

Joshua Chapters 20-21 – John Karmelich

1. The good news of this lesson is we get to finish the "land distribution thing" among the twelve tribes of Israel. The focus of these two chapters is on one tribe: the tribe of Levi. With that said, let me give my title for this lesson: "Understanding the Christian role and responsibility of judgment and our mission as believers." Well if that doesn't confuse you, nothing will." ☺
 - a) Know that these two chapters are the fulfillment of a promise that God stated to Moses back in the Book of Numbers Chapter 35. To summarize the key point of that chapter in Numbers, God told Moses to set aside 48 cities in the land of Israel for the tribe of Levi, including six cities that are to be a place of refuge if a person commits manslaughter.
 - b) At this point (where we are at now) in the book of Joshua, all of the land of Israel has now been distributed. The remaining tribe, the tribe of Levi, was never supposed to receive a section of the land. Instead this tribe is to be scattered all through Israel. The Levites were set aside by God to be the priests. That means they are to be man's representatives to God. What that means practically, besides taking care of the tabernacle and doing the sacrifices is to be God's witnesses for all the Israelites.
 - c) In a lot of ways, we as Christians are supposed to act like the Levites. Let me explain: We as Christians are primarily called to help others draw closer to Christ. That includes brining in new members into the fold as well as working with existing Christians. That idea of helping people grow in Christ is living the "Christian life" in a nutshell.
 - i) God never calls us Christians to just "sit there", but to get involved. God wants us scattered to where other believers (and potential believers) are in the world. Just as the Levites were to be scattered all through the land where other Israelites live, so we as Christians are to be scattered where other Christians are and other potential Christians live.
 - ii) The Levites were called to go out and make a difference in the lives of Israelites to bring glory to God. Christians are called to go out in the world and make a difference for Christ. Let me put this another way: The rest of the Israelites were to live in the territory assigned to them just as God wants Christians to go and live in the "territory" that God wants for us. That means God wants us to spread out and be among other believers and in some cases (missionaries) go to places where other Christians might be.
2. OK John, I get the idea that the Levites are to be God's witnesses among the Israelites. I also get the idea that we as Christians are called to be God's witnesses among "His People" today. So, what does that mean for me, as far as being a witness for Christ? I'm so glad you asked! ☺
 - a) If one is not sure "where" God wants you at this moment, ask Him and pray about the situation. Ask what ministry(s) you are to be involved with. Ask the question of "what is to be my role" in living for Christ at this moment in time. More often than not, it usually occurs right where one currently is. It may require getting more education and it may require moving. Usually there is a sense of comfort if one is where God wants us to be.
 - b) As a personal example, I spent years studying the bible before I ever wrote my first study. One day I was reading the bible, and all of a sudden, the words "popped out" of the bible that said, "By now you ought to be teaching". (Reference Hebrews 5:12.) I somehow knew that was God telling me, it was time for me to do something different. Did I understand at that point what my ministry would be? No, but I somehow knew it was time to be "moving" in a different direction. The rest, as they say, is history.
 - c) My point is to simply allow God to work in our lives to make a difference for Him. If we are willing to make that commitment, you and I would be amazed at what the results are going to be!

3. I need to switch topics and get to another key point of these two chapters. The Israelites were to give 48 cities (or towns) from all through the land of Israel (and including the land east of Israel where two and one half tribes settled) to the Levites. Of those 48 cities, six of those cities are to be "cities of refuge". Let me explain what that means.
- a) This means there are six specific cities that an Israelite or any person living among the Israelites can flee to if they commit manslaughter. OK, what is manslaughter?
 - i) The idea of manslaughter is to accidentally kill someone without intending to. The basic idea is that if we never had any previous thought of killing someone and we accidentally do so we are guilty of manslaughter. The "legal term" used in the United States is "murder in the second degree". The general idea is that we had no intent of killing someone prior to the moment of actually doing so.
 - ii) An example of manslaughter would be if we accidentally pushed someone and then they fell, broke their head and died. Another example might be if we were using some sort of tool, and part of that tool broke off and killed someone.
 - b) In the nation of Israel, when a person was killed (be it accident or not), it was the responsibility of the nearest living relative of the dead person to be the "avenger of blood" for the murdered. (Reference Numbers 35:19, et.al.) To put it another way, if we are an Israelite and we kill someone either on purpose or by accident, we have to run for our lives because there is going to be someone who's job it is to hunt us down to kill us.
 - i) Given the "hunted down part", the Israelites were to set aside six cities that were specifically to be places of refuge for the killers to run to. Three cities were to be in the land of Israel "proper" and three cities were to be located east of the Jordan River where two and one half tribes of Israel were to be located.
 - ii) Does this mean we have to set aside such cities today? No, today we have a court system to determine justice in such cases.
 - c) OK John, this is all very interesting. I haven't killed anyone, nor do I plan on judging anyone for murder in the near future. What does this have to do with me?
 - i) To understand this, one has to understand a key point about our role as Christians. God not only calls Christians to live a life to make a difference for Him, but God also calls on us to judge behavior. There is a false idea that Christians are never to judge behavior. Jesus did teach, "Do not judge", (See Matthew 7:1-2), but the context of that statement was about constantly putting people down. When it comes to behavior, Jesus and the Apostles judged people's behavior all the time and acted on that behavior.
 - ii) For example, if we see someone doing something inappropriately, we are to "judge that behavior" in the sense of not joining what they are doing. We may or may not say something, but that is a whole separate discussion.
 - d) So given that, what does "judgment" have to do with the cities of refuge? These cities of refuge were a place for murderers to run to. Let me start by saying it is no "accident" that God wanted these cities to be controlled by the Levites.
 - i) If someone commits murder and comes to our city, we want to have "good honest judges" to decide whether or not the person has committed first-degree murder (i.e., murder with intent) or second-degree murder (no intent, an accident).
 - ii) The Levites were held to a higher standard than the other Israelites for knowing God's laws and what He required of people. Therefore God wanted Levites to judge whether a person could flee from the "avenger of blood" and safely be in that city or decide if that person was guilty of first-degree murder.
 - e) My point of all of this is that God not only wants Christians to be a witness for Him, but also to fairly and honestly judge behavior. That does not mean all Christians are called to be professional judges. It does mean to judge people "fairly" and (as much as possible), to help guilty people not get away with things and not let the innocent suffer for crimes.

- f) OK, I have now been yapping for two pages about "guilt and judgment". ☺ What do you say I break down and actually start going verse by verse:
4. Chapter 20, Verse 1: Then the LORD said to Joshua: ² "Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, ³ so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood.
- a) If you have any doubts about how important this is to God, notice that Chapter 20 opens with the statement of "LORD said to Joshua". Joshua did not stop and contemplate that the laws that Moses (i.e., Genesis through Deuteronomy) had a "thing" about cities of refuge. This issue was significant enough that God "interrupted" the land distribution procedure to bring up the topic.
- b) Let me get back to the literal aspect for a moment: When a person commits an accidental murder, they can flee to one of these six cities. The "avenger of blood" was not allowed to come into this city with the intent of killing that person. The person who committed the crime must then stay in that city until 1) He or she stands trial to validate to the judges it was accidental murder and 2) that person cannot leave the city until whoever is the "High Priest" dies. Yes, these two points are not in these three verses, but they are coming up.
- c) The point in the first three verses is simply that God spoke to Joshua to tell him that he is to specifically designate cities of refuge throughout the land of Israel.
- i) I heard some interesting "tidbits" about these six designated cities: What I am about to say is not in the bible, but is based on Jewish "tradition": The road signs leading to these six cities were to be well marked and the roads leading to them must be well kept up. Through the history of Israel they have taken this seriously.
- a) Another (based on tradition) aspect of these cities is that the gates are to open at all times. I don't know if that was always true, but the idea is that the doors are always open if someone wants to flee there.
- d) My point for right now is God took these laws "serious enough" to interrupt Joshua's distribution process and state in effect to "don't forget to set aside the cities of refuge".
5. Verse 4: "When he flees to one of these cities, he is to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state his case before the elders of that city. Then they are to admit him into their city and give him a place to live with them.
- a) If one is an "elder" in an ancient Jewish city, one of the main jobs of those elders were to stay by the gate and judge who can and who cannot enter a city. The idea is that the elders protect the cities from criminals by judging who can and cannot enter the city.
- b) Remember that these six cities of refuge were all controlled by Levites.
- i) Imagine being an elder at one of these cities and someone comes to the gate and says in effect, "I have accidentally killed someone, please protect me from the person trying to take my life."
- ii) It became the job of the elders to judge that person as to whether or not they were a murderer or somebody who accidentally killed someone. I suspect that many a murderer in the land of Israel claimed their innocence and ran to these cities.
- iii) So why did God want the Levites to have this job? The answer is God held them to a higher standard than the rest of the Israelites. They should know God's laws better (i.e., the first five books of the bible) than the average Israelite. If one knows God's laws hopefully it makes that person a better judge.
- iv) I have to admit, as I was preparing this lesson, I thought of a guy I knew in college who I haven't seen since that time period. I've heard through mutual friends that he is now a superior court judge. There were things I liked and didn't like about him. I do remember he read his bible pretty regularly in college. My point is I hope that biblical information stuck to him, as he is now a person who judges others. I truly hope he has "Godly wisdom" in his judgment decisions.

- c) So what does all of this "judging" stuff have to do with us? I'm not a "superior court judge" in the United States court system and neither are you. ☺
 - i) The answer is that God does call on Christians to judge behavior. In the bible, Jesus and the apostles judged behavior all the time. They treated others based on how they acted and what they said. We are not to judge people's salvation, (only God knows people's heart) but we are to judge behavior and react accordingly. (We still are to have a loving attitude and not judgmental about people's actions).
 - ii) To quote a great Christian apologist, when someone says to you, "Don't judge", the proper response is "What's wrong with judging someone"? (Source: Greg Koukl).
 - a) There is nothing wrong with judging behavior. We do it all the time, including when a person says, "don't judge", they are judging our behavior.
 - iii) Getting back to the Israelites, the point of these six cities is that they should have their gates wide open and be willing to welcome someone who claims they are innocent and want to flee for help. At the same time, the judges (elders) of that city are to judge the behavior of the person claiming it was an accident.
 - iv) Let me add here a little about the danger of "judgment". This does not mean we look down at anyone who we deem inferior to us. Jesus did warn that if we have a "judgmental attitude" it will come back to haunt us (see Matthew 7:1-2).
 - v) I've learned that if someone truly believes in Jesus, we should let God work on them to make them better and it is not our job to fix them. If someone asks for our opinion or our help, we can offer it, but never without their asking. Usually the best thing we can do is be a good example as opposed to trying to fix others.
 - vi) Getting back to "potential murderers and these six cities", the point here is to judge carefully and then make the best decision "right or wrong" as what is best for that person as well as for the safety of those living in that city.
- 6. Verse 5: If the avenger of blood pursues him, they must not surrender the one accused, because he killed his neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought. ⁶ He is to stay in that city until he has stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then he may go back to his own home in the town from which he fled."
 - a) Getting back to the Israelites, the nearest living relative to the person who was killed was to be in charge of "justice" and making sure the person who did the murder pay the price for that murder. (See Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19).
 - i) The point as it relates here is that if a person claims they committed manslaughter, they could run to one of these cities of refuge. The elders of the city are to protect the murderer from the "avenger of blood" until he or she stands trial.
 - b) Here is where (in my opinion), things get interesting:
 - i) That person who committed the murder is to stay in that city until two things happen: The first is they have to wait until they have a formal trial. That means the elders of the city are the judges. They elders make the decision as to whether or not the person committed "accidental murder" or "murder on purpose".
 - a) If that person committed murder on purpose, the penalty is death.
 - b) If that person was found to commit an accidental murder, then the person on trial could live but they had to remain in the city for a specific time period, which is until the time when the current high priest of Israel dies.
 - c) Let's talk about "innocence" and why wait until the death of the high priest.
 - i) Why make that person wait for the death of the "high priest" before leaving? I suspect it is to give time for the victim's family to get over the death.
 - ii) In ancient Israel, the oldest son of Aaron was the High Priest until he died, and then his oldest son took over. I suspect word of a new high priest would spread through the land of Israel fairly quickly like the word of a new pope would spread through the Catholic world fairly quickly. ☺

- d) What if that murderer is found guilty of "intentional" murder? What happens then?
- i) The first five books of the bible all state that anyone found guilty of intentional murder is to be put to death. God respects human life and it is to be sacred. A murderer should be put to death because one has ended prematurely another human life and God wants respect for all human life.
 - ii) On a related note, I've stated in recent (past) lessons that the reason God wanted the Israelites to kill all of the residents of the Promised Land is they were guilty of murder on a regular basis. They performed human sacrifices (their children) to their false gods. Many centuries after this period, the Babylonian army killed most of the Israelites as essentially, the Israelites became guilty of the same sin.
 - iii) My point here is that God takes human life very seriously and desires that we as a society fairly judge people on this issue. If someone is guilty of intentional murder, they too are to get a death sentence. (As you can tell, I am strongly in favor of death sentences for murder.)
- e) Do I believe a murderer can be in heaven? Yes I do. If a murderer pleads for God's mercy for forgiveness, it is up to God to eternally forgive them. That is different from what God calls society to do. Jesus taught that all sins are forgivable and that would include murder. We are to judge in this lifetime and since heaven is "God's domain", He gets to decide who can join Him forever in His domain.
- i) Jesus said that the only unforgivable sin is "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit". The idea of that phrase is the lifetime denial of Jesus as God and nothing else. (See Matthew 12:31-32.). My point here is that in terms of "eternity", murder is forgivable, but that is a separate issue from how God calls us to judge murderers.
- f) OK, time to get off my judgment kick ☺ and onto my favorite part of this lesson.
- i) There is another way to read this section of Joshua as it applies to Christians. When Jesus was about to be crucified, He asked the Father to forgive his accusers in the sense that this crime not be charged against them "forever". (See Luke 23:34.)
 - a) In the book of Acts when Stephen was killed, he asked God not to charge the crime of murder against his accusers. (See Acts 7:60).
 - b) I believe in both cases, the point is the same. The point has nothing to do with whether or not those murderers should be on trial here on earth.
 - c) The point is they asked God the Father to treat such people as "accidental murderers" and that they still be given a chance to plead for their lives.
 - d) In a "spiritual sense", both Jesus and Stephen are asking that such murderers be allowed to run to a "city of refuge".
 - ii) This leads to us as Christians. We may not have actually killed someone, but if you are like me (and are honest), you have at least considered the idea at some point in our life. Jesus said that if we consider killing someone, we are guilty of sin. (See Matthew 5:21). We as "sinners" can run to safety to our "city of refuge" which is Jesus Himself.
 - iii) The "avenger of blood" (i.e., the guy trying to kill us) in a spiritual sense is a picture of Satan as His job is to be our accuser before God. Satan is making the case that we as humans are not worth eternal salvation. (See Revelation 12:10.)
 - iv) That leads to the issue of our "high priest". Who is our high priest? The book of Hebrews says it is Jesus Himself. (See Hebrews 3:1, 4:14 and 6:20.) When our high priest died on the cross, we are "now free" to go back into the world and not fear the "avenger of blood".
- g) OK, I've now been yapping for one and one half pages on these verses. The key point here is that these "cities of refuge" are a neat word-picture of how we as Christians are guilty of committing sin, but the price has been paid on our behalf by our high priest. Therefore, we are not "innocent", but we are forgiven as the price has been paid.

7. Verse 7: So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. ⁸ On the east side of the Jordan of Jericho they designated Bezer in the desert on the plateau in the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead in the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan in the tribe of Manasseh. ⁹ Any of the Israelites or any alien living among them who killed someone accidentally could flee to these designated cities and not be killed by the avenger of blood prior to standing trial before the assembly.
- a) These three verses represent the end of Chapter 20. For such an important little story, it actually does not take up a lot of verses.
 - b) Notice that most of these cities of refuge were up on a hill. The one city of refuge that is not on a hill is in the desert up on a "plateau". The point is that each of these cities can be clearly seen for a long distance away. Therefore, if someone commits an accidental murder, these six cities will be very visible as to where one is to go.
 - i) I stated earlier that the "Jewish tradition" is that the signs and roads leading to these cities were clearly marked.
 - ii) If someone had committed manslaughter, they cannot say they did not know how to get to a city of refuge as both God and the Israelites went out of their way to make it known that the road leading to these cities were clearly marked, the gates were always open, and the cities were on "high ground" so they could be seen.
 - iii) One more bit of geography: The cities were located so that if one was anywhere in the land of Israel, one of these six cities was no more than 10 miles away.
 - c) Going back to the image of Jesus as our "spiritual refuge", the point is Jesus is always accessible (i.e., the gates are always open and the pathway is clearly marked) and we can always and at anytime run to Jesus for our protection.
 - d) Also notice that these laws not only applied to the Jewish people, but also to strangers living in the land of Israel.
 - i) The idea is that both Jewish people and foreigners living in Israel have one law when it comes to the crime of murder. All people instinctively know that killing another innocent person is wrong. Therefore, the laws about committing murder are the same for "aliens" as for "Jews".
 - ii) This goes back to the key issue of innocence about murder. The crime of any murder is to be taken so seriously that one is to be put on trial. If one is found guilty of intentional murder, one is to be put to death. If one is only found guilty of "accidental murder" during the trial phase, then that person is protected in this city from someone who is the "avenger of blood" upon that person.
 - e) I have to admit it "endlessly" fascinates me that the cities of the priests are chosen to be the cities of refuge. Think about this practically: Here are a bunch of cities dedicated to those who are called to spend their lives serving God. Yet, these Levites are to let these murders live among them until they are put on trial. I am convinced that a key point here is that God does call the "saved" to judge others in this lifetime.
 - i) Yes there are eternal applications to this judgment concept as well. Jesus told His disciples that they would be judging the "12 tribes of Israel". (See Matthew 19:28 or Luke 22:30). I'm not sure exactly what that entails, but I get the feeling the apostles (and maybe us) have some judging to do in the next life.
 - ii) So what does this mean "practically" in this lifetime? Does this mean I should not lie to get out of serving jury duty? ☺ Well that's a start, but it is much more than that. The general idea is that we as Christians are called to judge people's behavior. Yes our focus is to lead people to Christ, but at the same time we should not allow people to get away with crimes. I'm not saying we have to take the law into our hands. I am saying that we as a society should not allow crime to happen and to stop it as much as possible.

- f) Let me discuss this from another perspective: Let me explain what it meant to be a Levite. It meant you were born to be a priest whether you like it or not.
 - i) Let's say you are an Israelite from one of the other tribes, besides Levi. You really feel called to be a priest. You believe God is calling you to serve Him and help others. If you were from the tribe of say, Dan or Judah or Manasseh and you had this desire, your parents would say to you, "Too bad son, you're going into the family camel trading business whether you like it or not".
 - ii) On the other hand, let's say you were a Levite living at that time. The smell of camels doesn't bother you ☺ and you like trading in the business world. If you were from the tribe of Levi, your parents would say to you, "Too bad you like trading camels, but the truth is you are a Levite, so it is off to seminary you go."
 - iii) The point of this silly illustration is that being a Levite is not something you "choose" but something you were born "into". If you or I have truly given our life to follow Jesus, from God's perspective, it is something we are "born into" whether we realize it or not. That means as a Christian we are called to be a living witness for Jesus in whatever capacity God has called for you or me.
 - iv) That "living for Jesus" mentality means that we are to live among other believers, but at the same time we are to allow "murderers" (think in terms of unrepentant sinners) to be in our midst in order to be a witness to them and yes, judge them.
 - g) Jesus told Peter in effect that the church has the right to accept or deny membership of any person into that church. (See Matthew 18:17-18). That means that we as Christians have the privilege and right to judge people and see if they are committed to Christ and have them in our church fellowship. Yes, if we say "no", they can join the church down the street, but that becomes "their" problem and not ours.
 - i) The point is Jesus did call on us to judge behavior. We don't have the privilege or the ability to judge one's heart, so we should never judge whether or not one is eternally saved. At the same time, we are to judge behavior. It does not mean we have a "judging" attitude in that we putting down anyone who we deem inferior. It does mean we judge behavior and work with such people to lead them to Christ or closer to Christ.
 - h) OK, enough judgment for one lesson. ☺ Let's move on to Chapter 21.
8. Chapter 21, Verse 1: Now the family heads of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the other tribal families of Israel ² at Shiloh in Canaan and said to them, "The LORD commanded through Moses that you give us towns to live in, with pasturelands for our livestock." ³ So, as the LORD had commanded, the Israelites gave the Levites the following towns and pasturelands out of their own inheritance:
- a) It's time for a quick reminder of the "where" question of these verses. Most of the second half of the book of Joshua is essentially all the Israelites standing around as one big congregation at a place called "Shiloh" in the land of Israel (also called the land of the Canaanites in Verse 2). Here, Joshua, their "civil leader" and the current high priest (Eleazar) were in charge of distributing the land of Israel on a tribe-by-tribe basis.
 - b) Joshua and Eleazar used some sort of random luck method called "casting lots" in order to determine what was God's will as far as the piece of land each tribe would get.
 - c) The last tribe to approach Joshua on this issue was the tribe of the Levites. By the time they approached Joshua, the entire land of Israel had already been distributed.
 - d) The Levites reminded Joshua that God commanded Moses that the Levites are to be given cities (also called towns) to live in. In fact, in Numbers Chapter 35:7, the command was to give the Levites exactly 48 cities (or towns) in the Promised Land, including the six cities of refuge. Besides the cities themselves, the Levites were to get some land surrounding each of the forty-eight cities in order to have a place to keep their livestock.

- e) All of the Israelites were required to pay a "tithe" (10% of their income) to the Levites. That payment was often in the form of animals. The point is the Levites needed places to live and places to keep their animals that were given to them.
 - f) One also has to remember that the Israelite "priests" were a subset of the Levites. All of the Israelite priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. The Levites who were not priests were the "supporting casts" in that they helped the priests in their duties.
 - g) It was the job of all the Levites to know God's laws and in particular, know the laws in relation to their particular duties. God held the Levites to a higher standard of knowing "right from wrong" (i.e., knowing God's laws) than the rest of the Israelites.
 - i) The point as it relates to you and me is that there is a "price to be paid" for knowing your bible well. God holds us to a higher standard than one who doesn't know their bible in the first place. Don't get me wrong: It is better to know it well and know what God requires of us, then to not know it in the first place. My point is once we do understand the basic principals of what God wants for our life, He holds us accountable for that knowledge. (Source 1st Timothy 1:8 and 2nd Timothy 3:14).
 - ii) Assuming I haven't scared you to stop reading, ☺ let's get back to the text.
 - h) Verse 3 finishes the point that the other Israelites agreed to give the Levites cities from among their inheritance. My point here is that there is cooperation among all the tribes as to the cities given to the Levites.
9. Verse 4: The first lot came out for the Kohathites, clan by clan. The Levites who were descendants of Aaron the priest were allotted thirteen towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin. ⁵ The rest of Kohath's descendants were allotted ten towns from the clans of the tribes of Ephraim, Dan and half of Manasseh.
- a) The tribe of Levi was divided into several groups. The point of the groups was that one group was to be the "priests themselves", another was in charge of moving the tabernacle around and others were in charge of care of other parts of the tabernacle structure. The good news is you don't have to remember that, just know that the tribe of Levi is divided by groups and that will be fine for the rest of the lesson.
 - b) The first group from the tribe of Levi was the Kohathites. The simply point here is the towns they were given for the descendants of Aaron the priests were in the southern part of Israel where the tabernacle will be set up. My point is the "interesting coincidence" is that God had these men who took care of the tabernacle reside not far from their service.
10. Verse 6: The descendants of Gershon were allotted thirteen towns from the clans of the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan. ⁷ The descendants of Merari, clan by clan, received twelve towns from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun. ⁸ So the Israelites allotted to the Levites these towns and their pasturelands, as the LORD had commanded through Moses.
- a) Just to warn you, I'm going to go fast through this section of scripture, only because the main point is that the Levites got the towns as God commanded.
 - b) In fact, Verse 8 is one of those verses of "obedience". It says in essence that the Israelites did as God commanded them to do.
 - i) Every now and then, you will notice that the bible goes out of its way to say in effect that "So and so (good guys) did what God commanded them to do". It is as if God is saying He is so happy people are being obedient to His desires that the bible goes out of it's way to praise them.
 - ii) That is what is happening here in that all of the Israelites are cooperating in terms of giving up some of their land to the Levites.
 - iii) Here's the application: If the bible goes out of its way to praise people for their obedience, think how happy God is when you and I are obedient to His desires.

11. Verse 9: From the tribes of Judah and Simeon they allotted the following towns by name ¹⁰ (these towns were assigned to the descendants of Aaron who were from the Kohathite clans of the Levites, because the first lot fell to them): ¹¹ They gave them Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), with its surrounding pastureland, in the hill country of Judah. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) ¹² But the fields and villages around the city they had given to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his possession. ¹³ So to the descendants of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron (a city of refuge for one accused of murder), Libnah, ¹⁴ Jattir, Eshtemoa, ¹⁵ Holon, Debir, ¹⁶ Ain, Juttah and Beth Shemesh, together with their pasturelands--nine towns from these two tribes.
- a) If you look carefully, these verses are not moving on to new towns being allocated, but just give more details about the first group of towns given to the "subgroup" of Levites called the Kohathites.
 - b) As you read through this chapter, notice that every tribe is giving to the Levites. The tribes that got more land gave more cities to the Levites and the tribes that got less land gave less cities away.
 - i) Let me get through some more of this, and then I'll explain the significance.
 - c) Verse 12 makes the simple point that the towns and land given to the Levites did not violate other promises made to other people. A few chapters back, some land was given to a man named Caleb. The point is that agreement was not violated for this new one.
 - d) Also notice how the six specific cities of refuge are pointed out. For example in Verse 13 lists one of those six cities. The point is the Israelites are willing to go along with God's plan to have these six specific cities among those being given to the Levites.
12. Verse 17: And from the tribe of Benjamin they gave them Gibeon, Geba, ¹⁸ Anathoth and Almon, together with their pasturelands--four towns. ¹⁹ All the towns for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were thirteen, together with their pasturelands. ²⁰ The rest of the Kohathite clans of the Levites were allotted towns from the tribe of Ephraim: ²¹ In the hill country of Ephraim they were given Shechem (a city of refuge for one accused of murder) and Gezer, ²² Kibzaim and Beth Horon, together with their pasturelands--four towns. ²³ Also from the tribe of Dan they received Eltekeh, Gibbethon, ²⁴ Aijalon and Gath Rimmon, together with their pasturelands--four towns. ²⁵ From half the tribe of Manasseh they received Taanach and Gath Rimmon, together with their pasturelands--two towns. ²⁶ All these ten towns and their pasturelands were given to the rest of the Kohathite clans.
- a) Let me ask the obvious question: Why give all of these details? Why not just say that each tribe gave some land to the Levites and that every tribe did their share? This leads to something I pointed about a page back: The bible seems to go out of its way to point out when people are doing God's will. It seems like every time in the bible when a person cooperates with God and does what he or she is asked of God, the bible goes out of its way to say in effect, "they cooperated".
 - i) The point is God loves when people cooperate with His plans for our lives.
 - ii) So how do we cooperate? It starts with prayer. All prayers are answered, but sometimes the answer is no or wait. It is also about living the type of life God desires of us. It is going about our lives knowing that God is watching our behavior and getting involved in our lives based on the decisions we make.
 - b) While our lives may not make the pages of the bible, the text of the bible is saying in effect that He loves those that make a difference for Him (despite our faults). Just as He is honoring these tribes who are doing His will, so God will honor those "today" who are doing His will in whatever capacity we are called to do so.
 - i) Am I positive God will honor us the same way God honors these Israelites for carrying out His will? No, but I do believe God works in patterns. Somehow, I do believe those that honor God do get rewarded somehow for our obedience.
 - c) OK, enough positive news. ☺ Let's finish distributing the land.

13. Verse 27: The Levite clans of the Gershonites were given: from the half-tribe of Manasseh, Golan in Bashan (a city of refuge for one accused of murder) and Be Eshtarah, together with their pasturelands--two towns;²⁸ from the tribe of Issachar, Kishion, Daberath,²⁹ Jarmuth and En Gannim, together with their pasturelands--four towns;³⁰ from the tribe of Asher, Mishal, Abdon,³¹ Helkath and Rehob, together with their pasturelands--four towns;³² from the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee (a city of refuge for one accused of murder), Hammoth Dor and Kartan, together with their pasturelands--three towns.³³ All the towns of the Gershonite clans were thirteen, together with their pasturelands.
- a) As a reminder, the Levites were divided up into specific smaller groups. Each of these groups had special duties involving the Old Testament "tabernacle" worship procedure. Their lives were more than just moving to these towns and helping people deal with sins and issues. The Levites also had specific duties in the setting up, taking down, organizing and serving in the "tabernacle" structure as described in the Book of Exodus.
 - b) Here we have more towns given from more tribes along with land around these towns.
 - c) There is actually a really neat application to all of this, and I'm leading up to that.
14. Verse 34: The Merarite clans (the rest of the Levites) were given: from the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam, Kartah,³⁵ Dimnah and Nahalal, together with their pasturelands--four towns;³⁶ from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer, Jahaz,³⁷ Kedemoth and Mephaath, together with their pasturelands--four towns;³⁸ from the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead (a city of refuge for one accused of murder), Mahanaim,³⁹ Heshbon and Jazer, together with their pasturelands--four towns in all.⁴⁰ All the towns allotted to the Merarite clans, who were the rest of the Levites, were twelve.⁴¹ The towns of the Levites in the territory held by the Israelites were forty-eight in all, together with their pasturelands.⁴² Each of these towns had pasturelands surrounding it; this was true for all these towns.
- a) Here are the last of the cities listed. If one adds up all the cities in these two chapters is does add up to forty-eight cities. That fact is also "verified" in Verse 41. Back in Numbers Chapter 35, God told Moses to set aside the specific number of 48 cities for the Levites when they get to the Promised Land and here is that promise being carrying out.
 - b) Here is where it gets interesting: I figured that the number 48 must be significant. Then it occurred to me: the "significant" number in Joshua Chapter 20 is the "six" cities of refuge. The fact the Levites got 48 cities and "six times eight" is forty-eight, must be significant.
 - i) I started thinking, "Why did God say there must be "six" cities of refuge? After all, God could have commanded one city, or ten or one hundred? Why six cities?"
 - ii) In the bible, the number "six" is associated with mankind. The number "seven" in the bible is associated with God's perfection as God rested on the seventh day of creation. The idea is that the number six is one less than seven and therefore, the number "six" is less than perfect. The number six represents man being imperfect.
 - a) For example, in the book of Revelation, the devil is associated with the number "666". (See Revelation 13:18.) The idea is the number 666 the imperfect number of man (6) times three. It is the idea of Satan taking man to his complete, yet still imperfect state of being.
 - iii) My point as it relates to Joshua is the reason there are exactly six cities of refuge is that it points to man's imperfection.
 - iv) In our "sinful, imperfect state", we run to God for protection, which is symbolic of running to the cities of refuge. We are required to wait there until we are found innocent of "murder in the first degree" and the death of the high priest. We as Christians are perfectly forgiven of all of our sins and our High Priest is Jesus, (See Hebrews 2:17, 3:1-2 and 4:14) who has already died for our sins.
 - v) My point here is that we as Christians no longer have to live in a "city of refuge" because our High Priest has paid the price for our sins. Since the price for our sins has been paid, we are now free to leave our "city of refuge".

- c) This leads me to a discussion of the forty-eight cities given to the Levites. Again, God commanded Moses a generation ago to give exactly 48 cities to the Levites, including these six cities of refuge. Why did God specify 48 cities?
 - i) Let's start with the fact that the number 48 is equal to "six times eight".
 - ii) The number six is again, associated with our imperfection and also requiring our refuge in our High Priest, which is a title for Jesus Christ in the book of Hebrews.
 - iii) If that is true, what is significant about "eight times that number?"
 - iv) Understand that in the bible, the number "8" is associated with a new beginning. If the number "7" in the bible is associated with God's "perfection", then the number "8" is associated with God's new beginning.
 - a) It is interesting that if you take the numerical value of any of the names and titles of Jesus (in the original Greek), they equal a multiple of eight.
 - b) The numerical value of Jesus' name and titles are all multiples of eight and the number eight is associated of our new life in Him. (For example the Greek numerical value of Jesus is 888. Other examples that work include the Greek words for Christ, Lord, Our Lord, Savior, Messiah and Son).
 - v) Therefore, "eight times six" represents beginning our new life in Christ after the price for our sins has already been taken care by our High Priest.
 - vi) In summary, "six times eight" is another way of saying the price for our sins has been paid in full and we are now free to begin our new life in Jesus.

15. Are you saying I have to understand bible numerology in order to be a good Christian? No. ☺
- a) All I am saying is this numerology is another way of pointing to our new life as believers in Jesus. It also leads to my final point about these cities.
 - b) Here among all the territory allotted to the Israelites on both sides of the Jordan River where all the Israelites were located, were 48 places for the Levites to live.
 - c) What I want us to notice is not so much the number 48 or the fact that all of the tribes of Israel gave of their land. What I do want us to notice is the concept of "scattering about the land" and being a witness for God. Once we have our new life in Christ, we are then to "scatter about" and be a living witness for God. That is what the "48" is all about.
 - d) Let me put it another way: The book of Joshua is predominately a book about learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives. We had chapter after chapter of miracles happening and Israelites winning battles because they were trusting in God. We too can have victories in our lives as we too, turn our issues over to God.
 - i) Like the Israelites, we too can have an "allotted territory" to go out and make a difference for God.
 - ii) Over and above that, there is a "final step" for growth in God: That is when we go over and above our "comfort zone" (or "allotted territory") to go be a witness for Him. Yes I am talking about missionary trips. Notice how all of Israel supported the Levites as they go out among them and represent the Israelites to God.
 - e) With that said, think of what God calls us to do: Go out into the world and be a witness for Him. (That's a paraphrase of the great commission in Matthew 28:19). It includes going out and telling new people about Jesus and being a witness for Him. It also means getting out of our "comfort zone" to make a difference in the life of other people.
 - f) The danger of being involved in any one particular line of work, or even a particular "ministry" is that we have to be careful not to be stuck in a rut when it is time to move on. (No, I'm not saying I'm quitting this ministry.) I am saying that sometimes God is calling us to do bigger and better things. When such a calling comes, we can be so busy in our particular lifestyle that we don't want to move on to something bigger and better when God is calling us.

- g) In a "spiritual sense", the Levites represent the highest calling of a person living amongst the Israelites. One cannot choose to be a Levite. One must be born into that position. In a similar sense, one cannot "choose" to be a Christian. One must be born (again) into that lifestyle. God knew you and I were going to be saved prior to it ever happening in our lives. Our decision is to know how far to "take that calling". God wanted the Levites to take that calling "all over the land".
 - h) The highest calling for a Christian is to "take our commission" all over the land and go make a difference for Him. I'm not suggesting that Christians have to quit their particular lifestyle and go into some missionary field. I am saying we have to be open to the idea of moving on to something bigger and better that God may want us for us. I'm saying there is a danger of getting comfortable in the "territory assigned for us". We have to be willing to ask God when it is time for us to move on to something bigger and better that He is calling us to.
 - i) There may be times in our lives when we try different things and it doesn't work. We may pray for changes in our life and our attempts to make those changes don't work out. That does not mean God doesn't want us in that particular calling for our lives. It just may mean it is not the right time.
 - ii) Learning to work on God's timing is a challenge for any Christian, old or new. Personally, I usually find the signs are obvious when God wants us to move on. Such signs may be a sense of lack of comfort with what we are doing or where we are, or some more obvious sign as to where God is leading us. Often it just means to try different things and see what is the right fit for us.
16. OK, let me wrap all of this up. The main thing that God wants for the life of the believer is to trust in Him and live our lives to make a difference for Him. Often it becomes "obvious" what God wants us to do and sometimes it is not. When it is "not obvious" is often some of the most interesting times in our lives. It is usually such times when we have to trust God more and watch what God wants for us next. It often means to try other things.
- a) Personally, I usually find it is "our move". God may not be taking us to the place we want to go because He is waiting for us to "make our move" in the direction He wants for our lives. We can't know what is the "right move" unless we are moving in some direction!
 - b) All I am saying is when one is "struggling" as a believer, be open to the idea that God may be calling us into something bigger and better than what we are currently doing. Figuring it out is half the "fun" of living the Christian life.
 - c) What does any of this have to do with the Levites? Everything. They set aside their own cities for their "criminals" to live a new life. Their job is to reach out to other Jews and help them draw closer to God. Living the Christian life is often about getting beyond ourselves and reaching out to others to help others draw closer to God. That is why the Levites were the "last" to get their distribution, as their job as a more "mature" believer is to help others grow closer to God.
17. If you recall, my title for this lesson was, ""Understanding the Christian role and responsibility of judgment and our mission as believers." Hopefully, this lesson helped to understand what is our roles in judgment and separately, the whole comparison to Levites and missionaries is helpful to explain what is mission as believers. OK, enough guilt. ☺ Let's close in prayer.
18. Father, First of all help us to be good judges in life. Help us not to be judgmental in that we are putting people down or giving unsolicited advice to others. Help us to be a good witness for You even as we are judging those around us. Next, help us to remember that we are like Levites in that we are called to serve You. Help each of us to know what is the calling for our lives at this particular moment in time and help us to act and "move" in the way You want for our lives. Guide us as we live to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.