

Joshua 21:1-45
Rest in Peace and Worship

NKJ Joshua 21:1 Then the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites came near to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the children of Israel.

2 And they spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The LORD commanded through Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with their common-lands for our livestock."

3 So the children of Israel gave to the Levites from their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their common-lands:

4 Now the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites. And the children of Aaron the priest, who were of the Levites, had thirteen cities by lot from the tribe of Judah, from the tribe of Simeon, and from the tribe of Benjamin.

5 The rest of the children of Kohath had ten cities by lot from the families of the tribe of Ephraim, from the tribe of Dan, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh.

6 And the children of Gershon had thirteen cities by lot from the families of the tribe of Issachar, from the tribe of Asher, from the tribe of Naphtali, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan.

7 The children of Merari according to their families had twelve cities from the tribe of Reuben, from the tribe of Gad, and from the tribe of Zebulun.

8 And the children of Israel gave these cities with their common-lands by lot to the Levites, as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses.

9 So they gave from the tribe of the children of Judah and from the tribe of the children of Simeon these cities which are designated by name,

10 which were for the children of Aaron, one of the families of the Kohathites, who were of the children of Levi; for the lot was theirs first.

11 And they gave them Kirjath Arba (Arba was the father of Anak), which is Hebron, in the mountains of Judah, with the common-land surrounding it.

12 But the fields of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as his possession.

13 Thus to the children of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), Libnah with its common-land,

14 Jattir with its common-land, Eshtemoa with its common-land,

15 Holon with its common-land, Debir with its common-land,

16 Ain with its common-land, Juttah with its common-land, and Beth Shemesh with its common-land: nine cities from those two tribes;

17 and from the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon with its common-land, Geba with its common-land,

18 Anathoth with its common-land, and Almon with its common-land: four cities.

19 All the cities of the children of Aaron, the priests, were thirteen cities with their common-lands.

20 And the families of the children of Kohath, the Levites, the rest of the children of Kohath, even they had the cities of their lot from the tribe of Ephraim.

21 For they gave them Shechem with its common-land in the mountains of Ephraim (a city of refuge for the slayer), Gezer with its common-land,

22 Kibzaim with its common-land, and Beth Horon with its common-land: four cities;

23 and from the tribe of Dan, Eltekeh with its common-land, Gibbethon with its common-land,

24 Aijalon with its common-land, and Gath Rimmon with its common-land: four cities;

25 and from the half-tribe of Manasseh, Tanach with its common-land and Gath Rimmon with its common-land: two cities.

26 All the ten cities with their common-lands were for the rest of the families of the children of Kohath.

27 Also to the children of Gershon, of the families of the Levites, from the other half-tribe of Manasseh, they gave Golan in Bashan with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), and Be Eshterah with its common-land: two cities;

28 and from the tribe of Issachar, Kishion with its common-land, Daberath with its common-land,

29 Jarmuth with its common-land, and En Gannim with its common-land: four cities;

30 and from the tribe of Asher, Mishal with its common-land, Abdon with its common-land,

31 Helkath with its common-land, and Rehob with its common-land: four cities;

32 and from the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), Hammoth Dor with its common-land, and Kartan with its common-land: three cities.

33 All the cities of the Gershonites according to their families were thirteen cities with their common-lands.

34 And to the families of the children of Merari, the rest of the Levites, from the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with its common-land, Kartah with its common-land,

35 Dimnah with its common-land, and Nahalal with its common-land: four cities;

36 and from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with its common-land, Jahaz with its common-land,

37 Kedemoth with its common-land, and Mephaath with its common-land: four cities;

38 and from the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), Mahanaim with its common-land,

39 Heshbon with its common-land, and Jazer with its common-land: four cities in all.

40 So all the cities for the children of Merari according to their families, the rest of the families of the Levites, were by their lot twelve cities.

41 All the cities of the Levites within the possession of the children of Israel were forty-eight cities with their common-lands.

42 Every one of these cities had its common-land surrounding it; thus were all these cities.

43 So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it.

44 The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand.

45 Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

We'll be looking at these verses as two sections, first verses 1-42 and then second 43-45.

As we look at verses 1-42, I am going to resist the urge to make this mostly into a Biblical Geography lesson, so I won't mention much about the actual location of these Levite cities except to say that obviously they weren't located in one particular tribe's allotment, but were instead scattered throughout the allotments of the other Tribes of Israel.

Now why was that, and who were the Levites anyway?

Well as the name suggests the Levites were the descendents of Jacob's son Levi. You may remember from Genesis that Levi and Simeon had tricked the people of the city Shechem and killed them in revenge for the Prince of that City having defiled their sister Dinah. Their father Jacob had been appalled at their deceitful and murderous actions and the way it had made him a stench in the nostrils of the peoples of the land. So on his death bed, as he was bestowing blessings upon his sons, Jacob had actually cursed Simeon and Levi saying:

Genesis 49:7 “Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel.”

And just like all of the other blessings and cursings that Jacob had uttered that day, this too came to pass. Simeon’s allotment was actually within that of Judah, and Levi properly had no allotment of their own at all, they instead had cities scattered throughout the land and common ground for their livestock in the areas of those cities, but they properly owned no land of their own. They are even described as Sojourners in the land. But as we shall see, God ended up turning what was a curse into a blessing.

Levi had three sons, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari and so there were 3 major divisions or clans amongst the Levites, the Gershonites, the Kohathites and the Merarites.

The Levites were scattered throughout the land specifically because into their hands was committed the worship and religious teaching of Israel. They were the ones who attended to the tabernacle – the tent of meeting, the Priests were drawn from their tribe, they were the ones who led the sacrifices and the singing, and they were also the teachers of the Law. And thus by distributing his Priests and Teachers throughout the tribe, the Lord ensured that none of the 12 tribes would be without religious instruction and oversight. As Calvin put it: ***“they were everywhere to keep watch, and preserve the purity of sacred rites unimpaired.”***

Now the Levites were maintained by the tithes of the people of the Lord, and they were permitted to take part of the meat offered up as sacrifices to the Lord:

Joshua 13:14 Only to the tribe of Levi he had given no inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance, as He said to them.

What might be seen as curse, became then a blessing for Levi and for all Israel. The Levites had the Lord God as their inheritance, and thus the people were pastored, and taught, and maintained in their worship of the Lord who had led them there.

The tribe of Levi although it was small was thus very important, they were after all the key facilitators of WORSHIP in the land in of Israel and also produced many of Israel’s greatest leaders, prophets, and Priests. For instance: Moses and Aaron were the Grandsons of Kohath, then there were amongst others, Eli, Ezra, & of course John the Baptist.

Now let us turn from the Levites to these incredibly important verses in 43-45. I say incredibly important because they are the “Tellic Note” of Joshua. Tellic comes to us from the Greek word *Tellos* meaning end. They tell you the summary or the end of what the author of Joshua was trying to get through in all the prior chapters of Joshua. We read the Tellic note for John this morning (John 20:31) ***“but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”***

What does it tell us, that the Lord God had kept his covenant promises made to the Patriarchs. He had sworn to make them a nation, to deliver them out of bondage, to bring them to a land not their own, to subdue the inhabitants and deliver that land into their hand. This the Lord God did, he failed in nothing.

But some would say, hey wait a minute, Andy we've been reading verses that showed how the conquest was already stalling, how the people had failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land. What's with all this rest and peace and possession stuff then?

Well friends, the answer there is that the promises of the Lord hadn't failed. He had kept every one of them. I mean think about the long view, it seemed impossible to begin with that an old childless wanderer named Abraham should become the Patriarch of a mighty nation that that nation would be the source of blessing to all the nations, and yet that is exactly what the Lord brought to pass.

Now the great confederations of the Canaanites had been subdued, great city states cast down, and none of the nations dared to attack them any more. So the failures that were occurring were in the increasing compromise of the people. There wasn't a Jericho or a Hebron in the land that could stand against them if they endeavored in faith to go up and possess them, no Anakim who could fight them and win, no Chariot whose wheels wouldn't come off if they would just be brave and steadfast. The problem was they were beginning to look at the walls of the Jerichos and say "They are too high" and the Anakim and say "they are too big" and the Chariots were becoming too terrifying. Their faith was waning, and their willingness to just get along was increasing.

The promises were good. The people were failing to believe them.

Three quick applications:

First: First notice how in the laying out of the promised land, worship is not an ancillary but a critical component provided for by the Lord.

If you ever look at the layout of the old Puritan pilgrim cities of New England, you know what is at the heart of every village? THE CHURCH. You see they knew what we have forgotten, that the strength of a society is not in its industry, or its armed forces, or even its academies, a society is only as strong as its relationship to the living God. Take that out of the way, and no army is mighty enough, no academy brilliant enough to stop it from falling. Israel prospered when it followed the Lord and believed his promises, she declined as she forgot them and followed the idols of the nations. The same is true of every individual, you are only as strong as your connection to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second: The Levites in a sense are a picture of all the people of the Lord. They do not own the land, they are sojourners in it. Brothers and Sisters, Christians are a pilgrim people. Our inheritance is not land, even the promised land, it is the heavenly country. That is what we are striving for. The Levites were blessed in not being too closely tied to the land.

Do you know why Deer are so easy to shoot from a tree stand? Because they so seldom look up. If you watch them as they move they are constantly looking at the ground, looking for food to forage. The worldling is unfortunately like that, he keeps his gaze fixed on the ground, seeking to accumulate dust and make it last. He will never be able to do so.

Third: Peace, and rest and worship brothers and sisters, all the things prefigured in this section are things we have a foretaste of but are ultimately things we will only have in full after the return of Jesus when all of the promises we have in Him will be yea and amen. When every enemy of the gospel is forever subdued and when Heaven and earth are reunited. We are looking forward, I hope to that

Sabbath rest. But until then keep looking up, and keep moving, and acting in faith on that which the Lord has vouchsafed to you.