

Joshua 21-22

21:1-3

Now that the rest of the tribes have received their inheritance, the tribe of priests, the tribe of Levi, comes forward, so that Joshua and the responsible leaders might give them “cities to dwell in.”

They wouldn't own the land, but they would dwell in the land.

This was according to the promise of the LORD, through Moses, back in *Numbers 35:1-5

“Commons lands” (NLT = Pasture lands)

In verses 4-7 we have a general summary of the number of cities the three lines of Aaron received, Kohath, Gershon, and Merrari, for each tribe; with Aaron singled out, since his lineage was the High Priestly lineage. Aaron was a descendant of Kohath.

21:4-5

Kohathites:

The children of Aaron – the High Priestly tribe received 13 cities by lot from Judah, Simeon and Benjamin.

The rest of the children of Kohath received 10 cities by lot from the tribe of Ephraim, Dan, and ½ tribe of Manasseh.

21:6

The children of Gershon received:

13 cities by lot from the tribe of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and ½ the tribe of Mannaseh (in Bashan) (east side of the Jordan)

21:7

The children of Merrari received: 12 cities from Reuben, Gad and Zebulun

In verses 8-40 we have the 48 cities listed by name, given to the children of Aaron, the children of Kohath, the children of Gershon and the children of Merrari.

21:8-19

Cities, by name, for the children of Aaron (13 cities)

21:20-26

Cities, by name for the rest of the children of Kohath (10 cities)

21:27-33

Cities, by name for the children of Gershon (13 cities)

21:34-40

Cities, by name for the children of Merrari (12 cities)

21:41-42

A total of 48 cities for the tribe of Levi to “dwell in” (not own), along with their common lands (pasture land).

*†“Every tribe gave four cities except Judah and Simeon, which gave nine cities between them, and Naphtali, which gave three cities. The cities of refuge, being cities of the Levites (vv. 13, 21, 27, 32, 36, 38), were scattered throughout all the tribes of Israel to fulfill the prophecy of Jacob (Gen. 49:5-7) and to better facilitate their **teaching ministry** to the nation.” - MacDonald, William*

21:43-45

The Lord gave them the **land** (43) (Genesis 12:7)

The Lord gave them **rest** (44a) (Exodus 33:14; Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:9-10; 25:19; Joshua 1:13)

All of this was according to His Word!

Not a man was able to stand against them!

Not a word failed of any good thing, which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. It all came to pass.

Later Joshua will reiterate the certainty of God's Word; not simply as a **wonderful** word, but also as a **fearful** word of warning (***Joshua 23:14-16**).

Not one Word of God's will ever fail; Solomon said the same thing at the dedicaton of the Temple. †1 Kings 8:56, "Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses."

Regarding the "rest"

*"This verse must be read in the light of other Scripture. It does not mean that Israel occupied all the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates; instead, it means that the land, which Joshua divided, was in fulfillment of God's promise that He would give them every place that the sole of their feet walked upon (*Joshua 1:3).*

*"God gave Israel victory over all their enemies and then gave them the rest from war (Josh. 21:44; see 1:13, 15; 11:23). What the ten unbelieving spies at Kadesh Barnea said could never happen **did** happen, because Joshua and the people believed God and obeyed His Word." - Warren W. Wiersbe*

22:1-4

The tribe of Reuben, Gad and ½ the tribe of Manasseh had been faithful to the LORD and the people, in the commitment they made to help their brethren on the west side.

I **love** what Joshua tells them in v. 3, "You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God."

The NIV uses the word "deserted" – they had not deserted their brethren. They clung to their commitment and completed the job, at no small price, imagine being away from your family for over 7 years! They were good brothers, good soldier's who would receive an "honorable discharge."

What a contrast to the uncaring question of Cain back in †Genesis 4:9 "Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where *is* Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. *Am* I my brother's keeper?"

Well...yes, to a certain degree, isn't that a large part of what brothers are? Isn't that a little bit of what brothers are supposed to do? We're not their Savior, but we are their brothers; this is true physically, for those biological brothers, and I would say this is especially true Spiritually, for those Spiritual brothers...and sisters.

These 2 ½ tribes did keep their commitment to help their brethren. Joshua commended them for it, and now releases them to head home, but he does so, as any wise and loving leader would, he sends them off with a warning.

22:5-6

Joshua says it in such a beautiful way, he tells them to live a life, to have a heart, of love and obedience to the LORD their God.

He says, be very careful to do this.

To walk in all God's ways, keeping His commandments, holding firmly to Him, God; serving Him, with all their heart, and all their soul.

Joshua knew there would be tremendous temptation on the other side of the river.

22:7-9

We read in v. 6 how Joshua blessed them, and again in v. 7, *“when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them.”*

It may well have been something like the prayer of Numbers 6:22-27; a prayer for protection, grace, peace and the pleasing presence of God upon their lives.

During the conquest these tribes had accumulated many riches, so Joshua tells them to take those riches home and share it with their people.

(*1 Timothy 6:17-19)

So the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and ½ the tribe of Manasseh returned and departed from the children of Israel...

22:10

This would be a **very** questionable practice...it definitely had the appearance of evil.

*“Before crossing over the Jordan, the soldiers from the two and a half tribes build a **great, impressive altar** near the Jordan River. This was significant not only because of its size, but because of the meaning of an altar. An altar was a place of sacrifice, and both the Israelites and pagans had altars they used for sacrifice.”* – David Guzik

This did not look good. †1 Thessalonians 5:22 commands us to, “[Abstain from every form of evil.](#)” The word translated “form” (1491 *eidos*) speaks of the external or outward appearance. The KJV translates this verse more accurately, “[Abstain from all appearance of evil.](#)”

It was definitely not wise for these 2 ½ tribes to build an altar, and to make matters worse, they did it without the consent of their leaders, not letting anyone from Israel know the motivation of their heart.

So...what do you do, when you hear about something that so clearly “appears” to be evil, being done by your brethren?

22:12

The first thing we see in Israel is:

†1. A heart of confrontation

This heart of confrontation requires 3 things: †[consecration](#), [care](#) and [courage](#).

†[Proverbs 27:6](#) “*Faithful are the wounds of a friend...*”

22:13-18

†2. A heart for conversation

The children of Israel sent Phinehas, along with 10 rulers from the remaining tribes and “...they spoke with them...” (v. 15)

Now, we know Israel was consecrated to God in that they were ready to fight and to cut out the cancer if necessary, but before they took those types of measures, before they made that final judgment, they talked with them, they did some investigation, and were willing to reason with them.

†“[He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.](#)” – Proverbs 18:13

It looked like they were sinning against God (v. 16)

Hadn’t they learned from the past? (v. 17; Numbers 25; 24,000 died)

God will judge, not just you, but all of us, if we “tolerate it.” (18)

A heart for confrontation, a heart for conversation, and thirdly, a heart to help:

22:19-20

†3. A heart to help

It's pretty cool how Eleazar not only points out the problem, but he offers a solution; when he sees the sin, he's not dead-set on **kicking out**, he's got a heart to **help them out**.

He says in essence, "I know we've already divided up the land, but if this river is a problem, come on over to our side of the river and we'll work things out, we'll absorb you...you can live with us."

What a blessing when you have a friend willing to help (if necessary).

Again, Eleazar points to the past...warning with the example of Achan (Joshua 7), who through his selfish sin caused the wrath of God to fall on the children of Israel, and 36 soldiers died, he and his family died, and the nation was therefore discouraged and defeated. It's so important that we learn from our past mistakes!

The 2 ½ tribes now respond:

22:21-29

The 2-½ eastern tribes explain the motivation of the making of this massive altar. **They meant well, but they did not do well**. They lacked wisdom in that they did not seek counsel or permission from their leaders, and the fundamental factor for their decision – was fear (v. 24)

This is a perfect example of †Proverbs 29:25, "The fear of man brings a snare..."

In their case, the fear of man superseded the fear of God. It led to a massive mistake, a serious sin; we are not to just go around building altars on our own volition.

Remember what we read earlier in *Joshua 9:14? They did not seek counsel of the LORD. They had a nice little plan to keep the peace, but it wasn't of the Lord, it didn't come from above; it actually came from below.

The other day I was reading in my devotional reading and I came to *Psalm 133:1-3

This Psalm speaks of unity, which was the hope of the 2-½ - unity, but they attempted to do have and maintain unity in the wrong way.

I like what Warren Wiersbe says on this, †*“Unity must come down from above, like the oil running down Aaron’s beard and bathing the twelve jewels on the breastplate (Ex. 29:5-7), or like the dew descending on the mountains. You can manufacture uniformity by manipulating people, and exerting pressure, but true unity can come only from God by His Spirit.”*

Often-times people use that cliché in the aftermath, “the Lord knows my heart.” And yes, maybe you meant well - but when we do not **do** well, it’s not good; the heart of the problem is that we really don’t seek the Lord.

I like what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in †2 Corinthians 8:21: *"For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men."* (NIV)

They explain this whole thing to the children of Israel...they meant well, but they did not do well...and the LORD had mercy upon them.

22:30-34

The Lord worked everything out...everyone was pleased in the end, but what a blessing to see that the children of Israel took steps of obedience, if in fact this had been a real rebellion. We learn from them...the children of Israel had a:

1. Heart for confrontation (this would require consecration, care and courage)
2. Heart for conversation
3. Heart to help

They show us what true friends do, the get involved in the fear of God, for the glory of God!