

THE REFUGE CITIES

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TEXT: Num. 35:10-34; Deut. 19:1-13; Josh. 20:1-9.

INTRODUCTION:

1 Overview of the texts.

a. Num. 35:10-34.

- (1). Provision for the cities of refuge (Num. 35:10-13).
- (2). Placement of the cities of refuge (Num. 35:14).
- (3). Persons involved with the cities of refuge.
 - (a). The children of Israel, strangers, and sojourners (Num. 35:15).
 - (b). Man slaughterers.
 - [1]. Protected (Num. 35:15,22-23,32).
 - [2]. Unprotected (Num. 35:26-28).
 - (c). Murderers (Num. 35:16-21,30-31).
 - (d). Avengers (Num. 35:19,27).
 - (e). The congregation (Num. 35:24-26). (f). The high priest (Num. 35:28).
- (4). Permanence of the cities of refuge (Num. 35:29).
- (5). Purpose of the cities of refuge (Num. 35:33-34).

b. Deut. 19:1-13.

- (1). Provision for the cities of refuge (Deut. 19:1-2,7-10).
- (2). Paths to the cities of refuge (Deut. 19:3).
- (3). Persons involved with the cities of refuge.
 - (a). Man slaughterers (Deut. 19:4-6).
 - (b). Murderers (Deut. 19:11-13).
 - (c). Avengers (Deut. 19:6,12).
 - (d). The elders (Deut. 19:12).
- (4). Purpose of the cities of refuge (Deut. 19:13).

c. Josh. 20:1-9.

- (1). Provision for the cities of refuge (Josh. 20:1-2).
- (2). Persons involved with the cities of refuge.
 - (a). Man slaughterers (Josh. 20:3-6,9).
 - (b). Avengers (Josh. 20:3,5,9).
 - (c). The elders (Josh. 20:4).
 - (d). The congregation (Josh. 20:6,9).
 - (e). The high priest (Josh. 20:6).
 - (f). The children of Israel and strangers (Josh. 20:9).
- (3). Places of the cities of refuge (Josh. 20:7-9).

2. Plan of the study.

a. To understand the purpose of refuge.

- b. To observe the places of refuge.
- c. To appreciate the perfection of refuge.

I. THE PURPOSE OF REFUGE.

A. Accidents and the avengers.

1. The accidents: Manslayer or murderer?
 - a. Manslayer: Freed from guilt.
 - (1). The one who had killed another by accident--that is, without premeditation, anger, or any ill-will--was not worthy of death.
 - b. Murderer: Faced by revenge.
 - (1). The one who killed in cold blood--not as the manslayer-- was guilty and worthy of death.
2. The avengers: Licensed to kill the guilty.
 - a. Blood for blood (Gen. 9:6, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.>").
 - b. The law of retaliation; i.e., *lex talionis* (Lev. 24:19-20, 24:17; Deut. 19:19-21).
 - c. For one of the best studies on the refuge cities, and particularly this point, see Guy N. Woods, "The Cities of Refuge," in *Gospel Advocate*, Vol. 89, No. 22, May 29, 1947, pp. 369,376.

B. Judgments and justice.

1. Trial by jury: The congregation.
2. Verdicts and sentences.
 - a. The guilty who is turned over to the avenger.
 - b. The innocent who leaves early and risks meeting the avenger (a picture of this is found in Joab's killing of Abner [II Sam. 2,3]).
 - c. The innocent who remains until the death of the high priest.

II. THE PLACES OF REFUGE.

A. The characteristics of the cities.

1. Refuge had been prophesied and refuge cities promised.
 - a. Prophesied in Exo. 21:13.
 - b. Promised in Num. 35:10-34 and Deut. 19:1-13.
2. A refuge city was no more than a half day journey from any spot in the promised land (Woods).
3. Guy N. Woods wrote, "The roads were kept open and in a good condition always; and where two or more roads met, posts were erected carrying a sign in large letters with the Hebrew word, MEKLAT (refuge), and pointing in the proper direction."
4. There were only six cities set apart; there was no other refuge.

B. The locations of the cities.

1. Three east of the Jordan (from North to South).

- a. Golan (Josh. 21:27).
 - b. Ramoth (Josh. 21:38).
 - c. Bezer (Josh. 21:36).
2. Three west of the Jordan (from North to South).
- a. Kedesh (Josh. 21:32).
 - b. Shechem (Josh. 21:21; 1Ch. 6:67).
 - c. Hebron (Josh. 21:13; 1Ch. 6:57).

III. THE PERFECTION OF REFUGE.

A. Found in the names of the cities.

1. Golan:
 - a. Circle (though other definitions such as passage and joy have been suggested).
 - b. This calls to mind completion.
2. Ramoth:
 - a. Height (each of these cities were on a prominence).
 - b. This calls to mind exaltation.
3. Bezer:
 - a. Fortress (each of these cities, of necessity, would have to be fortified strongholds).
 - b. This calls to mind security.
4. Kedesh:
 - a. Holy (each refuge city was separated [Deut. 19:7], but as this one was located in Galilee, it was certainly set apart!).
 - b. This calls to mind sinlessness.
5. Shechem:
 - a. Shoulder (this is where Abram first shouldered his God-given responsibility in the promised land, and where he erected the land's first altar to the true God [Gen. 12:6-7]).
 - b. This calls to mind strength.
6. Hebron:
 - a. Alliance (this, also known as Mamre or Kirjath-Arba, is where God's first covenant family members were buried [Gen. 49:29-31]).
 - b. This calls to mind unity.

B. Found in the safety of the Christ and His church.

1. Characteristics of the church.
 - a. Regarding her eternal existence.
 - (1). As Jesus was slain from the beginning (Rev. 13:8), the location of salvation was ordered from the beginning (Eph. 1:4; Mat. 25:34).
 - (2). The church had been prophesied (Isa. 2:2-3; Dan. 2:44) and promised (Mat. 16:18).

- b. Regarding her identifying marks.
 - (1). The way of salvation is clearly marked in God's Word (II Pet. 1:3; II Tim. 3:16-17; cf., Acts 2:21; Mark 16:16; II Cor. 7:10; Rom. 10:10; I Pet. 3:21; II Tim. 4:7-8).
 - (2). The church is clearly marked.
 - (a). She has one head (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18).
 - (b). She follows one book (Gal. 1:6-12).
 - (c). She worships one way (John 4:24).
- c. Regarding her proximity.
 - (1). Paul said of Jesus, ". . . he be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27).
 - (2). We can be subjects of a kingdom which has already been established (Col. 1:13).
- d. Regarding her exclusiveness.
 - (1). All have the ability to become Christians (John 3:16; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:10-11).
 - (2). None will become Christians and be saved through any other means (Acts 4:12).
- e. Regarding her enemy.
 - (1). We do not have a righteous avenger; we have an avenger nonetheless.
 - (2). Satan "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8).
 - (3). While Satan makes an easy application of the avenger, I might suggest upon further consideration that the avenger could actually just represent justice itself--Satan would not do the Lord's Will, but the avenger brought justice which is also the Lord's Will in the form of punishment of the shedder of blood; moreover, Satan "was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).
- f. Regarding possible apostasy.
 - (1). The Branch (the Christian) must abide in the Vine (Christ) (John 15:4-7).
 - (2). One can fall from the state of grace (salvation) (Gal. 5:4).
 - (3). One's latter end can be worse than his beginning (II Pet. 2:20-22).
- g. Regarding her High Priest: Jesus.
 - (1). This High Priest was made after the order of Melchizedec (Heb. 6:20).
 - (2). This High Priest dies, arose, and lives for evermore (Rev. 1:18).
 - (3). With His death came our cleansing (Rom. 6:3).

(4). With His resurrection came our hope (Rom. 6:4; I Cor. 15:20).

h. Regarding her holiness.

- (1). Like heaven, "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27).
- (2). The cities and the church (Gal. 3:27, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.").
 - (a). Golan: Circle: The Christian is perfect in Christ (Col. 1:28; I Pet. 5:10; Heb. 13:20-21; cf. II Tim. 3:16-17).
 - (b). Ramoth: Height: The Christian is exalted through Christ (I Pet. 5:6; Jam. 4:10; Mat. 18:4).
 - (c). Bezer: Fortress: The Christian has security with Christ (Psa. 18:2, 62:2; II Sam. 22:3; Mat. 7:24-27).
 - (d). Kedesh: Holy: The Christian is cleansed by Jesus' blood (Zec. 13:1; I John 1:7; I Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1:7; I Pet. 1:19).
 - (e). Shechem: Shoulder: The Christian is strengthened by Jesus (Phil. 4:13; II Cor. 3:5; Eph. 6:10; Col. 1:11; cf., John 15:7).
 - (f). Hebron: Alliance: The Christian is united with his brethren in Christ (Eph. 4:13-16; I John 1:3-7; cf. Amos 3:3; Acts 2:42).

CONCLUSION:

1. We sing a song penned in 1857 by Mary S. B. Dana (1810-1883).
 - a. Historically, this song was notable for accompanying funeral processions in New Orleans; today, we infrequently sing this song in various circumstances.
 - b. The song itself is directly based upon several Biblical pictures such as the safety found in trusting in the Lord (Psalm 11:1, "In the LORD put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee *as* a bird to your mountain?") and the one which is found in our study this evening: Refuge from the avenger (Deut. 19:6, "Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he *was* not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.").
 - c. The song is "Flee as a Bird," and it is fitting that we at least note its connection to this study.

"Flee as a bird to your mountain, Thou who art weary of sin;
Go to the clear flowing fountain Where you may wash and be clean.
Fly for th' avenger is near thee; Call, and the Savior will hear thee;
He on his bosom will bear thee,

O thou who art weary of sin, O thou who art weary of sin.

"He will protect thee forever, Wipe ev-ry falling tear;
He will forsake thee, O never, Sheltered so tenderly there.
Haste, then, the hours are flying, Spend not the moments in sighing,
Cease from your sorrow and crying:
The Savior will wipe ev-ry tear, The Savior will wipe ev-ry tear."

2. Is it not great that one today has a place of refuge?
- (a). Paul equated fleeing for refuge with laying hold upon hope (Heb. 6:18).
 - (b). "God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1); therefore, let us flee to Him and remain in Him that our salvation may be sure (II Pet. 1:10).

OVERVIEW OF REFUGE CITIES TEXTS

| | <u>Num_35:10-34</u> | <u>Deu_19:1-13</u> | <u>Jos_20:1-9</u> |
|-------------|---|---|---|
| PROVISION: | Entrance into Canaan Accidental man-slaughter Places of asylum/safety | When given victory Three cities in Canaan Three more cities Obedience prerequisite Preservation of innocent | The time had arrived Revelation preceded |
| PLACEMENT: | 3 cities in Trans-Jordan 3 cities in Canaan | | |
| PATHS: | | Prepared way Convenient access Available to all | |
| PERSONS: | For Israelites For strangers For protected innocent Not for wanderers Not for murderers Safety from avenger Judged by congregation High Priest's death freed | For innocent Not for murderers Safety from avenger Elders retrieved guilty | For innocent Safety from avenger Elders given account Judged by congregation High Priest's death freed For Israelites For strangers |
| PERMANENCE: | Throughout the age | | |
| PURPOSE: | To pollute not the land To defile not the land | To put away guilt To fare well | |
| PLACES: | | | Kedesh in Galilee Shechem in Mt. Ephraim Hebron in Mt. of Judah Bezer in wilderness Ramoath in Gilead Golan in Bashan |