

The City of Refuge

References: Num 35:6-32; Deu 19:1-13; Deu 4:41-49; Joshua 20:1-9

- Num 35:6 And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: Num 35:11 Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at **unawares**. Num 35:12 And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the **congregation in judgment**. Num 35:13 And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge. Num 35:14 Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge. Num 35:15 These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that **every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither**. Num 35:16 And if he **smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death**. Num 35:17 And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: **the murderer shall surely be put to death**. Num 35:18 Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of **wood**, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: **the murderer shall surely be put to death**. Num 35:19 The **revenger of blood** himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, **he shall slay him**. Num 35:20 But if he **thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait**, that he die; Num 35:21 Or in **enmity smite him with his hand**, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him. Num 35:22 **But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait, Num 35:23 Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm: Num 35:24 Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments:** Num 35:25 And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall **restore him to the city of his refuge**, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the **death of the high priest**, which was anointed with the holy oil. Num 35:26 But if the slayer shall at any time **come without the border of the city of his refuge**, whither he was fled; Num 35:27 And the **revenger of blood find him without the borders** of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood **kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood**: Num 35:28 Because **he should have remained in the city** of his refuge until the **death of the high priest**: but **after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession**. Num 35:29 So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Num 35:30 Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the **mouth of witnesses**: but **one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die**. Num 35:31 Moreover ye shall take no **satisfaction for the life of a murderer**, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death. Num 35:32 And ye shall take **no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge**, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest.
- Deu 19:4 And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past; Deu 19:5 **As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live:** Deu 19:11 But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities: Deu 19:12 Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Deu 19:13 Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.

- Jos 20:1 The LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, Jos 20:2 Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses: Jos 20:3 That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. Jos 20:4 And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and **shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them.** Jos 20:5 And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then **they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime.** Jos 20:6 And he shall dwell in that city, **until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest** that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled. Jos 20:7 And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjatharba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. Jos 20:8 And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. Jos 20:9 These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.

Opening:

- The fact that the cities of refuge are described at more or less length in no fewer **than four of the Old Testament books**—Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua—denotes the importance of them.
- **OT Type and figure**

Put into my own words:

- **Applied to accidental deaths**
- **Not premeditated murder**
- **No mercy shown for the guilty**
 - Original statute pertaining to the subject ; Gen 9:6 **Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed:** for in the image of God made he man.
 - **Eye for eye**
 - If someone kills someone else, then the **nearest male relative** of the deceased is **the “avenger of blood”** - he can track down and kill the original killer to exact revenge and justice for his dead relative. Obviously, the killer will want to stay away from this “avenger of blood.”
 - **The barbarous custom of blood-revenge still exists among the Arab tribes.** In virtue of it the kinsman of anyone put to death considers it a duty to avenge him by killing the intentional or even unintentional slayer.
- On the one hand, there must be a **strict enforcing of justice**; on the other, **the exercising of mercy**. **The guilty were not to be cleared; the innocent must not be executed.** Instead, there was a sanctuary provided for the innocent, to which he could go and obtain shelter and protection.
 - In all ages God has tempered His justice with mercy and caused His grace to reign through righteousness.
- **If the killer left the city of refuge, he forfeited legal protection,** and then, should the revenger of blood find him without its borders, he was entitled and duty bound to kill him.

- Even after his trial and he was found to be innocent, it was required that he **remain within the city of refuge until the death of the high priest**, and then he was free to return to his home and reside there unmolested.

City Details:

From what we read in Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19 and Joshua 20, we can distinguish a number of **characteristics of the cities of refuge**:

1. **Those cities were given to provide shelter from the avenger.** The family of the unintended victim had the right and duty to avenge him by killing the intentional or even unintentional slayer.
 - Describe the mental anguish and torment of an accidental killer
 - Once inside the city of refuge, the refugee was safe. The pursuer is Satan, the accuser of the brethren.
 - Thus those cities of refuge were not meant to provide shelter for murderers.
 - Murder, strictly speaking, involves more than the overt act: it includes the spirit behind the act, the motive prompting it. If the act be performed "without enmity" and with no desire to harm another, then it is a case of involuntary manslaughter and not of murder.
 - If you hate your brother, you are guilty of murder.
2. **They were established by God Himself before they were needed.**
 - God's appointing of Christ to be the Savior of sinners was no afterthought to meet an unlooked-for emergency: in the Divine purpose and plan Christ was the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).
3. **The roads were available as well as accessible to all. They were always to be kept in good repair.**
 - Those cities were so situated that when a person had need of such, one was near at hand. Express instructions were given that they were to be "**in the midst of the land**" (Deut. 19:2, 3), and not in remote corners which had been difficult to approach. The land had to be divided "into three parts," one city of refuge in each, so that it could be reached within a **single day's journey**, no matter where the manslayer resided—what a touching proof of God's tender mercy! Everything was done to facilitate the innocent's escape. The application is obvious: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart" (Ps. 34:18). Unto such He says, "My righteousness is near" (Isa. 51:5). The way to salvation is short: it is but a simple renunciation of self and a laying hold of Christ to be our all in all.
4. **Their gates were always open.**
 - In order to justify his claim to immunity the fugitive had to prove to the elders of that city that his deed was unpremeditated and accidental. After submitting his evidence he was allowed to remain within the prescribed precincts. He could not return to his old home, nor could he appease the avenger by money.
 - Once the killer convinced the elder, he must until the elders from the deceased's hometown arrive to extradite (under protection) the killer back to the deceased's hometown. Then the case is heard and judgment is prescribed:
 - If the killer is found guilty, then he/she is released to the avenger of blood. Death ensues.
 - If the killer is found innocent, then he/she is escorted back to the city of refuge, where he/she must stay until the death of the High Priest of Israel. After that, the killer can go free, and the avenger of blood can no longer seek revenge for the death of his relative.

- In either case, guilt or innocence, a death is required for the remission of that sin! In particular, a real killer must be put to death, and it also takes the death of the High Priest to remove the killer's guilt.....
5. **They were widely advertised.**
 - The road to the city was plainly marked out. "Thou shalt prepare thee a way . . . that every slayer may flee thither (Deut. 19:3). **Jewish writers say it was a law in Israel that one day in every year there were persons sent to repair the roads leading to them**, to remove all stumbling-stones which might by time have fallen in the way, and to see also that the signposts which were set up at every corner leading to the city were carefully preserved, and the name Miklac (that is, refuge) legible upon them. Whether or not that was the case, certain it is that in the Gospel God has fully and plainly made known the way of salvation, so that "**wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein**" (Isa. 35:8). See also Romans 10:6-8.
 6. **All the cities of refuge were prominently located at high elevations so that they could be seen from great distances.**
 - They were built upon hills or mountains.
 - This made them the more readily seen and kept in sight by those who were fleeing to the same.
 - They represent Christ whom "God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31).
 - For the same reason, the saints who lift Him up by their lives are likened to "**a city that is set on an hill**" (Matthew 5:14).
 - Raised to sit in heavenly places
 7. **Everyone was within a day's journey from at least one of them.**
 - So there are six cities of refuge in Israel, supposedly **no more than 20 miles** (or a good day's run) away from any settled part of the Promised Land, to which the killer can flee for safety.
 8. **"Whosoever" needed to flee to one of the cities was free to do so, whether or not he was an Israelite.**
 - John 3:16:, For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Compare to Christ

- **Jesus, Our City Of Refuge**
 - Psalms 91:2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.
 - "The Lord is a refuge, an ever present help in a time of trouble (Psalm 46:1)."
 - Underline those words, "an ever present help." Not a distant city, or a refuge out of reach, but an ever present one; a city of refuge no farther than a bent knee and a contrite heart.
- **Song: Blessed Refuge**
- A "way" which led to each city was to be prepared so as to guide the fugitive who was fleeing unto it.
 - Jews kept the way clear, replacing the signs which clearly pointed the way

- Jesus said, "I am the Way"
- **Deserving of death, but granted mercy**
 - Romans 6:23 warns us that the consequences of our sin is death. We are being pursued by the avenger of blood, if you will. God's appointed Savior is Jesus Christ. But as sinners on the run, fugitives apart from Christ, we must come to him by faith in order to be saved.
 - Jesus even invited us to come to him: "**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest [from running and hiding] (Matthew 11:28).**"
- **The gates of the cities of refuge were never to be locked.**
 - I can call Him, anytime.

Personal Application:

- **The prayer of David in Psalms. 143:9, "Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto Thee to hide me"**
- **Men do not flee for refuge when they are in no distress.** The vessel puts not into the harbor of refuge when winds and waves all favor her.
 - **Make personal**
 - **Song: I've Found A Refuge**
- **Even under the OT system, divine mercy was extended unto those who threw in their lot with the people of God!**
- **Are you desperately searching for a distant shelter from your enemies? Look no farther; the city of refuge has already found you.**
 - Enter His gates with praise; your case has all ready been decided, and **you have been found innocent in the blood of the lamb.** No travel required; the journey was over before it began, for Jesus Christ is our ever present city of refuge.
- **It is not sufficient for the manslayer to recognize his peril, nor to have the knowledge that God has provided relief for him**
 - He must flee to the city of refuge and personally avail himself of its shelter. Not until he actually passed within the portals of that sanctuary was he safe from the avenger of blood.
- **He is either under the wrath of God or under the atoning blood of Christ. There is no middle place between the two.**
 - He is this very day "**condemned already**" (John 3:18), waiting for execution.
- **The city of refuge is like the Lord Jesus Christ in His protection for guilty sinners.**
 - We have all sinned, deliberately. We are all worthy of death. Satan is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is like the avenger of blood. But in Christ we have a haven of safety. He is like the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land.
- The manslayer is an apt representation of the sinner, who is a soul-slayer: "**thou hast destroyed thyself**" (Hos. 13:9). But more particularly: **he sets before us the awakened sinner.**

- Previously, the man had lived in **quietness and comfort**, but when he slew another, though unintentionally, his peace was shattered. Everything was suddenly changed: there was danger without, and fear within. He now discovered himself to be in a very evil situation. There lies the body of another, dead by his own carelessness.
- **Who can conceive the distress and dismay which overwhelm his mind?** He knows that the next of kin has the right to take vengeance and slay him. He is no longer safe in his own home; he is unable to find security in any building of his own hands; he must now flee for his life.
- Thus it is with the **unconverted**. In his natural condition, a false serenity is his, and he finds contentment in the things of this world and the pleasures of sin. Then, unawares, the Holy Spirit arouses him from the sleep of spiritual death, convicts him of sin, makes him realize that the wrath of God is upon him, and his soul exposed to eternal death. Oh, what unspeakable anguish is his as he now realizes himself to be a rebel against the Most High, lost and undone.
- **The manslayer left his house, his wife, his children, everything, to flee away to the city of refuge.**
 - That is just what a man does when he resolves to be saved by grace: **he leaves everything he calls his own, renounces all the rights and privileges which he thought he possessed**; yea, he confesses to having lost his own natural right to live, and he flees for life to the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The manslayer had no right to live except that he was in the city of refuge, no right to anything except that he was God's guest within those enclosing walls.
 - **And so we relinquish, heartily and thoroughly, once and forever, all ideas arising out of our supposed merits**; we hasten away from self that Christ may be all in all to us. Fleeing for refuge implies that a man flees from his sin. He sees it and repents of it.
 - **There has to be a complete break from the old self-pleasing life**. Sin must be made bitter before Christ will be sweet.
 - **Fleeing for refuge implies earnestness**, for the manslayer dared not dawdle or leisurely stroll about: **he ran for his life**. It implied unwearied diligence, so that he loitered not till shelter and safety were reached.

Church:

- **The names of these cities (Josh. 20:7, 8) spoke of what the believer has in Christ.**
 - **Kadesh signifies "holy,"** and Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God, is made unto the believer sanctification as well as righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30)—how deeply suggestive that this is the first mentioned, that in the Redeemer we have a sanctuary of holiness.
 - **Shechem means "shoulder,"** which is 'the place of strength (Isa. 9:7) and of safety (Luke 15:5)—under the government of Christ the believer finds security.
 - **Hebron means "fellowship,"** and through Christ His people are brought into communion with the Father and with the holy angels.
 - **Bezer means "a fortified place"** and "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble" (Nah. 1:7); therefore "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust" (Ps. 91:2).
 - **Ramoth means "height" or "exaltation":** in Christ we are elevated above the world, made to sit in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).
 - **Golan means "exultation" or "joy,"** and "we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:11).
- **The church is just like an Old Testament city of refuge.**

- Everyone is welcome and none are rejected. Life may have left you battered and bruised, things may have gone horribly wrong, you may even be at the end of your rope, but don't give up hope; with God all things are possible.
- **Once inside, the refugee was safe from danger and harm.**
 - They were further welcomed, supported and restored by priests whose job it was to care for those who had fled for refuge.
 - We are all Kings and Priests
 - Priesthood of all believers
- **This is one of the major messages that we as the body of Christ need to communicate to our friends and neighbors.**
- **The saints warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come, and instruct and exhort them to 'flee for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them.'** " (Heb. 6:18).
 - Should death, like the avenger of blood, find them without, destruction is inevitable."
 - There is a **place of safety** in a terrifying world, there is one who is completely accessible to all of us. Our cry ought to be "Refuge! Refuge!"
- **It is our duty to invite others to this great city**
 - In Revelation 22:17, John says, "**The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'** And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price."
 - The Spirit of God is sovereignly at work inviting people to this open access that's found in Jesus Christ.
 - But it also says that the Bride is saying, "Come." We are the Bride of Christ, his body, the church.
- **God still wants it to be easy for fugitives to find their way to salvation and safety in Jesus Christ.**
- **At our assemblies you'll meet people who felt the same way but are now experiencing the miracle of new life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

2 Key Differences

1. **The city of refuge provided protection only for the accidental slayer from the revenger of blood. The deliberate murderer was excluded**

- Guilty can come to the city and find refuge
- We were all guilty of **willful sin**
- **A refuge without limitations**
- He gave me mercy, not justice that day
- **Song:**

I was guilty with nothing to say
 And they were coming to take me away
 But then a voice from Heaven was heard and He said
 "Let Him go and take me instead"

CHORUS

I should have been crucified
I should have suffered and died
I should have hung on the cross in disgrace
But Jesus, God's Son, took my place

VERSE 2

Crowns of thorns, the spear deep in His side
And those pains should have been mine
Those rusty nails were meant for me
But Jesus took them and let me go free

2. **Death of the High Priest which secured full and final deliverance (Josh. 20:6).**

- Hebrews 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.
- Heb 10:21 And having an high priest over the house of God; Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.
- Now, the High Priest, Jesus Christ, has died and been risen.
 - He is alive forevermore
- The captives have been set free through the blood of the lamb

Ending:

- Plea for the weary Christian
- Plea for the sinner
 - **We don't have to seek out the city of refuge, for now Jesus is seeking for me**
 - The simple truth is, without Christ, all our plans for self preservation are flawed. Jesus is our city of refuge unlike any other, for He is a city of refuge that seeks us.
 - No longer do we need to run from our adversaries, struggling to reach the walls of safety.
 - No longer is our rest a distant city journeyed towards in fear of being captured. Jesus is a city of refuge who seeks the weary, where ever we are.
 - In the clutches of sin, in the darkness – void of light, He is there; a city brightly lit. His gates are opened wide; waiting to provide shelter for all in troubled times.
- Plea for the backslider
 - Those who have left the city of refuge
- **The picture that we see of Jesus today shifts from doors of a city of refuge that we have to approach, to the door of our own heart that he approaches.**
 - He says to each of us, "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock**; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).
 - **The door is ours, and Jesus is out looking for us as guilty, lost fugitives, knocking on the door** and saying, "I know who you are, I know the sin you've committed, I know how messed up you are inside. I want to come inside you and clean up the mess."