**Cities of Refuge and Towns for the Levites**

Brook Farm was a failed attempt to create a utopian community in New England. It was founded by former Unitarian minister George Ripley and his wife Sophia in 1841. The commune was established on a 170 acre farm in West Roxbury, MA. From the essay by Alexander Winston Utopia: Dream Into Nightmare: *T*he utopian pictures a static society in which careful planning solves every major problem of human life. Faith is placed in a collectivity that owns or controls all property. Competition for markets or jobs vanishes. Family ties diminish, and the rearing of children by the state is taken for granted. Everything is rationally ordered by those most capable of doing so. The founders of Brook Farm thought they could create a community where everyone contributed to the collective without regard for personal gain. Their hubris was expressed by one of the members who said their ultimate aim was to create heaven on earth. From Lawrence Reed’s review of the essay: *There’s something about these utopian experiments that appeal to the eccentric, the misfits and the oddballs of society. Brook Farm came to possess more of its fair share of them. It attracted ex-ministers who couldn’t handle the duties of the pulpit, bankrupt merchants who resented the market’s verdict on their efforts, flaky artsy-types who hoped to paint or draw or dance their way to a livelihood, young people “out for a lark,” at least one “professional reformer” who decided to eschew the use of money.* By 1847, the commune was bankrupt and its members dispersed. The were many other similar communes established in the 1800’s that also ended in failure. In our study of Joshua chapters 20 and 21, we see the continued parceling of the land in Canaan for cities of refuge and towns for the Levites. Unlike the ill fated utopian attempts, the Jewish nation of Joshua’s time seems to have been built on sound economic and societal principles.

Chapter 20 is brief and only repeats instructions for the establishment of cities of refuge. God had previously commanded that they set up cities to which a person could flee is he killed someone by accident without malice (see Ex. 21:13 and Num. chap. 35). Before his death, Moses had named the cities of Bezer, Ramoth and Golan as cities of refuge for the Transjordanian tribes (see Deut. 4:43). Joshua established 3 additional cities west of the Jordan to serve the remaining tribes: Kadesh, Shechem and Hebron. Once again the curious rule regarding the death of the high priest relieving an innocent man to return to his home is mentioned.

Chapter 21 describes the towns that were set aside for the Levites. As we have previously studied, God considered the honor of serving Him sufficient reward for the Levites, therefore they received no large parcels of land as an inheritance as the other tribes did. They did received small parcels of land within the confines of towns for their houses, gardens and pastures. Verses 9 through 40 detail the towns given to the Levites by clans. Note that the cities of refuge previously designated were given to the Levites to administer. Note also that each of the other tribes contributed towns so that the Levites were dispersed among all of the tribes. The chapter ends with the statements that: God gave the Israelites the land He had promised them, He gave them rest and handed over their enemies to them and not one of God’s promises had failed, all were fulfilled.

To me, the most important message contained in these chapters is that although the Levites were set apart by God, they lived among the other tribes. This was important as they ministered to the people and they advocated with God on their behalf. David Guzik noted that the Levites were “sprinkled” throughout Israel and God never intended that there would be 1 “state” of Levi, rather each tribe was to have the priestly influence and presence among them. He went on to say “In the same manner, Christians (being priests, [1 Peter 2:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+2.5&t=NKJV) and [2:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+2.9&t=NKJV)) are to be “sprinkled” throughout the world and society, instead of heading off to make a “Christian country” somewhere”. Given the rampant sin in society, some might feel compelled to withdraw from society and establish Christian cities where like minded believers could co-exist peacefully and indeed attempts have been made of such communities, similar to the communes established in the 1800’s. As these chapters illustrate, we are called to be the salt and light (heavy on the light, light on the salt) to the lost and we cannot do that by avoiding them, rather we must engage them. As Rick Warren said, failing to do so is telling them they can go Hell.