

Last, but not Least.

Joshua 21.

Sunday evening, September 19, 2010.

I. Who were the Levites?

- A. The Levites were the descendants of Levy; one of the sons of Jacob.
Levy had three sons, from which came the three families of the tribe of Levy, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. A sub-division of the Kohathites were the descendants of Aaron who became Israel's priesthood.
- B. According to the passages we have read there were 48 cities assigned to the Levites.
 - 1. There were some cities in the territory of all twelve tribes. The larger tribes had more cities; the smaller tribes had fewer.
 - 2. The 6 cities of refuge were among the 48 Levitical cities. There were three cities on each side of the Jordan river.
- C. The cities were assigned by lot, in the same way that each tribe had gotten its inheritance. The larger families got more cities; the smaller families got fewer.
- D. It is to be noted that the descendants of Aaron, which constituted the priesthood, got 13 cities assigned to them by lot, all of which were in the tribal area's of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon; Simeon being an "island" inside the tribe of Judah.
 - 1. This is a remarkable act of providence in light of the future rift which would take place following the reign of Solomon. It put the entire priesthood inside the Southern kingdom of Judah where the temple had been built in Jerusalem by Solomon.
 - 2. It is all the more remarkable considering that the tabernacle for over 400 years would remain in Shilo, in Ephraim, some 20 miles outside Judah and Benjamin. The priesthood was made to commute during these years.
- E. Finally, it is to be noted that the distribution of the Levitical cities concludes the historical event of Israel inheriting and settling into the Land.

II. What did the Levites do?

What was the purpose of them having their own cities, and being evenly distributed throughout the land? What role did they play in the life of the nation of Israel? The broader context of scripture gives us answers to these questions.

- A. They were in charge of the physical structure of the tabernacle and later the Temple. During the wilderness wanderings they were camped immediately around the tabernacle. Numbers 1:50-53.
- B. They were the custodians and administrators of the tithes and other offerings. 1 Chronicles 9:26-29.
 - 1. They themselves were supported by Israel's tithes.
 - 2. They supported the priesthood by paying tithes on Israel's tithes.
- C. They prepared the showbread and assisted the priests in preparing the sacrifices, especially at Passover time, while keeping the altars in a state of readiness
- D. They were teachers of the law Deut. 33:10.
- E. They were judges; especially so in the cities of refuge. Deut. 17:9
- F. They were door-keepers, or gate keepers whenever and wherever there was a

- gathering of God's people, especially so at Israel's great festivals.
- G. They were the musicians at the temple service.
- H. They supervised weights and measures in the land. 1 Chron. 23:29.
- I. They were exempt from military duty, yet were to share in the spoils of war. Numbers 31:30, 42-47; Numbers 1:47-54 compared to 1 Chronicles 12:26.
- J. They were Israel's scribes, making new copies especially of the sacred books of the Scriptures, but of other valuable writings as well.

III. Some lessons to be learned from Levy's inheritance.

- A. Concerning the Lord's strange and inconvenient providences:
 With hindsight we can see the wisdom of God at work in putting all the priestly cities in the Southern kingdom; so as to preserve the ministry of temple and sacrifice in the midst of His people, even as the Northern kingdom perished. Yet for all those generations of priests, especially those from the southern most region, it was a most inconvenient arrangement which would not be remedied for over four hundred years.
 Happy are we if we can humble ourselves under the inconvenient arrangements of providence in our lives while trusting (rather than questioning) the wise purposes of an all-wise God.
- B. Concerning Levy being the last one to get its inheritance:
 In some ways we would have expected Levy, as the representative of the Lord's ministry in Israel, to be the first one to receive its inheritance. Would that not have been in line with "Putting the Kingdom of God and its righteousness first?" There are two perspectives in scripture on "Putting first things first."
 1. Looking at the Kingdom from the Lord's perspective He always puts His children first; they are His treasure; the apple of His eye; the reason He came from heaven to earth to redeem them.
 2. Looking at the Kingdom through the eyes of the Lord's children, they put the Lord and His kingdom and His righteousness first because He is the Lord.
 Levy represented the Lord in the midst of His people; therefore they put all of the Lord's children first, and themselves last.
 The Lord's ministers would do well to adopt this truth for themselves today, for the nature of the kingdom has not changed.
 You would do well to internalize this truth with regards to those you seek to minister to in the Name of Jesus.
- C. By way of the distribution of the Levites throughout the Land there was a manifestation and a diffusion of the Lord's spiritual kingdom throughout the land. In this way the Lord dwelt in the midst of His people.
 How blessed are we in new covenant times with a much more full diffusion of God's grace and truth throughout the towns and villages of at least our western world. Let us never take this diffusion for granted; it is the way God still abides among us through the ministry of His word and sacraments and in His churches. The Levitical ministry largely failed in Old Covenant times as the Levites largely lost their sense of calling and purpose. Similar things may be said of the era of the Christian church. Let us watch so as not to loose our sense of calling and purpose.