

## Notes on Joshua 21

© Copyright David E. Pratte, December 22, 2005

### H. Cities Appointed for the Levites

Verses 1-3

1. Who next requested to receive their possession in the land? What were they given? Where had Moses spoken about this?

#### *The Levites request their land*

All the tribes had received their lands of inheritance, and the cities of refuge had been appointed. One more group of people needed to receive their possession: the Levites. The heads of the Levite houses came before Eleazar and Joshua to request to be given the cities that God had commanded Moses to be given to them.

This was also discussed in Num. 35. The Levites were not to inherit a territory as a tribe, as did other tribes. Instead they were to receive cities scattered throughout the land. This was to include common land around each city.

The common lands would extend outward from the cities themselves. These lands were for the grazing of the Levites' herds, cattle, and all animals. The Levites were to be given 48 cities altogether, of which six would be cities of refuge where the manslayer could flee (as described in chap 20).

Tribes with larger land holdings would be required to give a larger number of cities to the Levites, and tribes with smaller land holdings would give fewer cities.

Verses 4-8

2. The Levites were divided into what three families? Which of these included the priests?
3. How many cities did the priests receive, and in what tribes were they?
4. How many cities did the rest of that family receive, and where were they?
5. For each of the other two families tell how many cities they received and where they were located.

#### *The number of cities assigned by family*

The Levites were divided into three families according to the sons of Levi. The Kohathites, descendants of Kohath, included the descendants of Aaron who would include the priests. The descendants of Aaron were to be given thirteen cities in Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. The other Kohathites were to be given ten cities in Ephraim, Dan, and the half tribe of Manasseh west of Jordan.

The descendants of Gershom, the Gershomites, were to be given 13 cities from Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh east of Jordan.

Then the descendants of Merari, the Merarites, were to be given 12 cities from Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

Verses 9-42

6. How many cities did the Levites receive altogether?

#### *The cities named*

These verses name the 48 cities given to the Levites. Again, we will not try to specifically identify them and their location.

The only point of particular interest is the fact that Hebron was appointed a city for the Levites, but it had already been given to Caleb. The text explains that the city with its common lands was given to the Levites, but Caleb was given the fields around the city along with the villages that surrounded it.

Verses 43-45

7. What promise had now been fulfilled? List **b/c/v** where the promise had been given.

8. Case Study: Suppose someone says God must give Israel the land of Palestine when Jesus returns in order to fulfill the promise to Abraham. How would you respond? Give **b/c/v**.

### ***Fulfillment of the land promise***

God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he would make their descendants a great nation, give them the land of Canaan, and through their descendants would come a great blessing on all nations (salvation through Jesus) – see Gen. 12:2,3,7; 15:5-8,18-21; 13:15,17; 18:18; 22:17,18; 24:7; 26:3,4,24; 28:3,4; 32:12.

This passage of Joshua expressly states that God did fulfill that promise. See also on 23:14; cf. 11:23. Specifically, the account says that God gave Israel all the land that He had sworn to their fathers to give. They took possession of the land and dwelt in it.

In the land, He gave them rest. Their enemies could not withstand them, but the Lord delivered their enemies into their hands. Again, nothing failed of anything good that God had promised to do for Israel. It all came to pass. There is no disputing such plain language.

God gave them the land because of the promises He had made to their fathers. So the passage states. But their keeping the land depended on their own willingness to be faithful (see 23:11-16). They turned out not to be faithful, so they lost the land eventually. But for now they had it as God had promised.

Amazingly, there are those who say that Israel never received all the land God promised to give. So they claim this promise to Abraham must still be fulfilled sometime yet in the future. They also claim that God still has great blessings for the physical descendants of Israel. This plainly contradicts this passage and many others. It simply is a false claim and as such it denies the accuracy of Scripture, specifically the accuracy of Joshua.

For further information, see our articles on premillennialism at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

At this point, God had fulfilled two of these three major promises to Abraham regarding his descendants. The people became a great nation in Egypt. That first promise was fulfilled by the time Moses led them out of Egypt. Now the second promise had been fulfilled as God had led them into the land and subdued it before them.

The only promise remaining to be fulfilled was the promise of a great blessing to come upon all nations. That was fulfilled many years later when Jesus came to die for all men's sins. Meanwhile, until that promise was fulfilled, God worked with the nation of Israel, trying to keep them faithful. This becomes the story of the rest of the Old Testament until the birth of Jesus.

© Copyright David E. Pratte, December 22, 2005

These study notes are copyrighted but are made available free to individuals for personal study.

They must not be reproduced for distribution (other individuals may download their own copy from our web site). In no case may these commentaries be reproduced in any form for sale or a financial fee. All rights reserved. To see our copyright guidelines for more details go to

[www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm)

**For other free Bible commentary study notes, please visit**  
[www.gospelway.com/commentary/](http://www.gospelway.com/commentary/).

**To find topical study notes or online Bible courses about Bible topics, Christianity, and Christian doctrine, see the following links:**

**Free online Bible Study Courses & Lessons – [www.biblestudylessons.com](http://www.biblestudylessons.com)**

**Study our Online Bible Study Guides (the Gospel Way) – [www.gospelway.com](http://www.gospelway.com)**  
**Free e-mail Bible study newsletter - [www.gospelway.com/update\\_subscribe.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/update_subscribe.htm)**  
Information about copyright permission or restrictions - [www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm)