

Joshua 21:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Helkath with her suburbs, and Rehob with her suburbs; four cities.

Analysis

Helkath with her suburbs, and Rehob with her suburbs; four cities.

These final two cities complete Asher's contribution to Gershonite Levites. Helkath (הלכח) derives from cheleq (חֵלֶק, "portion" or "allotment"), emphasizing the concept of inheritance central to Joshua's land distribution. The city is mentioned in the border description of Asher (Joshua 19:25) and called Hukok in 1 Chronicles 6:75—either a variant spelling or indication that the city was known by multiple names. Its exact location remains uncertain.

Rehob (רחוב, "broad place" or "street") was a common place name—multiple cities bore this designation (Numbers 13:21; Judges 18:28). The Rehob assigned to Levites in Asher differs from these other locations. The name suggests a spacious, prosperous city—appropriate for a Levitical center requiring pasture lands for livestock. The phrase "four cities" totals Asher's contribution, maintaining the chapter's careful accounting of each tribe's provision for Levitical support.

The distribution of these cities throughout Asher ensured Levitical presence across the tribe's territory—coastal areas, inland regions, northern and southern sections all had access to priestly teaching and judicial administration. This comprehensive coverage modeled the ideal that every Israelite should have reasonable access to instruction in God's law (Deuteronomy 31:9-13).

Historical Context

Asher's coastal location provided economic advantages through maritime trade and fishing. The fertile coastal plain supported agriculture while proximity to Phoenician cities enabled commercial exchange. This prosperity brought both blessing and temptation—Levites in Asher faced the challenge of maintaining covenant distinctiveness in an economically integrated region where Phoenician culture exerted strong influence.

The allocation of four cities to Gershonites from Asher, combined with previous allocations, demonstrates systematic provision across all tribal territories. No region lacked Levitical presence; no tribe was excused from supporting Levites. This universal distribution prevented regionalism—Levites couldn't identify exclusively with one tribe but served all Israel, fostering national unity under God's law.

Asher's territory later became contested between Israel and Phoenicia, eventually falling under foreign control during the Assyrian conquests. The tribe's mixed record of faithfulness and compromise (Judges 5:17 questions their commitment during Deborah's battle) may have contributed to their vulnerability. Yet even in decline, Levitical cities maintained witness to covenant truth.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the comprehensive distribution of Levitical cities challenge modern church planting strategies to reach every community?
2. What does Asher's economic prosperity coupled with spiritual compromise teach about the relationship between wealth and faithfulness?

3. In what ways can you support faithful ministry presence in areas where cultural pressure against biblical truth is strongest?

Interlinear Text

אֶת	חֶלְקֶת	וְאֶת	מִגְרָשָׁהּ	וְאֶת	רְחֹב	וְאֶת
H853	Helkath	H853	with her suburbs	H853	and Rehob	H853
	H2520		H4054		H7340	
	מִגְרָשָׁהּ	עַרְיִם	אַרְבַּע:			
	with her suburbs	cities	four			
	H4054	H5892	H702			

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