

Joshua 19:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Kattath, and Nahallal, and Shimron, and Idalah, and Beth-lehem: twelve cities with their villages.

Analysis

And Kattath, and Nahallal, and Shimron, and Idalah, and Beth-lehem: twelve cities with their villages.

This verse lists five specific cities within Zebulun's inheritance, then summarizes the total as **twelve cities with their villages** (arim sheteim-esreh ve-chatzereyhen, עָרִים שְׁתֵּי־עָשָׂרָה וְחֻצְרֵיהֶן). The number twelve resonates throughout Scripture—twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twelve gates in the New Jerusalem. Whether intentional symbolism or coincidental, the twelve cities provided Zebulun with adequate urban centers for administration, commerce, and refuge.

Among the cities listed, **Beth-lehem** (בֵּית לֶחֶם, "house of bread") shares its name with the more famous Judean city where Jesus was born, but this is Bethlehem of Zebulun (distinct from Bethlehem Ephrathah). The name's meaning—"house of bread"—testifies to agricultural productivity, fitting for fertile lower Galilee. The existence of multiple cities with identical names in ancient Israel required geographical qualifiers ("Bethlehem of Judah," Joshua 19:15 implies "Bethlehem of Zebulun").

Shimron (שִׁמְרוֹן) was previously mentioned as a Canaanite royal city whose king Joshua defeated (Joshua 11:1; 12:20). Its inclusion in Zebulun's inheritance demonstrates the progression from conquest to settlement—from defeating Canaanite kings to Israelite families dwelling in their former cities. This transformation from enemy stronghold to covenant inheritance illustrates

redemption's pattern: Christ conquers territories held by Satan, then establishes His people as rightful inhabitants (Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:19-22). What the enemy once controlled becomes the dwelling place of God's redeemed children.

Historical Context

Archaeological excavations at Tel Shimron reveal extensive Late Bronze Age Canaanite occupation followed by Israelite settlement in the Iron Age, confirming the biblical narrative's basic framework. The transition from Canaanite to Israelite material culture appears in pottery styles, architectural patterns, and religious objects. While debates continue about the conquest's precise nature and timing, the archaeological record supports population change in Canaan during this period.

The phrase "cities with their villages" (chatzer, חָצֵר) distinguishes fortified urban centers from surrounding unwalled settlements. Cities provided military defense, administrative centers, and commercial hubs, while villages housed agricultural workers who farmed surrounding lands. This urban-rural structure characterized ancient Israel's economy and society. Each tribe needed both fortified cities for protection and agricultural villages for food production.

Nahallal (נַחֲלָל) was later assigned to the Levites (Joshua 21:35), though Judges 1:30 records that Zebulun failed to fully drive out Nahallal's Canaanite inhabitants, who became forced laborers instead. This partial obedience pattern appears throughout Judges—Israel conquered but didn't completely cleanse the land, leading to ongoing compromise and syncretism. The failure to fully execute God's commands regarding Canaanite removal eventually produced the spiritual decline that culminated in exile, validating Joshua's warnings about compromise (Joshua 23:12-13).

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the transformation of cities like Shimron—from enemy strongholds to Israelite inheritance—illustrate the gospel pattern of Christ conquering Satan's territory and establishing believers as God's dwelling place?
2. What does Zebulun's failure to fully drive out Canaanites from cities like Nahallal teach about the long-term consequences of partial obedience?
3. How should the phrase 'twelve cities' encourage us to see God's providential care in providing adequate resources for His people's calling?

Interlinear Text

וְקָטָת	וְנַהֲלָל	וְשִׁמְרוֹן	וְיִדְאָל הַ	וּבֵית	לְחֵם
And Kattath	and Nahallal	and Shimron	and Idalah	H0	and Bethlehem
H7005	H5096	H8110	H3030		H1035
עָרֵים	שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂר הַ	וּמִצְרֵיהֶן:			
cities	twelve	H6240	with their villages		
H5892	H8147		H2691		

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 11:1 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph,