

# 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, יהוה צוה בַּיַּד־מֹשֶׁה) grounds their request in direct divine revelation rather than human need or entitlement. The phrase beyad (בַּיַּד, "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 lashevet, עָרִים לְשֶׁבֶת) with "**suburbs thereof for our cattle**" (migresheyhen livhemtenu, מִגְרָשֵׁיהֶן לִבְהֶמְתָּנוּ) 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 migrash (מִגְרָשׁ, 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, שִׁלֹה) 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

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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

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**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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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

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וַיִּדְבֹּר ו	אֵלֵיהֶם	בְּשֵׁל ה	בְּאֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	לְאמֹר
And they spake	H413	unto them at Shiloh	in the land	of Canaan	saying
H1696		H7887	H776	H3667	H559
יְהוָה	צִוָּה	בְּיַד	מֹשֶׁה ה	לָתֵת	לָנוּ
The LORD	commanded	by the hand	of Moses	to give	H0
H3068	H6680	H3027	H4872	H5414	H5892
לָשֶׁבֶת בַּת	וּמִגְרָשִׁיָּהּ	לְבָהֶמֶתָנוּ:			
to dwell in	with the suburbs	thereof for our cattle			
H3427	H4054	H929			

## Additional Cross-References

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**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.