

Joshua 21:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they spake unto them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle.

Analysis

And they spake unto them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with the suburbs thereof for our cattle.

The Levites' appeal "**The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses**" (Yahweh tsivah beyad-Moshe, יְהוָה צָה בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה) grounds their request in direct divine revelation rather than human need or entitlement. The phrase beyad (בְּיַד, "by the hand of") designates Moses as God's authorized mediator—these weren't Moses' ideas but Yahweh's commands transmitted through Moses (Numbers 35:1-8, Deuteronomy 18:6-8). This demonstrates proper biblical advocacy: citing God's explicit Word rather than appealing to sentiment, tradition, or pragmatic arguments.

The request for "**cities to dwell in**" (arim lashev, עָרִים לְשֵׁבֶת) with "**suburbs thereof for our cattle**" (migreshayhen livhemtenu, מִגְרַשֵּׁיָהוּ לְבַקְעָתֵנוּ) shows the Levites understood both their spiritual calling and practical needs. Though they received no territorial inheritance like other tribes (Numbers 18:20-24), God commanded provision for housing and livestock. The migash (מִגְשָׁה, pasture land) extended 1000 cubits around each city, balancing the Levites' priestly dependence on tithes with agricultural subsistence. This models how Christian ministers deserve material support (1 Corinthians 9:13-14, 1 Timothy 5:17-18) without owning church property as personal inheritance.

The setting "**at Shiloh**" (beShilo, בְּשִׁלּוֹה) is significant—Shiloh housed the Tabernacle and represented Israel's worship center. The Levites made their claim where God's presence dwelt, before both civil (Joshua) and priestly (Eleazar) leadership. This illustrates proper ecclesiastical order: spiritual matters addressed in God's presence, with proper authorities cooperating in their distinct spheres.

Historical Context

This conversation occurred at Shiloh in central Canaan, where the Tabernacle was set up after the initial conquest (Joshua 18:1). Shiloh served as Israel's religious capital for over 300 years until its destruction during the judges period (Jeremiah 7:12-14). The Levites' petition came after the land distribution to the other twelve tribes was complete—they waited for others to receive inheritances before claiming their own provision, demonstrating patience and trust in God's timing.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does grounding your requests in God's revealed Word (rather than personal preference or need) change how you pray and make decisions?
2. What does the balance between spiritual calling and practical provision teach about Christian vocation and material support for ministers?
3. How does the Levites' patient waiting for God's timing before claiming their cities challenge your impatience in seeking God's promises?

Interlinear Text

לְאָמֵן רְכִבָּעַן בָּא רַץ	יִדְבֶּר וְאַלְיָה מְבָשֵׁל הַשִּׁלֹּה	וְאַלְיָה מְבָשֵׁל הַשִּׁלֹּה	וְאַלְיָה מְבָשֵׁל הַשִּׁלֹּה	וְאַלְיָה מְבָשֵׁל הַשִּׁלֹּה	וְאַלְיָה מְבָשֵׁל הַשִּׁלֹּה
And they spake	H413	unto them at Shiloh	H7887	in the land	H776
	H1696				H3667
The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses	H3068	H6680	H3027	H4872	H0
				H5414	H5892
עַר יִם לְנוּ לְתַת מֵשׁ הַבַּיִד צְרוּ הַיְהוָה	לְשֵׁבֶת מִתְּמִימָנָה וּמִגְּרַשִּׁים	לְבַבְּמִתְּמִימָנָה וּמִגְּרַשִּׁים			
to dwell in with the suburbs thereof for our cattle	H3427	H4054	H929		

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 18:1 (Parallel theme): And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them.

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