

Joshua

Lesson 16

Chapter 20

Have you ever noticed that when starting a project that most of it can be completed quickly, but the finishing details of the project can take exceptionally long? For instance, when building a house, the structure can be up and weatherproofed in about three weeks, but all the finishes, the plumbing, wiring, sheetrock, floors, cabinets, moldings, doors, etc., can take another fifteen to twenty weeks. The details always take longer than the main body. Such was the case in the division of the Promised Land. Dividing the land for the masses was easy; assigning the land for the Priests and the cities of refuge was a different story.

J. The Tribal Cities Assigned to the Levites (20:1-21:45)

1. Six Cities of Refuge (20:1-9)

a) Places of the Six Cities of Refuge (20:1-8)

(1) The Accidental Death by a Manslayer (20:1-4)

Chapter 20 describes the six cities of refuge and the reason for those cities. We come to the places of the six cities of refuge. Chapter 20, verse 1. *“Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, ² ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘Designate the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, ³ that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge from the avenger of blood. ⁴ He shall flee to one of these cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city; and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them.’”* (20:1-4)

What is a manslayer? It is a person who is guilty of accidentally killing another person. They killed a person, but they did not do it intentionally. It was an accident. A manslayer is different from a murderer who kills with hatred and intent. An example of an accidental death is one by a blow in a sudden quarrel or by stone or missile thrown at random (Numbers 35:22). It could also be when an ax head flies from its handle (Deuteronomy 19:5). Or, the killing of a thief in the dark of the night, not during daylight (Exodus 22:2). But when a person becomes a manslayer, his life may be in jeopardy because of the avenger of blood. What is that?

(2) The Avenger of Blood of a Manslayer (20:5-8)

The LORD speaks of the avenger of the blood of a manslayer. Verse 5. *“Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand. ⁶ He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the manslayer shall return to his own city and to his own house, to the city from which he fled.”* (20:5-8)

What is “an avenger of blood?” When a family member was killed, accidental or not, in the Israelite culture, the “avenger of blood” could only be the nearest male relative. He was the one who could avenge the shed blood of the loved one. The law of retaliation could not extend to anyone but the killer (Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chronicles 25:4; Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:20). The nearest family member could justifiably kill the one who killed the relative. Therefore, when a murder killed someone intentionally, the avenger could kill him without fear of punishment. However, if the manslayer accidentally killed someone, the avenger might kill the manslayer before a trial could be held to prove his innocence. The LORD sees fit to provide a place for manslaughterers to

run until a trial could prove innocence or guilt. Six cities were strategically located across the Promised Land where the manslayer could run for safety.

With the reason for the cities of refuge stated, the cities of refuge are named.

b) The Cities of Refuge on the West (20:7)

The LORD designates the cities of refuge on the west. Verse 7. *“So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and Kiriath-arba (~~that is, Hebron~~) in the hill country of Judah.”* (20:7)

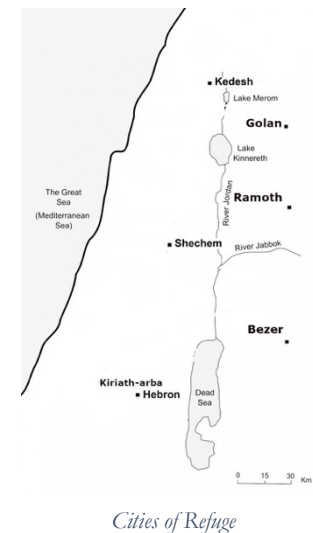
c) The Cities of Refuge on the East (20:8)

The LORD designates the cities of refuge on the east. Verse 8. *“Beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh.”* (20:8)

d) Reasons for the Six Cities of Refuge (20:9)

The LORD states the reason for the six cities of refuge. Verse 9. *“These were the appointed cities for all the sons of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally may flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the congregation.”* (20:9)

These six cities were selected by the LORD, not by the leaders of Israel.



Chapter 21

With the six cities of refuge established, the heads of the families of the Levites remembered that the LORD had directed Moses to establish forty-eight cities for the Levites in the Promised Land. Chapter 21, verse 1. *“Then the heads of households of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of households of the tribes of the sons of Israel. ² They spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, “The LORD commanded through Moses to give us cities to live in, with their pasture lands for our cattle.” ³ So the sons of Israel gave the Levites from their inheritance these cities with their pasture lands, according to the command of the LORD.”* (21:1-3)

We must make sure that we understand the plan for dividing the Promised Land. We have already discussed the divisions by lots, but we need to clarify how it was done by lot.

The Tribal Areas by Name

Jacob had twelve sons. The birth order of the twelve sons is as follows: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Each was the father of a tribe of descendants included in the Nation of Israel. However, when it came to acquiring tribal areas in the Promised Land, Levi received none, and Joseph received two shares under the names of two of his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Why? Jacob, on his deathbed, claimed Manasseh and Ephraim as his own even though they were his grandsons by Joseph. Therefore, the twelve tribal areas in the Promised Land are called by the names Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin.

The Tribal Areas by Divisions

The divisions of each tribal area were apportioned by the number of divisions in each tribe. These divisions were identified by the names of the sons of each of the ten sons of Jacob (not including Levi and Joseph) and the sons of the two sons of Joseph who took the place of Levi and Joseph – Manasseh and Ephraim. We need to identify the divisions at this time.

- Reuben's sons were Hanok, Pallu, Hezron, and Karmi – four divisions (Genesis 46:9).
- Simeon's sons were Jemul, Jamin, Ohad, Zohor, and Shaul – five divisions (Genesis 46:10)
- Judah's sons were survived to enter Egypt and have offspring were Sheleh, Perez, and Zerah – three divisions (Genesis 46:12).
- Issachar's sons were Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron – four divisions (Genesis 46:13).
- Zebulun's sons were Sered, Elon, and Jahleel – three divisions (Genesis 46:14).
- Gad's sons were Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli – seven divisions (Genesis 46:16).
- Asher's sons were Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah – four divisions (Genesis 46:17).
- Joseph's sons were Manasseh and Ephraim.
 - Manasseh's son was Machir – one division (1 Chronicles 7:14).
 - Ephraim's sons were Shuthelah, Beker, and Tahan – three divisions (Numbers 26:35).
- Benjamin's sons were Bela, Beker, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard – ten divisions (Genesis 46:21).
- Dan's son was Hushim – one division (Genesis 46:23).
- Naphtali's sons were Jaziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shilem – four divisions (Genesis 46:24).

And there was also the tribe of Levi who did not inherit land in the Promised Land because the LORD was his inheritance. Levi's sons were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari – three divisions (Genesis 46:11).

The Tribal Areas by Families/Households

Finally, after each tribal area was divided by the number of divisions in the tribe, the divisions were divided by the number of families in each division. For this, the Bible does not give all the family names. Interestingly, Manasseh had only one son, Machir, and therefore one division. Machir had many descendants. By the time of the division of the land, the families related to Manasseh would be large enough to necessitate the division of the tribe into two parts. One part would receive land on the east side of the Jordan River, and one part would take land on the west side.

2. The Forty-eight Levitical Cities (21:4-45)

a) The Number of Cities by Divisions (21:4-7)

(1) The Kohath Sons of Aaron from Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin – Thirteen (21:4)

In the style of the Hebrew writers, the topic of the forty-eight Levitical cities will be covered in two passes through the story. In the first pass, the writer will tell the number of cities designated to each division of the Levites, first to the Kohath descendants of Aaron, second to the rest of the Kohaths, third the descendants of Gershon, and fourth the descendants of Merari. They are all Levities, but the Kohaths had special duties with the Tabernacle complex, and Aaron's group of Kohaths had special duties that only they were allowed to perform as the priests in the Tabernacle Holy places. After giving the number for each division, the writer will then circle back around to tell the story again and name the cities for each division. To begin, we look at the number of cities by divisions. The writer will start with the line of Aaron.

For background, the tribe of Levi was the priestly line. Levi, the son of Jacob, had three sons – Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. Kohath had four sons – Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Amram had two sons – Aaron and Moses. The descendants of Aaron were in the line to be the high priests. No one from any other Kohath line could be in line to be the high priests except those who

descended from Aaron. For the number of cities by divisions, we come to the Kohath sons of Aaron. We are looking at the number of cities given to Aaron's line and the tribal areas where the cities will be located. Verse 4. *"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."* (21:4)

Thirteen cities were given to the sons of Aaron from the tribal areas of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. We will discover the names of those thirteen cities soon.

(2) The Rest of the Kohaths from Ephraim, Dan, and West half-tribe Manasseh - Ten (21:5)

There were more sons of Kohath who were not from the sons of Aaron. The other sons were the families of Izhar, Hebron, Uzziel, with all their descendants. To them, cities were given in the tribal areas of Ephraim, Dan, and west half-tribe Manasseh. Verse 5. *"The rest of the sons of Kohath received ten cities by lot from the families of the tribe of Ephraim and from the tribe of Dan and from the half-tribe of Manasseh."* (21:5)

Ten cities were given to all the descendants of Kohath, who were not descendants of Aaron. The ten cities will come from the tribal areas of Ephraim, Dan, and half-tribe Manasseh.

(3) The Sons of Gershon from Asher, Naphtali and East Half-tribe Manasseh – Thirteen (21:6)

To the sons of Gershon, Kohath's brother, cities were given in Asher, Naphtali, and east half-tribe Manasseh. Verse 6. *"The sons of Gershon received thirteen cities by lot from the families of the tribe of Issachar and from the tribe of Asher and from the tribe of Naphtali and from the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan."* (21:6)

Thirteen cities were given to the Gershites. The thirteen cities will come from the tribal areas of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and half-tribe Manasseh.

(4) The Sons of Merari from Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun – Twelve (21:7)

To the sons of Merari, the brother of Kohath and Gershon, the land was given from Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. Verse 7. *"The sons of Merari according to their families received twelve cities from the tribe of Reuben and from the tribe of Gad and from the tribe of Zebulun."* (21:7)

Twelve cities were given to the Merarites. The twelve cities will come from the tribal areas of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

b) The Names of Cities by Divisions (21:8-40)

(1) To the Sons of Aaron (21:8-19)

We now come to the second pass through the story, where the writer identifies the names of the cities of each division by name. First, the cities are donated to the sons of Aaron. Verse 8. *"Now the sons of Israel gave by lot to the Levites these cities with their pasture lands, as the LORD had commanded through Moses.⁹ They gave these cities which are here mentioned by name from the tribe of the sons of Judah and from the tribe of the sons of Simeon;¹⁰ and they were for the sons of Aaron, one of the families of the Kohathites, of the sons of Levi, for the lot was theirs first."* (21:8-10)

If you remember, earlier in this lesson, I explained the plan for the distribution of the Promised Land to the tribes. The tribes were named after ten sons of Jacob and two sons of Joseph. The divisions of the tribes were named after the sons born to the twelve original men. Put another way, these divisions were named after Jacob's grandsons including Joseph's grandsons because Joseph received two portions through Manasseh and Ephraim. In this passage, we find that Aaron was *"one of the families of the Kohathites, of the sons of Levi...."* Levi was the son of Jacob and, therefore, the name of one tribe. Kohath was a direct son of Levi, grandson of Jacob. Kohath had two sons, Aaron and Moses. The descendants of Aaron and Moses were considered the families of Kohath and were called *Kohathites*. However, this passage is only pointing to the sons of Aaron, the line of the high

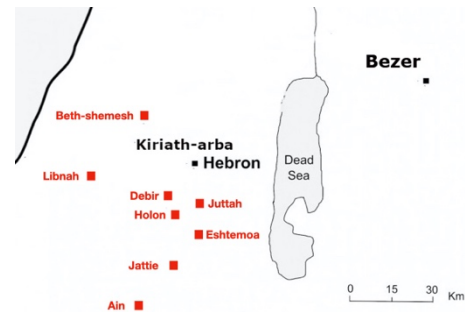
priests of Israel as heirs of the donated cities in the tribal areas of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. The descendants of Moses will not be included in these cities. The cities for Moses' descendants will be included in the division given to the *rest of the Kohaths*.

(a) From the Tribes of Judah and Simeon (21:11-16)

Thus, the writer continues by naming the cities for the descendants of Aaron from the tribes of Judah and Simeon first. Verse 11. *“Thus they gave them Kiriath-arba, Arba being the father of Anak (~~that is, Hebron~~), in the hill country of Judah, with its surrounding pasture lands. ¹² But the fields of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as his possession.¹³ So to the sons of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron, the city of refuge for the manslayer, with its pasture lands, and Libnah with its pasture lands,¹⁴ and Jattir with its pasture lands and Eshtemoa with its pasture lands,¹⁵ and Holon with its pasture lands and Debir with its pasture lands,¹⁶ and Ain with its pasture lands and Juttah with its pasture lands and Beth-shemesh with its pasture lands; nine cities from these two tribes.”* (21:11-16)

Here we discover the gift of Kiriath-arba, Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, Holon, Debir, Ain, Juttah, and Beth-shemesh - nine cities from these two tribes.

As a reminder, Kiriath-arba was a section of the city normally called Hebron. When Caleb attacked this city and defeated the Anakim, he received the city as an inheritance in the tribal land of Judah because he was of the tribe of Judah. Caleb's city will be called Hebron, and it will belong to his family; however, the section of the city that once belonged to Anak will be set aside as a city of refuge and a Levitical city to receive the offerings and tithes.



Nine Levitical Cities given to the line of Aaron from the tribal areas of Judah and Simeon

Furthermore, because Simeon's tribal area was taken out of the middle of Judah's tribal area, the cities are not evenly disbursed between the two tribes. If you were to take the time to look at a topographical map, you would notice that the terrain and availability of water greatly influenced the placement of villages and cities. Therefore, the disbursement of these Levitical cities had to do more with closeness to populated areas than equal disbursement across the acres of land.

(b) From the Tribe of Benjamin
(21:17-19)

Sitting just north of Judah's land was that of Benjamin. Aaron's descendants would also receive cities from the tribe of Benjamin. Verse 17. *“From the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon with its pasture lands, Geba with its pasture lands,¹⁸ Anathoth with its pasture lands, and Almon with its pasture lands; four cities.¹⁹ All the cities of the sons of Aaron, the priests, were thirteen cities with their pasture lands.”* (21:17-19)

Here we discover the gift of Gibeon, Geba, Anathoth, and Almon - four cities from the tribe of Benjamin. We also discover that the combined number of cities from Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin total thirteen cities. Remember, the descendants of Aaron will occupy these thirteen cities. They are responsible for the offerings and tithes in those cities, just as if they were serving in the Tabernacle complex now at Shiloh where it will be there for about four hundred years. Over those years, as new high priests are ordained to serve, they will come from these cities and then move to live in Shiloh to handle the offerings at the Tabernacle complex. This seems odd because Shiloh is not in the tribal areas of Judah, Simeon, or Benjamin. Over the next four hundred years, this will not matter because the activity at the Tabernacle will be limited to those



Four Levitical Cities given to the line of Aaron from the tribal area of Benjamin

who live nearby. However, when King David comes into the story, he will move the Tabernacle complex to Jerusalem when he makes it his capital. Jerusalem is just twenty miles from Hebron. David will install a rotation system for priestly duties that will continue and still be used at the time of the birth of Jesus. The rotation system will be based on the twenty-four patriarchic heads of Aaron's line alive at the time of David. Each line will use a lottery system to decide who, among its line, will have the privilege to spend one week in Jerusalem in service before the LORD in the Tabernacle or later the Temple. For example, if you will remember from your study in the Book of Luke, Zechariah, of the patriarchic line of Abijah, was severing in the Temple when the angel appeared and told him that he and Elizabeth would have a son that we call John the Baptist. Zachariah and Elizabeth home would have been in one of these Levitical cities. In fact, all of the priests who would win the lottery to serve one week in the Temple would have lived in one of these thirteen Levitical cities. As such, looking ahead, hundreds of years into the future, the LORD arranged the circumstances so that all the descendants of Aaron who would serve in the Temple did not have far to travel to Jerusalem if their opportunity came by lot to attend to the duties before the LORD in the holiest of places.

(2) To the Rest of the Kohaths (21:20-26)

(a) From the Tribe of Ephraim (21:20-22)

Second, the writer tells of the cities given to the rest of the Kohaths, those not in the line of the descendants of Aaron. These Kohaths will have duties for the care of the Tabernacle complex but will never be in line to be high priest or server in the holy place or holy of holies. These cities will be in the tribal areas of Ephraim, Dan, and the west half-tribe of Manasseh. First, we identify the cities from the tribe of Ephraim. Verse 20. *"Then the cities from the tribe of Ephraim were allotted to the families of the sons of Kohath, the Levites, even to the rest of the sons of Kohath. ²¹ They gave them Shechem, the city of refuge for the manslayer, with its pasture lands, in the hill country of Ephraim, and Gezer with its pasture lands, ²² and Kibzaim with its pasture lands and Beth-horon with its pasture lands; four cities."* (21:20-22)



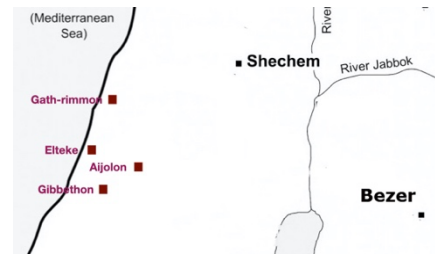
Four Levitical Cities given to the rest of the Kohaths from the tribal area of Ephraim

Shechem, Gezer, Kibzaim, Beth-horon – four cities are slated for the rest of the Kohaths in the tribal area of Ephraim. Shechem may be the most recognized of these cities, and it should be. It was there that Jacob purchased the land from the father of Shechem. It was there that Shechem fell in love with Jacob's daughter, Dinah. It was there that the sons of Jacob slaughtered the family of Shechem and brought great grief to Jacob. It was there that Joseph was finally laid to rest after the division of the Promised Land was completed. His bones had been carried around with the nation of Israel for more than forty-five years after leaving Egypt. It was the land promised to Ephraim, Joseph's son, by Jacob on his death bed.

(b) From the Tribe of Dan (21:23-24)

The rest of the Kohths also received cities in the tribal land of Dan. Verse 23. *“From the tribe of Dan, Elteke with its pasture lands, Gibbethon with its pasture lands,²⁴ Aijalon with its pasture lands, Gath-rimmon with its pasture lands; four cities.”* (21:23-24)

Elteke, Gibbethon, Aijalon, Gath-Rimmon – four cities were given as gifts from Dan’s land. If you will remember, Dan had only one son; therefore, one allotment was given to the one division of Dan. It was the smallest tribal area given during the disbursement at Shiloh. These cities would also house the Kohaths who would receive offerings and tithes but, in years to come, will also serve as needed to move the Tabernacle from Shiloh to Jerusalem. About three-hundred and fifty years after the division of the land, a boy will be born of the tribe of Dan. He will be a judge of Israel, and his name will be Samson. We will study him in the last part of the Book of Judges.



Four Levitical Cities given to the rest of the Kohaths from the tribal area of Dan

(c) From the Half-tribe Manasseh (21:25-26)

More cities were needed for the rest of the Kohath's, and their need would be met in the tribal areas of the west half-tribe of Manasseh. Verse 25. *“From the half-tribe of Manasseh, they allotted Taanach with its pasture lands and Gath-rimmon with its pasture lands; two cities.²⁶ All the cities with their pasture lands for the families of the rest of the sons of Kohath were ten.”* (21:25-26)

Taanach and Gath-rimmon – two cities were provided from the west half-tribe of Manasseh. We also learn that in all, the rest of the Kohaths received ten cities from Ephraim, Dan, and the half-tribe Manasseh. All the Kohaths together received twenty-three cities. Thirteen were for Aaron’s descendants, and ten were for the rest of the Kohaths.



Two Levitical Cities given to the rest of the Kohaths from the tribal area of Half-tribe Manasseh

(3) To the Sons of Gershon (21:27-33)

(a) From the Half-tribe Manasseh (21:27)

As previously mentioned, Levi had three sons. His sons were Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. With Levitical cities established for all the Kohaths, the writer turns to identify the cities given to the Levitical descendants of Gershon. Verse 27. *“To the sons of Gershon, one of the families of the Levites, from the half-tribe of Manasseh, they gave Golan in Bashan, the city of refuge for the manslayer, with its pasture lands, and Be-eshterah with its pasture lands; two cities.”* (21:27)

Golan and Be-eshterah – two cities come from the east half-tribe of Manasseh. Be-eshterah is also spelled Beth-Ashtaroth in some versions of the Bible. Interestingly, only two cities are given in this tribal area. Golan is a city of refuge. Bee-eshterah is just a Levitical city for the descendants of Gershon. Later we will learn that the specific family of Gershon living in the east half-tribe of Manasseh are descendants of Machir.



Two Levitical Cities given to the rest of the Sons of Gershon from the half-tribe Manasseh

(b) From the Tribe of Issachar (21:28-29)

Back on the west side of the Jordan River, Gershon descendants will receive cities from the tribe of Issachar. Verse 28. *“From the tribe of Issachar, they gave Kishion with its pasture lands, Daberath with its pasture lands, ²⁹Jarmuth with its pasture lands, En-gannim with its pasture lands; four cities.”* (21:28-29)

The gifts from Issachar are Kishion, Daberath, Jarmuth, En-gannim – four cities. These cities border on the south side of the valley of Jezreel, also known as the valley of Megiddo, and will be known as the valley of Armageddon one day. You might notice the interesting pattern of the cities on the map. The reason for the pattern, but not shown on the map, is the presence of the mountains. These cities were selected in places that were easy to travel to and near populated areas – not up in the mountains where offering and tithes would be hard to transport.



Four Levitical Cities given to the rest of the Sons of Gershon from the tribe of Issachar

(c) From the Tribe of Asher (21:30-31)

The Levitical descendants of Gershon received cities from the tribe of Asher. Verse 30. *“From the tribe of Asher, they gave Mishal with its pasture lands, Abdon with its pasture lands, ³¹Helkath with its pasture lands and Rehob with its pasture lands; four cities.”* (21:30-31)

The writer tells us that Mishal, Abdon, Helkath, Rehob – four cities were given Gershon from the land of Asher. At the time, some of these cities were still under the control of the Canaanites. Asher still had work to do to possess these cities

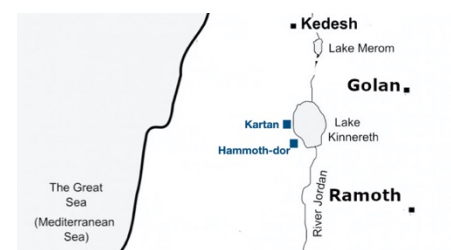


Four Levitical Cities given to the rest of the Sons of Gershon from the tribe of Asher

(d) From the Tribe of Naphtali (21:32-33)

Gershon’s descendants were given cities from the tribe of Naphtali. Verse 32. *“From the tribe of Naphtali, they gave Kedesh in Galilee, the city of refuge for the manslayer, with its pasture lands and Hammoth-dor with its pasture lands and Kartan with its pasture lands; three cities. ³³All the cities of the Gersbonites according to their families were thirteen cities with their pasture lands.”* (21:32-33)

Kedesh, Hammoth-dor, Kartan – three cities were added to the donations to Gershon. In all, we learn that thirteen cities belonged to Gershon from four tribal areas – east half-tribe Manasseh, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali.



Three Levitical Cities given to the rest of the Sons of Gershon from the tribe of Naphtali

(4) To the Sons of Merari (21:34-40)

(a) From the Tribe of Zebulun (21:34-35)

The last division of Levi to receive Levitical cities were the sons of Merari. The first mentioned was from the tribe of Zebulun. Verse 34. *“To the families of the sons of Merari, the rest of the Levites, they gave from the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with its pasture lands and Kartah with its pasture lands. ³⁵Dimnah with its pasture lands, Nahalal with its pasture lands; four cities.”* (21:34-35)

Jokneam, Kartah, Dimnah, Nahalal – four cities, were given to the priests of Merari. Interestingly, the lot fell this



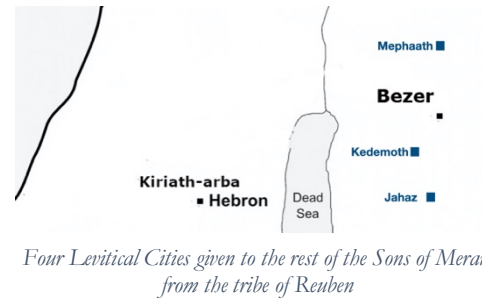
Four Levitical Cities given to the rest of the Sons of Merari from the tribe of Zebulun

far north in the Promised Land. The descendants of Merari needed twelve cities, but these four were miles away from the other eight.

(b) From the Tribe of Reuben (21:36-37)

Merari also received cities from the tribe of Reuben, on the far east side of the Jordan River, in the furthest southern district next to the Dead Sea. Verse 36. *“From the tribe of Reuben, they gave Bezer with its pasture lands and Jahaz with its pasture lands,³⁷ Kedemoth with its pasture lands and Mephaath with its pasture lands; four cities.”* (21:36-37)

The gifts to Gershon were Bezer, Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath – four cities.



(c) From the Tribe of Gad (21:38-40)

Finally, at the end of the distribution of cities, Gershon’s descendants received cities from the tribe of Gad on the east side of the Jordan River, north of the land of Reuben, south of the land of the east half-tribe of Manasseh. Verse 38. *“From the tribe of Gad, they gave Ramoth in Gilead, the city of refuge for the manslayer, with its pasture lands and Mahanaim with its pasture lands,³⁹ Heshbon with its pasture lands, Jazer with its pasture lands; four cities in all.⁴⁰ All these were the cities of the sons of Merari according to their families, the rest of the families of the Levites; and their lot was twelve cities.”* (21:38-40)

Ramoth, Mahanaim, Heshbon, Jazer – four cities were given from Gad. In all, twelve cities were given to the sons of Merari. Mahanaim may be the most notable at this time because it was there that Jacob met *“the angels of God”* (Genesis 32:1-2).

c) The Summary of the Cities by Divisions (21:41-42)

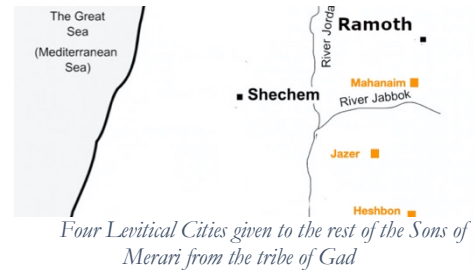
In two sentences, the writer gives a summary of the cities by divisions. Verse 41. *“All the cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the sons of Israel were forty-eight cities with their pasture lands.⁴² These cities each had its surrounding pasture lands; thus it was with all these cities.”* (21:41-42)

d) The Summary of the Inheritance of the Promised Land (21:43-45)

The distributions of the Promised Land to the tribes and the priests were complete. The writer gives the summary of the inheritance of the Promised Land in verse 43. *“So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it.⁴⁴ And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand.⁴⁵ Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.”* (21:43-45)

As we have mentioned, the text has clearly stated that all the Canaanites had not been removed from the land at the time of the distribution of the Promised Land to the twelve tribes. Much work was still to be done. Enemies had to be eliminated. Forests and land had to be cleared. Cities had to be built.

Nevertheless, the writer ends this passage with, *“Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.”* Translation: All the Israelites had to do was possess the land because the LORD would keep His promise that He made to them. If the tribal people would attempt to take the land, the LORD would go before them and the Canaanites would be destroyed.



As we will see, the tribes did not obey the LORD and He will chastise them in the book of Judges for not obeying Him. The same is true for us today. He will keep the promises that He will make in the rest of the Bible that apply to us, if we will follow His instructions. For that, we can trust Him fully! He will not fail you or forsake you.