

Joshua 21:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Israel gave by lot unto the Levites these cities with their suburbs, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

Analysis

And the children of Israel gave by lot unto the Levites these cities with their suburbs, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

This summary verse emphasizes Israel's complete obedience. The phrase "**gave by lot**" (vayitnu...bagoral, וַיַּתֵּן...בָּגָד) combines human agency (giving) with divine sovereignty (lot-casting). Israel actively obeyed, but God determined specific allocations. This models the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility—we act obediently while trusting God's sovereign ordering of outcomes.

The comprehensive statement "**these cities with their suburbs**" (et-hearim haeleh veet-migresheyhen, אֶת-הַעֲרִים הַאֶלְهִים וְאֶת-מִגְרֵשֵׁיהֶן) repeats the thorough provision from verse 3. Israel didn't give cities grudgingly or incompletely—they provided both urban living space and surrounding pastureland, exactly as commanded. This demonstrates that partial obedience is disobedience; God's people must follow His instructions completely, in the manner prescribed.

The concluding phrase "**as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses**" (kaasher tsivah Yahweh beyad-Moshe, כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהָוָה בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה) roots obedience in divine command. Israel obeyed not because it was convenient or beneficial, but because Yahweh commanded. The phrase beyad-Moshe ("by the hand of Moses") recognizes Moses as God's authorized mediator—commands given through him

carried divine authority requiring compliance. This prefigures Christ as ultimate Mediator whose commands demand obedience (Hebrews 3:3-6, John 14:15).

Historical Context

This verse summarizes the entire Levitical city allocation process detailed in verses 9-42. The system worked successfully during the united monarchy and into the divided kingdom period. When northern tribes apostatized under Jeroboam (1 Kings 12), faithful Levites fled south, abandoning their cities (2 Chronicles 11:13-16). During Hezekiah's reforms (2 Chronicles 31) and Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 23), Levitical cities served as centers for covenant renewal. The system's breakdown paralleled Israel's spiritual decline—when people stopped supporting Levites through tithes, the teaching infrastructure collapsed (Nehemiah 13:10-11).

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does combining human action (giving) with divine sovereignty (lot-casting) inform your understanding of prayer, decision-making, and obedience?
2. What does Israel's complete provision (cities plus pastures, exactly as commanded) challenge about your tendency toward partial or selective obedience?
3. How should recognizing God's commands (mediated through Scripture) as divinely authoritative shape your response to biblical teaching you find difficult or costly?

Interlinear Text

בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְלִוִּים אֶת הַעֲרָקִים וְתַנְתֵּן
gave And the children of Israel unto the Levites these cities
H5414 H1121 H3478 H3881 H853 H5892

יְהִי הַקְּרָבָה כְּאֶשֶׁר צִוָּה לְהַעֲלֵת מִגְּרוּשִׁים | אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
with their suburbs commanded as the LORD
H428 H853 H4054 H834 H6680 H3068

בְּגַזְלָה: מֵשֶׁה בְּ יַד
by the hand of Moses by lot
H3027 H4872 H1486

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 21:3 (References Lord): And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their suburbs.

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