

Joshua 21:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the families of the children of Kohath, the Levites which remained of the children of Kohath, even they had the cities of their lot out of the tribe of Ephraim.

Analysis

The families of the children of Kohath, the Levites which remained of the children of Kohath (מִשְׁפְּחוֹת בְּנֵי־קֹהַת הַלְוִיִּם הַנּוֹתָרִים מִבְּנֵי קֹהַת, mishpechot benei-Kehat haLevi'im hanota'rim mibbenei Kehat)—The phrase hanota'rim ("which remained") distinguishes the non-Aaronic Kohathites from Aaron's priestly descendants already allocated thirteen cities. Kohath was Levi's second son (Exodus 6:16), and his line split into two groups: Aaron's descendants (priests) and the rest (Levites who assisted but did not sacrifice). The Kohathites had the sacred duty of carrying the ark, table, lampstand, and altars during wilderness journeys (Numbers 4:4-15), though only after priests covered them—direct contact meant death.

They had the cities of their lot out of the tribe of Ephraim (וַיְהִי עָרֵי גּוֹרָלָם מִמַּטֵּה אֶפְרַיִם, vayehi arei goralam mimateh Efrayim)—The word goral (lot) emphasizes divine providence, not human choice, in allocation. Ephraim, Joseph's younger son who received the birthright blessing (Genesis 48:17-20), now provided cities for Levitical service.

Historical Context

The Kohathites descended from Moses and Aaron (Exodus 6:18-20). While Aaron's line received the priesthood, Moses' sons became ordinary Levites (1 Chronicles 23:14-15), demonstrating that spiritual privilege passes through God's choice, not

human lineage. During the wilderness period, Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16) arose from Kohathite envy of Aaron's priesthood, resulting in 250 leaders being consumed by fire. This allocation 40 years later shows God's faithfulness despite that community's earlier rebellion.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does the division between Aaronic priests and other Kohathites teach about God sovereignly distributing spiritual gifts and callings?
2. How does Moses' humble acceptance of his sons becoming ordinary Levites model servant leadership?
3. Why did God entrust the most sacred objects (ark, altars) to Kohathites who could not directly touch them without dying?

Interlinear Text

וּלְמִשְׁפַּח וְ	מִבְּנֵי י	קֹהַת	הַלְוִיִּם	הַנּוֹתָרִים
And the families	of the children	of Kohath	the Levites	which remained
H4940	H1121	H6955	H3881	H3498
מִבְּנֵי י	קֹהַת	וְהָיָה	עֲרֵי י	גֹּזְלֵם
of the children	of Kohath	H1961	even they had the cities	of their lot
H1121	H6955		H5892	H1486
מִמֵּטֵּה	אֶפְרַיִם:			
out of the tribe	of Ephraim			
H4294	H669			

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 6:66 (Parallel theme): And the residue of the families of the sons of Kohath had cities of their coasts out of the tribe of Ephraim.

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