

Joshua 21:42

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

These cities were every one with their suburbs round about them: thus were all these cities.

Analysis

These cities were every one with their suburbs round about them: thus were all these cities.

This concluding statement emphasizes uniformity in provision—every Levitical city came with *migrash* (מִגְרָשׁ, pasture lands) extending approximately 1000 cubits (500 meters) in each direction (Numbers 35:4-5). The repetition "every one... all these cities" stresses comprehensive fulfillment without exception. No Levitical city was shortchanged, receiving urban settlement without necessary pasture for livestock. God's provision was both complete (forty-eight cities) and equitable (each with suburbs)—demonstrating that divine blessing combines adequacy with fairness.

The phrase "round about them" (סָבִיב סָבִיב, *saviv saviv*) uses repetition for emphasis—the suburbs surrounded each city completely, not partially. This comprehensive provision enabled Levites to maintain flocks and herds, supplementing tithes with limited agricultural self-sufficiency. The balance prevented extremes: Levites wouldn't become wealthy landowners competing with other tribes, nor would they become destitute beggars dependent entirely on others' generosity. This middle position modeled economic moderation and maintained focus on spiritual service rather than wealth accumulation.

The verse concludes the Levitical city allocation with liturgical completeness—every detail commanded by God through Moses (Numbers 35:1-8) found fulfillment

under Joshua's administration. This pattern of divine command-and-human-obedience establishes the book's theological framework: God speaks, His people obey, blessing follows. When Israel later abandoned this pattern (Judges), disaster ensued. The success of Joshua's generation depended not on superior ability but on faithful adherence to revealed divine will.

Historical Context

The pasture lands provision recognized that Levitical ministry, while focused on spiritual service, required physical sustenance. Levites could own livestock, cultivate gardens, and engage in limited agriculture—they simply couldn't inherit large territorial allotments like other tribes. This arrangement freed them for ministry while preventing destitution. The system worked effectively when Israel honored covenant obligations to tithe; it failed when apostasy led to neglect of Levitical support (Nehemiah 13:10-13; Malachi 3:8-10).

The forty-eight city network created organic infrastructure for teaching God's law throughout Israel. Every tribe had Levites who could instruct in Torah, administer justice, and lead worship. This decentralized model prevented concentration of religious authority in one location while maintaining theological unity through shared commitment to Mosaic law. The system's effectiveness depended on Levitical faithfulness—when Levites taught truth, Israel prospered; when they compromised, the nation suffered.

Archaeological evidence shows that some identified Levitical cities (Hebron, Shechem, Gezer) were indeed significant urban centers during Iron Age Israel, supporting the biblical account's historical credibility. The cities' distribution across varied geographical regions (coastal plains, hill country, Transjordan plateau) required Levites to minister in diverse cultural and economic contexts—preventing insularity and requiring adaptability.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the uniformity of provision (every city with suburbs) challenge contemporary inequities in ministerial compensation and support?
2. What does the balance between Levitical service and limited self-sufficiency teach about avoiding both prosperity gospel excess and false asceticism?
3. In what ways does the comprehensive fulfillment of every detail of God's command encourage your faith in His promises?

Interlinear Text

תָּהֵי יָנָה H1961	הָעָרִים יִם These cities H5892	הָאֵלָה H428	הָעָרִים יִם These cities H5892	הָעָרִים יִם These cities H5892	וּמִגְרָשׁ יָהּ with their suburbs H4054
סְבִיבֹתָ יָהּ round about H5439	כֹּן H3651	לְכָל H3605	הָעָרִים יִם These cities H5892	הָאֵלָה: H428	

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