

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, בָּגָרָל) 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, לֵבָנִי 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-הַלְּבִיִּם)

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

לְבָנִי יְהָוָה וְבָנֵי קֹהַת וְבָנֵי לְמַשְׁפָחָה תְּבָגַע לֹא
came out And the lot for the families of the Kohathites H1961 and the children H1121
H3318 H1486 H4940 H6956

וְמִמְּפֻט הַלְוִיִּם וְמִמְּפֻט הַבְּנִים וְמִמְּפֻט הַיְהוּדִים
of Aaron the priest H4480 which were of the Levites and out of the tribe of Judah H3063
H175 H3548 H3881 H4294

בָגַע לְבָנֵי בְּרִיתָם וְמִמְּפֻט הַשְׁמִינִית וְמִמְּפֻט הַשְׁמִינִית וְמִמְּפֻט הַלְוִיִּם
and out of the tribe of Simeon and out of the tribe of Benjamin And the lot H1486
H4294 H8099 H4294 H1144

שָׁלַשׁ עָרֵי מַשְׁרָה:
cities thirteen H6240
H5892 H7969

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