

Joshua 21:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Heshbon with her suburbs, Jazer with her suburbs; four cities in all.

Analysis

Heshbon with her suburbs, Jazer with her suburbs; four cities in all.

These final two cities complete Gad's contribution to Merarite Levites. Heshbon (חֶשְׁבֹן) was originally the capital of Sihon, king of the Amorites, before Moses conquered it (Numbers 21:25-26; Deuteronomy 2:24-30). The city's transformation from pagan Amorite capital to Levitical city illustrates redemptive conquest—what served idolatry now serves Yahweh. Heshbon became a border city contested between Israel, Moab, and Ammon throughout biblical history. Jeremiah and Isaiah include it in oracles against Moab (Isaiah 15:4; 16:8-9; Jeremiah 48:2, 34, 45), confirming its eventual loss to Israel's enemies.

The name Heshbon derives from chashab (חָשַׁב, "to think, reckon, or devise"), possibly referring to the city's strategic importance requiring careful planning. Song of Solomon mentions "the pools of Heshbon" (Song 7:4), indicating the city's water resources—crucial for settlement in the semiarid Transjordan plateau. Levites stationed here would have access to good water and agricultural land while serving in a culturally contested frontier.

Jazer (יָזֶר, "he helps") was a fortified Amorite city conquered by Moses (Numbers 21:32; 32:1). The city and its surrounding pasture lands were specifically requested by Gad and Reuben for their livestock (Numbers 32:3-4), indicating particularly productive grazing. Jeremiah's oracle "O vine of Sibmah, I will weep for thee with the weeping of Jazer" (Jeremiah 48:32) suggests viticulture in the

region. The phrase "four cities in all" confirms Gad's total contribution, completing the eastern Transjordanian allocation.

Historical Context

Heshbon's prominence as Sihon's capital made its conquest particularly significant—defeating this powerful Amorite kingdom opened Transjordan to Israelite settlement. The city's conquest is recounted multiple times in Scripture (Numbers 21:21-30; Deuteronomy 2:24-37; 3:2, 6; Joshua 12:2; 13:17; Judges 11:19-21; Nehemiah 9:22; Psalm 135:11; 136:19-20), emphasizing its importance in salvation history. Israel's victory over Sihon demonstrated that God could defeat formidable enemies, encouraging faith for the Canaan conquest.

Archaeological excavations at Tell Hesban (ancient Heshbon) reveal extensive Iron Age occupation, confirming sustained Israelite presence during the judges and monarchy periods. However, the site also shows later Moabite control, consistent with biblical and Moabite Stone testimony about fluctuating borders. The city's contested nature meant Levites there ministered in an unstable political environment—requiring courage and adaptability.

Jazer's productive pasture lands made it economically valuable, generating tithes supporting Levites while also attracting Moabite and Ammonite covetousness. The city's loss to Israel's enemies (Jeremiah 48:32) represents not merely territorial defeat but spiritual tragedy—land God gave for supporting His ministers fell to pagans serving false gods. This pattern warns that covenant blessing can be lost through unfaithfulness, though God's ultimate purposes cannot fail.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Heshbon's transformation from pagan capital to Levitical city illustrate the gospel's power to redeem what formerly served evil?
2. What does the contested nature of Transjordanian cities teach about the spiritual warfare inherent in maintaining biblical witness in hostile culture?
3. In what ways might material prosperity (like Jazer's rich pastures) create both opportunity for generosity and temptation toward compromise?

Interlinear Text

אֶת	חֶשְׁבוֹן	וְאֶת	מִגְרָשָׁהּ	אֶת	יַעֲזָר	וְאֶת	מִגְרָשָׁהּ
H853	Heshbon	H853	with her suburbs	H853	Jazer	H853	with her suburbs
	H2809		H4054		H3270		H4054
כָּל	עָרֵי	אַרְבָּע:					
H3605	cities	four					
	H5892	H702					

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