–Save This Page as a PDF–

Levitical Cities
35: 1-8

Levitical cities DIG: With duties that kept them on the go, how would the landless Levites manage to live in dispersed cities? Secure as their own tribal unit, but scattered among the people, how were they to function in ministry? In what way is the local Torah community like a Levitical city in the midst of Isra'el?

REFLECT: In what sense can our communities be seen as a Levitical city? How can our lives be seen to imitate the life of a Levite? In what sense are we Messiah's Levites? What is your inheritance? Can you take it with you? In what ways does the writing of the Rambam describe your spiritual journey today?

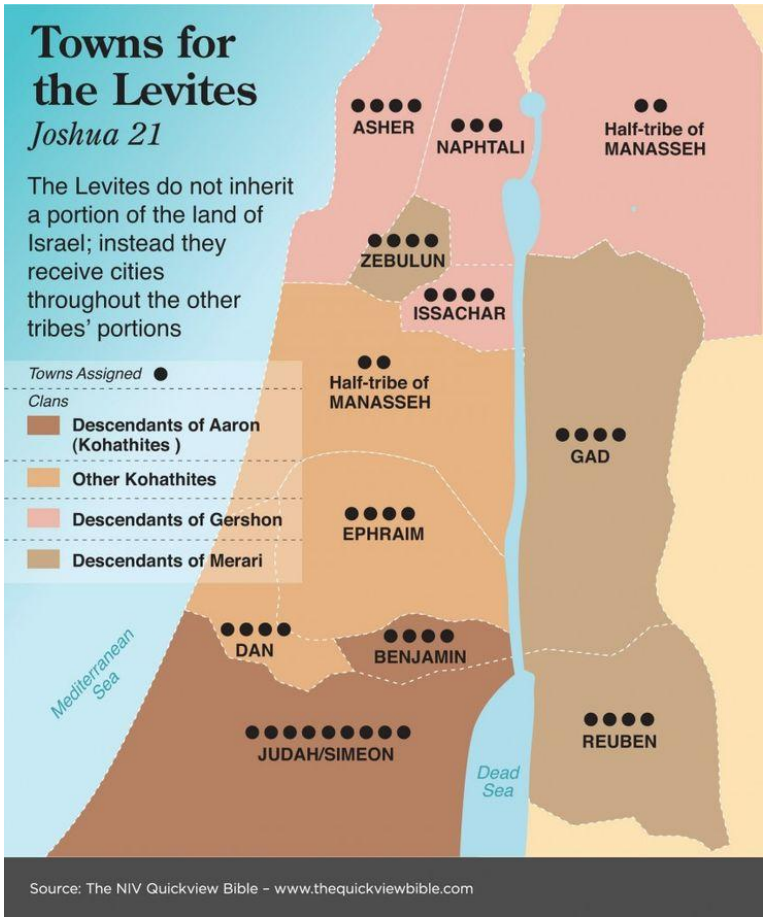
As Messiah is the living Temple; as His disciples, we are His Levites.

The Levites were not included among **the tribes** receiving a portion of **the Land**. Instead, they were to be dispersed throughout **the tribes**. This dispersion was accomplished by establishing **Levitical cities** within each of the tribal territories. The Torah mandates that **Isra'el** was to set aside a total of **48 Levitical cities**, **six** of which were **cities of refuge** (**to see link click Gk – Cities of Refuge**).[769]

In the plains of Mo'av by the Jordan, across from Jericho, ADONAI said to Moshe, "Order the people of Isra'el to give to the Levitical cities to live in from the heritage they will possess" (35:1). The Levites didn't own **the land** on which **they** built **their** homes, and as a result, **they** couldn't sell **it (Leviticus 25:34)**, but were allowed to live there. Because of this, serious agriculture was not a possibility for **them**. **As to the cities you will give from those the people of Isra'el possess, from the many you will take many, and from the few you will take few – each tribe will contribute from its cities to the Levites in accordance with the size of its inheritance (35:1-2a** and **6-8,** also see **18:23; Deuteronomy 10:9, 12:12, 14:27** and **29, 18:2: Joshua 13:14** and **33, 14:4, 18:7).** Every **tribe** was required to have **Levitical cities**.

Therefore, instead of **land, they** were given two things for **their inheritance**. First, **Adonai ELOHIM** was **their inheritance, "This is why the Levites have no inheritance among their brothers; ADONAI is their inheritance" (Deut 10:9a, 18:2; Joshua 13:33).** Secondly, **the tithe** belonged to **them, "I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to ADONAI. That is why I said concerning them, 'They will have no inheritance among the Israelites' (Numbers 18:24** and **Joshua 13:14)."**

However, **ADONAI** did allow **them** a measure of **open pasture land surrounding their cities** to maintain **their livestock. They are to have the cities to live in, while their open land will be for their livestock, for growing crops and for all their animals.** It is difficult to ascertain exactly how **the Torah** determines the boundaries of **the pastureland**. **They** were to **draw a line around the city wall 1,500 feet outside it and to extend outward from there. Measure 3,000 feet outward from the city wall to the east, south, west and north, with the city in the center. The space between the 1,500-foot line and the 3,000-foot line will be their open land around the cities (35:2b** and **4-5).** This was to be the property of **the Levites**.[770]



In this anticipatory passage (see **Ac – Numbers from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Anticipatory Passages**) the mention of **the six cities of refuge** in **35:6** anticipates the creation of **the cities of refuge** for cases of homicide.[771] In the book of **Joshua**, when all **the tribes** were at last settled into **their** territories, the heads of **the Levites** petitioned **Joshua** to assign **them their cities (Joshua 21:1-3)**. **Joshua** and **Eleazar** cast lots to determine which **cities** in the newly conquered territories would be given to **the Levites**. **The cities you give to the Levites are to be the six cities of refuge to which you permit the person who kills someone** unwittingly **to flee to; plus an additional forty-two cities. Thus, you will give the Levites** a total of **forty-eight cities with their surrounding open land (35:6-8).**

According to **Joshua 21** each of the various clans of **the Levites** were granted **cities** among a given group of **Levitical tribes**. **The Kohathites** of Aaronic lineage received **twenty-three cities** in Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, and **the** remaining **Kohathites** were provided with ten **cities** in Ephraim, Dan, and **one-**

half of Manasseh in Cisjordan. **The Gershonites** were granted **thirteen cities** within the tribal territories of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and **one-half of Manasseh** in the Transjordan. **The Merarites** then received **twelve cities** from Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. Most of these tribal allocations and their respective towns follow general geographical regions, moving from south to north, with the exception that **the Merarite** allotments were separate geographically, with several **cities** in the Upper Jezreel Valley and the remaining in the Transjordan, separated by the tribal territory of Issachar in the southeastern Jezreel and Beth Shean Valley regions.[772]

The Levites were to be spread throughout **the people of Isra'el** in order to **teach the Torah** to the whole nation. It is, of course, everyone's responsibility to learn **Torah** and share it with others, but **the Levites** were specifically given that ministry. Since **they** were supported by the other **tribes**, **they** were available to commit **their** lives to the study and pursuit of **the Torah**, as well as the holy ministry of supporting the priests in the Tabernacle. **They shall teach Your mitzvot to Jacob, and Your Torah to Isra'el. They shall put incense before You, and whole burnt offerings on Your altar (Deuteronomy 33:10).** Even though **they** were spread out all over the nation, **they** still needed places to live. The solution came in the concept of **cities** embedded among the other **tribes**. In this way **the Levites** could serve as a "holy leaven" that would permeate **the tribes** with **their** presence as special representatives of the work of **YHVH** in **their** midst. Among **the people, they** would serve as holy guides to the truth and work of **God (Gen 49:7; Leviticus 10;11; Deut 31:9-13** and **33:10)**.[773]

Earlier (see **Ao – The Levites: Messiah's Levites**), we noted similarities between the calling of **the Levites** and **the Master's** call to discipleship. Disciples are like **Levites** for **Messiah**. **The Levites** were the servants of the Tabernacle/Temple and of the priesthood. **Messiah** is the living Temple. **He** is our **High Priest** in **the order of Melchizedek** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bl – Yeshua the Melchizedek Priest**). As **His** disciples, we are **His** servants . . . **His Levites**.

In the same sense that **the Levites** were the property of the priesthood and the Tabernacle/Temple, we are the property of **Yeshua**. Our diligence in the Kingdom falls along the same lines as much of **the Levitical** work. Like the **Levites**, we are to help those seeking to worship **God**. We point the way, we carry the burden, and we build the congregations that help people to encounter **the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**. Like **the Levites**, we are to provide people with teaching. We are entrusted with the words of **the Master** and the teaching of **the Torah**. And like **the Levites** we are scattered among **the People of God**, and our job is to

function as **salt** and **light** in **their** midst (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Df – You are the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World**).[774]

Maimonides, commonly referred to by the Hebrew acronym Rambam (1138 to 1204 AD)**, a Sephardic rabbi and philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages, regarded the Levites' dedicated life as a model worthy of imitation. As with the Levites, the call of discipleship often involves laying our earthly pursuits aside. He wrote, "And this is not only true for the tribe of Levi, but for everyone throughout the world whose spirit is willing, and whose intellect has guided, to set apart to stand before YHVH, to minister unto Him and to serve Him with a view of knowing Him, following the right path according to the LORD's design, and casting off our shoulders the yoke of many worldly affairs sought after by mankind. The one who has dedicated himself is made holy to the highest degree, and that ADONAI becomes his portion and his inheritance for all eternity, and will grant him in this world whatever will suffice for his needs, even as He has done for the priests and the Levites (Mishneh Torah, Zeraim, Hilcoth Shemitah Ve-Yobel 13:12-13).**[775] **Maimonides** might have been describing the committed disciple of **Yeshua** today who has left home and career to follow the **Messiah's** leading. Yet that is not to say that discipleship cannot be reconciled with a career. **Maimonides** supported **himself** as a physician all the years that **he** studied and taught, and **his** work in **the Torah** is second to none.

It is helpful to think of the role of the local congregation as a sort of **Levitical city** in the midst of **Isra'el**. Our communities are scattered. We are very distinct from other congregations. Yet, we should not be too isolated. Our responsibility is **to proclaim the whole Word of God (Acts 20:27)**. We are to be a ministry, a witness, and an example to those outside the community. In other words, we are meant to be an oasis of **Torah**.[776]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise **You**, that as **You** were **the inheritance** of **the Levites**, so also **You** are **the inheritance** of all who love you! Thank **You** for **Your** great love that chooses to adopt into **Your** family **(Ephesians 1:5)** all who believe/trust/have faith in **You (John 1:12)** as their **Lord** and **Savior**. **For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for***

salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever trusts in Him will not be put to shame" (Romans 10:9-11).

*Receiving a large monetary **inheritance** is helpful in buying things, but money goes only so far and then it is gone and things do not last very long . . . and then they are gone. Having a prestigious family name does often bring some respect, but family names cannot get anyone into heaven. What is most important is eternity! Being **sealed by the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** is the best **inheritance** that ever could be. Praise, thank, glorify and worship **You** my awesome and loving heavenly **Father** for the home in heaven that **Yeshua** is preparing for me! Such a huge gift takes my breath away and I do not have words to praise **You** enough! **You** redeem those who love **You** and bless them with your loving adoption as sons and daughters, **"In Messiah"** (**Ephesians 1:5-7**). Thank **You** for giving me **Messiah's righteousness**, for **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:17).** Praise **You** so much for being the **inheritance** of all who love **You**! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*