

Joshua 21:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And out of the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, to be a city of refuge for the slayer; and Hammoth-dor with her suburbs, and Kartan with her suburbs; three cities.

Analysis

And out of the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, to be a city of refuge for the slayer; and Hammoth-dor with her suburbs, and Kartan with her suburbs; three cities.

Naphtali's allocation begins with Kedesh in Galilee, another city holding dual function as Levitical city and *ir miklat* (עיר מקלט, "city of refuge"). The name Kedesh (קדש) means "holy" or "sacred," from the root *qadosh* (קדש). Multiple cities bore this name; the designation "in Galilee" (בגליל) distinguishes this northern location from other Kedesh cities. Tel Kedesh in Upper Galilee preserves the ancient site.

Kedesh in Galilee gained prominence as the mustering point where Deborah summoned Barak to fight Sisera (Judges 4:6, 9-10). The city's role as refuge center required Levitical administration of complex legal cases—distinguishing intentional murder from accidental manslaughter demanded both legal expertise and spiritual discernment (Numbers 35:22-25). The combination of legal judgment and refuge ministry illustrates how God's justice and mercy always operate together.

Hammoth-dor (המֹת דָּר, "hot springs of Dor") is called Hammon in Joshua 19:35 and Hammoth in 1 Chronicles 6:76—variations reflecting the city's identification

by its thermal springs. The name suggests natural hot springs in the area. Kartan (קְרָתָן) appears as Kirjathaim in 1 Chronicles 6:76. The variations in biblical manuscripts remind us that ancient scribes worked without standardized spelling, yet the substance of God's Word remains reliable despite minor textual differences.

Historical Context

Naphtali occupied the mountainous Galilee region north of the Sea of Galilee, bordering Phoenicia and Syria. Jacob's blessing described Naphtali as "a hind let loose" giving "goodly words" (Genesis 49:21)—suggesting freedom and eloquence. The tribe's territory was rugged but beautiful, with varied topography from the Sea of Galilee to the Lebanese mountains. This geographical diversity required Levites who could minister effectively across different communities.

Kedesh in Galilee became one of the first Israelite territories conquered by foreign powers—Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria captured it in 732 BCE (2 Kings 15:29), beginning the northern kingdom's dismemberment. Isaiah prophesied that this region of darkness would see great light (Isaiah 9:1-2), fulfilled when Jesus began His ministry in Galilee (Matthew 4:12-16). The Messiah's ministry centered in formerly pagan, conquered territory—demonstrating that God's redemptive purposes overcome human failure.

The allocation of three cities from Naphtali completed the northern Levitical network. Gershonite cities in Naphtali, Asher, Issachar, and half-Manasseh created comprehensive coverage of Israel's northern territories—areas most exposed to pagan influence from surrounding nations.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Kedesh's dual role as refuge city and mustering point for holy war illustrate the tension between mercy and justice in God's character?
2. What does Jesus' ministry focus on Galilee teach about God's redemptive purposes in places marked by past compromise and defeat?
3. In what ways can the church provide both spiritual refuge for the guilty and equipping for spiritual warfare?

Interlinear Text

את קָרְצֵן מִקְלֵט עָרִים אֲתָה נִפְתָּלִי וּמִתְּמִיטָה
And out of the tribe of Naphtali cities of refuge for the slayer
H4294 H5321 H853 H5892 H4733 H7523 H853

דָּרְשָׁנְדָרְמָה וְאֶת בְּגָלִיל קְרֵדֶשׁ מִגְרָשָׁה
Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs and Hammon
H6943 H1551 H853 H4054 H853 H0 H2576

עָרִים מִגְרָשָׁה וְאֶת קִרְיָת אַת מִגְרָשָׁה וְאֶת
with her suburbs and Kartan with her suburbs cities
H853 H4054 H853 H7178 H853 H4054 H5892

שֶׁלֶשׁ:
three
H7969

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 6:76 (Parallel theme): And out of the tribe of Naphtali; Kedesh in Galilee with her suburbs, and Hammon with her suburbs, and Kirjathaim with her suburbs.

Joshua 20:7 (Parallel theme): And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah.

