

place where he might dwell among them. If the avenger of blood came to the city, these men were not to deliver the slayer to the avenger of blood. When the fugitive's case had been heard and judgment had been rendered, the elders were to see that the proper execution of the judgment was implemented. In this sense, a fugitive "stood before the congregation." The elders of the city of refuge and the inhabitants of that city passed judgment on behalf of all Israel.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 20

1. Who selected the cities of refuge east of the Jordan?
2. Who selected the cities of refuge west of the Jordan?
3. How long was a fugitive to live in the city of refuge?
4. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Naphtali?
5. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Ephraim?
6. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Judah?
7. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Reuben?
8. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Gad?
9. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Manasseh?
10. Were only native-born Israelites protected by these provisions?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 21

- Vv. 1- 8 *Preparation for the assignment of the Levitical cities.* Since the children of Levi did not have any land as an inheritance in Canaan, they were

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to be given forty-eight cities, scattered throughout the borders of the other tribes. Their inheritance was the service of the Lord. Some of them were to attend to the work of the Tabernacle, while others were living in the six cities of refuge which were appointed out of the total of forty-eight cities given to them. The remainder must have been busily engaged in teaching the Law, making copies of the Scriptures, and in general, "waiting on the Lord."

Vv. 9-19 *Cities given to the family of Aaron.* The high priests were all descendants of Aaron. Aaron had four sons—Nadab, Abihu, Ithamar, and Eleazar. Anyone eligible for the priesthood had to be a descendant of these men. Two of them, Nadab and Abihu, were killed (Leviticus 10); and the line of the high priests was traced through the other two sons—Ithamar and Eleazar. A total of thirteen cities were given to the descendants of these high priests.

Vv. 20-26 *Cities given to the family of Kohath.* Both Aaron and Moses were from the family of Kohath, a descendant of Levi. Other prominent men such as Korah were also out of this family. When the Levites were numbered at Sinai, there were 8600 of the family of Kohath among the Levites (Numbers 3:28). During the exodus, these men resided in the area immediately south of the Tabernacle and had charge of the Ark, the Table of Shewbread, the Candlestick, the altars, and the vessels of the

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sanctuary. Whenever camp was broken, these men shouldered these hallowed items of furniture and carried them until camp was set up again. A total of ten cities were given to the families of the children of Kohath.

Vv. 27-33 *Cities given to the family of Gershon.* There were 7,500 Levites, a month old and upward, among the families of the Gershonites when they were numbered at Sinai (Numbers 3:22). These members of the tribe of Levi encamped at the back of the Tabernacle in front of the tents of the tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin. These workers had charge of the coverings of the Tabernacle itself, the hangings, the screen for the door of the tent of meeting, and the cords (Numbers 3:25, 26). Thirteen cities were given to the Gershonites.

Vv. 34-40 *Cities given to the families of Merari.* Twelve cities were given to the remaining families of the Levites by the tribes of Israel. These Levites were all descendants of Merari, one of the descendants of Levi. There were 6,200 of them when they were numbered at Sinai (Numbers 3:34). Their workmen had charge of the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, pins, and cords (Numbers 3:37).

Vv. 41-45 *Summary of the assignment of the land.* A total of forty-eight cities with their suburbs were given to the Levites. Since all the other tribes had received their inheritance of land, the work of assigning the territory to the children of Israel was completed.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *There is a task for every worker.* The children of Israel were very well organized. Captains were appointed over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. The work was thereby properly administered, and the special task of the Levites was the service of the Lord. In Numbers, specific details were given with regard to their service. Such a division of labor reminds us of the fact that there is a job for each Christian.
2. *A laborer is worthy of his hire.* When Jesus sent forth the seventy disciples, two by two, He told them to enter into whatever house would receive them. As they stayed in these houses, they were to eat whatever was given to them. He then said, "The laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7). The Apostle Paul declared that they who preached the gospel should live of the gospel (I Corinthians 9:14). God made provision for the Levites to receive their livelihood at the hands of their fellow Israelites. Not only did they receive a tithe of the income of the land, but they also were given cities in which to dwell.
3. *Jesus never fails.* It is a frequent statement of truth on the part of the Christian that "Jesus never fails." Jesus came into the world that they who beheld Him would behold the Father. He said that if any man had seen Him, he had seen the Father. Jesus' faithfulness is an example of the never-failing goodness of God. When the Israelites had been settled in the Promised Land and cities had been assigned to the Levites, we read, "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:45).

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Preparation for the Assignment of the Levitical Cities
21:1-8

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;

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

1. *Who were the "heads of the fathers of the Levites"?* 21:1

Every tribe was led by the respected elders who had been appointed and recognized. The leaders of the twelve tribes were listed in the first chapter of Numbers. Since the high priests were from the tribe of Levi, Eleazar would be recognized as the primary leader of these Israelites. Under him were the "heads of the fathers' houses" (Numbers 1:4). At the time of the first numbering, the names of the heads of the three families of Levites were listed (Numbers 1:18-20). Their successors must have approached Eleazar and Joshua when they asked for the cities to be assigned to them.

2. *When did God command Moses to give cities to the Levites?* 21:2

God spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, and commanded him to give an inheritance to the Levites. He stipulated that this inheritance was to be cities in which they might dwell. They were also to receive suburbs for the cities (Numbers 35:1, 2). Such provision made it possible for them to have some cattle and other beasts. They could also erect their houses in which to live and perhaps have some small vegetable crops.

3. *Where were the cities given to the children of Aaron?* 21:4

A total of thirteen cities were given to the children of Aaron. These lay within the borders of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon. Thus, all the cities given to the children of Aaron were on the west side of the Jordan and in the south part of the territory.

4. *Where were the cities given to the family of Kohath?* 21:5

Since all the children of Aaron were also descendants of Kohath, only ten additional cities were given to the remaining families of the Kohathites. These cities were located within the borders of the tribes of Ephraim, Dan,

and the half tribe of Manasseh, who lived west of the Jordan. All of these cities were also west of the Jordan, but they were in the central part of the western territory.

5. *Where were the cities given to the families of the Gershonites?* 21:6

Thirteen cities were given to the families of the Gershonites. These were located within the borders of the tribes of Asher, Naphtali, and the half tribe of Manasseh which lived east of the Jordan. These cities were, thus, located on both sides of the Jordan River, but were all in the extreme northern part of the Promised Land.

6. *Where were the cities given to the families of Merari?* 21:7

Twelve cities were given to the descendants of Merari. These were located within the borders of the tribe of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. The cities assigned to these Levites were more scattered than any of the others. Some of them were east of the Jordan and some were west of the Jordan. Some of them were in the north—in the tribe of Zebulun, and some were in the far south—in the tribe of Reuben. Others were in the central part of the eastern territory—within the borders of the tribe of Gad.

Cities Given to the Family of Aaron 21:9-19

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.

10 Which the children of Aaron, being of the families of the Kohathites, who were of the children of Levi, had: for their's was the first lot.

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.

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

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,

14 And Jattir with her suburbs, and Eshtemoa with her suburbs,

15 And Holon with her suburbs, and Debir with her suburbs,

16 And Ain with her suburbs, and Juttah with her suburbs, and Beth-shemesh with her suburbs; nine cities out of those two tribes.

17 And out of the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon with her suburbs, Geba with her suburbs,

18 Anathoth with her suburbs, and Almon with her suburbs; four cities.

19 All the cities of the children of Aaron, the priests, were thirteen cities with their suburbs.

7. *What important cities were given to the children of Aaron? 21:10-19*

Several of the cities given to the children of Aaron were well known and figured prominently in later Israelite history. Jattir, for example, was one of the cities to which David sent spoils from Ziklag (I Samuel 30:27). This town lay twelve miles south of Hebron. The ruins of Attir have been located on a hill at this point. Hebron, a city of refuge, was one of the most famous cities in the entire land. Gibeon was famous as the home of the Hivites, who had tricked Joshua into making a peace treaty with them. Anathoth was the home of high priests in the times of David.

8. *What special provision was made with regard to Hebron? 21:11*

Since Caleb had asked for territory in the South and had been given Hebron and its suburbs, a provision was made for him to have jurisdiction over the villages which

belonged to Hebron. The fields that surrounded the city were also left in Caleb's possession.

Cities Given to the Family of Kohath 21:20-26

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.

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,

22 And Kibzaim with her suburbs, and Beth-horon with her suburbs; four cities.

23 And out of the tribe of Dan, Eltekeh with her suburbs, Gibbethon with her suburbs,

24 Aijalon with her suburbs, Gath-rimmon with her suburbs; four cities.

25 And out of the half tribe of Manasseh, Tanach with her suburbs, and Gath-rimmon with her suburbs; two cities.

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

9. What important cities were given to the families of the Kohathites? 21:20-26

Prominent among the cities given to the Kohathites was Shechem, which was also one of the cities of refuge. Gezer was on the Shephelah, and was one of Solomon's fortified cities. Beth-horon was a point on the western border of Benjamin and served to identify the line between Benjamin and Dan. Aijalon was the point over which the moon stood when Joshua prayed for an extension of time as he fought against the kings of the South. Tanach has been excavated in recent times and was an important citadel on the northern border of Ephraim.

Cities Given to the Family of Gershon 21:27-33

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.

28 And out of the tribe of Issachar, Kishon with her suburbs, Dabareh with her suburbs,

29 Jarmuth with her suburbs, En-gannim with her suburbs; four cities.

30 And out of the tribe of Asher, Mishal with her suburbs, Abdon with her suburbs,

31 Helkath with her suburbs, and Rehob with her suburbs; four cities.

32 And out of the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, to be a city of refuge for the slayer; and Hammoth-dor with her suburbs, and Kartan with her suburbs; three cities.

33 All the cities of the Gershonites according to their families were thirteen cities with their suburbs.

10. What important cities were given to the families of Gershon? 21:27-33

The families of Gershonites were given Kedesh, which was also a city of refuge. In addition, they had jurisdiction over En-gannim, which is the modern Jenin, a town of four thousand inhabitants. They also possessed Golan, east of the Sea of Galilee. This was an important city in Bashan and was one of the cities of refuge.

Cities Given to the Family of Merari 21:34-40

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,

35 Dimnah with her suburbs, Nahalal with her suburbs; four cities.

36 And out of the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with her suburbs, and Jahazah with her suburbs,

37 Kedemoth with her suburbs, and Mephaath with her suburbs; four cities.

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,

39 Heshbon with her suburbs, Jezer with her suburbs; four cities in all.

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.

11. What important cities were given to the families of Merari? 21:30-40

Jokneam, a city located on a high hill, overlooking the valley of Jezreel, belonged to these people. Definitive archaeological excavations are yet to be undertaken at this site. They also had two cities of refuge—Bezer and Ramoth-Gilead. The families of the Merarites also lived in Heshbon, which had been the capital city of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who was defeated by Moses.

Summary of the Assignment of the Land 21:41-45

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

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

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.

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

45 There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

12. *What was the total number of cities? 21:41*

Moses had commanded Joshua to give the children of Levi a total of forty-eight cities—six cities of refuge and forty-two other cities (Numbers 35:6, 7). Joshua was faithful in fulfilling the will of God in this matter. He, Eleazar, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel were careful to give the exact number of cities to the Levites.

13. *What were the "suburbs"? 21:42*

When the original instructions were given by God to Moses, He ordered suburbs to be given to the Levites. He specified that these were to reach out a thousand cubits from the city wall on every side (Numbers 35:1-5). Evidently these suburbs were strips of land around the cities where the Levites could tether their animals and plant some small vegetable crops. They did not have enough room for vineyards or large fields of grain, but they were able to raise some produce for their tables. This would supplement their sustenance which they received from the tithe given by the other tribes.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 21

1. How many cities were given to the families of Aaron?
2. How many cities were given to the other Kohathite families?

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3. How many cities were given to the families of Gershon?
4. How many cities were given to the families of Merari?
5. Which family possessed Shechem?
6. Who possessed Kedesh?
7. Who possessed Ramoth-Gilead?
8. What was the total number of cities given to the Levites?
9. How many of these were cities of refuge?
10. Were any of God's promises left unfulfilled?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 22

Vv. 1- 9 *The dismissal of the eastern tribes.* The war of conquest had been finished. Land had been distributed to the tribes receiving an inheritance west of the Jordan. The three eastern tribes had fulfilled their promise of assisting to conquer the land, and they were now ready to return to their possessions east of the Jordan. Joshua called the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh and sent them home from Shiloh.

Vv. 10-20 *An altar erected at Jordan.* When the three eastern tribes reached the valley of the Jordan River they stopped on the west side and erected an altar. Their actions were reminiscent of the two memorials which Joshua and the children of Israel erected in the Jordan Valley when they crossed over on dry land near Jericho. Their motive in building this altar was misunderstood for a time, and it nearly caused a civil war in Israel.