

Joshua 20 – God Provides Cities of Refuge from the Wicked One

Calvin, Clarke, HebrewLexicon, Henry, TSK, Gill, Trapp, JFB, Poole, Geneva, INT, Delitzsch, Maclaren,

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: It is a historical fact that great societies were not destroyed by outside forces, but by corruption or confusion from the inside. This is why, even though Israel had peace from their external enemies, God continued to give them directions for maintaining peace and order internally. Today you'll see one of those things that God required to keep peace and order. He told them how to protect the unintentional murderer from the avenger (复仇者) .

Our headings are:

Demand for the Cities of Refuge (逃城)

Description of the Cities of Refuge

Our goals are: That you will see the need to protect society by protecting the innocent, that you will see how the cities of refuge typified (象征着) your security in Jesus Christ, and in turn, that you will work harder for the innocent and praise God better for your eternal security.

The Demand for the Cities of Refuge

1 The LORD also spoke to Joshua, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: '**Appoint for yourselves cities of refuge**, of which I spoke to you through Moses,

1. As evidence of God's care, God demanded that Israel appoint for themselves cities of refuge throughout the land.

Now God could have told them where to put the cities, but he chose not to. God had instructed them well. God had removed their main enemies. God had blessed them with many blessings. And then, as a good Father, God required that they fulfill some responsibilities. No wife wants a husband who enjoys the benefits of the home, but does not fulfill any responsibility there. No parent wants his children to enjoy the benefits of the home but who refuses to fulfill any duties in the home. Rewards and responsibilities go together.

3 'that the slayer who kills a person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there; and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. (使那无心而误杀人的, 可以逃到那里。这些城可以作你们逃避报血仇人的地方。)

2. Cities of refuge were cities where a man who accidentally killed a friend, foe, family, or foreigner, would flee and remain in safety

from another who sought revenge. (The same act, done from different motives, is not the same.) How could one have accidentally killed another? One could have been tearing down a house and it fell and killed another. One on the roof could have accidentally dropped something and hit one on the head and killed him. Even in play, one could have killed another. And with a weak central government God knew it was necessary to protect the innocent in order to maintain peace. If everyone sought personal revenge (报私仇), the society would be in chaos. God cares. **What can you learn from this?**

a. You are not to kill or execute someone for accidental murder (意外杀人). Bloodguilt (杀人罪) by the eager avenger would bring condemnation and curses from God.

b. This is a reminder that you are to flee to Jesus for rescue. Note the similarity in the language.

Hebrews 6:18 that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, **who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope** set before *us*. (藉这两件不更改的事, 神决不能说谎, 好叫我们这逃往避难所, 持定摆在我们前头指望的人, 可以大得勉励。)

Refuge is only found in Jesus. There was another picture in the OT (旧约). An accused (被指控的人) could run to the temple/tabernacle (会幕) and hold on to the horns of the altar of sacrifice (献祭的坛) and be safe from execution. With Christ as your sacrifice...and your temple...you can daily run to him for rescue.

Philippians 3:9 and **be found in Him**, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

In Jesus Christ you are free from arrests. In fact, you have no condemnation in him. (你在祂里面就不被定罪。)

Romans 8:1 *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...

4 'And when he flees to one of those cities, and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them.

3. But, like the horns of the altar, cities of refuge were not places where one could be guilty and be safe. The accused had to make his case before the elders of that city. If he convinced (使相信, 说服) them of his innocence, they would keep and protect him in that city. He was restricted 受限制, but he was free to live and work. He need not fear.

Today, because Christ is your righteousness, even though you are guilty of heinous sins, you need not fear either. His righteousness is counted as yours before the Father in heaven.

5 'Then if the **avenger of blood pursues him**, they shall **not deliver the slayer into his hand**, because he **struck his neighbor unintentionally**, but did not hate him beforehand. 6 'And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, and **until the death of the one who is high priest (大祭司) in those days**. Then the slayer (杀人的) may return and come to his own city and his own house, to the city from which he fled."

4. With innocence established, if the avenger came and tried to get the accidental murderer to kill him, the men of the city could not turn him over to be killed. Instead, they would defend his innocence. Isn't it what Jesus said as well?

John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me **I will by no means cast out.**

Even in the walls of the figurative church there are **12 gates to welcome in all who would come and enjoy God's peace** through the blood of the Lamb of God. They are then safe in those walls.

5. The accused would remain in the city of refuge and could not return to his people until the High Priest died. Why? The High Priest, the most spiritual man of Israel, typified Jesus Christ. So like

the future sacrifice of Jesus, the High Priest would be a substitute for the accused, so the accuser had no more reason to pursue him. To go after the accused after the High Priest died would have been like putting two persons to death for the same crime.

You must see the High Priest today as your High Priest.

Hebrews 9:14 how **much more shall the blood of Christ**, who through the eternal Spirit **offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience** from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant...

The Description of the Cities of Refuge

7 So they appointed (分定) **Kedesh** in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, **Shechem** in the mountains of Ephraim, and **Kirjath Arba** (which is Hebron) in the mountains of Judah. 8 And on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward, they assigned **Bezer** in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, **Ramoth** in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and **Golan** in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.

1. The people, in response to God, then designated cities throughout the Canaan.

a. The word “appointed” is a special word. It means “to set aside for special use” (为特定用途而分别出). It is the same word that we translate “sanctify” (分别为圣). It is the only time this word is translated “appointed.” Maybe the translators believed that the cities were set aside for ordinary use and they had no spiritual significance. **You will see that these cities did have spiritual significance (属灵意义).** These places of safety were sanctified, like your place of safety – the Lord Jesus - was sanctified!

John 17:19 “And for their sakes I **sanctify Myself**, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

b. All 6 of these cities were Levite cities (利未人的城邑). This put a special honor on them, but it also ensured impartiality in justice.

c. These cities were all upon hills and conveniently spread from north to south on either side of the Jordan River so all Israel could have access to them. In fact, Israel had to build clear roads leading to these cities.

Is heaven open today...and everyday...from any part of the universe? Access to your Mediator is 24/7.

2. Kedesh was in Naphtali in the North. Jesus Christ spent a lot of time there. Kedesh means “holy.” Wasn’t the Lord described as holy, both in his human and Divine natures? Wasn’t it his being holy that qualified him to be the sacrifice for man’s sins?

Psalms 16:10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, **Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.**

Hebrews 7:26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, **who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners**, and has become higher than the heavens;

3. Shechem was in Ephraim in the center or heart of Israel. Shechem means “shoulder”. Wasn’t the Lord said to **carry the government upon his shoulder**. The woman at the well lived here.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the **LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.**

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And **the government will be upon His shoulder.** And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God...

4. Hebron (Kirjath Arba) was in Judah in the south of Israel. Hebron means “fellowship.” Don’t believers share in fellowship with Christ? Aren’t you called to fellowship with Christ?

1Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, by whom **you were called into the fellowship of His Son,** Jesus Christ our Lord.

1John 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and **truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

5. Bezer was on the east side of the Jordan River in Reuben. This was East South East, close to the Arabian Desert. Bezer means “fortification” (堡垒, 防线) . Isn’t the Lord a strong tower from the enemies? Is Christ the means of your defence from God’s judgment...the one you run to for hope and safety...the wall around his sheep?

Psalms 144:2 My lovingkindness and **my fortress, My high tower and my deliverer,** My shield and the One in whom I take refuge, Who subdues my people under me.

6. Ramoth was in the tribe of Gad and also supported the covenant people on the East of the Jordan River. Ramoth means “high” or “exalted.” Isn’t Jesus the one who is on high and exalted at God’s right hand? Isn’t he exalted in his person, in his office, and in his grace? And are you not exalted and made to sit in heavenly places in Jesus Christ? (Eph 2)

Acts 2:33 "Therefore **being exalted to the right hand of God,** and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

7. Golan was in Bashan in the far northeast section on the east side of the Jordan. Golan means “exultation” (欢腾、喜悦) or “manifestation.” (体现、化身) Aren’t the redeemed in Christ filled with joy as he is his righteousness? And didn’t Christ have to be manifested in the flesh, live and die for you, so that you might have joy? And won’t he reveal himself on the last day and take you to heaven?

9 These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwelt among them, that whoever killed a person accidentally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stood before the congregation.

8. Then the plan was repeated for clarity. These places were not to protect the guilty, as those who get pardons by our political leaders today. No, these 6 cities were placed to keep in check (抑制、约束) the fury of the one who lost a loved one and thought he might satisfy his fury by murdering the un-convicted.

9. What wondrous love. Look how God cared for his people.

Too often in our society the innocent have suffered. If you have high connections you can get away with murder. **In many countries** the innocent are languishing in prisons (在监狱里受苦). Blacks were tried (or not) and hung with little or no evidence in the Southern United States. Remember Hitler's murdering of the innocent Jews.

Think of churches that have no procedure for discipline but leave it up to one man to do as he wishes.

Think of cruel fathers who have disciplined with excessive force. The point is: When order is gone internally, chaos soon follows. (当内部的秩序丧失时, 混乱的局面就开始了。) But our Lord, for all peoples, has mandated internal order. How evidence is collected, how witnesses are to be treated, etc. are all directed by him. This keeps peace.

Spiritually, you can learn how Christ is the means by which you are kept in safety from the Devil who is out to steal, kill, and destroy. And how are you ultimately kept safe and given freedom? Your **High Priest died and freed you from condemnation**, so may you enjoy his protection.

Conclusion:

God, out of his desire to maintain justice and order in Israel, called on them to appoint 6 cities of refuge. Anyone who was unfairly targeted, whether Jew or Gentile (外邦人), could flee there and be safe. In the appointing of these cities you see a remarkable picture of the work of Jesus Christ, the true refuge (真正的避难所) who provides safety for his people.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: 1. **Do you take time to learn of the order God requires in the world, in your church, job, and home?** I am afraid sometimes you can become so busy learning how to be a successful church that the home is ignored...sometimes you can become so busy being a successful family that the state is ignored. This is dishonoring to Christ. God demands order in all areas of society. You may not say: I don't have time for any one of the spheres of life. 2. **Considering the spiritual implication of this lesson, do you run to Jesus daily for protection and strength?** Do you see him as a distant Lord, or one who lives in you and you in him? If presence of Christ there is peace and joy. Don't rob yourself of these comforts.

Finally, will you run to Jesus as a place of sure defense, or do you think that you can protect yourself from the unjust avenger Satan (撒旦)? I can tell you with certainty that the Devil will catch you and destroy you. Only if you run to Christ and plead for his wall of protection that came from the cross – only then will you be safe.