

Joshua 21 – The Levites: Rewards and Responsibilities

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Gill, Poole, JFB, Trapp, Delitzsch, Henry, Zekveld, INT, Calvin, Eclectic,

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: After all the tribes of Israel received their allotted land in Canaan it was finally the Levites' turn to get theirs. Today you will learn of the Levites (利未支派) getting their land and you will hear of their consequent responsibilities.

Our headings are:

The Levites Request their Land to fulfill their Responsibilities

The Levites Receive their Land to fulfill their Responsibilities

All Israel Rested in the Land and fulfilled their Responsibilities

Our goals are: **That you will see the need of the church, having received eternal life, to spread throughout the world shining the light of the full Gospel and leading those in darkness to look to Jesus.**

The Levites Request their land to Fulfill their Responsibilities

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."

1. The Levites came to the leaders to ask for their land.

2. Who were these Levites and why did they need this land? Levites were the religious leaders.

Specifically...

The Levites were sacrificers (献祭者) for God's people, leading them in worship.

Deuteronomy 33:8 And of Levi he said: "Let Your Thummim and Your Urim be with Your holy one, Whom You tested at Massah, And with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah, 9 Who says of his father and mother, 'I have not seen them'; Nor did he acknowledge his brothers, Or know his own children; For they have observed Your word And kept Your covenant. 10 They shall **teach Jacob Your judgments**, And Israel Your law. They shall **put incense before You**, And a **whole burnt sacrifice** on Your altar.

You today are the royal priests of God's people, working under your great High Priest, Jesus Christ. You are also to pray for the world.

The Levites were instructors (教导者) - teachers of God's people.

Malachi 2:7 "For the **lips of a priest should keep knowledge**, And *people* should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

God gave the Great Commission of the Old Testament to the Levites. They were a remarkable picture of the Lord's church today. You are called to teach of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the need for people to put and keep their faith in him.

The Levites were disciplinarians (训导者) **and guardians of God's people.** Remember when Israel joined and worship idols?

Exodus 32:26 then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the LORD'S side—come to me." **And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.** 27 And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and **let every man kill** his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" 28 So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.

A church that fails in discipline is not a true church and you should not be in it. You must protect the church from sin.

3. But the Levites were more than their job. They were more than 9-5'ers. They served as the unifying (使联合的, 使统一的) **factor of the body of believers.** They held the nation together and showed the unity by their work and words. They were like the blood that flowed through Israel's body. (See how this contradicts centralized church structures.)

Similarly today **you are kept together by Christ's blood – by his Word and his Spirit. You hold each other up.**

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Christ your Redeemer (拯救者) **is everywhere present, sanctifying you by His Word and Spirit,** not just on Sundays, and not just when His word is preached, just as the Levites permeated the land every day of the week. The Levites were like salt on meat – **they had a preserving value** 保存的价值. It is strange that some people argue that there are 2 kingdoms, the church and the state, and that the church is governed by the Word of God and the state is governed by natural law (which is a horrible misnomer 不适当的名称, 误称). The church has different functions from the state, but they are both to work together as one because they are both under the Lord's dominion. So you are the reason the world is preserved. Without you, there is no reason for the world to exist. So spread your influence! Even as you are like the Levitical sojourners!

4. Why did the Levites get their land last? It was not because Israel put little interest on spiritual things. Far from it! The Levites were last to get their land because they needed to know where the rest of the tribes would live so that they would know where to go. Example: If a tribe did not conquer all the land allotted to them, the Levites could only settle where that tribe had conquered. For example, in the case of Dan, they went out in the farthest parts of Canaan, probably not wanting to fight with the Canaanites and settled. That might not have been part of the plan of where the Levites were to go, but they had to go there where the Danites settled.

5. In fact, the Levites were well-provided for based on God's direction.

And doesn't God command similarly today? Cursed is the nation that does not provide well for the servants of God.

Deuteronomy 12:19 "Take heed to yourself that you **do not forsake the Levite as long as you live** in your land.

1 Timothy 5:18 For the Scripture says, "**You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain**," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (因为经上说：“牛在场上踹谷的时候，不可笼住它的嘴。”又说：“工人得工价是应当的。”))

1 Corinthians 9:13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of *the things* of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings* of the altar? 14 Even so **the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.**

And do you see how forgiving God is? Levi was cursed with being forced to spread out for murdering the men of Shechem (Genesis 49:7), but then the Lord forgave them and gave them homes, though they still were spread.

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:

6. Israel as a nation responded and provided a large and liberal maintenance for the Levites – even what they needed for their animals. What is interesting here is that the grazing land (牧场) was held in common with the other residents. **This sharing of land showed that the Levites were not superior to the rest of the nation**, but were in every way common except for their religious duties. They could marry (were not required to be celibate 独身者), they could build houses, save up their money, educate their children, and every other duty as regular citizens.

The Levites Receive their Land to Fulfill their Responsibilities

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.

1. By God's appointment, 48 cities were allotted to the Levites throughout Israel, east and west of the Jordan, and north and south of Israel. There was not place where worship was not. God's worship had to be accessible to all. **These were 48 lampstands (灯台) in the house of God.** The lampstand in the temple represented the light of God.

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 (Aaronic)**, 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.

2. The 1st family of the Levites (from Kohath) to whom God allotted land (by lot through Joshua) were the priests. This shows the priority that God gave to worship and you would do well to remember this. All their towns were listed.

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.

3. Then the 2nd family to get their reward was also from Kohath – but were non-priests. The 3rd family, Gershon, and the 4th family, got their rewards as well.

4. Then all the cities each family was allotted was named. There was no doubt what belonged to the Levites. Even the land their animals shared was listed. One thing of note: Caleb gave Hebron to the Levites. They then generously gave Hebron as a city for the wrongly accused to find comfort and protection. What generosity! True Christians are always known for their generosity, even you have little! BTW, don't get bogged down with the details here. These details are simply proof God's faithfulness. He said Messiah would come, and nothing could stop him.

All Israel Rested in the Land and Fulfilled their Responsibilities

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.

1. Then after the religious apparatus (陈设, 用品) was put in place, Israel rested in peace. The **land was holy** because God was worshipped everywhere. Yes, the land was good, and yes, their enemies were destroyed or contained, but when holiness and worship were established, Israel then had the ground for **continuous peace**.

Now if the ministry of the Levites scattered throughout the whole land in 48 cities brought peace, how much more does the work of Jesus Christ – who shed His own blood to remove our guilt and make peace with God? And did he not send His Spirit to write the law upon your hearts today? You are a people set apart for God - a people dedicated to God through the ministry of the **Gospel of Jesus Christ! You are not darkness; you are light in the Lord...so live as children of light! Shine the light. You are the salt of the earth so it is preserved. You have the message of salvation. Spread it.** There is no peace without the Word. But this peace was not maintained magically. Israel had to be taught God's law and obey God's law.

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

2. All of God's promises were fulfilled. Israel's enemies were destroyed. They enjoyed freedom from slavery. They enjoyed wealth beyond measure so they would lend and not have to borrow. They enjoyed being feared by their enemies. **Question: If everything God said had come to pass, how come they were still Canaanites (迦南人) in the land?** God delayed destroying the Canaanites because Israel was not large enough to fill the land. God was using the Canaanites like land sitters – to take care of the land until Israel was ready to fully occupy it.

Conclusion:

The Levites requested their land to fulfill their duty. Their duty was to spread throughout the land and lead God's people in worship, teaching them to observe what God commanded, and opening the door for converts. So Israel gave them their allotted land to fulfill their duties. After worship was properly established and supported, all Israel rested in the land and fulfilled their duties. Surely they could rest knowing they were close to God...or rather, God was close to them.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: You have rest...and anointed in Christ – the one greater than the Levites. **As priests of the great High Priest 大祭司, are you in the business of praying for your brothers every day and night and for the lost?** (See why the prayer meeting is a good thing.) **As prophets, are you shining the Gospels** to those under your care? Do you take time to teach your family? **As kings, are you willing to discipline in your home and churches?** Are you able to rebuke people who do wrong in the church? Do you have the knowledge and the courage to rebuke those who water down God's truth and so weaken the faith of God's people? God has equipped you to do these things and he expects nothing less from you.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, you could be either like people of Jericho (耶利哥), who refused to surrender to the God and perished, or you could be like Rahab and her family, who put their faith in the coming Savior (救主) and were saved. There is no other option. Put your faith in the Savior and receive what he has done for sinners or die in your sins.