

## Cities of Refuge

### Joshua 20: 1-9

#### Rev. 5

### **Joshua 20:1-9** **THE CITIES OF REFUGE**

**Intro:** The land of Canaan has been possessed and subdued. The various tribes have received their inheritance and things are starting to wind down as far as the conquest of the land is concerned. However, there is still much work to be done by Joshua and the people of Israel. In this chapter, we find them carrying out a command that was first given to Moses in Numbers 35:1-34. They were to appoint 6 cities that were to be known as "cities of refuge". These cities were to be made available to someone who has killed another person by accident. They could flee to any of these 6 cities and find safety and help.

It is these cities of refuge that I want to consider for a while this morning. They paint for us a clear picture of the salvation that is to be found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. Allow me to share several truths with you this morning concerning the cities of refuge.

#### I. V. 1-3 **THE PURPOSE OF THESE CITIES**

A. **They Were To Serve As A Refuge** - It is clear from these verses that these cities were to be set up to protect the person who had accidentally taken the life of another person. When the Lord gave Israel His Law, He made no provision for a police force. Every crime against society was to be dealt with swiftly and in accordance with the nature of the offense. For instance, if a person stole something, they were to make restitution, Ex. 22:1-5. The punishments were always designed to fit the crime, "*Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*" Ex 21:24-25. If the crime in question happened to take the life of another human being, the nearest kinsman of the slain man had the right to avenge the death of his fallen relative, Num. 35:19-21. However, it is clear from reading passages like Numbers 35, that the Lord sees a difference between murder and manslaughter.

Therefore, when a man had accidentally taken the life of another, he could flee to one of these 6 cities of refuge and there, if it was determined that the death had indeed been an accident, he could find safety from the "avenger of blood." So, these cities were established as a refuge.

B. **They Were To Serve As A Reminder** - For our sakes, these cities serve to point out certain facts about the salvation we enjoy in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as these were places where a man could flee in a time of desperate need, so Jesus is a place of safety this morning.

You see, here is our problem. We are born sinners, Rom. 3:23, Rom. 5:12, Psa. 58:3. It isn't our fault, we are just born with an old sinful nature that we inherited from our father Adam. But, even though it isn't our fault that we are born this way, it is our fault that we stay this way! As we grow older and reach an age where we can make a choice regarding sin, we all choose to sin. That makes sin a double edged sword! We are guilty by birth and by practice.

Now, since this is true, we are in deep trouble! Just like there was a death sentence on all those who took the life of another, there is also a death sentence on every person born into the human race. We are all being pursued by an Avenger of Blood. The end of our flight is death, Rom. 6:23! After death, there is nothing to look forward to but Hell and all its misery, Psa. 9:17. We need a refuge! We need a place where we can run to and find safety for our souls! I praise God that there is a place where the sinner can flee and find help and hope. A place where we can find a new life and a new start. A place where the avenger of blood cannot touch us, ever! That place is a man. That man's name is Jesus Christ. Notice what these cities of refuge teach us about Him.

#### I. The Purpose Of These Cities

#### II. V. 1 **THE PROVISION OF THESE CITIES**

A. **They Were Provided By God** - Man did not come up with the idea for these cities. This was a notion that was birthed in the heart and mind of God. He wanted to teach His people that murderers had to pay for their crimes, hence, the avenger of blood. Yet, He also wanted to teach His people that there was a place of mercy for those who were only guilty of an accident. Therefore, God gave them the cities of refuge.

(Ill. May I remind you that Jesus Christ is also the gift of God! Remember what the Bible says about Him, John 3:16? Christianity and salvation through the shed blood of Jesus did not originate in the heart of man. This thing is all God's idea! From start to finish this thing we are involved in this morning is the work of God!)

(Ill. When man creates a religion, he fixes it in such a way that he is in control of it. He sets it up as a system of works and makes himself responsible for getting himself to whatever Heaven he is striving for. God, on the other hand, does it in such a way that man is left out of the picture. All man does is trust Jesus as his Savior by faith. And, even that faith is given to him by the Lord, Eph. 2:8-9. You use, salvation is all God or it isn't real at all!)

B. **They Were Provided By Grace** - God could have allowed the manslayer to die like any other person who had taken a life. However, in His grace He made a way that those folks who had accidentally taken the life of another might find refuge and help.

(Ill. By the same token, God could have allowed sinners to all go to Hell. After all, we are guilty in His sight and we deserve nothing but damnation in the fires of Hell! But, I praise the precious name of the Lord this morning that God sent His Son to take our sins upon Himself on the cross, Isa. 53:6. I thank God that Jesus paid the price that sinners like you and me might live through Him!)

(Ill. Whatever anyone may tell you about getting to Heaven, the Word of God tells us that it will never happen unless it happens through grace. Folk, it is all God from start to finish!

1. **He initiates the process** - John 6:44; Eph. 2:1.

2. **He provides the means** - Rom. 3:25; Acts 4:12

3. **He saves those who believe** - Acts 16:31

4. **He keeps those He saves** - 1 Pet. 1:5

You and I are capable of doing none of these things ourselves. If we were left alone to get ourselves to Heaven, we would all wind up in Hell! It's all God!

## I. **The Purpose Of These Cities**

## II. **The Provision Of These Cities**

## III. V. 4-6, 9 **THE POWER OF THESE CITIES**

A. **They Had Power To Save** - When the manslayer arrived in the city, his case was heard by the elders and if it was determined that the death had indeed been an accident, he was given a place within the city and was protected from the avenger of blood. The city of refuge allowed a man to live who would have otherwise surely died.

(Ill. So it is with Jesus! He is the only One Who can guarantee salvation to the soul of man! When a sinner comes to Jesus Christ by faith and accepts Him as Savior, that person is immediately adopted into the family of God. He has his sins washed away forever and his name written in the Lamb's book of Life in Heaven. He is forever saved by the grace of God! No other system of believe can make that claim! You can try anything you will to be saved, and you can guarantee yourself that you will surely fail! However, if you will trust Jesus Christ and His death at Calvary, His resurrection and His shed blood, you will be saved! Guaranteed! Ill. Rom. 10:9-10; Rom. 10:13; John 5:24!)

B. **They Had Power To Secure** - Notice that as long as the person stayed within the city he was safe. He could live there until the day of judgment and for as long as the high priest lived and when the high priest died, the manslayer was free to return home without fear.

(Ill. When we commit our souls to the Lord Jesus for salvation, we too are secured! Unlike the person in the city of refuge, we cannot leave! It is impossible for us to get out of our relationship with Almighty God! Note John 10:28-29! But, what about the day of judgment? If it was determined that the manslayer was guilty, then he was cast out. I know I am guilty, what does that say about my situation? It just adds another glory! You see, when Jesus died on the cross, that was our judgment day! Now, that day has past forever and we are safe in the city of refuge! I am safe in Jesus, my High Priest, for as long as He lives, Heb. 7:25! What a glorious privilege we have been afforded just to know that we are eternally saved!)

C. **Their Power Was Sufficient** - The cities of refuge would work for all those who fled to them. They were sufficient for the need!

(III. Again, I am glad that I can remind you today that Jesus Christ is sufficient for the need of the soul! Regardless of the past you carry around. Regardless of the depths of your sin. Regardless of the hardness of your heart. Regardless of anything you wish to name that you feel might keep you from coming to Him, let me tell you that He is bigger than all of it! He is God and He is able to save you soul! He cannot and need not turn any away, John 6:37! His power is sufficient to the task. None need fear that it won't work for them! God's promise of salvation through Jesus is given to all who will come, Rev. 22:17.)

I. **The Purpose Of These Cities**

II. **The Provision Of These Cities**

III. **The Power Of These Cities**

IV. V. 7-9 **THE POSITION OF THESE CITIES**

A. **They Were Available To All** - God provided 6 cities of refuge. There were three east of the Jordan and three west of the Jordan. They were placed so that there was not tribe that was too far from a city of refuge. They were available to everyone no matter where they were or who they were! Whether the manslayer was a son or a stranger, there was a city of refuge open for him.

(III. What a picture this is! Just as those ancient cities were available to all, so Jesus Christ is available to all as well. The plan of salvation makes only one requirement upon a man and that is that he is required to be a sinner! If you are a sinner and know it; if you are willing to admit that to God; if you can know and believe that Jesus died on the cross, shedding His blood to pay for your sins and that He rose again from the dead, then my friend, you can be saved! You can be saved today! You do not have to run from the avenger of blood for even another minute, but you can run to Jesus and be saved by the grace of God. Jesus is available to you today - Isa. 55:6; 2 Cor. 6:2; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 3:20.)

B. **They Were Accessible To All** - Just as these cities were spaced all over the country and were available to every Israelite, they were also accessible to every person. There are several reasons why I say that.

1. **They Were Prominent** - Most of these cities were built on top of mountains. Most of the cities of ancient Israel were built of white limestone. When the sun hit these cities they gleamed. Even in the night, under the light of the moon, they would be visible. They were easily seen, even from many miles away.

2. **They Were Prepared** - There were certain preparations that were made in and around these cities that guaranteed the manslayer that he would find safety when he arrived at the city of refuge.

A. **The Roads Were Never Clogged** - The priests would make sure that the roads leading to these cities were clear from obstructions and always open to the traveler.

B. **The Gates Were Never Closed** - No matter what the time of day or night, the gates on the city of refuge were never closed.

C. **The Direction Was Never Confused** - There were sign posts with the Hebrew word "Miklat" written on them that had been set up to point the way to the city of refuge. That word means "Refuge" There was no need for anyone to misunderstand the way to get there.

(III. What a picture these things paint for us of the salvation that can be found in Jesus Christ. Just like the cities of refuge, He is accessible to all.

1. **Like a city set on top of a hill, He can be seen by the weary traveler.**

2. **The road leading to Him is always clear.** On His side, there are no obstructions. When He died on the cross, He died for all sin, so sin is not a problem that can keep you from coming. He had cleared the way! The only things that can keep you from getting to Him are those things you lay in your own path. Things like unbelief and pride.

3. **He is always available!** Jesus Christ is never closed. He will receive anyone who will come to Him at any time! He is waiting for you to show up!

**4. The way to Him is clearly marked.** Thankfully, God has gone before and placed the signpost we call the Bible. It is clear in what it teaches us about Jesus Christ. It tells us that He is the only way to God - John 14:6. And that if we will come to Him, then we must come by faith. The only question that we must answer is, are we trusting Jesus and Him alone?)

**5. WE ARE LIVING ROADMAPS:** There is a word here for the children of the Lord. You see, those of us who know about the refuge are to go out into the highways and the hedges and we are to set up the signs pointing the way to Him. You see, there should be no doubt about where we stand! We need to be pointing the way to Jesus at all times. That is why we always need to have a clear word and a clear message. Everything we do should point men to our blessed Savior!)

**I. The Purpose Of These Cities**

**II. The Provision Of These Cities**

**III. The Power Of These Cities**

**IV. The Position Of These Cities**

**V. V. 7-8 THE PICTURE IN THESE CITIES**

**A. There Is A Picture In Their Names** - These six cities paint a wonderful picture of the provisions of God which are our's through the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. **Kadesh - Righteousness** - Isa. 64:4; 2 Cor. 5:21 (Ill. A refuge for the unclean!)
2. **Shechem - Shoulder** - Luke 15:3-7 (Ill. A refuge for that one lost in the wilderness of sin.)
3. **Hebron - Fellowship** - 1 John 1:7 (Ill. A refuge for the lonely sinner!)
4. **Bezer - Fortress** - Heb. 18:2 (Ill. A refuge for the helpless sinner.)
5. **Ramoth - Heights** - Eph. 2:6 (Ill. A refuge for the wretched sinner!)
6. **Golan - Joy** - 1 Peter 1:8 (Ill. A refuge for the downcast.)

**B. There Is A Picture In Their Necessity** - Without these cities, many innocent people would have died. But, their existence guaranteed that they would continue to enjoy life.

(Ill. My lost friend, you might not see it this morning, but you need Jesus in your life! Without Him, you have no refuge from the wrath of God and will one day wind up in Hell, lost forever in torment! You may not like that today, but it is still the truth! The simple fact is that you need to be saved today! Will you do it? Will you come to Jesus while He can give you life? You can live without a lot of things in this world, but you cannot make it to Heaven without Jesus!)

**C. There Is A Picture In Their Nature** - These cities by their very natures spoke of the grace of God and of His love for the needy. They were there because God cares!

(Ill. The same is true about Jesus! He is there for your salvation simply because God cares about you! He does not want you to do and go to Hell, 2 Pet. 3:9. He wants you to be saved! Because He wants that so much, He proved His love for you when He allowed His Son, Jesus, to suffer on the cross in your place, Rom. 5:8. Hey friend, Jesus has a place for you! You can enter into the refuge and find a dwelling place.

**Conc:** There is an interesting story in the book of 2 Samuel. In chapter 2, we see a man named Abner, who had been Saul's Commander-in-chief, being pursued by a man named Asahel, 2 Sam. 2:18-24. Abner tries to reason with Asahel, but Asahel continues to pursue Abner. Abner is carrying a spear and apparently, Asahel runs into the spear and dies. Later, we find Abner at the gates of the city of Hebron. Remember, Hebron was one of the 6 cities of refuge. There, he is met by Joab, David's Commander-in-chief. Joab is also the older brother of Asahel. Joab catches Abner at the gate of the city of refuge and kills him, to avenge the death of Asahel, 2 Sam. 3:27. What is most striking are the comments made by king David as he mourned the death of Abner, 2 Sam. 3:32-34. It is as if David were saying, "*Abner, you died like a fool! You were right there at the gates of the refuge. All you had to do was walk right in. Nobody had you tied up! You could have been saved, but you died like a fool!*" Friend, don't let that same thing happen to you! Nobody has you tied down this morning. All you have to do is walk into the refuge and be saved. Our Refuge, Jesus, is waiting for you!

If you are tired of running from your sins and of feeling trapped in a hopeless situation, I would like to invite you to leave your seat and to come to Jesus this morning. If you will come to Him and ask Him by faith, He will save your soul and take you to Heaven when you leave this world. Isn't that what you really want? Aren't you tired of empty promises and dead end days? Aren't you sick of knowing that Hell is ever expanding and is waiting on you? Wouldn't you like to be sure that you will go to Heaven when you die? If you need Jesus in your heart and life I invite you to come to Him right now. He will give you life!