

Joshua 21:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites: and the children of Aaron the priest, which were of the Levites, had by lot out of the tribe of Judah, and out of the tribe of Simeon, and out of the tribe of Benjamin, thirteen cities.

Analysis

And the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites: and the children of Aaron the priest, which were of the Levites, had by lot out of the tribe of Judah, and out of the tribe of Simeon, and out of the tribe of Benjamin, thirteen cities.

The allocation **"by lot"** (bagoral, בַּגוֹרָל) demonstrates divine sovereignty in apportioning cities—the goral (lot) was cast seeking God's will (Proverbs 16:33). The Aaronic priests receiving **"thirteen cities"** from Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin strategically placed them in the southern kingdom's heartland, surrounding Jerusalem where the Temple would stand. This wasn't coincidental but divinely ordered—those ministering at the altar lived near the worship center.

"The children of Aaron the priest" (livney Aharon hakohen, לִבְנֵי אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן) distinguishes the high-priestly line from other Kohathites. Only Aaron's descendants could serve as priests (Exodus 28:1), while other Kohathites served as Tabernacle carriers (Numbers 3:27-32). This division within Levi demonstrates God's sovereign appointment—not all Levites were priests, just as not all Christians are pastors or elders, yet all have roles in God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

The phrase **"which were of the Levites"** (asher min-haLeviim, אֲשֶׁר מִן־הַלֵּוִיִּם)

emphasizes that priests were a subset within the Levitical tribe. This hierarchical structure—Israel, then Levi, then Aaron's line—models how God calls some from among His people to specialized service while all remain part of the covenant community.

Historical Context

The thirteen cities given to Aaronic priests clustered around Jerusalem (future temple site), Hebron (patriarchal burial place), and the Judean highlands. This concentration ensured priestly expertise remained near the worship center. Archaeological evidence shows several of these cities (Hebron, Libnah, Jattir) were substantial settlements capable of supporting priestly families. The Aaronic priesthood continued until 70 AD when Rome destroyed the Temple, ending the sacrificial system that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice had already rendered obsolete (Hebrews 7:11-28, 10:1-18).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the lot-casting system demonstrate trust in God's sovereignty over human planning and preferences?
2. What does the distinction between Aaronic priests and other Kohathites teach about God's sovereign calling to different roles within His people?
3. How should the strategic placement of priests near the worship center inform how we think about equipping and positioning spiritual leaders today?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּצֵא	בַּגּוֹךְ ל	לְמִשְׁפַּחַת	הַקֹּהֲתִי	וְיֶהּ	לְבָנֵי
came out	And the lot	for the families	of the Kohathites	H1961	and the children
H3318	H1486	H4940	H6956		H1121
אָהֲרֹן	הַכֹּהֵן	מִן	הַלְוִיִּם	וּמִמֶּנֶּה	הַיְּהוּדָה
of Aaron	the priest	H4480	which were of the Levites	and out of the tribe	of Judah
H175	H3548		H3881	H4294	H3063
וּמִמֶּנֶּה	הַשִּׁמְעוֹנִי	וּמִמֶּנֶּה	בִּנְיָמִן	בַּגּוֹךְ ל	
and out of the tribe	of Simeon	and out of the tribe	of Benjamin	And the lot	
H4294	H8099	H4294	H1144	H1486	
עָרֵי	שָׁלֹשׁ	עֶשְׂרֵה:			
cities	thirteen	H6240			
H5892	H7969				

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