

Joshua 15:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Lebaoth, and Shilhim, and Ain, and Rimmon: all the cities are twenty and nine, with their villages:

Analysis

And Lebaoth, and Shilhim, and Ain, and Rimmon: all the cities are twenty and nine, with their villages—**Lebaoth** (לְבָאוֹת, "lionesses") appears only here, suggesting a place where lions or lionesses were common. **Shilhim** (שִׁלְחִים) is unidentified. **Ain** (עַיִן, "spring" or "fountain") indicates a water source, vital in the Negev. **Rimmon** (רִמּוֹן, "pomegranate") appears elsewhere combined with Ain as "En-rimmon" ("spring of the pomegranate," Nehemiah 11:29), suggesting close proximity or merger of two settlements.

The summary statement "all the cities are twenty and nine" creates interpretive challenges—the actual count varies depending on how compound names are reckoned. This mathematical discrepancy has generated scholarly discussion but likely reflects ancient counting methods (some cities counted as one unit, villages not always tallied separately) or textual transmission variations. The purpose isn't mathematical precision but demonstrating comprehensive possession of God's promised inheritance.

Ain ("spring") and Rimmon ("pomegranate") together suggest an oasis settlement with water and fruit trees—a picture of blessing in the desert. Springs were precious in the Negev, determining settlement locations and survival. Pomegranates symbolized fruitfulness and abundance, appearing on the high priest's robe (Exodus 28:33-34) and temple decorations (1 Kings 7:18).

Historical Context

The Negev's harsh climate made springs vital for settlement. Communities clustered around perennial water sources or developed cistern systems to capture runoff. Ain's name indicates a natural spring, making it strategically valuable. Archaeological surveys identify numerous Iron Age settlements near water sources, confirming biblical patterns.

The numeric discrepancy (29 cities claimed, but different count when tallied) parallels similar issues in ancient city lists. Scribal practices, compound names (like Hazar-gaddah counted as one or two), and classification questions (when does a village become a city?) explain variations. These textual features demonstrate authentic ancient composition rather than modern fabrication—later editors would likely harmonize counts if inventing the text.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the image of Ain and Rimmon—a spring producing pomegranates in the desert—picture God's ability to bring fruitfulness and blessing in spiritually arid circumstances?
2. What does the comprehensive listing of Judah's cities, even with textual complexities, teach about God's thoroughness in fulfilling promises down to specific details?
3. How should encountering difficult textual issues (like numerical discrepancies) affect your confidence in Scripture's overall reliability and divine inspiration?

Interlinear Text

וּלְבָא זֹת	וְשִׁלְחֵי יָם	וְעַיִן	וְרִמּוֹן	כָּל	עָרֵי יָם	עֲשָׂרֵי יָם
And Lebaoth	and Shilhim	and Ain	and Rimmon	H3605	all the cities	are twenty
H3822	H7978	H5871	H7417		H5892	H6242
וְתֵשַׁע	וּמִצְרֵיהֶן:					
and nine	with their villages					
H8672	H2691					

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