

JOSHUA

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Joshua chapter 20 as we continue our study through the Word of God. As we have seen, the children of Israel have conquered the southern, the middle and then northern parts of the land of Canaan. They have defeated the major enemies in the areas but there are still pockets of resistance that will have to be dealt with.

Keep in mind that these pockets of resistance will not be dealt with on a national level but each tribe, as they go to their land, will have to drive out, destroy these enemies. The problem is that they don't destroy them completely but place them in forced labor camps you might say, to assist the children of Israel and this will be their downfall. You don't make covenants with the enemy and this compromise will bear bad fruit as they succumb to the false ideas of these pagan nations. And we will see this played out as we come to the book of Judges.

As we move into Joshua chapter 20 this evening we will be dealing with these cities of refuge. Remember back in Numbers 35:11-15 how Moses instructed Joshua and the children of Israel to set up these cities of refuge when they entered the Promise Land. Moses told them, **“then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment. And of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge. You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, which will be cities of refuge. These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there.”**

Now they are in the land and Joshua will establish three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan River and three cities of refuge on the west side of the Jordan River in the land of Canaan, the Promise Land. And if you are not familiar with what these cities of refuge are all about, we will expound on them as we go through this chapter. With that said, let's begin reading in Joshua chapter 20, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

JOSHUA 20**VERSES 1-6**

1. Here we see the Lord instruct Joshua to fulfill the words He spoke through Moses in Numbers chapter 35 and establish these cities of refuge. Now, what were these cities of refuge all about? If you accidentally or unintentionally killed someone, manslaughter, you could flee to one of these six cities spread throughout the land. Obviously you would run to the closest one for safety. Now, why would you need safety, why would you have to flee to one of these cities of refuge if you accidentally killed someone?

Because the avenger of blood would be hot on your trail and this avenger of blood was usually a close relative, more often a brother of the deceased. And this was a custom to make sure that justice was carried out upon the person who committed this crime, that the death of that family member would be avenged. But in this case, in the case of manslaughter, they were safe within these cities of refuge. Once you were in this city you would present your case before the judge, usually one of the priests, and if they ruled that it was manslaughter and not murder, you would not be handed over to the avenger of blood, you were safe within the city walls.

But, because life is precious and you did accidentally kill someone, you had to remain in this city until the death of the high priest and then you could go free. If you left before the high priest died, then the avenger of blood, if he found you, he could kill you and he would be innocent of any crime.

2. Now, if you did murder someone, there was no safety within these cities of refuge for you. They would turn you over to the avenger of blood and you would be put to death for murder because murder was a capital crime! We see God institute this long before the Law was ever established with Moses. Back in Genesis 9:6 we are told, **“Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.”**

And folks, God still considers murder a capital crime! In Romans 13:3-4 we are told, **“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”** In other words, Paul is telling us that the state, the government has the power over life, they do have the right to use the sword of execution for a capital crime, for murder!

3. Listen to what the Lord says about the land when murder is prevalent and nothing is done about it. In Numbers 35, beginning in verse 31 we are told, **“Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. . . . So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel.”** Numbers 35:31, 33-34. Look at how polluted our land has become!

4. Thus, with the testimony of two or three witnesses, according to Deuteronomy 17:6-7, the person could be found innocent or guilty of murder. And the whole idea of these cities of refuge was to protect the innocent person from the avenger of blood, of being put to death for what he did, which was just an accident, it was not premeditated.

VERSES 7-9

1. Here we see that these six cities of refuge were spread throughout the land of Israel. They were located in the north, the middle portion and in the south, on both sides of the Jordan River. The reason for this is simple. No person would be more than a days journey to one of these cities, which would be important if this happened to you.

2. Also, it was the responsibility of the Levites to take care of these cities. In fact, according to Jewish tradition, the roads leading up to these cities were kept clear, well maintained and well marked with signs reading, "Refuge! Refuge!" We see this in the Scriptures, Deuteronomy 19:3, "**You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.**"

Think about it. If those roads were not maintained and not well marked, these cities of refuge would be meaningless because you couldn't get there, you couldn't find them! I like the way one writer put it as he wrote, "The glory of God, the purity of His land, and the integrity of His government, had to be duly maintained. If those were touched, there could be no security for anyone."

3. Now let's look at these six cities of refuge beginning with the three cities on the west side of the Jordan River and then we will look at the three cities on the east side of the Jordan River and you will see how they were spread throughout the land.

- KEDESH, which is located in the land of Naphtali in Galilee. This was in the north part of the country and the name KEDESH means "Holy of God". We read of this in I Corinthians 1:30 says "**But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness, sanctification and redemption.**" What a beautiful picture that we have here for we are holy in Christ!
- SHECHEM, located in the land of Ephraim, was in the middle part of the land. The name SHECHEM means "shoulders." In Isaiah 9:6 we read, "**For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulders.**" Again, a beautiful picture of our Lord!
- HEBRON, located in the mountains of Judah, was in the south part of the land. The name HEBRON means "fellowship." John tells us "**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.**" I John 1:3. And again, that is all based in Christ for us, we have fellowship with God the Father through Jesus Christ!

4. Now we will look at the three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan River, outside the Promise Land where Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh lived.

- BEZER was located in the area of Reuben, in the south. BEZER means, "fortified one." Nahum 1:7 says "**The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.**" And in Proverbs 18:10 we read, "**The name of the LORD is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and they are safe.**" Folks, only in Christ do we have this safety!
- RAMOTH was located in the area of Gad, in the middle part of the land. The name RAMOTH means "exaltation." Philippians 2:9-11 says "**Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**" We are to lift up and praise the name of the Lord and as we humble ourselves before Him, He will lift us up!

- GOLAN was located in the area of Manasseh, in the north part of the land. GOLAN means, “joy.” Romans 5:11 says “**And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**” We should rejoice in the Lord for all He has done for us and most importantly, He has reconciled us back to God the Father!

5. These cities of refuge are a picture of Christ, whom we can run to and as long as we enter in through Him and remain in Him, we are safe from the judgment. Psalm 46:1 puts it this way, “**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.**” We see that over 15 times in the Psalms that God is our refuge, and what a comfort that should be to us!

Also, in Hebrews 6:18 we are told, “**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.**” I like the way that The Amplified Bible puts this verse. We are told, “**This was so that, by two unchangeable things [His promise and His oath] in which it is impossible for God ever to prove false or deceive us, we who have fled [to Him] for refuge might have mighty indwelling strength and strong encouragement to grasp and hold fast the hope appointed for us and set before [us].**” We can run to Him and take refuge in our strong tower; we can take refuge in the shadow of His wings!

Now, this avenger of blood or GOEL in the Hebrew is literally the redeemer. That is one who buys back at the appointed price what has fallen into another’s hands. You see, our sins have separated us from God, and thus our lives are in the hands of the enemy. But Christ has paid the penalty for our sin and thus as we come to Him, we have safety from the judgment that comes upon the sinner.

You see, God never says that He wants to reform the sinner. You won't find that anywhere in the Bible. But He wants us to be transformed into His image through the power of the Holy Spirit. As Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "**I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me.**" And in Romans 12:2 Paul says, "**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**"

6. Listen to what David Guzik said regarding the similarity between these cities of refuge and our refuge in Christ. He wrote:

- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are within easy reach of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are open to all, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would live; you didn't come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only alternative for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.
- Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries, to go outside means death.
- With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest.

- David Guzik

But there is one major distinction between these cities of refuge and our refuge in Jesus. These cities of refuge only helped the innocent. But Jesus, our city of refuge, He accepts all who come to Him, even the guilty and folks, we are all guilty! It is as the songwriter George Keith said, “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say than to you He hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled!” Jesus Christ is our refuge, for which we can flee to and escape His judgment that is coming!

JOSHUA 21

VERSES 1-3

1. Remember that the tribe of Levi did not get an inheritance in the land because the Lord was their inheritance. But they were to get 48 Levitical cities spread throughout the land, given to them by the various tribes, but it was not their inheritance. And from these Levitical cities they would teach the children of Israel the things of God!

2. Interestingly enough the Bible calls us kings and priests and that we are pilgrims that are just passing through this land. This earth is not our home. This earth is not our inheritance. You see, our home, our inheritance is in Heaven with the Lord and thus, we are to be serving the Lord down here, doing the work He has called us to do just as the Levites were to do. And I think Paul picked up on this when he said in Philippians 3:20-21, **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”** May we not forget that our citizenship is in Heaven and thus, all this will pass away! Don’t hold onto it too tightly!

3. Keep in mind that Gilgal has been their base camp or headquarters during their seven years of military campaigns against the enemy, taking down those strongholds in the Promise Land. But now they moved from Gilgal to Shiloh and this is the place where the Tabernacle will be set up and the worship of God instituted until David set it up in Jerusalem and finally Solomon built the Temple! Shiloh was located some 20 miles west of Gilgal and it was more in the center of the land, in that land that was given to the tribe of Ephraim.

4. As we continue on we will see Joshua divide up these 48 Levitical cities between the three families of Levi. The Kohathites were the priestly family from which Aaron and Moses came from. Their function was to care for the Tabernacle and to bear the Ark and the sacred vessels. The Gershonites were in charge of the fabrics of the Tabernacle, the covering's, curtains, hangings, and cords. The Merarites were in charge of the planks, bars, pillars, and sockets of the tabernacle. But now these 3 divisions would be spread throughout the land with the Kohathites staying in the area where the Temple would be built in the future!

VERSES 4-26

1. (OVERVIEW)

For the Kohathites, they had 23 cities. 9 were located in the tribes of Judah and Simeon including Hebron, which was a city of refuge. 4 of these cities were located in the tribe of Benjamin. We also see 10 more cities located in Ephraim, Dan and western Manasseh, including another city of refuge, which is located in Shechem.

VERSES 27-33

1. (OVERVIEW)

For the Gershonites, they had 13 cities located in eastern Manasseh, Issachar, Asher and Naphtali. They also had 2 cities of refuge which were located in Kedesh, which is in the land of Naphtali, and Golan which is located on the east side of the Jordan River in the area of Manasseh.

VERSES 34-40

1. (OVERVIEW)

For the Merarites, they had 12 cities in the area of the tribes of Zebulun, Ruben and Gad. They also had 2 cities of refuge, Ramoth, which is located in the area of Gad, and Bezer, which is located in the area of Ruben.

VERSES 41-42

1. Thus, we see 38 cities given to the descendants of Levi on the west side of the Jordan River, and 10 cities located on the east side of the Jordan River. It has been estimated that no one in Israel lived more than 10 miles from one of these 48 Levite cities. Thus, they were close to a man who knew the law of God and to give them Godly counsel. But as we move to the book of Judges we will see that they failed in their mission. They were not a preserving force in the land. And thus, we see the children of Israel fall into idolatry, which spreads like a cancer throughout the land.

2. Folks, we too are spread throughout the land and we are to be the preserving force, the light in a world that is in darkness. Jesus put it like this in Matthew 5:13-16, **“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** May we be salt and light to this world!

VERSES 43-45

1. What a remarkable conclusion to this chapter, that, **“Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.”** Joshua 21:45. Yes, God gave them all the land but tragically they didn’t take all that God had given to them!

2. Before we are too hard on the children of Israel here, keep in mind what Paul tells us as Christians today, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”**

Ephesians 1:3. God has given to us all that we need but how often we don’t appropriate those things into our lives. Many Christians run around like they are spiritually bankrupt when God has given to us all the spiritual blessings, and the key is we need to be in Christ!

3. Listen to what Alan Redpath wrote regarding this issue here. He wrote:

In the light of the Cross, is it not true that the enemy has no right to dwell in the land? Is it not true that Satan’s claim to your life was taken from him at Calvary? Is it not true that sin has no right to a foothold in the life of the child of God? Is it not true that Satan has no power in the presence of Omnipotence? Is it not true that by virtue of His blood and His resurrection, Jesus Christ is pledged to destroy the enemy utterly? Is it not true that in the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit there is strength for every temptation, grace for every trial, power to overcome every difficulty?

- Alan Redpath

God has given to us the things we need in this life to have victory as we walk with Him. May we use those resources, those blessings that He has given to us to defeat the enemy and take back the land!

4. As we move into chapter 22 this evening we are going to see how Civil War almost broke out between the children of Israel living on the west side of the Jordan River and those living on the east side of the Jordan River.

JOSHUA 22

VERSES 1-4

1. Joshua is releasing the soldiers from Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh from their military service and allowing them to return home to their families on the east side of the Jordan River. They had fulfilled their promise serving with their brethren these last seven years and defeating the enemies in the land that God had given to the children of Israel, the land of Canaan. Imagine, seven years away from their families, fighting these wars, but now they are heading home!

VERSES 5-6

1. Before Joshua dismisses them he warns them to hear God's Word, to love the Lord and to walk in His ways. This may seem trivial but the order does seem to be important. You see, if there is love before hearing God's Word, that can lead to heresy. Also, to obey before loving, that can lead to legalism. Thus, **HEAR, LOVE, OBEY** and you will do well!

2. And Joshua blesses them, maybe as the Lord instructed Moses and the priestly line to do back in Numbers 6:24-26, "**The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.**" What a blessing!

VERSES 7-9

1. Before they departed home they divided the spoils of their victories between them, they did deserve it as they fought alongside their brethren these past seven years. And as they were leaving, it must have been an emotional departure, seeing them preparing to go across the Jordan River, outside the Promise Land, separated by that body of water!

2. Folks, as we serve the Lord we too are blessed, there are spoils of the victories we have in our lives. They are not necessarily material blessings, but God does bless us with many things. May we be looking for them and thanking Him!

VERSE 10

1. Here we see these 2½ tribes build an altar, maybe very similar to the brazen altar where the sacrifices were made. If it was similar it stood about 4½ feet high and 7½ feet squared and it was located on the east side of the Jordan River for all to see!

VERSES 11-12

1. When the children of Israel living in the Promise Land hear of this, well, Civil War almost breaks out! Why did they respond like this? Because they saw this altar as an act of rebellion against God. They were not to set up an altar of sacrifice anywhere they wanted. Thus, the children of Israel living in the Promise Land were ready to go to war over this, a war against their brethren that they just spent seven years fighting together against their enemies!

2. Francis Schaeffer wrote this regarding what was taking place here. He wrote:

“They thought the holiness of God was being threatened. So these men, who were sick of war, said, ‘The holiness of God demands no compromise!’ I wish today that the church of the 20th century would learn this lesson. The holiness of God who exists demands that there be no compromise in the area of truth.”

- Francis Schaefer

I can’t agree more. We need Christians to stand up for the holiness of God and not compromise in the area of truth. You can’t sacrifice truth for unity and the children of Israel recognized this and so should we and take a stand against the doctrines of demons that are being taught in the church today!

VERSES 13-20

1. So Phinehas, the high priest, and 10 men from the 10 tribes of Israel not involved in this compromise, came to meet these rebels on the east side of the Jordan River. And Phinehas confronts them in Gilead, saying that your sin will not only affect you, but the whole nation of Israel. Like the sin of Peor, through the counsel of Balaam, it caused a curse to come upon the whole nation. Balaam told Balak the king to send the pagan women into the camp of Israel, which will cause the children of Israel to lust after them and then to follow after their gods, for the worship of their gods were attached to sexual acts many times. You see, Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel, but God told him not to, so he gave this counsel which was just as destructive, for it made the children of Israel fall into sin. Also the sin of Achan, how it affected the whole nation when he took the spoils of war when God said those firstfruits of war belonged to Him.

You see, God looked upon them as a unit. Thus, if one sinned, the whole nation suffered for it. And Phinehas said that if dwelling on this side of the Jordan has caused you to sin, if this possession is not of God, then cross over with us so that you may not sin. They should have never compromised and stayed on the east side of the Jordan River in the first place and here is an invitation to return to the land that God gave them.

2. Just as with Israel, the body of Christ is looked upon as a unit. Yes, sin in the body of Christ does affect the unit you might say. Think about it. When that pastor went on television after a gay man was murdered several years back, he had a sign that gave us his web site, "godhatesfags.com" How sad and it was and it was a blemish on the entire body of Christ for people saw this as the way Christians feel. We don't hate gay people, we hate the sin, we love the people!

Remember what Paul said in I Corinthians 5:6, "**Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?**" In other words, sin will grow; it will affect and infect the entire body if it is not dealt with, like cancer! It must be cut out! Also, Paul tells us in I Corinthians 12:26-27, "**And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.**"

3. Now what will transpire here? What will these brethren say regarding this compromise? Is this really a compromise? Will Civil War break out between them? Let's read on and see.

VERSE 21-29

1. They basically told them that if they did do anything wrong, then kill them. But the reality is, they did nothing wrong. This altar was not to be used for sacrifices, for burnt offerings but as a witness to future generations who may forget the ties they had with their brethren on the west side of the Jordan River and with the God they served! This was not an act of rebellion but a witness that they were part of the family of God! But, if they were not living outside the Promise Land they would not even have needed this altar in the first place!

VERSES 30-34

1. Thank God that cool heads prevailed and they did not just jump into this war. You see, the reason the altar was built was explained and then accepted by Phinehas. And it is just as the Psalmist said, **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!”** Psalm 133:1. Folk’s, that unity must be based in truth and we see that it is. For apart from truth, there can be no unity!

The lesson here is simple. You see, what had the potential of a Civil War with devastating affects, was first searched out for the truth of the matter before they jumped to the wrong conclusion. May we learn that lesson before we jump in and either make fools of ourselves or cause devastating damage in the body of Christ. Search out the truth instead of looking just at the outward circumstances.

2. As I close this evening, let me leave you with these several principles we can apply to our lives from this portion of Scripture. They are:

- Be zealous for the purity of the faith.
- It is wrong to judge peoples motives on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Get the facts. In fact only God can judge the motives, we can look at the fruit.
- Keep the lines of communication open.
- A person who is wrongfully accused does well to remember the words of Solomon in Proverbs **“Hell and Destruction are before the LORD; so how much more the hearts of the sons of men.”** Proverbs 15:11. And **“A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies. . . . A true witness saves lives but a deceitful witness speaks lies.”** Proverbs 14:5, 25.
- Respond with a concern for God’s holiness.
- Respond with the courage to confront in love.
- Respond with an attempt to reconcile before you fight.
- Determine that you are willing to sacrifice to help them; don’t confront unless you are willing to help.
- Determine that you will see the situation from the perspective of the other person.
- Determine that you will believe the best of one another.

These are some great lessons, some great words of wisdom to take with us and it can help prevent Civil War in our lives!