

SOUTH GROVE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LONDON

Lord's Day Morning

Gospel Mission (3)

Date 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2022

Preacher Rev Philip Knowles, Hymns 275, 280 236, 273 Read: Joshua 20:1-9, Text: Joshua 20:1-9

Title – The Cities of Refuge

Joshua chapter 20, along with Numbers 35, and Deuteronomy 19 records details concerning the cities of Refuge.

The word refuge means **a hiding place, a place of safety and security**. Therefore, these are cities gave protection for those in danger.

When Joshua along with the people of Israel, entered into the land of Canaan, six cities were appointed by the Lord as confirmed in the days of Moses as cites of refuge.

These six cities of refuge were object lessons to teach spiritual truth pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only refuge for the soul of guilty sinners.

Christ Himself is the City of refuge, He is the sinners hiding place, because all six cities find their fulfilment in Him, as the only sufficient Saviour who guarantees safety from God's wrath.

Familiar language was used by the Apostle Paul in Heb 6:18 when he states that Jewish believers have "...**fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before,**" them. The hope is Christ Himself, the hope of glory.

**the Lord Jesus Christ is the refuge appointed for the spiritual and the eternal well-being of lost and guilty sinners.**

With that in mind unsaved one, it is of the utmost importance that you, come to a realisation of your need for refuge.

You must come personally to Christ, the sinner's refuge, where protection and safety are found.

## **The Cities of Refuge**

**I FIRST- THE PURPOSE OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE v1-3**

***“the Lord spake unto Joshua saying, speak unto the children of Israel saying, appoint out for you cities of refuge, 3 that the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither, and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood.***

**Num 35:6 which ye shall appoint for the man-slayer that he may flee thither.**

Notice the city of refuge was specifically ***for the man-slayer.***

The '***man-slayer***' was one who took life from another, killed another person. This case it was accidental death, meaning the death was not planned or out of bitterness, or anger, as cain when he slew Abel.

But having taken life, the next of kin, a family relative, of the one slain, took the role of **the avenger of blood.**

They had the right under the law to avenge that person's blood.

The man-slayer aware of the danger that he was in, fled to the city of refuge.

Notice the words in **verse 3** “*the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither.*”

The words **unawares** and **unwittingly** refer **to accidental death**.

This is illustrated in **Deuteronomy 19:5** where a man who goes to cut a tree down with his neighbour, but as he is chopping away the axe head falls off and kills the neighbour, and though it is accidental still it is death.

As a result, **the avenger of blood** who is the relative of the person killed had every right to seek after the man-slayer, and exact justice upon him to satisfy and bring honour back to the family.

We must remember to **the avenger of blood** and his family that **slayer is worthy of death**, he is condemned, the death penalty is upon him, he deserves judgment.

It is interesting to note the word **avenger** is the Hebrew word **Goel** also meaning **Kinsman** the nearest of kin, a relative, it speaks of responsibility.

The Goel, had a duel responsibility, **to act as the Kinsman**, to keep the family name, as his relative died he would take the wife, and children to be his own, take responsibility for their well being, as he was the next in kin. To redeem what was lost and buy back.

**But as the avenger of blood** he acted to see justice carried out.

There was no allowance for the circumstances in which blood was shed, his relative had been slain, and it was his responsibility, to carry of the punishment of the law.

**This action would continue each time someone was killed.**

**1 The first purpose for the city of refuge was to show the law had been broken and there is a Penalty for breaking the law.**

The very fact that this man is called a slayer, and that the avenger of blood views him as guilty, reveals he had broken God's law.

The man-slayer is now under the law's penalty of death.

In Genesis 9v6 "*whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed*". Ex 21v12 "*He that smiteth a man so that he die shall surely be put to death.*" Deuteronomy 20v13 "*thou shalt not kill.*"

Taking the life of another, whether it was planned or an accident as in this man's case, still meant the law had been broken and so activated the death penalty.

This leads us to consider, the moral law of God, as summarised in the 10 commandments.

God's law is unbreakable, unchangeable and unbendable. God's law will be upheld.

All humanity have broken God's law, and thereby are guilty of activating its penalty.

God told Adam **the day that thou eatest (the day you disobey my command my law), thou shalt surely die.**

We have broken God's law, we fail to love God with a perfect love and fail to love others perfectly.

One bad thought, word, deed, ill response, confirms we have broken God's law, and under its penalty of eternal death.

**2 The second purpose for the city of refuge was to show the pursuit of the broken law.**

Since the man-slayer had broken the law, and falling under its penalty of death, **the avenger of blood would then pursue the man-slayer**, for the rest of his days until justice was carried out.

The man-slayer was now aware of his danger, he is alarmed, and awakened of his need to flee to the city of refuge for safety, because the cities of refuge were the only places the avenger of blood could not carry out the law's sentence.

But until the man-slayer reached one of the cities, the avenger would follow him, all the days of his life, seeking to catch him and carry out the punishment deserved.

This is the natural state of every sinner, you are awakened, alarmed and made aware in this gospel picture, **God's law is the avenger of blood that is on your track!**

You have transgressed His law, you have, as it were, killed God's commandments, you have trampled them under your foot;

**the avenger of blood**, is after you, pursuing, hunting, chasing you, **he will never stop, until he is satisfied by your death.**

Unsaved one, condemnation is hanging over your head now, God's law calls put for sentence to be carried out.

and it shall surely overtake you, to execute vengeance upon you, and you shall perish in hell.

What must you do, where can you go, get to Christ who is the refuge of the soul, Christ in speaking of Himself said in **John 3:18** **he that believeth on Him is not condemned.**

Therefore, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

I The Purpose of the Cities of Refuge –

## **II SECOND- THE PROVISION OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE**

**Joshua 20:3** **“...the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither, and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood**

**Numbers 35:4** **“six cities of refuge which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither...”**

The guilty man slayer must flee to refuge.

The word **flee** means **run for life, make haste**, there is a need that is urgent, without delay.

The same language is used in **Hebrew 6:18** **who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.**

Christ is the anchor of the soul, He is the sinners refuge for shelter.

**The man-slayer knew that if he reached and entered the city it would be well with his soul.**

The way to each city of refuge was marked out clearly.

Jewish authors say, there was a law in Israel that one day in every year people were sent to repair the roads leading to the cities of refuge, to remove all stumbling-stones which might by time have fallen in the way, so that the signposts which were set up at every corner leading to the city were carefully seen.

The sign posts had the Hebrew name *Miklac* meaning **refuge** written upon them.

As the man-slayer fled he needed the way to be clear, no confusion, he needed to see clearly the sign pointing to the right way, to a city of refuge.

Once again, see the gospel picture, the gospel sign is posted clearly today, pointing way to Christ as the only refuge. He is alone is set before you.

**There is nothing hard or confusing about the message of the cross,**

From all eternity God had appointed a refuge for sinners the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sinner you must flee to Christ, receive Him as your saviour, otherwise you will perish.

The way to Christ is clear today, flee to Him just now.

## ***I The Purpose of the Cities of Refuge, II The Provision for the cities of refuge.***

### **III THIRD- THE POSITION OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE**

There were six cities of refuge available for all who fled to them.

**They** were built upon hills or mountains, as several of their names and the locations of others plainly signify.

**1 the cities of refuge were Accessible v7-8.** Num 35v13-14  
“***six cities shall ye have for refuge, ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan which shall be cities of refuge.***”

**Joshua 20v7-8** deals with 3 cities east and 3 on west. Those cities were so situated, so positioned that when a person fled to them, there was one near at hand.

Express instructions were given in **Deut 19:2-3** that they were to be “**in the midst of the land**”, and not in remote corners which had been difficult to approach.

The land had to be divided “***into three parts,***” each part had a city of refuge, so that it could be reached within a single day’s journey, no matter where the man-slayer fled from.

Remember the man-slayer’s need, its urgent he reaches the refuge, or else he will face death.

Likewise, with you sinner, because of judgement for your sin, you must flee to Christ quick.



Christ has made Himself accessible to you, seek Him while He may be found call upon Him while He is near. He is not far from you.

He is here today inviting you to come unto Him and flee to Him, He has removed obstacles that laid in the way between guilty sinners and the place of safety.

**2 the cities of refuge were Available v9** *“these were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them that whosoever killeth any person unawares might flee thither”*. **Num 35:15** **every one.**

To only know there was a city available and not to flee to it, and enter it, was of no benefit to the guilty one.

If the avenger of blood caught the man-slayer outside the city, he was a dead man!

### **He must be in the city!**

Men and woman, if you would be saved, you must be in Christ! To know about Christ, to admire Christ will not save you.

Christ is sufficient for the guilty sinner on the run.

God appointed six cities!

The number 6 in the bible speaks of man, as it was day 6, God created humanity.

God shows that by appointing these cities His grace is sufficient for humanity.

For the 6 cities was all sufficient For the Israelite, sojourner and the stranger.

This is illustrated in **2 Samuel 2 -3, 2 Sam. 2:18-24**. we learn about a man named **Abner**, who had been Saul's Commander-in-chief, he was being pursued by a man named **Asahel**.

Abner is carrying a spear and **Asahel** runs into the spear and dies.

Asahel's older brother named Joab, (**nearest relative, acts as the avenger of blood**). He pursues Abner.

But Abner reaches the gates of the city of Hebron one of the 6 cities of refuge, but he does not enter, he remains outside unprotected, **2 Sam. 3:27, 2 Sam. 3:32-34**.

**Joab**, catches up with him and carries out the penalty of the law.

What is most striking are the comments made by king David as he mourned the death of Abner.

In **2 Sam 3:32-34**. Died Abner as a fool dieth. "**Abner, you died like a fool!** You were right there at the gates of the refuge.

All you had to do was walk right in. You could have been saved, but you died like a fool!" Oh men and woman, don't let that same thing happen to you! All you have to do enter by faith into the refuge and be saved. Christ will save you,

Its not enough to come to church or to know that Christ saves, you must come know him as your personal Saviour and refuge.

**I The Purpose, II The Provision, III The Position of the Cities of Refuge**

**IV FOURTH- THE PROTECTION OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE V6** “*He shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the Death of the High Priest that shall be in those days then shall the slayer return and come unto his own city*”.

Once the slayer entered the city of refuge he was under the protection of the High Priest.

All the days that Israel’s high priest lived, the man-slayer abode within the city, he was safe and secure, the avenger of blood could not touch him,

but when High Priest high died he was free to leave the city.

No condemnation could come upon him. He was freed the avenger of blood.

The reason being the life and *death of the high priest* secured full and final deliverance.

What a gospel truth we have, Jesus Christ the great high priest by His life and death has secured the full deliverance and eternal safety for all who have fled to Him.

Christ’s death has silenced the claims of the avenger of blood, He has extinguished the wrath of God. His death was paid the price.

God wrath no longer burns against the sinners who trusts in Christ, because His wrath burned out on Christ in their place.

The man-slayer was set free. It is Christ who set sinners free from penalty, pursuit and punishment of sin.

Only in Christ is refuge, safety, protection from wrath to come.