

# Joshua 21:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs.

## Analysis

**And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs.**

Israel's obedience is emphasized: they "**gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance**" (vayitnu veney-Yisrael laLeviim menachalatam, וַיִּתְּנוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לַלְוִיִּם מִנַּחֲלָתָם). The verb natan (נָתַן, "gave") indicates voluntary transfer—the tribes willingly surrendered portions of their hard-won territories to support the Levites' ministry. The phrase menachalatam (מִנַּחֲלָתָם, "from their inheritance") shows this was costly obedience—giving from what they possessed, not from surplus. Each tribe sacrificed cities they could have used for their own expansion.

The motivation "**at the commandment of the LORD**" (al-pi Yahweh, עַל־פִּי יְהוָה) literally means "according to the mouth of Yahweh." The phrase al-pi (עַל־פִּי) indicates direct divine command requiring compliance. Israel's obedience demonstrates covenant faithfulness—they recognized that supporting Levitical ministry was not optional philanthropy but commanded stewardship. This prefigures New Testament teaching on supporting gospel ministers (Galatians 6:6, Philippians 4:15-18).

The comprehensive phrase "**these cities and their suburbs**" (et-hearim haeleh veet-migresheyhen, אֶת־הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְאֶת־מִגְרֵשֵׁיהֶן) shows complete provision—not just cities but surrounding pasture lands. This wasn't token compliance but full

obedience to God's specific instructions. Reformed theology emphasizes that true obedience extends to details, not just general principles—Israel gave exactly what God commanded, in the manner He prescribed.

## Historical Context

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The forty-eight Levitical cities (Joshua 21:41) represented significant sacrifice from each tribe. Some cities were strategic locations (like Hebron and Shechem), yet tribes surrendered them for priestly service. This distribution occurred after the main conquest but before Joshua's death, during the period when tribes were settling their territories. The system functioned throughout Israel's monarchy, with Levitical cities serving as teaching centers, judicial hubs, and cities of refuge.

## Related Passages

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**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

## Study Questions

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1. What portions of your 'inheritance' (time, resources, gifts) is God calling you to give for gospel ministry and kingdom work?
2. How does Israel's willing sacrifice from their own possessions challenge consumer Christianity that gives only from surplus?
3. What does obedience 'at the commandment of the LORD' teach about doing what God commands because He commands it, not only when it's convenient?

## Interlinear Text

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וַתֵּן ו	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל	לְלוֹיִם	מִנְחֻלָּתָם	אֶל
<b>gave</b>	<b>And the children</b>	<b>of Israel</b>	<b>unto the Levites</b>	<b>out of their inheritance</b>	
H5414	H1121	H3478	H3881	H5159	H413
פִּי	יְהוָה	אֶת	הָעָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	אֵת
<b>at the commandment</b>	<b>of the LORD</b>		<b>these cities</b>		
H6310	H3068	H853	H5892	H428	H853
מִגְרָשֵׁיהֶן:					
<b>and their suburbs</b>					
H4054					

## Additional Cross-References

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**Genesis 49:7** (References Israel): Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.