

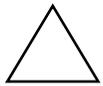
11

LESSON

The Cities of the Levites

Bible Passage – Joshua 20:1–21:45

Vocabulary Words



avenge: (ə venj') to correct a wrong that has been done by punishing the wrongdoer

manslayer: (man' slā ər) a person who kills another without intending to do so

The Levites were the only tribe that did not inherit any land. Their inheritance was to serve in the tabernacle as priests and helpers of priests. But God also knew that His people, once they had moved to their territories, would be far from the tabernacle. They might forget Him; so He commanded Moses to choose cities throughout Canaan for the Levites to live in. The Levites could then teach the people God's laws and lead them in worshiping the Lord.

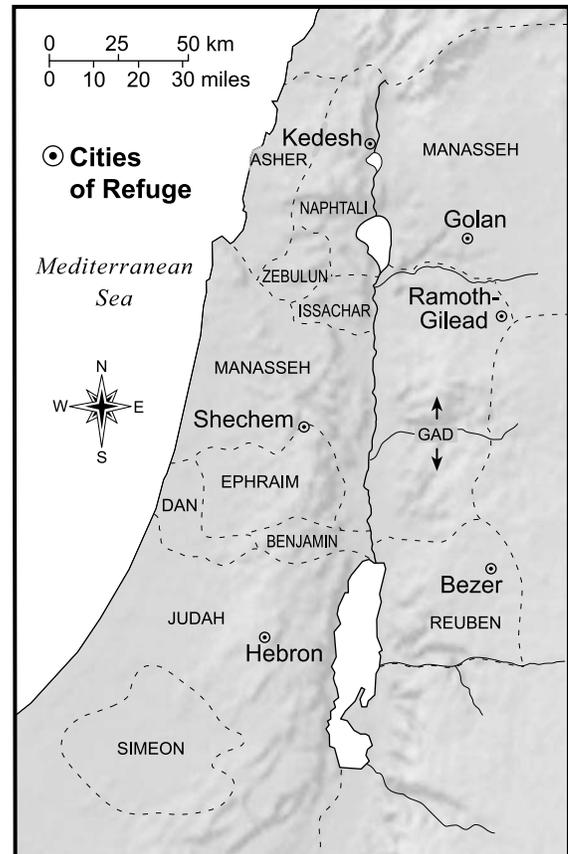
Now that the land had been divided, Joshua set aside forty-eight cities in Canaan for the tribe of Levi. Thirteen cities would belong to the priests. The other thirty-five cities were for the rest of the Levites. Each city was to give some land outside its city walls to the Levites, who could till the land and raise their cattle on it.

During most of the year, the priests lived in these cities, where they served God and His people. The rest of the year, they took turns going to Shiloh to perform the priestly duties at the tabernacle.

Joshua also chose six Levite cities to be cities of refuge. The custom of the ancient

world said that when a man was murdered, a relative should **avenge** his death. A close relative of the slain man was required to take the life of the one who had killed him. This relative was called an “avenger of blood.”

But this custom did not always work. People sometimes killed each other only because



© Map Resources

they wanted revenge. An angry avenger of blood might kill a man even though that man had accidentally killed another. Sometimes, the killing would then go on and on for many generations between families, as they killed each other to get even for past killings. There seemed to be no way to end the bloodshed.

The LORD gave Israel a new law in place of the old custom. His law told the people of Israel that they could only punish someone who had murdered another, and the new law provided “cities of refuge,” places to find safety from an avenger of blood. If a man—whether an Israelite, a foreigner, or a sojourner—accidentally killed another, he could flee to the nearest city of refuge and be safe.

Joshua chose three cities of refuge west of the Jordan River and three cities east of the river. West of the Jordan were Kedesh in the territory of Naphtali, Shechem in Ephraim, and Hebron in Judah. On the east side of the Jordan were Bezer in Reuben, Ramoth-Gilead in Gad, and Golan in Manasseh. These cities were located in the north, central, and southern parts of Canaan. A man could reach one of these cities within a day. Most cities of refuge were built on a hill, so they could be seen from far away. The roads to these cities were broad, well-marked, and kept in good repair.

When a man accidentally killed another he was called a **manslayer**. He would run as quickly as possible to the nearest city of refuge. The avenger of blood might pursue him, but as soon as the manslayer arrived at

the city, he would tell the elders sitting at the gate what had happened. They would let the manslayer enter the city, but would not allow the avenger to pass through the gate.

The manslayer would then stand before an assembly for questioning. If he was found innocent because he had slain someone accidentally, he was allowed to remain in the city of refuge. But if the man was found guilty of murder, he was released at once to the avenger of blood.

As long as a manslayer stayed within the boundaries of the city of refuge, he was safe. If he ventured outside the city limits, he was no longer safe, and the avenger could kill him. The manslayer was to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest; then he was free to return to his own city and he could not be killed. It was as if the high priest had died in his place.

This new law taught the people to be more just in their dealings with each other. It taught the Israelites to control themselves—not to yield to sudden anger. It taught them to protect the innocent and to love justice.

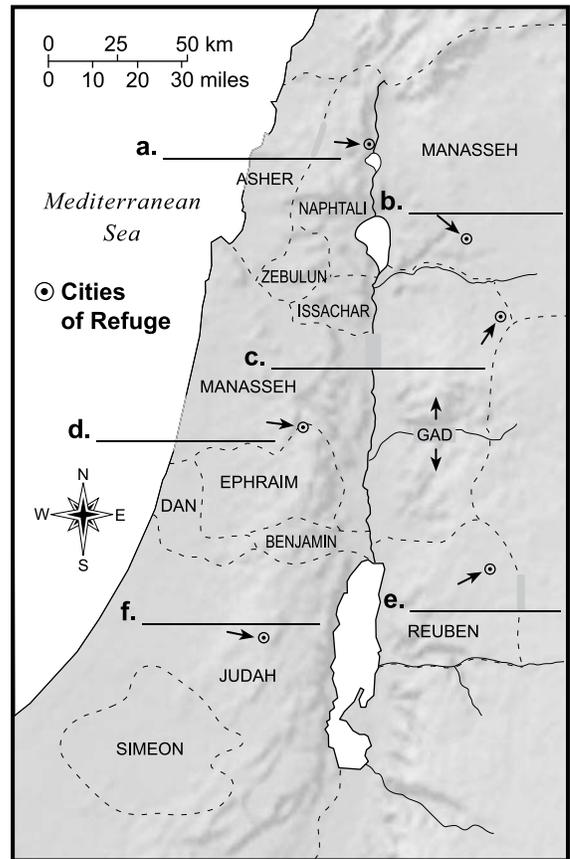
Once the land had been divided among the tribes, Joshua blessed the people. Then he sent them away—each tribe to its new homeland. Now God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was fulfilled. The Israelites possessed Canaan, their promised homeland. God had kept every word of His promise. Not one of the promises God had made to them failed—everything came to pass. The children of Israel were home; they rested from war.

Lesson 11

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Complete the exercises.

1. Write the names of the cities of refuge beside their letters on the map.
 - a. Kedesh
 - b. Golan
 - c. Ramoth-Gilead
 - d. Shechem
 - e. Bezer
 - f. Hebron
- Ⓜ 2. What city did Caleb take from the giants?



KNOW YOUR BIBLE

Answer these questions.

3. What was the inheritance of the Levites?

4. Why did God command the Levites to live in cities scattered throughout Canaan?

5. What did the Levites take turns doing at Shiloh?

6. Why would the elders of a city sometimes turn a man over to the avenger of blood?

Match the terms and their descriptions.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 7. _____ manslayer | a. safe place |
| 8. _____ avenger of blood | b. his death freed a manslayer |
| 9. _____ high priest | c. he sought revenge |
| 10. _____ city of refuge | d. he accidentally killed another |
| 11. _____ Shiloh | e. home of the tabernacle |

Complete the sentences to tell what was wrong with the old custom for avenging murder.

12. Sometimes avengers killed those who had _____ killed another.
13. Sometimes people killed for _____ rather than for justice.
14. Sometimes killings went on for generations, leading to endless _____.

KNOW GOD

Circle the word which makes the sentence correct.

15. God taught Israel to be more **just, vengeful** by giving them the laws about the cities of refuge.
- ① You can be confident that God will always keep His word. God cannot lie. And nothing can ever stop God from doing what He says He will do. We need only to trust Him by doing the things He tells us to do.

The final paragraph of today’s story says: “God had kept every word of His promise. Not one of the promises God had made to them failed—everything came to pass.” Reread the introduction to Section 3 and answer the question.

Complete this exercise.

16. Write the sentence from Joshua 21:43-45 that means the same thing as the words quoted in the paragraph above.

Lesson 11

LOOKING BACK

Answer these questions.

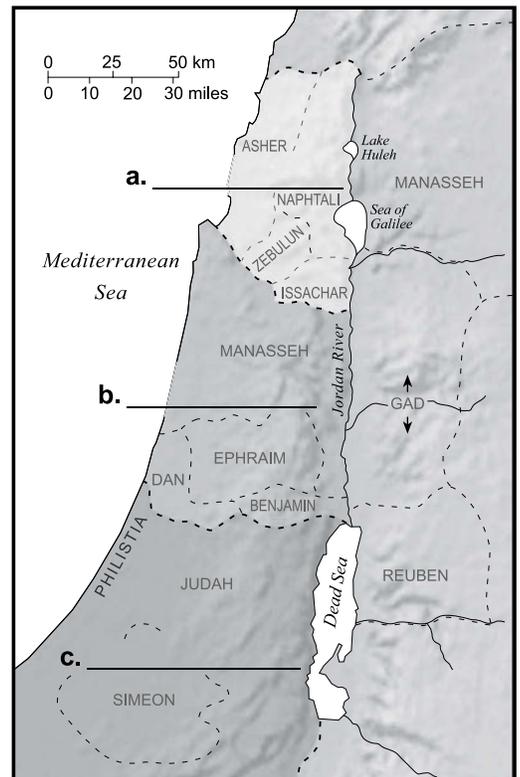
17. Which feast celebrated the salvation of Israel's firstborn? _____
18. Which feast recalled the wilderness wanderings of Israel? _____
19. At which feast did Israel offer firstfruits? _____

Complete the sentences about the tabernacle.

20. After Israel entered Canaan, the tabernacle was set up in Gilgal. Once the Canaanites had been conquered, Joshua moved the tabernacle to (a) _____. Joshua chose this city for the tabernacle because it was in the (b) _____ of Canaan. Israelites visited the tabernacle in this city (c) _____ times a year, for the Feasts of (d) _____, (e) _____, and (f) _____. The tribe of (g) _____ lived as priests in the cities among the tribes.

Complete the map exercises.

21. Label the regions on the map of Canaan *South*, *North*, and *Middle*.
22. Write *South*, *North*, or *Middle* to match the description of each region.
 - a. very dry _____
 - b. small farms between the hills _____
 - c. a sea with abundant fish _____
 - d. open grazing land _____
 - e. the large, fertile Jezreel Valley _____



© Map Resources

12

LESSON

An Altar by the Jordan River

Bible Passage – Joshua 22:1-34

Joshua had divided Canaan, chosen cities for the Levites, and named the cities of refuge. Then he had sent the people to their new territories. Israel was at rest in the land God had given them.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had returned to Gilead, east of the Jordan River. Joshua had blessed them and sent them on their way, loaded with spoils from their battles with the Canaanites—silver, gold, brass, iron, cattle, and clothes to share with their families.

Soon after they settled down, these tribes decided to build an altar. They constructed this altar—a very large altar—right beside the river.

Word of the altar soon reached the tribes west of the Jordan River. The leaders of the western tribes thought that the eastern tribes must have turned from the LORD to worship idols. They remembered how Balaam had led Israel into sin, and they knew the LORD would not be with Israel if some of them began to worship false gods.

So the western tribes gathered at Shiloh to go to war against the eastern tribes. However, before they attacked, the Israelites decided to send one of the priests, Phinehas (fin' ē hās), the son of Eleazar the high priest, to talk to the men of the eastern

tribes. He was to find out why they had built the altar. Phinehas had served God faithfully by standing against idolatry when God sent a plague upon the Israelites, killing thousands. He had led the battle against the Moabites and Midianites who had lured Israel into idolatry. Balaam had been killed in this battle.

Phinehas took with him ten leaders of the tribes in Canaan. They met with the men who had built the altar by the Jordan River.

“What have you done?” Phinehas asked. “Why have you built yourselves an altar, when the altar stands at Shiloh? Are you turning away from the LORD to worship other gods? Have you forgotten how angry God was when Israel worshiped the gods of Moab? Your rebellion against the LORD will bring His wrath upon all of Israel! If your land is full of idolatry, then give it up and move across Jordan with the rest of us. Don’t you remember that Achan’s sin affected everyone in Israel?”

The men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh listened carefully to everything Phinehas had to say. Then they cried out, “The Mighty One is God the LORD! The Mighty One is God the LORD! He knows we did not build this altar to worship false gods. If we built this altar to rebel

Lesson 12

against Him, may the LORD Himself punish us today!

“No, instead, we were concerned that your children might one day say to our children, ‘The Jordan River is the border between you and us. You have no part in worshiping the LORD at the tabernacle.’ So we built this altar as a memorial for all our children to see. We can tell them, ‘This is a copy of the LORD’s altar at Shiloh. Let it be a witness that we are all one people and worship the one LORD, God of Israel.’”

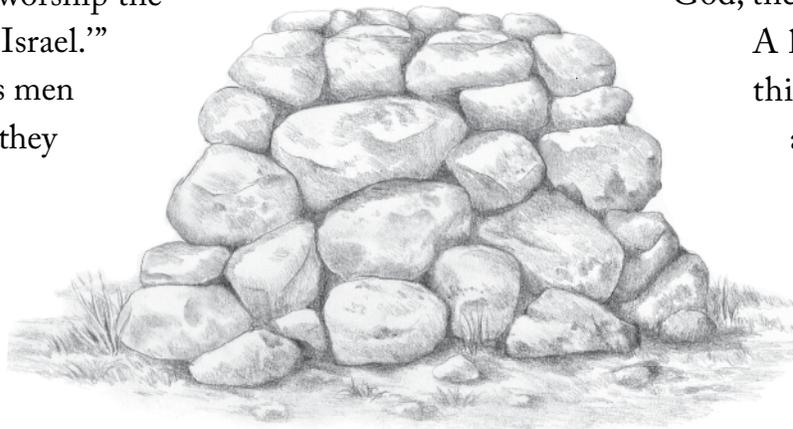
Phinehas and his men were pleased when they heard this explanation. Phinehas told the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, “Today we know that God is among us, because you have not sinned against the LORD; you have delivered the children of Israel from the hand of the LORD.”

Phinehas and the ten tribal leaders returned to Shiloh, where they told the people why the altar by the Jordan had been built. How different this reason was from what

they had expected! They were glad they had talked to the eastern tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh before waging war against them. They were thankful the eastern tribes wanted to continue worshipping the one true God.

The men who built the altar named it Ed, the Hebrew word for “witness”; for it stood as a witness between the tribes east and west of the Jordan River that the LORD was their God, the God of them all.

A long time before this, in this same area, another altar had been built as a witness. Do you remember when Jacob fled from Laban, and the two men made a covenant? As a me-



altar

memorial of this covenant, they piled up a heap of stones. Each man, in his own language, named the memorial altar Gilead (gil' ē əd).

At this time, the Israelites began to call the whole area east of the Jordan River Gilead, which means a “witness heap.”

LAY OF THE LAND

Complete the exercises.

1. What was the area east of the Jordan River called?

2. Which three tribes possessed land in this region?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

③ 3. Write the names of the three cities of refuge east of the river.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

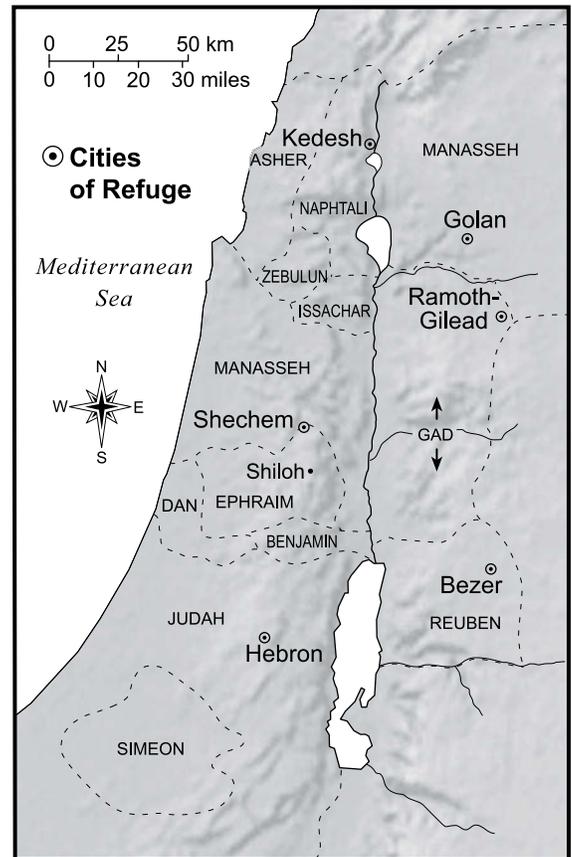
4. Circle the city that was home of the tabernacle after Israel conquered Canaan.

5. Write the names of the western cities of refuge.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____



KNOW YOUR BIBLE

Complete the exercises.

6. Why did the building of an altar in Gilead make the western tribes so upset? Circle the letter of the best answer.

- a. They believed there should only be one altar, the one at the tabernacle.
- b. They thought the eastern tribes would use the altar to worship false gods.
- c. The eastern altar was bigger than the altar in western Canaan.
- d. The eastern tribes had used the spoils of war to build their altar.

7. Whom did Israel send to the eastern tribes to discuss the altar? _____

Lesson 12

8. Circle the letter of the reason this man was a good choice for this job.
 - a. He was known to be a good peacemaker.
 - b. He was Aaron's grandson.
 - c. He had taken a stand against idolatry before.
 - d. He was Israel's army captain.

9. Complete the eastern tribes' confession about God.

The _____ One is _____ the _____!

- △ 10. Why did the eastern tribes build the altar on their side of the Jordan River?

11. a. What did the eastern tribes call their altar? _____
- b. What does that name mean? _____
- c. What was the eastern altar a copy of? _____

KNOW GOD

- ① God will not accept worship from people who also worship or serve false gods. It does not matter if those gods are visible idols, like the gods of Moab or if they are like the gods that people serve today: money, pleasure, and pride. God will not share His glory with another.

Complete the exercises.

 Read Exodus 20:3 and 5 in your Bible.

12. Write the commandment in verse three.

13. Write the word that explains why God will not tolerate idolatry.

"Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a _____ God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

LOOKING BACK

Complete the exercises.

14. Which tribe inherited the service as priests, instead of land? _____

15. What did God command Moses to do so that the Levites could lead the people in worshiping God?

16. The men of which tribe took turns serving in the tabernacle at Shiloh? _____

17. What was the purpose of the cities of refuge?

18. A manslayer was one who _____.

19. An avenger of blood was one who _____.

20. If a man came looking for safety in a city of refuge, what would make the city's leaders hand him over to the avenger of blood?

△ 21. Explain in your own words how God's law changed the custom of taking vengeance for a death.
