

God is Our Refuge

Numbers 35:6-15

March 22, 2009

Intro

In Numbers 35, God apportioned 42 cities to the Levites so they can have a place to live in the land. They were not given an apportionment of the land of Israel as other tribes because their inheritance was God Himself. In other words, the Levites received the better inheritance, because God's presence is more important than anything this world has to offer. These cities were to be placed within the areas of the other tribes according to their size.

In addition to the 42 cities, God also designated six cities as cities of refuge. They were Levitical cities in every sense, but were given this designation as cities of refuge so that if anyone accidentally, or in other words, unintentionally, killed another person, they could run to a city of refuge and be safe.

These cities of refuge were to be evenly distributed throughout the land of Israel so that they were never more than one day's journey if one were to run. There were three on the west side of the Jordan, and there were three on the east side of the Jordan.

As we have seen throughout our study of the book of Leviticus as well as the book of Numbers, this is a picture of our relationship to Jesus Christ.

So there are many spiritual insights in these verses for us, and even though these cities were a provision for the people of Israel, they are a spiritual illustration of what God has given us in Jesus Christ.

I. Everyone Needs a Refuge

- 1 The cities of refuge were provided for those who needed protection from the threat of death.
- 2 Though we may not have unintentionally killed anyone, the threat of death is still upon our lives.

A. The avenger was to seek justice

- 3 Many cultures throughout the world even today have a concept of an avenger. Unfortunately, these commonly devolve into family blood feuds.
 - 1 The concept of an avenger did not begin with Israel; it was in fact a common practice in most of the cultures of that time.
 - 2 Most cultures at that time did not have any police force or a system of justice such

as we have today with courts, and lawyers, and judges.

- 3 Therefore, if someone had died through the actions of another person, then the nearest relative would be designated as the avenger to track that person down and mete out justice.
- 4 This system had a tremendous weakness, however. The avenger wouldn't care if the death was intentional or not, he would simply seek revenge. But if the person was killed unintentionally, or accidentally, the person did not deserve death, so the family of that person would choose an avenger and another death would be perpetrated. That family would then feel wronged and they would select an avenger.
- 5 Unfortunately, there are many such blood feuds around the world. There are many deaths in the Middle East today because of the concept of an avenger.

Illus – last year, when there were riots in Kenya because of an election controversy, many took advantage of the chaos in the continuing blood feuds.

Illus- they say that if you're traveling and accidentally hit someone with your car, you should head to the airport as quickly as possible. I was speaking to a missionary in Uganda who was driving and accidentally hit a boy on his bicycle...

Illus- I also remember when I was in the DRC and a group of pastors asked me to drive to any evangelistic meeting one night...

Illus – The Hatfield and McCoy feud is probably the most famous running blood feud in the US history. But in June 9, 2000 the two families joined together for a reunion and to bury the hatchet.

Illus – The real end of the family feud came when Devil Anse Hatfield went forward at a revival meeting when he was 72 years old and received Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior and baptized in Island Creek.

- 6 Of course, we know from the New Testament that we do not take it upon ourselves to extract justice by getting even with people.

Romans 12:18-21, If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head," Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

B. Justice must be satisfied

- 7 The scripture tells us that we are all under the condemnation of death.

Romans 6:23, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- 8 In other words, because we have all sinned before God, then the judgment of death is upon us.
- 9 However, it's the Law of God, the righteous of God that must be satisfied.
- 10 The cities of refuge then, become a powerful illustration of how we are saved from the condemnation of death.
- 11 Therefore, everyone needs a refuge.

II. Christ is Our Place of Refuge

- 1 There are many scriptures that give us insight into the refuge that we have in Christ.

A. The cities of refuge are always near

- 1 The cities of refuge were strategically placed in such locations within Israel so that a person would not have to cross a river or climb a mountain to reach that city.
- 2 In fact, they were placed so that a person would be able to reach a city within one day's run.
- 3 God has also made Christ easily accessible, He is near and you can run into him and be saved.

Romans 10:6-10 The Word is near you

- 4 Each of the cities speaks to the blessing of Christ over our lives when he is our refuge.

Joshua 20:7-9 The cities of refuge by name

- 5 Kedesh- to cleanse, holiness
- 6 Shechem – to shoulder a burden
- 7 Hebron – fellowship
- 8 Bezer – a strong fortress

9 Ramoth – to be lifted up

10 Golan – to be encircled

App – The key is to run there as fast as possible. The scriptures says to flee there (verse 11), not walk, or mosey, but to run.

Psalm 46:1, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 62:8, Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

Illus – There is also a scripture that tells us that the roads to the cities of refuge were to always be maintained and there were signs at every crossroads that pointed the way to the nearest city of refuge.

B. The death of our High Priest saves us

11 There was a very interesting provision in the laws of refuge.

12 A person under the protection of the city of refuge would be set free upon the death of the high priest (verse 25). In other words, the provision of the law was such that it pointed to the death of the high priest.

Hebrews 6:17-20 Our refuge, our High Priest

13 There are several scriptures in the New Testament that help us to understand that it is through dying with Christ that we have life.

Galatians 2:20, I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

C. We must stay in the place of refuge

14 The cities of refuge provided a place of protection for those who stayed there, but if anyone ventured outside the city, then he was not safe.

15 This is an interesting spiritual insight. But first, it should be noticed that the right of sanctuary was given to everyone whether they were a Jew a gentile, or a sojourner in the land.

16 It's important to see that the way is open to all.

Galatians 3:28, There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is

neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:29, Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

17 Secondly, we must understand that Christ is our refuge even for intentional sins.

18 There are many kinds of things we do that are unintentional, yet they may hurt someone.

Illus – When I was youth leader at a church and we went chopping wood, someone was hurt unintentionally. Even then, we need forgiveness because someone was hurt. How much more do we need forgiveness for intentional sins?

1 But third, we see that we must stay in the place of refuge. If they did not stay, then they were not safe.

App- the same is true for us in that if we do not stay near to Christ, and venture into the world, that it is a spiritually dangerous place.

John 15:4-5, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”