
Joshua 21

Joshua 21:1–45

The Cities Given to the Levites

Introduction: For many of you, Joshua 21 will be another laundry list of cities. If it is any consolation, we will probably be going through this laundry list rather quickly, as the cities have been covered in some detail already in previous chapters of Joshua. Forty-eight cities would be given over to the Levites, four from each tribe in Israel. Along with the cities would be given the surrounding land for their cattle. Roughly a dozen cities would be given to the three families of Levi (Merari, Gershon and Kohath), as well as to the smaller family of Aaron.

Now, perhaps you are wondering *why in hell are there so many chapters about cities?* Every 49 years (seven sevens), God required that the land revert back to the tribe and family that it had been given to. There is a point at which some people amass fortune beyond what they could ever use, beyond what they would ever give back to the community, beyond imagination, beyond their ability to even grasp the amount which they themselves possess. With His people, God did not allow that. Every forty-nine years, the land would revert back to the family that it originally was purchased from. The spiritual side of this is, *what God gives is eternal*. These chapters stood as an eternal record as to which tribe was entitled to which piece of property. When the year of property return came around, they were to return the lands as per these chapters which we have been studying. Since this was a part of the Word of God, it was not to be altered. See Lev. 25:10 for more details.

Outline of Chapter 21:

- Vv. 1–8 **A summary of the distribution**
- Vv. 9–19 **The cities given over to the family of Aaron, of the tribe of Kohath**
- Vv. 20–26 **The cities given over to the family of Kohath**
- Vv. 27–33 **The cities given over to the family of Gershon**
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- Vv. 41–42 **Summary**
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Charts:

A Summary of the Distribution

Literally:

And so came heads of fathers of the Levites unto Eleazar the priest and unto Joshua ben Nun and unto heads of fathers of the tribes for sons of Israel.

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21:1

Smoother English rendering:

Then the leaders of the Levite tribe went to Eleazar the priest, and to Joshua ben Nun and to the leaders of the other tribes of Israel;

Now, the appearance is that there was no immediate assignment of cities to the Levites by Joshua. Therefore, they approached Joshua with their desire to be given their own land. Calvin indicates that this was perhaps the result of some neglect. Since the tribes will not be dismissed to their lands until later, it is reasonable to suppose that Joshua had not forgotten to do this; he just had not done it yet. Masius wrote: *When the business had reached that point, they approached the dividers of the land in the common name of the members of their tribe, to receive by lot the cities appointed for them. They simply expressed the commands of God, and said in so many words, that they had been deputed by the Levites generally to draw lots for those forty-eight cities with their suburbs, which had been appointed for that tribe.*¹ In other words, the representatives for the Levites had been chosen and they approached Joshua in order to complete the distribution of the land. What we have here is not

¹ This quote is found in Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 153.

the implication of dereliction of duty on Joshua's part, but simply the formal language which indicated that the Levites were now ready to complete the following of God's commands.

And so they spoke unto them in a land of Canaan, to say, "Y^ehowah commanded by a hand of Moses to give to us cities to dwell in and their pastures lands for our cattle."

Joshua
21:2

And so the leaders of the Levites in the land of Canaan said to them, "Jehovah commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities in which to dwell, as well as pasture lands for our cattle."

What is interesting, and what is missed here in most English translations, is that the subject of the verb *commanded* comes first, placing great emphasis upon the name of God. Another interesting touch—I expected God to command by the mouth of Moses, but it reads *by the hand of Moses*. We read in Lev. 25:32–35 (God is speaking to Moses): "As for cities of the Levites, the Levites have a permanent right of redemption for the houses of the cities which are their possession. What, therefore, belongs to the Levites may be redeemed and a house sale in the city of this possession reverts in the jubilee, for the houses of the Levites are their possession among the sons of Israel. But pasture fields of their cities will not be sold, for that is their perpetual possession." Num. 35:2–3: "Command the sons of Israel that they give to the Levites from the inheritance of their possession cities to live in; and you will give to the Levites pasture lands around the cities. And the cities will be theirs to live in; and their pasture lands will be for their cattle and for their herds and for all their beasts." Notice that the way all of this is framed is that the remaining tribes of Israel are giving these lands and cities to the Levites. God gave particular cities and lands to the tribes of Israel and that was completed in Joshua 19:49–51. Now, by God's guidance, a portion of these cities are to be given to the Levites, who represent the spiritual portion of Israel. This is a model for giving in general. God gives to us great material wealth and we pass this on. I have personally known Christians who were tight with a dollar when it came to giving and God appeared, at least, to entrust them with less money. **If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also, the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel** (1 Cor. 9:11–14).

And so gave sons of Israel to the Levites out from their inheritance regarding a command of Y^ehowah the cities the these and their pasture lands:

Joshua
21:3

And the sons of Israel gave to the Levites from their own inheritance these cities and their suburbs, as per the command of Jehovah:

The following will be a laundry list of all of the cities which were given over to the Levites. A word found in here throughout is the masculine plural noun *mig^erāsh* (מִגְרָשׁ) [pronounced *mig^e-RAWSH*], which means *common, common-land, open land*. It apparently is land not owned by anyone in specific. Young renders this *suburbs*. Strong's #4054 BDB #177.

And so came out the lot for families of the Kohathite; and so he was to sons of Aaron the priest out from the Levite out from a tribe of Judah and out from a tribe of the Simeonite and out from a tribe of Benjamin by the lot, cities, thirteen.

Joshua
21:4

And so the lot was for the Kohathites—they were sons of Aaron the priest from the tribe of Levi—and they were given thirteen cities from the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin.

This was a rough verse to deal with in some ways, and there is one possible important improvement in the less literal rendering of this verse. The last dozen words or so in this verse are attached to no verb. The second verb is *to be*, found way, way at the beginning of this verse, and my guess is the subject of that verb is *lot*, and it is the lot which comes out of the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin. You will recall the latter two tribes essentially took their inheritance out of Judah. Let me just give you a taste as to how others rendered this verse:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And when the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites then had the sons of Aaron the priest from among the Levites—out of the tribe of Judah and out of the tribe of the Simeonites and out of the tribe of Benjamin—by lot, thirteen cities.
NASB	Then the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites. And the sons of Aaron the priest, who were of the Levites, received thirteen cities by lot from the tribe of Judah and from the tribe of the Simeonites and from the tribe of Benjamin.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And the lot goeth out for the families of the Kohathite, and there are for the sons of Aaron the priest (of the Levites), out of the tribe of Judah, and out of the tribe of Simeon, and out of the tribe of Benjamin, by lot thirteen cities,...

My first question was how much *chance* is involved here. That is, certainly God is in control of all, but one would think that the cities from Judah, Simeon and Benjamin would have been naturally assigned to Aaron and his family because of their close proximity to Jerusalem. But keep in mind that the holy city, at that time, was not going to be Jerusalem, but in Shiloh, which was in Ephraim. That fact, along with this verse, would be reason enough to assume that a lot was cast for the family of priests as well as for the remainder of the Levite families. Therefore, *God so overruled it that the priestly families were placed round the spot which He had determined beforehand to choose as the site of His temple.*²

A good point which Barnes brings up is, *why is the tribe of Aaron being given thirteen cities?* In case you have lost track of how the family of Levi worked, 400-450 years ago, the family of Levi, which included his wife and three sons, moved to Egypt. During that time, those three sons, as the heads of the Levite families, had scads of children and grandchildren. It wasn't until perhaps 130 years prior to the time period of this passage that Aaron was born. Furthermore, even though Aaron had four sons, two were killed directly by God for taking their responsibilities lightly. The upshot of all this is that Aaron's family is going to be significantly smaller than any of the other three families. They still were given thirteen cities. This is not unprecedented—you will recall that the five daughters of Zelophehad were assigned lots of land, although they had not yet married and therefore, did not have children. Furthermore, between Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's two remaining sons, they had 24 sons. Now given that Aaron was 123 at his death (Num. 33:39), his sons's likely had grandchildren and great grandchildren during his final years. Barnes continues: *They might be numbered in the thousands. The "cities" of Canaan were for the most part small; as is manifest from the astonishing number of them in proportion to the area of land, more particularly in the south, where the portion of priests was situated. The priests or Levites would not occupy the whole of the dwellings in any city, nor all its "fields," nor necessarily and always all its "villages" (cp v. 12). Non-Levites, to whom the cultivation of their land, and other secular concerns, were entrusted, no doubt resided in the Levitical cities or their precincts. It appears, further, that several of the cities here enumerated were only wrested from the Canaanites at a later date.*³ Keil and Delitzsch do some similar mathematics and come up with up to 1000 males who would have been alive in the line of Aaron in 200 families; therefore, their co-possession of thirteen cities is not beyond the realm of imagination.⁴

And to sons of the Kohathite the remaining [are] from families of a tribe of Ephraim and from a tribe of Dan and from a half-tribe of Manasseh, by the lot, cities ten.

Joshua
21:5

And to the sons of Kohath there were given ten cities from the tribes of Ephraim, Dan and the half tribe of Manasseh.

Just as it was God's plan for the Israelites to be scattered throughout the earth, it will be God's plan for the Levites to be scattered throughout Israel. Barnes alleges that when Korah rebelled and was swallowed up by the earth (Num. 16), two of the Kohathite families appear to have been removed from this earth as well. I don't know if he really made his case (compare the Scripture references he gave, which were Num. 3:27ff 16 26:57ff). In any

² Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 402. Barnes is paraphrasing Calvin at this point.

³ Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; pp. 401-402. It's nice to have someone like Barnes to remind us of the practical matters that we might have otherwise missed.

⁴ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 154.

case, we have in the family of Kohath perhaps 8000 males (26:62), which is going to be 800 males per city. And this is if the population figures given are correct. Keil and Delitzsch also did a similar determination and came to the conclusion that roughly 1300 Levites, males and females, would co-occupy each town with the tribe which owned that town.

And to sons of Gershon [are] from families of a tribe of Issachar and from a tribe of Asher and from a tribe of Naphtali and from a half of a tribe of Manasseh by the lot, cities thirteen.

Joshua
21:6

And to the sons of Gershon there was allocated thirteen cities, from the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and from the half tribe of Manasseh.

Recall that the Levites were essentially broken down into three sub-tribes: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. We also have the tribe of Aaron, the true priestly tribe of the Levites (Aaron was from the family of Kohath).

To sons of Merari to their families from a tribe of Reuben and from a tribe of Gad and from a tribe of Zebulun, cities twelve.

Joshua
21:7

And to the sons of Merari and to their families was given twelve cities from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun.

The families of Merari were placed on both sides of the Jordan. In the LXX, we have *were allotted* as the verb in this verse. One of the very unusual things about this chapter is the absolute dearth of verbs in the Hebrew. Throughout this chapter, there will be several places where the Greek inserts the verb *allotted*. I would bet that Joshua get as worn out as we did with the lists of cities. However, the lists of these cities and land area was necessary as they were the record of the possessions of Israel, which would have been absolutely necessary to Israel for the Year of Jubilee.

And so gave [the] sons of Israel to the Levites the cities the these and their pasture lands as which commanded Y^howah by a hand of Moses by the lot.

Joshua
21:8

So the sons of Israel gave these cities and their suburbs to the Levites, as Jehovah had commanded through Moses.

One of the Hebrew words we will mention here is *mig^erâsh* (מִגְרָשׁ) [pronounced *mig^e-RAWSH*], which means *common, common-land, open land*. Young renders this *suburbs*, which is a nice up to date rendering. Strong's #4054 BDB #177.

The Cities Given over to the Family of Aaron, of the Tribe of Kohath

I Chron. 6:54–60

This same material is covered in the sixth chapter of I Chronicles, however there are enough differences to cause Keil and Delitzsch to hypothesize that the author's of the two books were independent of one another. Whereas that is very likely, certainly the majority of the differences could be attributed to manuscript deterioration. We do not know how well these portions of Scripture stayed together, if at all, for several hundred years. Therefore, the corruption of the text in one book would be different than the corruption of the text in another. Keil and Delitzsch assert that the arrangement of the list in Chronicles along with the change in spelling both would point toward different and independent source records for this information than the book of Joshua. The other differences would be the result of manuscript corruption.

While there are 48 towns to be given over to the Levites (Joshua 21:41 I Chron. 6:60–63), there are only 42 given by name in I Chron. 6, indicating that there was some serious corruption of the text. The cities which come up missing in Chronicles are: Jutta in Judah; Gibeon in Benjamin, Ethekeh and Gibbethon in Dan; and Jokneam and Nahala in Zebulun. The names which vary will be dealt with as we come to them.

And so gave from a tribe of sons of Judah and from a tribe of sons of Simeon the cities these which were read by name

Joshua
21:9

The tribes of Judah and Simeon gave the following cities which were read by name:

We should touch on the verb, which is the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of qârâ' (קָרָא) [pronounced *kaw-RAW*] which simply means *call, proclaim, read*. Strong's #7121 BDB #894.

A practical piece of information: not only did the tribe of Levi not hold any contiguous portion of land, but the very cities they occupied were occupied by the tribes who received the cities in the throwing of the lots. That is, they did not have exclusive ownership or occupancy of the cities in which they dwelt, which is a marvelous parallel to Israel today. Although Israel has fallen away from God, she will return to God in the end times. Jews will be scattered throughout the world in the end times and will function as evangelists for Jesus Christ, just as the tribe of Levi functioned as the spiritual tribe of the twelve tribes of Israel. None of these things happen by chance; God knew the beginning from the end and He placed historical parallels throughout Scripture which would continue to the end times. This is one of the ways that we know that Jehovah Elohim, the God of the Jews, is the true God of the Universe, Jesus Christ, our Savior, Who is blessed now and forever. Amen.

And so was to sons of Aaron, from families of the Kohathite from sons of Levi for to them was the lot first.

Joshua
21:10

The first lot fell to the sons of Aaron, from the families of Kohath Levites.

The cities will be distributed first to the family of Aaron, which, strictly speaking, is the priestly line of the family of Levi.

And so gave to them Kiriath-arba (father of the Anakim) (this [was] Hebron) in hill country of Judah and her pasture lands round about her.

Joshua
21:11

And so they gave to them Kiriath-arba (Arba was the father of the Anakim; and Kiriath-arba is also called Hebron), which is in the hill country of Judah; with it was given its pasture lands..

We covered Hebron back in Joshua 14:5 and 20:7. This was the city given to Caleb. He and his family would share this city with the sons of Aaron.

And fields of the city and her villages were given to Caleb ben Jephunneh in [or, as?] his possession.

Joshua
21:12

However, the fields of that city and its villages had been given to Caleb ben Jephunneh as his possession.

Caleb, although an older man, would still have a family which would be limited in size. His family was given an entire city; the one which he requested in Joshua 14. With him will be living the sons of Aaron, who are the true priestly line of Levi.

And to sons of Aaron the priest they gave the city of asylum [for] the manslayer Hebron and her pasture lands and Libnah and her pasture lands.

Joshua
21:13

And they gave to the sons of Aaron, the priest, Hebron, a city of Asylum, and her pasture lands, and Libnah and her pasture lands;

So Hebron was quite the place—the sons of Aaron would occupy it, as would Caleb and his family; and it was one of the cities designated as a city of refuge (or, asylum). We covered Hebron briefly in Joshua 10:3 and the **Doctrine of Hebron** in Joshua 14:15. Along with this, Libnah was given to Aaron (see Joshua 10:29).

And Jattir and her pasture lands and Eshtemoa and her pasture lands, and Holon and her pasture lands, and Debir and her pasture lands;

Joshua
21:14–15

along with the cities of Jattir, Eshtemoa, Holon and Debir, and their pasture lands;

All these cities have already been discussed: Jattir and Debir in Joshua 15:48–49; and Eshtemoa and Holon in Joshua 15:50–51.

And Ain and her pasture lands; and Juttah and her pasture lands; and⁵ Beth-shemesh and her pasture lands—cities nine from among two of the tribes the these.

Joshua
21:16

as well as Ain, Juttah and Beth-shemesh and their pasture lands; nine cities directly from these two tribes.

The last preposition is *mîn* (*from, off*) and *ʿêth* (אֶת) [pronounced *ayth*] (which means *with, among*) together they mean *from proximity with, from with, from close proximity to*. A good up-to-date rendering might be *directly from*. This can also refer to being in one's possession or in one's keeping. This can also mean *to proceed from someone*. Strong's #854 BDB #85.

Ain is found in Joshua 15:32 and it is Ashan in I Chron. 6:59; Juttah is found in Joshua 15:55, and Beth-shemesh in Joshua 15:10 (albeit briefly).

And from a tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon and her pasture lands, Geba and her pasture lands, Anathoth and her pasture lands and Almon and her pasture lands—cities four.

Joshua
21:17–18

And from the tribe of Benjamin was given the four cities of Gibeon, Geba, Anathoth and Almon, as well as their pasture lands.

Geba will covered in I Sam. 5. Anathoth was covered in Joshua 18:24; Gibeon in 18:25; and Almon is an alternate form of Allemeth, which was discussed in Joshua 18:24.

All of cities of sons of Aaron, the priests, thirteen; cities and their pasture lands.

Joshua
21:19

There were thirteen cities in all given over to the sons of Aaron, the priests; as well as their pasture lands.

For whatever reason, the numbers seem to add up so far.

The Cities Given over to the Family of Kohath

I Chron. 6:61–70

And so families of sons of Kohath the Levites the remaining ones of sons of Kohathites, it was cities of their allocation from a tribe of Ephraim.

Joshua
21:20

And so to the families of the Kohath Levites who remained, their received their allocation from the tribe of Ephraim.

In this verse, we have the plural construct of *cities* followed by the masculine singular noun *gôrâl* (גֹרָל) [pronounced *goh-RAWL*], which means *lot* (or, *lots*), *allotment*, *portion*, *recompense*, *retribution*, *allocation*. Strong's #1486 BDB #174.

⁵ This *and* is found in 4 early printed editions, and in the Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac codices. This will occur several times throughout this chapter. Please refer to Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible* for those other occurrences (p. 254).

And so they gave to them a city of asylum [for] the slayer, Shechem and her pasture lands in a hill country of Ephraim; and Gezer and her pasture lands; and Kibzaim and her pasture lands; and Beth-horon and her pasture lands; cities four.

Joshua
21:21–22

And so they gave to them Shechem, the city of asylum, located in the hill country of Ephraim, along with Gezer, Kibzaim and Beth-horon, as well as their pasture lands.

Shechem has been covered in Joshua 20:7 and Gen. 12:6; and Gezer and Beth-horon in Joshua 16:3.

We are uncertain about Kibzaim, which means *two heaps*. It may be identified with Jokmeam of I Chron. 6:68, and it is then guessed to be two miles northwest of Nablus. However, if Jokmeam is equivalent to Jokneam, then it would be found at the foot of Mount Carmel.

And from a tribe of Dan, Elteke and her pasture lands, Gibbethon and her pasture lands; Aijalon and her pasture lands; Gath-rimmon and her pasture lands—cities four.

Joshua
21:23–24

And from the tribe of Dan: Elteke, Gibbethon, Aijalon, and Gath-rimmon, four cities, along with their pasture lands.

Elteke and Gibbethon are found in Joshua 19:44; Aijalon in Joshua 19:42; and Gath-rimmon in v. 45.

And from a half of a tribe of Manasseh: Taanach and her pasture lands and Gath-rimmon and her pasture lands—cities two.

Joshua
21:25

And from the half-tribe of Manasseh, the two cities Taanach and Gath-rimmon, as well as their pasture lands.

This second *Gath-rimmon*, which we find here, is the result of a scribal error. The copyist looked above while he was copying this, and wrote down *Gath-rimmon* rather than *Ibleam*. There should only be one Gath-rimmon which belongs to Dan. This should actually be Ibleam (or, Bileam), which is found in I Chron. 6:70. LXX β has Ἰβραθα (which would be transliterated *Ibatha*, which is closer to *Ibleam* than it is to *Gath-rimmon*), instead of Gath-rimmon.

According to Keil and Delitzsch, *Taanach* is also a very early copyist error and that the text of I Chron. 6:70, is correct (where *Aner* is the city named).⁶ However, they are mistaken here, simply because (1) Taanach is a very important city in Manasseh; it would be confusing to find it missing from the list of cities belonging to Manasseh. (2) We find *Taanach* in the Greek here rather than *Aner*. (3) This is in full agreement with Joshua 17:11. These passage does not have to agree with I Chron. 6:70. This passage is how the lots were *supposed* to fall. These are the cities which were *supposed* to have been given over. I Chron. 6:70 was written nearly a millennium later and it gives us what actually happened. Whether *Aner* was the city which was actually given over to the Levites is possible; however, that name only occurs in I Chron. 6:70 (and it is in agreement with the Greek).

All of [the] cities ten and their pasture lands to families of sons of Kohath the remaining ones.

Joshua
21:26

All ten cities along with their pasture lands went to the family of Kohath.

Between vv. 22–26, we have those ten cities, with the minor problem of Gath-rimmon, which we dealt with.

⁶ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 455.

The Cities Given over to the Family of Gershon

I Chron. 6:71–76

And to sons of Gershon from families of the Levites out from a half of a tribe of Manasseh a city of asylum the manslayer—Golan in the Bashan and her pasture lands, and Beeshterah and her pasture lands—cities, two.

Joshua
21:27

The following cities were given to the tribe of Gershon Levites and their families from the half tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan (an asylum city for those guilty of involuntary manslaughter), and its pasture lands; and Beeshterah and its pasture lands—two cities total.

The Gershonites received their inheritance from the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Issachar. Other than Zebulun, these were the three northern-most tribes (Zebulun was tucked between these three tribes).

For all intents and purposes, we have no verbs in this verse, but we have the untranslated mark of a direct object prior to *Golan* and *Beeshterah*. Joshua 20:8 deals with Golan and Beeshterah (or, Be-esherah) is probably the same as Ashtaroth, which could even be Beth-ashtoreth. In any case, it has not been named previously (recall that several verses probably dropped out in the previous chapters); and *Ashtaroth* is mentioned in I Chron. 6:71.

According to Rotherham,⁷ although it is written as *Galon* in the Hebrew, when this is read, it is read as *Golan*. However, in my Hebrew Bible, it is written as *Golan*.

And out from a tribe of Issachar, Kishion and her pasture lands, Daberath and her pasture lands; Jarmuth and her pasture lands; En-gannim and her pasture lands—cities four.

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21:28–29

And from the tribe of Issachar was given Kishion, Daberath, Jarmuth, En-gannim, along with their pasture lands; four cities in all.

Jarmuth is probably Remeth, as per the Greek and Joshua 19:21. All four cities were covered back in Joshua 19:20–21.

And out from a tribe of Asher: Mishal and her pasture lands; Abdon and her pasture lands, Helkath and her pasture lands; and Rehob and her pasture lands—cities four.

Joshua
21:30–31

And from the tribe of Asher was given Mishal, Abdon, Helkath and Rehob, along with their pasture lands—four cities in all.

We covered Mishal in Joshua 19:26, Abdon and Rehob in Joshua 19:28 and Helkath in Joshua 19:25.

And out from a tribe of Naphtali a city of asylum the slayer—Kedesh in the Galilee and her pasture lands; and Hammoth-dor and her pasture lands; and Kartan and her pasture lands—cities, three. All of [the] cities of the Gershonite to their families—cities thirteen and their pasture lands.

Joshua
21:32–33

And from the tribe of Naphtali was given Kedesh (an asylum city), Hammoth-dor, and Kartan, along with their pasture lands—three cities in total. All of the cities given to the Gershonite families was thirteen.

⁷ Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 254.

Kedesh is in Joshua 19:37. Hammoth-dor is likely the same as Hammoth in Joshua 19:35 and Hammon in I Chron. 6:76 and as the Emmaus of Josephus.⁸

Kartan was apparently dropped out of the text in Joshua 19, and is probably equivalent to Kiriath-aim in I Chron. 6:76. This is not the same Kiriathaim which is found several times in Scripture and belongs to the tribe of Reuben. Naphtali's Kiriathaim is mentioned only here (and here barely) and in I Chron. 6:76 and some identify it with Khirbet el-Qarelyeh which is located in Upper Galilee.

The Cities Given over to the Family of Merari

I Chron. 6:77–81

And to families of sons of Merari the Levites the remaining one out from a midst of a tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam and her pasture lands, Kartah and her pasture lands, Rimmon [Dimnah in the Hebrew] and her pasture lands, Nahalal and her pasture lands—cities four. Joshua 21:34–35

And to the family of the Merari Levites from the tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam, Kartah, Rimmon and Nahala, along with their pasture lands—four cities in all.

The cities indwelt by the sons of Merari will be scattered on both sides of the Jordan; most will be in Reuben and Gad on the east, and some will be in Zebulun in the northern portion of Israel. There will be several cities listed in this passage which are not found in Joshua 19:10–16, further evidence of Joshua 19 being corrupt.

Dimnah is how this city reads in the Hebrew. However, since the Hebrew *r* and *d* are so similar, this should be Rimmon, as it is in the Greek and in Joshua 19:13 and I Chron. 6:77.⁹ Dimnah was covered in Joshua 19:13; Nahalal in Joshua 19:15. And Jokneam in Joshua 12:22. Kartah is mentioned only here, another city which very likely dropped out of the text of Joshua 19 (and very possibly I Chron. 6).

And out from a tribe of Reuben: Bezer and her pasture lands; and Jahaz and her pasture lands; Kedemoth and her pasture lands; and Mephaath and her pasture lands—cities four. Joshua 21:36–37

And from the tribe of Reuben: Bezer, Jahaz, Kedemoth and Mephaath, along with their pasture lands—four cities in all.

The location of Bezer was mentioned in the previous chapter. We know it as one of the cities of asylum, yet it is not so identified here. That is the Hebrew reading; however, in the Septuagint, Vulgate and in one early printing, this is identified just like the other cities of asylum.¹⁰ After *Bezer*, the Vulgate and Septuagint add the phrase *in the desert*.¹¹ Jahaz, Kedemoth and Mephaath are all covered in Joshua 13:18. These two verses are omitted in several important Hebrew manuscripts.¹²

⁸ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 3, p. 22; they reference Josephus' *Antiquities* XVIII. ii. 3; War IV. i. 3.

⁹ Keil and Delitzsch disagree at this point, although I don't know why. See Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 156.

¹⁰ Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 254.

¹¹ Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 254.

¹² *The Complete Parallel Bible*; NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB; Oxford University Press; ©1993; p. 494. Rotherham also mentions this and refers us to Dr. Ginsburg's *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical edition of the Hebrew Bible* of 1897, pp. 178, 585. These verses are found in the Septuagint and the Vulgate, however. Since I don't want to list all of the variations here, let me add what the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has to say about this: *Vs 36.37, which give the names of the Levitical cities in Judah, are omitted in the Heb printed txt although found in many Heb MSS. Four vs also are added after ver 42, the first three of which repeat 19 50 f, and the last is a reminiscence of 5 3* (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. III; p. 1751).

And out from a tribe of Gad: a city of asylum for the slayer, Ramoth in the Gilead and her pasture lands; and Mahanaim and her pasture lands; Heshbon and her pasture lands; Jazer and her pasture lands—all cities four.

Joshua
21:38–39

And from the tribe of Gad: Ramoth (an asylum city), Mahanaim, Heshbon and Jazer, along with their pasture lands—four cities in all.

Heshbon was covered in Joshua 13:17; Jazer in Joshua 13:25; Mahanaim in Joshua 13:26; and Ramoth is mentioned in Joshua 20:8.

All of the cities to sons of Merari to their families, the remaining ones from families of the Levites—and so were their allotment—cities twelve.

Joshua
21:40

The total number of cities given to the Merari Levites was twelve.

This finishes off the great list of cities given over to the Levites, family by family.

Summary

All of [the] cities of the Levites in a midst of a possession of sons of Israel cities, forty and eight and their pasture lands.

Joshua
21:41

Forty eight cities in all were given from Israel to the Levites.

This is a general summary giving the total number of cities which were given over to the Levites.

The cities the these were a city a city and her pasture lands round about her so all the cities the these.

Joshua
21:42

Each city included the pasture land around it.

Except for not placing the verb first, this is the correct way to render v. 42. Therefore, you may want to see what others did with it:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	...these cities passed, each severally, with its pasture lands round about it; thus was it with all these cities.
NASB	These cities each had its surrounding pasture lands; thus it was with all these cities.
NJB	These towns consisted in each case of the town itself and the pasture land round it. This was the case with all the towns.
NRSV	Each of these towns had its pasture lands around it; so it was with all these towns.
REB	Each town had its common land round it, and it was the same for all of them.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	These cities are each city and its suburbs round about it; so to all these cities.

The point which is made is that each town had with it pasture land which was included; and that was the case for each and every town.

For the sake of completeness, I am going to add what the Septuagint adds at this point. However, I want to point out in advance that it should not be a part of God's Word, but is merely the recording of a very early Jewish legend. *...and the children of Israel gave a portion to Joshua because of the commandment of the Lord; they gave him the city which he asked; they gave him Thamnasachar in mount Ephraim; and Joshua built the city, and dwelt in it; and Joshua took the knives of stone, where with he circumcised the children of Israel that were born in the*

*desert by the way, and put them in Thamnasachar.*¹³ There is no other evidence for these additional words and are therefore rejected as being a portion of Scripture.

Now, we have spent a long time, probably too long in your opinion, as to where God placed the Israelites. However, this is God's Word and we need to make it absolutely clear that God has a place for us to be and that place is where we can accomplish His work for us. We have a variety of gifts and purposes, and when it comes to witnessing, we may not necessarily witness but to a handful of people and often it is to that handful of people who know us the best. Where God places is where we belong. I was, for all intents and purposes, picked up and moved to Houston from California. A year prior to this move, I could have thought of nothing more far-fetched than a move to the state of Texas. And I was homesick, even though everything came together when I moved here. This is where God placed me and not one time did it occur to me that I needed to save up enough money to move back to California. When God wants me to move, He will move me. There are circumstances in which we find ourselves—circumstances which we often want out of—however, they are just as much a part of where we belong as our own address. I've carried around a heart-ache for years. However, that was a combination of God's plan and my fault. Would I give up the pain if I could? In a heartbeat; however, it is God's plan for that pain to be there as a reminder to me of the mistakes which I made. Where we are is more than just place and, given our own predilections, God has placed us in the environment where we belong. When it is time for us to move out of our environs, he will move us.

God Fulfills His Promises

And so gave Y^ehowah to Israel all of the land which He swore to give to their fathers. And so they possessed her and so they dwelt in her.

Joshua
21:43

And finally, Jehovah gave Israel all of this real estate which He had promised their fathers to give to them. Therefore, they possessed the land and remained there.

The final verb is the Qal imperfect of *yâsha^bv* (יָשָׁב) [pronounced yaw-SHAH^BV] and it means *to remain, sit, dwell*. Strong's #3427 BDB #442. *The occupation of the land was not yet complete (see 23:4–5; Judg 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.*¹⁴ God's promise to give Israel this land is recorded throughout the Pentateuch. *On that day, Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the River Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates; the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."* (Gen. 15:18–21). *"And I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River [Euphrates]; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you."* (Ex. 23:31; see also Gen. 12:7 26:3–4 28:4, 13–14 Num. 33:53). Quite obviously, the Israelites did not possess all of that land, but perhaps an eighth of it. The remainder of the land will be given to Israel, but this is still future. At the present time, no one in their right mind would really want much to do with all that desert, apart from the oil which is there.

So that we understand this correctly, God had promised to give that huge portion of land to Israel. However, He did not promise to give it to this generation in particular. God merely promised to give it to Israel, and that time had not come to pass yet, nor has it even been fulfilled in its entirety yet. There must be a number, a dollar amount, that, to you, beyond which is incomprehensible or unnecessary. For some, maybe \$80,000,000 is the key. So if you were given \$90,000,000, the additional amount would be superfluous. That is the situation here. There is no way that Israel could even begin to occupy all of the land that God had promised them. They will barely be able to occupy what God has given them so far. However, God has promised a great deal more to them and that will be fulfilled. In fact, God was not going to give them the entire land at once, but would give it to the Israelites piece by piece. *"And Jehovah your god will clear away these nations from before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, so that the wild beast do not grow too numerous for you."*

¹³ *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*; Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton; Hendrickson Publishers; ©1992; p. 308.

¹⁴ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 316.

(Deut. 7:22). “I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate, and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.” (Ex. 23:29–30).

Also, let us not forget God’s promise to Joshua, to which Joshua is certainly referring: *Now, it came to pass after the death of Moses, servant of Jehovah, that Jehovah spoke to Joshua ben Nun, Moses’ servant, saying, “Moses, My servant is dead; now, therefore, arise, cross over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place one which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun—that will be your territory. No man will stand before you in all the days of your life. As I have been with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you.”* (Joshua 1:1–5).

The last point of discrepancy is that Israel never did even fully possess the land west of the Jordan. Keil and Delitzsch explain: *The Israelites never came into undisputed possession of the whole of the promised land, to the full extent of the boundaries laid down in Num. 34:1–12, never conquering Tyre and Sidon for example. The promises of God were no more broken on that account that they were through the circumstance, that after the death of Joshua and the elders his contemporaries,[that] Israel was sometimes hard pressed by the Canaanites...the complete fulfilment of this promise was inseparably connected with the fidelity of Israel to the Lord. To this statement, Keil and Delitzsch append Calvin’s commentary: In order to remove every appearance of discrepancy, it is right to distinguish well between the clear, unwavering, and certain fidelity of God in the fulfilment of His promises, and the weakness and indolence of the people, which caused the blessings of God to slip from their hands. Whatever war the people undertook, in whatever direction they carried their standards, there was victory ready to their hand; nor was there anything to retard or prevent the extermination of all their enemies except their own slothfulness. Consequently, although they did not destroy them all, so as to empty the land for their own possession, the truth of God stood out as distinctly as if they had; for there would have been no difficulty in their accomplishment of all that remained to be done, if they had only been disposed to grasp the victories that were ready to their hand.*¹⁵

And so gave rest Y^ehowah to them from every side as all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not taken a stand a man to their faces from all their enemies; all their enemies, gave Y^ehowah into their hands.

Joshua
21:44

Then Jehovah gave Israel rest from war on every side, just as He had sworn to their fathers. None of their enemies stood in opposition to them. Jehovah had given all of their enemies into their hand.

The first verb is the Hiphil imperfect of nûwach (נִוַּח) [pronounced NOO-ahk], which means *rest, cause to rest, set down, lay down, deposit, leave*. The verb nûwach (נִוַּח) [pronounced NOO-ahkh], which means *to rest, to be at rest*. In the Hiphil, this means *to deposit, to set down, to cause to rest*. Strong’s #5117 (and 3240) BDB #628.

Then we have the mîn preposition and the masculine noun çâḇvîḇ (סָבִיב) [pronounced saw^b-VEE^bV], which means *circuit, round about, encircle*. With the mîn preposition of separation *from round about, from every side*. Strong’s #5439 BDB #686.

We have a negative and then the Qal perfect of ʿâmad (עָמַד) [pronounced ʿaw-MAHD], a favorite word of Joshua’s, which means *to take a stand, to stand, to remain, to endure*. Strong’s #5975 BDB #763.

When describing those in opposition to them, we have the Qal active participle of ʾâyaḇv (אֵיבָב) [pronounced aw-YA^bV] and it means *to be at enmity, to be hostile*. As a participle, it can be reasonably rendered *enemy*, but it is more literally, *the one being at enmity with you*. Strong’s #340 BDB #33. You will recall that God promised there would be an end to this: *And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”* (Ex. 33:14).

¹⁵ Both quotes are from Keil & Delitzsch’s *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 157.

Not brought down a word from all the word the good that spoke Y^ehowah unto a house of Israel; the all went out.

Joshua
21:45

Not a single word failed of all the good words which Jehovah spoke to the house of Israel; everything He promised to them was fulfilled.

Let's just see how some others have handled this verse:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	There failed not a thing, out of all the good things whereof Yahweh had spoken unto the house of Israel,—the whole came to pass [lit., <i>came in</i>].
NASB	Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.
NIV	Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...there hath not fallen a thing of all the good thing which Jehovah spake unto the house of Israel—the whole hath come.

The first verb (with a negative particle) is the Qal perfect of *nâphal* (נָפַל) [pronounced *naw-FAHL*], which means *to fall, to lie, to die a violent death, to be brought down, to settle, to sleep deeply*. Strong's #5307 BDB #656.

The final verb is not the Qal perfect of *to be* but of *bôw'* (בָּוֹא) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. Strong's #935 BDB #97.

Joshua said this also to Israel: "Now, observe, today, I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which Jehovah your god spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you; not one of them has failed." (Joshua 23:14). The immediate promised of God to Israel were all fulfilled. As the Levites sang (or said) in the book of Nehemiah: "You are Jehovah god Who chose Abram and brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham. Furthermore, You did find his heart faithful before You and you made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite—to give to his descendants and You have fulfilled Your promise, for You are righteous." (Neh. 9:7–8). Those which peered into the future still had to come to pass (although most of that came from analogy rather than direct promise). You will recall what our Lord promised at the Sermon on the Mount: "Point of doctrine: until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of the pen will pass away from the Law until all is accomplished (Matt. 5:18).

Barnes: *It was no part of His purpose that the native population should be annihilated suddenly (Deut. vii. 22); that they were delivered into the hand of Israel, and their complete dispossession could have been effected at any time by that divine aid which was never wanting when sought. At the time referred to in the text, the Canaanites were discouraged, broken in strength, holding fast in isolated spots only up and down the land in the very midst of the tribes of God's people. The conquest of Canaan was already ex parte Dei a perfect work; just as in the New Testament the triumph of the individual Christian and of the Christian church in their warfare is often spoken of as accomplished in view of the Divine will that it should be so, and of Divine grace that it may be so. It was therefore only the inertness and pusillanimity of the Israelites which prevented the completion of the conquest when the allotment of Canaan was made by Joshua; as it was their subsequent backslidings which caused God to turn the tide of victory against them and even to cast them out of the land promised to their forefathers and actually won in the campaigns of Joshua.*¹⁶

An extended quote, taken from McGee, is well-suited to end this chapter as well as this portion of the book of Joshua: *The rest for us today is the rest of redemption. It is the rest that we desperately need. We live in an age of tension. There are many pressures, and if there is one thing that the average Christian needs, it is to enter into the rest God has provided.*

¹⁶ Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; pp. 403–404.

As we shall see as we move into the book of Judges, Israel failed to completely rid her possession of her enemies. Why? Because of her unbelief. Even Joshua could not give them the rest they needed since they failed to believe God and appropriate His power.

The writer to the Hebrews warns us about repeating Israel's failure: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Hebrews 4:9–11). How do you and I enter into that rest? By faith. That is the only way.

At the time of Christ, when Israel rejected Him as King and He rejected their cities, He gave a personal invitation which stands yet today, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will rest you." That rest is the rest of redemption.

Now here in Joshua 21 the people have entered into the rest—at least temporarily—which God had provided for them. My, how wonderful it must have been after the long, weary journey through the wilderness and the warfare to take their possessions, to settle down on their own parcel of ground. What a thrill it must have been to cultivate it and eat the fruits of it.¹⁷

Sometimes our life is like that long, weary journey through the wilderness, the constant warfare. How marvelous it will be to lay hold of our eternal possessions and to spend eternity in rest, where there is no more tears, no more sorrow, where the old things have passed away, and all things have become new (Rev. 21:4).

At the end of this chapter, chronologically speaking, we should go the Joshua 24:1–28, and then return to Joshua 22.

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¹⁷ J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 94.