



Study Guide: Joshua – Chapter 21

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This study guide provides an educational overview of Joshua Chapter 21 using a verse-by-verse structure, theological context, and application-oriented insights grounded in Scripture.

Introduction

Joshua Chapter 21 marks a significant moment in the book of Joshua as it details the allocation of cities to the Levites, the priestly tribe. This chapter contributes to the overall narrative by showing how God's covenantal promises are being fulfilled through the establishment of a religious and social order within the Promised Land. Readers should watch for how the Levites, who do not receive a territorial inheritance like the other tribes, are nonetheless provided for through designated cities and pasturelands, emphasizing their unique role in Israel's spiritual life and the importance of maintaining holiness in the community.

Context

Joshua 21 follows the conquest and division of the land among the tribes of Israel, as recorded in the preceding chapters. The immediate literary context is the completion of the land allotments, fulfilling God's promise to the patriarchs. Historically, this chapter is set during the early settlement period in Canaan, after the Israelites have crossed the Jordan River. The Levites, as the priestly tribe, do not receive a contiguous territory because their role is centered on religious duties rather than agricultural or military functions. Key figures include Joshua, who oversees the distribution, and the heads of the Levite families who receive their cities. The chapter highlights the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, emphasizing obedience and the establishment of a holy community.

Outline

The chapter begins with Joshua consulting the leaders of the Levite families regarding their inheritance, setting the stage for the distribution of cities. It then describes the specific cities given to the Levites from the territories of the other tribes, emphasizing the fulfillment of God's command. The narrative continues by listing the total number of cities



allocated and the provision of pasturelands surrounding these cities. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary statement about the completion of the land allotment and the Levites' satisfaction with their inheritance, underscoring the faithfulness of God's promises.

Verse-by-Verse Study

Verses 1-3: Joshua gathers the heads of the Levite families to inquire about their inheritance, highlighting the unique status of the Levites who do not receive a portion of land like the other tribes. This sets the tone for the chapter's focus on their special role.

Verses 4-8: The Levites are assigned cities from the tribal territories of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. This allocation ensures that the Levites are distributed throughout Israel, enabling them to serve the entire nation effectively.

Verses 9-19: The chapter continues with the cities given to the families of the Gershonites and Merarites from the lands of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. This detailed listing underscores the thoroughness and fairness of the distribution.

Verses 20-26: The Kohathites receive their cities from the tribes of Ephraim, Dan, and half of Manasseh. The attention to detail in the allocation reflects the importance of maintaining order and fulfilling God's commands precisely.

Verses 27-42: A comprehensive list of the 48 cities given to the Levites is presented, including six cities designated as cities of refuge. This section highlights the Levites' role in justice and sanctuary within Israel.

Verses 43-45: The chapter concludes by affirming that the Lord fulfilled His promises to Israel through Joshua's leadership, and the Levites are content with their inheritance. This affirmation reinforces the faithfulness of God and the legitimacy of Joshua's leadership.

Key Themes

One key theme is the provision for the Levites, illustrating God's care for those dedicated to spiritual service. The chapter emphasizes the holiness of the community by ensuring the Levites are integrated throughout the land, maintaining religious instruction and worship. Another theme is faithfulness, as God's promises to Israel are fulfilled through the careful distribution of land and cities. The role of the Levites as mediators between God and the people is also highlighted, showing the importance of spiritual leadership in the



life of the nation.

Cross-References

Numbers 35 provides background on the cities of refuge and the Levites' inheritance, clarifying the legal and religious framework for the allocations in Joshua 21. Deuteronomy 10:8-9 explains the special status of the Levites and their lack of territorial inheritance, reinforcing the reasons for the city allotments. 1 Chronicles 6 gives genealogical details about the Levites and their cities, offering historical confirmation and additional context. Finally, Hebrews 7 discusses the priesthood in a New Testament context, helping readers understand the ongoing significance of the Levitical role and its fulfillment in Christ.

Application

Modern disciples can learn from Joshua 21 the importance of honoring and supporting those who serve in spiritual leadership roles. Just as the Levites were provided for to enable their ministry, contemporary believers are called to uphold and encourage pastors, teachers, and ministry workers. The chapter also challenges Christians to recognize the value of community holiness and the distribution of spiritual resources across the body of Christ. Additionally, it invites reflection on God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises, encouraging trust in His provision even when circumstances seem uncertain.

Summary

Joshua Chapter 21 completes the land allotment narrative by detailing the distribution of cities to the Levites, underscoring their unique role within Israel as spiritual leaders without a territorial inheritance. Through careful allocation of 48 cities and surrounding pasturelands, the chapter highlights God's provision, faithfulness, and the establishment of a holy community. This distribution not only fulfills divine commands but also ensures that the Levites are positioned throughout the nation to carry out their priestly duties, reinforcing the covenantal relationship between God and His people under Joshua's faithful leadership.