

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 worshipping 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



42

Lesson 11: pp. 42–46

The Cities of the Levites

Objectives

Students will be able to

1. State that the inheritance of the Levites was to serve in the tabernacle
2. Identify the six cities of refuge and their locations
3. Describe how the cities of refuge replaced the custom of revenge killing
4. State the lessons God wanted Israel to learn from His new law
5. State that God is faithful to keep His promises

New Words

Kedesh (kē' dish)

Bezer (bē' zər)

Golan (gō' lən)

Ramoth-Gilead

(rā' məth-gil' ē əd)

Review Questions

1. What was each tribe responsible for once the land was divided?

driving out the Canaanites who remained in their territory

2. Name the tribes located in each area and describe the land in the first three areas.

Southern Canaan:

Judah, Simeon; very dry, open grazing land

Central Canaan:

Benjamin, Ephraim, Dan, half of Manasseh;

small farms between the hills

Northern Canaan:

Asher, Issachar, Naphtali, Zebulun; large, fertile valley, sea

East of the Jordan River:

Gad, Reuben, half of Manasseh

3. Who asked Joshua for a special inheritance and why?

Caleb; because he had faithfully given a good report about Canaan, and the LORD had told Moses that Caleb could have a possession in the land

4. Who did Caleb drive from Hebron and where did they go?
giants; to cities along the seashore where other enemies of Israel lived
5. Which strong enemy of Israel lived along the Mediterranean coast?
the Philistines
6. What were the first-fruits that the people brought to Shiloh during the Feast of Weeks?
firstborn animals and first harvested grain or vegetables
7. What did the Israelites pledge in the Feast of Weeks?
to give themselves wholly to God

Class Starter

- Is there anything God cannot do? We have been studying about the miraculous ways God helped the Israelites conquer Canaan. But this lesson tells us there is something that God cannot do.
- God cannot lie. When He makes a promise, He cannot fail to keep it. Numbers 23:19 says God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?
- Ask the children to quote their favorite promises. Spend some time praising God for His faithfulness.

Lesson 11

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.

Discussion Questions

1. How many cities altogether did Joshua set aside for the Levites?
forty-eight
2. What was each city to give the Levites?
some land outside the city walls on which the Levites could farm and raise cattle
3. What was the ancient custom when a man was killed?
a relative could avenge the man’s death

Teacher Notes

Lesson 11

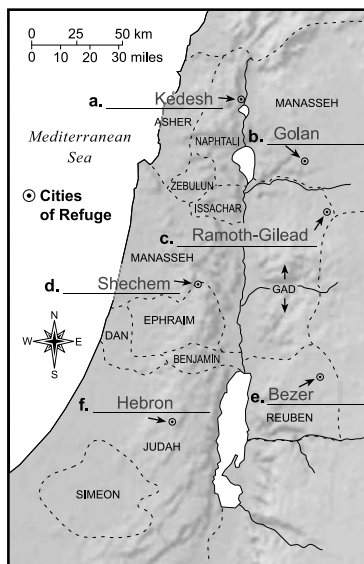
THE LAY OF THE LAND

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?
Hebron



KNOW YOUR BIBLE

Answer these questions.

3. What was the inheritance of the Levites?
They were to serve in the tabernacle as priests and helpers of the priests.
4. Why did God command the Levites to live in cities scattered throughout Canaan?
so they could teach the others the Law and lead them in worshipping God
5. What did the Levites take turns doing at Shiloh?
performing priestly duties in the tabernacle
6. Why would the elders of a city sometimes turn a man over to the avenger of blood?
If they discovered he had murdered rather than accidentally killed, they would turn him over.

4. What was the law the LORD gave to replace that custom?
that only someone who had murdered another could be punished, and a manslayer could find safety in "cities of refuge"
5. What did this new law teach the people?
to be more just in their dealings with each other, to control themselves and not to yield to sudden anger, and to protect the innocent and love justice
6. How many cities of refuge were chosen?

six; three on each side of the Jordan River

7. In what areas of Canaan were the cities of refuge located?
Each part of Canaan—northern, central, and southern—had a city of refuge.
8. What was done to make it easy for people to get to the cities of refuge?
They were positioned so a man could get there in a day. They were built on hills to make them easy to see. The roads leading there were broad, well marked, and kept in good repair.

9. Describe how a city of refuge served the people of Israel.

If a man accidentally killed another, he would run to the nearest city of refuge. When he arrived, he would tell the elders what had happened. They allowed the manslayer to enter the city but would not let the avenger enter. An assembly would question the manslayer. If he was found innocent, he remained in the city. As long as he stayed there, he was safe. If found guilty, he was released to the avenger.

10. Upon the death of the high priest, a manslayer could return to his own city. Did he need to fear the avenger anymore? Explain.
- No, the death of the high priest had freed him. It was as if the high priest had died in his place.*

Lesson 11

Match the terms and their descriptions.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 7. <u>d</u> manslayer | a. safe place |
| 8. <u>c</u> avenger of blood | b. his death freed a manslayer |
| 9. <u>b</u> high priest | c. he sought revenge |
| 10. <u>a</u> city of refuge | d. he accidentally killed another |
| 11. <u>e</u> 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 accidentally killed another.
13. Sometimes people killed for revenge rather than for justice.
14. Sometimes killings went on for generations, leading to endless bloodshed or killing.

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.
- There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

Answers

Ex # Where Found

THE LAY OF THE LAND

1 p 42, map

2 p 37, para 2

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3,4 p 42 para 1

5 p 42, para 3

6 p 43, col 2, para 1

7 p 42, vocab word

Ex # Where Found

8 p 42, para 4

9 p 43, col 2, para 2

10 p 43, para 1

11 p 42, para 3

12-14 p 42, last para

KNOW GOD

15 p 43, col 2, para 3

16 given

Teacher Notes**Lesson 11****LOOKING BACK****Answer these questions.**

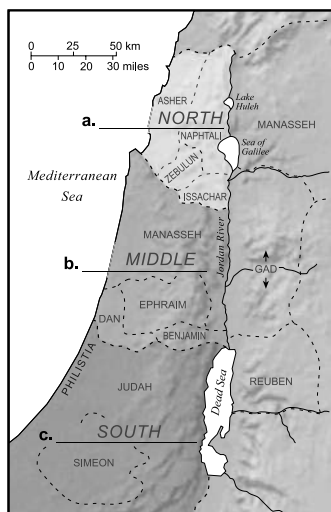
17. Which feast celebrated the salvation of Israel's firstborn? Passover
18. Which feast recalled the wilderness wanderings of Israel? Booths
19. At which feast did Israel offer firstfruits? Weeks

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) Shiloh. Joshua chose this city for the tabernacle because it was in the
- (b) center of Canaan. Israelites visited the tabernacle in this city
- (c) three times a year, for the Feasts of (d) Weeks,
- (e) Passover, and (f) Booths. The tribe of
- (g) Levi 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 south
- b. small farms between the hills middle
- c. a sea with abundant fish north
- d. open grazing land south
- e. the large, fertile Jezreel Valley north

**Ex # Where Found****LOOKING BACK**

- 17 p 35, para 3
- 18 p 35, last para
- 19 p 35, col 2, para 1
- 20 p 35, para 2-5; p 36, para 2
- 21 p 36, para 3
- 22 p 36, para 4-23 p 36, col 2, para 1
- 24 p 36, para 3
- 25 p 36, col 2, para 1

History, Culture, Geography, and Archaeology

- Today the area northeast of the Sea of Galilee is called the Golan Heights. The land is in the southwest corner of Syria, but Israel has claimed legal and political rights. Syria and many other nations do not recognize this claim. And so the dispute between the two countries is ongoing.

Deeper Discussion

- Discuss how we can find refuge in Jesus Christ. Also that we can have freedom from sin through Jesus, because Jesus, our high priest, died in our place.