

Joshua 16:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the separate cities for the children of Ephraim were among the inheritance of the children of Manasseh, all the cities with their villages.

Analysis

And the separate cities for the children of Ephraim were among the inheritance of the children of Manasseh, all the cities with their villages—this verse reveals an important exception to tribal boundaries: Ephraim received **separate cities** (he'arim hamivdalot, הָעָרִים הַמִּבְדָּלוֹת, "the set apart cities") within Manasseh's territory. The term **separate** or **set apart** indicates these were enclaves—Ephraimite cities surrounded by Manassite territory.

This arrangement likely addressed practical concerns: Ephraim's larger population relative to Manasseh (Numbers 26:34, 37 shows Ephraim with 32,500 and Manasseh with 52,700, though Ephraim received the blessing of greatness in Genesis 48:19). The phrase **all the cities with their villages** (כָּל-הָעָרִים וְחִצְרֵיהֶן) indicates complete settlements including surrounding agricultural areas and smaller dependent villages, not just walled cities.

This interpenetration of tribal territories demonstrates flexibility within the overall allotment system, prioritizing practical needs over rigid boundary maintenance. It also required cooperation between Ephraim and Manasseh despite their separate identities—foreshadowing how God's people must balance distinct callings with mutual interdependence. The arrangement worked because both tribes descended from Joseph, sharing common heritage despite separate inheritances.

Historical Context

The practice of one tribe receiving cities within another's territory appears elsewhere in Joshua (e.g., Levitical cities scattered among all tribes). This created complex territorial mosaics rather than simple contiguous blocks, requiring ongoing cooperation and preventing tribal isolation. Ancient Near Eastern parallels show similar arrangements where enclaves existed within larger territorial units, often for administrative or strategic reasons. The specific Ephraimite cities within Manasseh aren't listed here but may include sites like Taanach and Megiddo, though some texts assign these to Manasseh with notes that Israel couldn't fully possess them. The tribal allotment system balanced competing priorities: maintaining distinct tribal identities while ensuring adequate resources for varying population sizes and promoting intertribal cooperation essential for national unity. This complexity reflects the real-world challenges of settling a diverse population across varied terrain with existing Canaanite enclaves that Israel failed to fully conquer.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the enclave system—Ephraim within Manasseh's territory—illustrate the need for flexibility and cooperation within the body of Christ despite distinct callings and boundaries?
2. What does this arrangement teach about balancing individual/group identity with mutual interdependence and shared resources?
3. How can you maintain your distinct calling while graciously sharing space and resources with others whose inheritances overlap with yours?

Interlinear Text

הָעָרִים יִם	הַמִּבְדָּלוֹת	בְּנֵי	אֶפְרַיִם יִם	בֵּת יוֹרְ	
all the cities	And the separate	for the children	of Ephraim	were among	
H5892	H3995	H1121	H669	H8432	
נַחֲלָת	בְּנֵי	מְנַשֶּׁה	כָּל	הָעָרִים יִם	וְחִצְרֵיהֶן:
the inheritance	for the children	of Manasseh	H3605	all the cities	with their villages
H5159	H1121	H4519		H5892	H2691

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