

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

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

This chapter records the assignment of specific cities to the Levites. After noting that the tribes had received their inheritances, the Levites were next to come to Eleazar, Joshua and the leaders chosen from the tribes to supervise the division of the land. They reminded the committee that the LORD had commanded through Moses that they be given cities to live in and the surrounding suburbs for their cattle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

As with the division of the land among the tribes, the process used was the casting of lots. The first lot fell to the children of Aaron, children of Kohath. They were to be given 13 cities and their suburbs out of the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin.

The rest of the Kohathites were allotted ten cities and their suburbs from the tribes of Ephraim, Dan, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

The children of Gershon were given 13 cities and their suburbs from the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and the half tribe of Manasseh in Bashan.

The children of Merari were given 12 cities and their suburbs from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun.

The NIV Commentary notes the following: “Some towns were assigned to the Levites even though they were still held by the Canaanites. Joshua assigned many portions of unconquered land, apparently confident that God would give

Israel possession of these areas also....Though Levitical towns were selected from every tribe, they were not evenly distributed but seem to have been clustered on the frontiers and in other endangered areas.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Joshua 21:16 And Ain with her suburbs, and Juttah with her suburbs, *and* Bethshemesh with her suburbs; nine cities out of those two tribes.**

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

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

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

This section begins to detail the specific cities and their suburbs that were given to the descendants of Aaron, those who served as priests. From the tribes of Judah and Simeon (who was given land within Judah):

- Arba or Hebron in the hill country of Judah; note is made, however, that Caleb maintained possession of the fields and villages of the city. Hebron was also designated as a city of refuge.
- Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, Holon, Debir, Ain, Juttah and Bethshemesh

From the tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon, Geba, Anathoth and Almon

- Clarke notes that Anathoth was “the birthplace of Jeremiah, about three miles northward of Jerusalem, according to St. Jerome.”

So Aaron’s descendants were given a total of 13 cities with their suburbs.

Several commentators note that the cities given the priests were in areas close to Jerusalem in light of God’s foreknowledge that the coming temple would be built there.

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

the tribe of Ephraim.

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

**Joshua 21:22** And Kibzaim with her suburbs, and Bethhoron with her suburbs; four cities.

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

**Joshua 21:24** Aijalon with her suburbs, Gathrimmon with her suburbs; four cities.

**Joshua 21:25** And out of the half tribe of Manasseh, Tanach with her suburbs, and Gathrimmon with her suburbs; two cities.

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

The rest of the Kohathites were given ten cities from the tribes of Ephraim, Dan and the half tribe of Manasseh.

- From Ephraim: Shechem, also designated as a city of refuge; Gezer, Kibzaim and Bethhoron
- From Dan: Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Aijalon and Gathrimmon
- From half Manasseh: Tanach and Gathrimmon

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

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

**Joshua 21:29** Jarmuth with her suburbs, Engannim with her suburbs; four cities.

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

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

**Joshua 21:32** And out of the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, *to be* a city of refuge for the slayer; and Hammothdor with her suburbs, and Kartan with her suburbs; three cities.

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

The descendants of Gershon were allotted 13 cities and their suburbs as follows:

- From half Manasseh: Golan in Bashan, also designated as a city of refuge, and Beeshterah
- From Issachar: Kishon, Dabareh, Jarmuth and Engannim
- From Asher: Mishal, Abdon, Helkath and Rehob
- From Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee, also designated as a city of refuge, Hammothdor and Kartan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The children of Merari were given 12 cities and their suburbs as follows:

- From Zebulun: Jokneam, Kartah, Dimnah and Nahalal
- From Reuben: Bezer, Jahazah, Kedemoth and Mephaath
- From Gad: Ramoth in Gilead, also designated as a city of refuge, Mahanaim, Heshbon and Jazer

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

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

The Levites were given a total of 48 cities and their suburbs as commanded by Moses.

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

I liked Guzik's observation and application: "The striking thing about this list is that God wanted the Levites 'sprinkled' all throughout the land of Israel. He never intended there to be one 'state' of Levi, but every tribe was to have the priestly influence and presence in their midst. In the same manner, Christians (being priests, 1 Peter 2:5 and 2:9) are to be 'sprinkled' all throughout the world and society, instead of heading off to make a 'Christian country' somewhere."

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

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

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

The chapter closes with a summary statement that the LORD gave the people of

Israel all the land that He had promised to give Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were the recognized ruling authority in the land although they still had enemies in the land. At this point the LORD gave them rest from attack from their enemies.

The final verse declares an important truth: The LORD delivered on every promise He had made to the house of Israel; He did not fail on one single thing.

I love this quote from Alan Redpath: "In the light of the Cross, is it not true that the enemy has no right to dwell in the land? Is it not true that Satan's claim to your life was taken from him at Calvary? Is it not true that sin has no right to a foothold in the life of the child of God? Is it not true that Satan has no power in the presence of Omnipotence? Is it not true that by virtue of His blood and His resurrection, Jesus Christ is pledged to destroy the enemy utterly? Is it not true that in the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit there is strength for every temptation, grace for every trial, power to overcome every difficulty?"