

THE CITIES OF REFUGE



Passages to Study: Joshua 20:1-9; Num.35:6-32; Deut.4:41-43; Deut.19:1-13.

Read with the class: Joshua 20:1-9.

Texts for memorization:

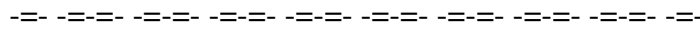
Younger: Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength."

Older: Psalm 46:1 and Heb. 6:18, "We have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us."



OBJECTIVES: To teach that:

- 1. God is concerned about the salvation of those He has created.
2. God had provision already made before man needed it.
3. God is a merciful God.
4. The refuge that the sinner needs today is found in the Lord Jesus.
5. The safety of the person who broke the law depended upon the presence of the priest.



SCENE No. 1. VISUAL AIDS: A map which indicates the location of the six cities of refuge. Another drawing to show the routes to the cities of refuge and workmen to maintain the roads in good condition.

DEVELOPMENT:

- Joshua has the responsibility of dividing up the land and its cities for the children of Israel .
- Each tribe was then required to oust the Canaanites and take possession of the land as God had commanded.
- To rid the land of the Canaanites meant fighting for the possession God had given them.
- The majority of the people lived together in the particular area given to each individual tribe when the land was divided up, but the tribe of Levi received 48 cities distributed throughout the possessions of their brethren.
- Six of these cities are called the cities of refuge.
- They were distributed through all the land of Israel, three on each side of the Jordan River, two in the north, two in the center and two in the south.
- The roads were marked to indicate the way to the cities of refuge.

Cmt. Every precaution was taken so that a person would not make a mistake about the road.

- God considered the maintenance of the road to these cities to be of great importance. (Deut.19:3)
- There were people employed in doing this work.

Apl. Christians are responsible to make known the way of salvation to those who have not found it.

- The person that killed another would suffer death by the hand of the avenger of blood.
- A near relative was the one who had a right to avenge the blood of the dead person.
- God knew that there could be unintentional deaths.
- The murderer in this case did not deserve to die.

Cmt. In today's language, this crime is called manslaughter.

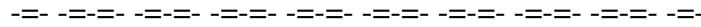
- For such a case as this, a refuge could be found.
- God provided for the needy and made it possible for him to reach a place of protection without hindrance.

Apl. God provides a way of escape for the sinner that seeks a refuge from the judgment that hangs over him.

Cmt. In this lesson, the gospel is presented from the point of view that the sinner is born with the seed of sin already in his/her being because of another (Romans 5:12), but is responsible for his/her sinful actions.

Cns. The sinner needs to be born again, not because he/she has committed sin but because HE/SHE IS A SINNER.

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SCENE No. 2. VISUAL AIDS: Figures that represent an accidental death, such as a man lying on the ground with an axe beside him, and another fleeing from the scene.

DEVELOPMENT:

- There are several possible examples of a work accident.
- This scene uses the case described in Deut.19:5.
- The manslayer flees without losing any time, for a close relative of the dead person has the right to avenge the blood that has been shed.

Cns. The relative that takes on the responsibility of avenging the killing is acting on righteous principles. Justice requires satisfaction for any act that violates its terms.

Sug. Emphasize the principle of recognizing one's fault and taking responsibility for the action.

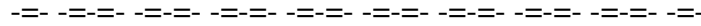
- The manslayer leaves to another the sad task of informing the family, for he must hurry if he is to save his life.
- The manslayer realizes that he is in danger of death.
- Refuge is offered only to those who shed blood unintentionally.
- God is the only one who has the right to take a life.

Cns. This is a responsibility God has placed in the hands of some who, as judges today, are the ones called upon to make a person pay for what he has done.

- God is just and makes a difference between those who ought to die for their sins committed with treachery, and others who took a life unintentionally.

Cns. The one who took a life intentionally would not be accepted in the city of refuge.

Cns. God has provided salvation for all, and since Christ died for each sinner, He offers it to all that believe in Him.



SCENE No. 3. VISUAL AIDS: A road with a city of refuge in sight. Figures of a man running toward the city pursued by another.

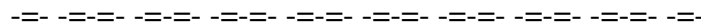
DEVELOPMENT:

- The manslayer knows he is in real danger of death.
- His life depends on how quickly he reaches the city of refuge.
- He has to take refuge in one of the six cities that God has made available. No other city will do.

Apl. The city of refuge for the sinner today is Christ Jesus. He is God's provision.

- Christ died for our sins and offers a refuge to all, including those who have sinned knowingly.

Apl. The sinner ought to recognize that eternal death (divine punishment), is sure and if he does not seek the refuge provided by God.



SCENE No. 4. VISUAL AIDS: At the entrance to a walled city a figure of a man presenting himself to the group of elders of that city. Separately, the figure of a cross and several young people, and the text, Hebrews 6:18, written out.

DEVELOPMENT:

- The manslayer is received into a safe place which will provide him with protection, fitted to his needs.
 - The refuge that the sinner finds in the Lord Jesus Christ is greater, for it is offered to all who come.
- Cmt.** The Bible gives an example of a person who did not take advantage of the provision offered in the city of refuge. It is the case of Abner who was killed by Joab who took him "aside in the gate" at the door of the city of Hebron, one of the cities of refuge. Abner had killed Asahel. (2 Samuel 2:20-23; 3:26-39)



Cmt. The following Verse by Verse Commentary describes the procedures and the conditions which were to be taken into account to give protection to one who took advantage of the city of refuge.

JOSHUA 20.

v.1 Instructions referring to the cities of refuge as given by the Lord, spelled out originally to Moses. (Num. 35:6-32. Deut.4:41-43; Deut.19:1-13)

This provision was a merciful act of God.

NUMBERS 35.

1. The cities of refuge were to be six all together. (**v.6**) Strategically located.
2. In hands of the Levites. The Levites were to have 42 + 6 = 48 cities as their inheritance. (**vv.6-7**) They did not receive lands but the Levites were distributed throughout all the territory.
3. These cities would be needed by the manslayer that had killed unintentionally. (**v.11**)
4. A principle of justice. Not guilty until there is proof. (**vv.12-13**)
5. Three cities on each side of the Jordan. (**v.14**)
6. They were available to all, including foreigners. (**v.15**)
7. The murderer that killed intentionally had to die. (**vv.16-18**)
8. A relative of friend of the deceased could be the avenger. (**v.19**)
9. The murderer motivated by hate was punished. (**vv.20-21**)
10. The cases of accidents. (**vv.22-23**)
11. Justice was expected from the congregation. Some would perhaps be witnesses. (**vv.24-25**)
12. The life of the slayer depended on the high priest. (**v.25d**)
13. Need of depending on the high priest. (**vv.26-28**)
14. Warning against bribery. (**vv.29-32**)

DEUTERONOMY 4.

1. Moses separated three cities on the eastern side. (**v.41**)
2. The names and locations were known. (**v.43**)

DEUTERONOMY 19.

1. The distribution of the cities was well organized. (**v.3**)
2. The roads were kept in a good state to make access easy. (**v.3**)
3. Examples of manslaughter cases (unintentional homicide). (**vv.4-6**)
4. Moses foresaw the three additional cities. (**v.9**)
5. Purpose of the cities: to avoid unjustifiable deaths. (**v.10**)
6. The truly guilty must die. (**v.11**)
7. The death penalty permitted. (**v.12**)



JOSHUA 20.

v.2 APPOINTED. Everyone knew of these cities.

Joshua establishes a rudimentary system of civil government.

At the door of the cities of refuge, they held a kind of court or judgment hall.

They were required to try the case with several present to avoid abuse of justice. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."

The members of the dead man's family naturally wanted revenge.

The Levites were the tribe charged with following the ceremonial law, and were also charged with administering civil law.

v.3 Place OF REFUGE.

AVENGER. SHW (Same Hebrew Word) See Ruth 3:9; Psalm 19:14.

v.4 ENTERING OF THE GATE. Place of commercial, civil, etc. transactions. **Cmp.** Ruth 4:1. Job 29:7.

Specific confession before the elders. He admits he is guilty.

The elders have to judge the merits of the case.

A place of protection is assigned him if his claim is accepted.

v.5 Not a premeditated act.

v.6 Life of the murderer is guaranteed by the life of the priest.

The high priest did not have to live inside the city, only be alive. No doubt he was in some other place.

There was only one high priest, not several.

A kind of amnesty was granted on the death of the high priest. The avenger had to promise not to kill the slayer. Time was allowed to pass so his wrath would diminish.

vv.7-8 Names of the cities.

Cities named from north to south in v.7 and from south to north in v.8.

KEDESH. Place of consecration.

v.9 Anyone might take advantage of the provision determined by God and permitted by the laws of the Lord.

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