

“Cities of Refuge”

Josh 20:2

Text: Josh 20:2

(Joshua 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:"

Introduction:

The principle of blood-revenge is a deep seated one in the Eastern mind. The custom was when one was murdered or slain without malice aforethought, for the nearest relative, his heir, or any person related to him to take revenge for him upon the person who, either intentionally or unintentionally was the means of his death.

The avenger of blood would hunt his victim until he found him or died himself. He would trail him the rest of his life until he found him and avenged the blood of his relative.

That is the foundation for this message today.

I will first give you an explanation and then and exhortation concerning the cities of refuge.

Notice

1. Explanation

A. Proclamation

1. It is divine in nature

(Joshua 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:"

(Numbers 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: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities."

- a. These cities were set apart according to the will of God.
- b. God's will is that none would perish, but many today and many who have passed on have lived outside of God's will.

(Matthew 18:14) "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

(2 Peter 3:9) "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

B. Purpose

1. For whom it was and wasn't provided

- a. It was not provided for the willful murderer.

C. Principle

1. It was the responsibility of the nearest of kin to carry this out, and if they could not then anyone in the family could do so.

Illustration:

David and Saul's sons

Joshua after being tricked by the Gibeonites made a covenant or a league with them and allowed them to live. (Joshua 9:3-27)

Saul in his pride killed some of them, and because the blood of the Gibeonites had not been avenged, Israel was in the midst of a famine. (2 Sam 21:1-9)

2. Exhortation

A. Picture

Give an illustration of a man innocently killing an individual and running with all he has toward the city of refuge, while the avenger is quickly closing in on him.

B. Significance of each city

1. Kedash (v. 7) *Holy Place*

(Joshua 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."

a. A refuge for the unclean

There is no cleansing for the unclean apart from the fountain open for sin.

(Zechariah 13:1) "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

Illustration:

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's vein and sinners plunge beneath its flood loose all their guilty stain.

2. Shechem (vs 7) *Shoulder*

a. A refuge for the weary

Illustration:

The lost sheep found both safety and rest upon the Shepherds shoulders.

(Luke 15:5) "And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

(Matthew 11:28) "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

3. Hebron (v 7) Fellowship

a. A refuge for the homeless

1. Man is spiritually a homeless wander, like Noah's dove.
2. Outside the ark, no rest, no fellowship, no safety.

Illustration:

The homeless prodigal found a refuge in the Father's house and in the Fathers Fellowship

4. Bezer (v 8) *Strong*

(Joshua 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."

a. A refuge for the helpless

(Lamentations 1:6) "And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer."

(Romans 5:6) "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

5. Ramoth (v 8) Heights or Exalted

a. A refuge for the hopeless

1. By nature we are not only without strength, but we are without hope as well.

(Ephesians 2:12) "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:"

2. In exalting Him He will draw all men unto Himself.

(John 12:32) "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

- a. He was exalted on the cross.
- b. Is exalted today at the right hand of God.

- c. Should be exalted in the life of every believer.

(John 3:30) "He must increase, but I must decrease."

6. Golan (v 8) *Separated or encircled*

- a. A refuge for the uncertain and the tempted.

Close:

Back to our picture, just as the man doesn't stop until he falls into the city of refuge, how much more earnest should our cry to the lost be.

Not only is time wasting and night is quickly approaching, but right on your heels is the avenger of blood. He has already slain his thousands; and may we let the screams of the damned come up to our ears, and soften our hearts.

Let the gnashing and grinding of teeth from the flames of hell startle you. Let the howling and moaning from beneath shake your soul.

Will you pause with such an avenger in swift pursuit?