Beth-horon - There were two cities of this name, the upper and the nether; but which is intended here, cannot be ascertained.

Verse 24

Aijalon - See on Joshua 10:12 (note).

Verse 27

Golan in Bashan - On this and the other cities of refuge mentioned here, see the note on Joshua 20:7.

Verse 35

Dimnah with her suburbs, etc. - It is well known to every Hebrew scholar that the two following verses are wholly omitted by the Masora; and are left out in some of the most correct and authentic Hebrew Bibles. Between critics there is no small controversy relative to the authenticity of these verses; and those who wish to see the arguments at large on both sides, must consult the *Variae Lectiones* of De Rossi on this place. Dr. Kennicott, who is a strenuous advocate for their authenticity argues thus in their behalf: "Joshua 21:41 and Joshua 21:42 of this chapter tell us that the Levitical cities were forty-eight, and that they had been all as such described; so that they must have been all specified in this chapter: whereas now in all the Hebrew copies printed in full obedience to the Masora, which excludes two verses containing four of these cities, the number amounts only to forty-four.

"The cities are first mentioned, in the general, as being thirteen and ten, with thirteen and twelve, which are certainly forty-eight. And yet when they are particularly named, Joshua 21:13-19 gives thirteen cities; Joshua 21:20-26 gives ten cities; Joshua 21:27-33 gives thirteen; Joshua 21:34-36 gives four cities; and Joshua 21:35-36 gives four more, all which can make but forty-four. And what still increases the wonder is, that Joshua 21:40 infers from the verses immediately preceding, that the cities allowed to the Merarites were twelve, though they here make eight only, unless we admit the four other cities expressed in those two verses, which have been rejected by that blind guide the Masora. In defiance of this authority these two verses, thus absolutely necessary, were inserted in the most early editions of the Hebrew text, and are found in Walton's *Polyglot*, as well as in our English Bible. But they have scarce ever been as yet printed completely, thus, And out of the tribe of Reuben, A City of Refuge for the Slayer, Bezer, in the Wilderness, with her suburbs, and Jahazah with her suburbs, Kedemoth with her suburbs, and Mephaath with her suburbs; four cities. See on this place my edition of the Hebrew Bible, where no less than one hundred and forty-nine copies are described, which happily preserve these verses, most clearly essential to the truth and consistency of this chapter. See also *General Discourse*, pp. 19, 26, 54."

Though this reasoning of Dr. Kennicott appears very conclusive, yet there are so many and important variations among the MSS. that retain, and those that reject these verses, as to render the question of their authenticity very difficult to be determined. To Dr. Kennicott's one hundred and forty-nine MSS. which have these two

verses, may be added upwards of forty collated by De Rossi. Those who deny their authenticity say they have been inserted here from 1 Chronicles 6:78, 1 Chronicles 6:79, where they are found it is true, in general, but not exactly as they stand here, and in Dr. Kennicott's Hebrew Bible.

Verse 36

Jahazah - See on Joshua 13:18 (note).

Verse 41

Forty and eight cities - At the last census of the Hebrew people, related Numbers 26, we find from Numbers 26:62 that the tribe of Levi amounted only to 23,000; and it is supposed that forty-eight cities were too great a proportion for this tribe, the other tribes having so very few. But,

1. All the cities of the other tribes are not enumerated.

2. They had the circumjacent country as well as the cities.

3. The Levites had no other cities than those enumerated.

4. They had no country annexed to their cities, the 2,000 cubits for their cattle, etc., excepted.

5. Cities in those ancient times were very small, as most villages went under this appellation.

6. The Levites had now the appointment that was suited to their consequent increase. The other tribes might enlarge their borders and make conquests, but this was not suitable to the mere servants of God; besides, had they made conquests, they would have become proprietors of the conquered land; and God determined that they should have no inheritance in Israel, He himself being their portion.

Verse 43

And the Lord gave - all the land which he swore - All was now divided by lot unto them, and their enemies were so completely discomfited that there was not a single army of the Canaanites remaining to make head against them; and those which were left in the land served under tribute, and the tribute that they paid was the amplest proof of their complete subjugation. Add to this, they had as much of the land in actual possession as they could occupy; and, as they increased, God enabled them to drive out the rest of the ancient inhabitants; but in consequence of the infidelity of the Israelites, God permitted their enemies often to straiten them, and sometimes to prevail against them. It should also be remembered, that God never promised to give them the land, or to maintain them in it, but on condition of obedience; and so punctually did he fulfill this intention, that there is not a single instance on record in which they were either straitened or subjugated, while obedient and faithful to their God.

The cavil is as foolish as it is unprincipled which states, "The Israelites never did possess the whole of the land which was promised to them, and therefore that promise could not come by Divine revelation." With as much reason might it be urged that Great Britain has not subdued the French West India Islands and Batavia, (Feb. 1812), because the ancient inhabitants still remain in them; but is not their serving under tribute an absolute proof that they are conquered, and under the British dominion? So was the whole land of Canaan conquered, and its inhabitants subdued, though the whole of the ground was not occupied by the Israelites till the days of David and Solomon. In the most correct and literal sense it might be said, There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass. Nor shall one word of his ever fail to any of his followers while the sun and moon endure.