

Joshua 14:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance.

Analysis

Joseph's double portion: 'For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance.' Joseph's blessing through his two sons receiving tribal status (Genesis 48:5) meant he effectively got double portion—firstborn's inheritance despite Reuben's biological priority. This fulfilled Jacob's elevation of Ephraim and Manasseh to tribal status (Genesis 48:5). With Levi not receiving territory, the twelve territorial tribes became: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh. The provision for Levitical cities with pasturelands shows practical care—while not owning territory, Levites needed living space and capacity to keep some livestock for family support. This balance between 'God as inheritance' and practical provision models kingdom living: spiritual priority without despising physical needs.

Historical Context

Jacob's adoption of Joseph's sons (Genesis 48) created the legal mechanism for Joseph's double portion—compensation for his suffering and faithfulness during brothers' betrayal and Egyptian exile. This elevation also meant firstborn's privilege (double portion, Deuteronomy 21:17) went to Joseph rather than Reuben,

who forfeited it through sin (Genesis 49:3-4). The twelve-tribe structure remained constant despite variations in lists: sometimes Joseph counted as one (with Ephraim/Manasseh as sub-units), sometimes as two (with Levi excluded), sometimes Levi included with Joseph as one. The forty-eight Levitical cities (chapter 21) with surrounding pasturelands provided practical support. Archaeological evidence shows some of these cities were fortified, serving dual religious and defensive purposes. The Levitical cities' distribution throughout Israel ensured religious instruction was geographically accessible, preventing centralization that might breed corruption. This dispersed clergy model influenced later Protestant emphases on distributed ministerial presence.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Joseph's double portion (reward for faithfulness through suffering) encourage perseverance during unjust treatment?
2. What does balancing spiritual priority (God as inheritance) with practical provision (cities and pasturelands) teach about holistic kingdom living?
3. How should ministry structures balance spiritual calling with practical needs of those serving?

Interlinear Text

מְנַשֶּׁה הַ מַט וְתַּשְׁנַת יְסֻדְּ בָּנִי
H3588 H1961 For the children of Joseph were two tribes
H1121 H3130 H8147 H4294 H4519 Manasseh

בְּאֶרֶץ לְלִוִּים לְאַפְּגָת יְמִינָה
and Ephraim H3808 therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land
H669 H5414 H2506 H3881 H776

לְמִקְנִית מִן גְּרָשִׁים מִלְשָׁבֵת עָרִים אֶם כִּי
H3588 H518 save cities to dwell in with their suburbs for their cattle
H5892 H3427 H4054 H4735

וְלֹא כִּי
and for their substance
H7075

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 48:5 (Parallel theme): And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.

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