

THE CITIES OF REFUGE

BIBLE TEXT : Deuteronomy 19:1-21; Joshua 20:1-9

LESSON 139 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "The "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Deuteronomy 19:1-21

¹ When the LORD thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the LORD thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses;

² Thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it.

³ Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither.

⁴ And this *is* the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past;

⁵ As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live:

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.

⁷ Wherefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt separate three cities for thee.

⁸ And if the LORD thy God enlarge thy coast, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers;

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Refuge Ordained by God for Israel's Innocent Manslayers

- 1 Canaan was to be divided into three parts, a city of refuge in each, Deuteronomy 19:1-3; Joshua 20:7
- 2 The country east of Jordan was also to be in three parts, with three such cities, Deuteronomy 19:7-9; Joshua 20:8

Deuteronomy 4:41-43

⁴¹ Then Moses severed three cities on this side Jordan toward the sunrising;

⁴² That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live:

⁴³ *Namely*, Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain country, of the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Gilead, of the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, of the Manassites.

Numbers 35:9-14

⁹ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

¹⁰ Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan;

¹¹ Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.

¹² And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment.

¹³ And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge.

¹⁴ 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.

- 3 The law required a murderer's life to be forfeited, the nearest relative of the murdered to be the executioner, Deuteronomy 19:21;

Genesis 9:6

⁶ Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

Exodus 20:13

¹³ Thou shalt not kill.

Exodus 21:12

¹² He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.

Leviticus 24:17-22

¹⁷ And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death.

¹⁸ And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast.

¹⁹ And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him;

²⁰ Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him *again*.

²¹ And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death.

²² Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I *am* the LORD your God.

Numbers 35:16-21

¹⁶ And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he *is* a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

¹⁷ And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith

⁹ If thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them, which I command thee this day, to love the LORD thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, beside these three:

¹⁰ That innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance, and *so* blood be upon thee.

¹¹ But if any man hate his neighbour, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him mortally that he die, and fleeth into one of these cities:

¹² Then the elders of his city shall send and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

¹³ Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away *the guilt of* innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee.

¹⁴ Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it.

¹⁵ One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

¹⁶ If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him *that which is wrong*;

¹⁷ Then both the men, between whom the controversy *is*, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days;

¹⁸ And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, *if* the witness *be* a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

¹⁹ Then shall ye do unto him, as he

he may die, and he die, he *is* a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

¹⁸ Or *if* he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he *is* a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

¹⁹ The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.

²⁰ But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die;

²¹ Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote *him* shall surely be put to death; *for* he *is* a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.

Numbers 35:29-30

²⁹ So these *things* shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

³⁰ Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person *to cause him* to die.

Proverbs 28:17

¹⁷ A man that doeth violence to the blood of *any* person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.

4 Accidental killings were not to be punished by death. To protect the manslayer, God set aside the cities of refuge, Deuteronomy 19:4-10; Joshua 20:1-6, 9

5 The accused must stay in the city of refuge, to be protected,

Numbers 35:22-28

²² But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait,

²³ Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing *him* not, and cast *it* upon him, that he die, and *was* not his enemy, neither sought his harm:

²⁴ Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments:

²⁵ And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil.

²⁶ But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled;

²⁷ And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood:

²⁸ Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.

6 Under this system, justice was not perverted, but guaranteed, Deuteronomy 19:11-13, 15;

Numbers 35:31-34

³¹ Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which *is* guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.

³² And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest.

³³ So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye *are*: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

³⁴ Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.

7 Perjury was considered a capital crime,

Deuteronomy 4:16-19

¹⁶ Lest ye corrupt *yourselves*, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

²⁰ And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

²¹ And thine eye shall not pity; *but* life *shall go* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Joshua 20:1-9

¹ The LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying,

² Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses:

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.

⁴ And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them.

⁵ And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime.

⁶ And 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, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled.

⁷ And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjatharba, which *is* Hebron, in

¹⁷ The likeness of any beast that *is* on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air,

¹⁸ The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that *is* in the waters beneath the earth:

¹⁹ And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, *even* all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.

8 Punishment for wilful offenses was ordained as an example to others,

Deuteronomy 4:20-21

²⁰ But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, *even* out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as *ye are* this day.

²¹ Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance:

II The Refuge for Us in Christ

1 A sinner needs a place of refuge, because of the

(a) Curse of a broken law,

Galatians 3:10

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

(b) Justice of God,

Nahum 1:3

³ The LORD *is* slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit *the wicked*: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds *are* the dust of his feet.

(c) Consequences of sin,

Romans 6:23

²³ For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(d) Guilt of sin,

Romans 3:19

¹⁹ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

(e) Power of sin and Satan,

Romans 6:14

¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Colossians 1:12-13

¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:

(f) Wrath to come,

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

⁷ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

⁸ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

⁹ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

2 Refuge is provided by God, in Christ, and is ample for all, accessible to all, and adequate for every need,

John 3:16

the mountain of Judah.

⁸ And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh.

⁹ These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth *any* person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 14:5-6

⁵ Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

⁶ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 10:27-29

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

²⁸ And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.

²⁹ My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

Revelation 22:17

¹⁷ And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Psalms 9:9

⁹ The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

Psalms 27:1-14

¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

² When the wicked, *even* mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

³ Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this *will* I be confident.

⁴ One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

⁵ For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

⁶ And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.

⁷ Hear, O LORD, *when* I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

⁸ *When thou saidst*, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

⁹ Hide not thy face *far* from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

¹⁰ When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.

¹¹ Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

¹² Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.

¹³ *I had fainted*, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Psalms 57:1

¹ Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until *these* calamities be overpast.

Psalms 62:7-8

⁷ In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, *and* my refuge, is in God.

⁸ Trust in him at all times; *ye* people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.

Psalms 142:4-7

⁴ I looked on *my* right hand, and beheld, but *there was* no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.

⁵ I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my refuge *and* my portion in the land of the living.

⁶ Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.

⁷ Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

3 We must stay in the Refuge, to receive His protection,

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 15:4-7

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

⁷ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Hebrews 6:17-19

¹⁷ Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath:

¹⁸ That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

¹⁹ Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

NOTES:

Symbols of the Gospel Dispensation

Here is another one of the many Old Testament provisions that were instituted, not only for Israel's temporal welfare but as a symbol, or type, of a great Gospel truth. The cities of refuge, appointed by God for the benefit of Israel's manslayers, that innocent blood would not be unnecessarily shed, are but a type of the refuge that we may find in God, through Jesus Christ, from the ultimate consequences of sin.

Israel's temporal blessings in Canaan are symbols of spiritual blessings in this Gospel dispensation. They inherited a land flowing with milk and honey that was rich in natural resources. We are promised a "spiritual Canaan" that satisfies all our spiritual needs, a wealth of blessings that continually flow to us from the Fountainhead of Living Waters, God Almighty, through Jesus Christ, His Son.

The Law Regarding Murder

When a life was taken, in Old Testament times, it was necessary that justice be satisfied and the guilty person punished. The first murderer, Cain, felt the weight of the divine sentence imposed upon him and said it was more than he could bear, since he would be a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of the earth. The stern edict of that early day said that "who- so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). And no doubt in the years of time there have been many who have suffered unjustly through the hasty mistakes of the avenger. God, ever mindful of His people and eager that His holy laws might be carried out in the

spirit in which they were given, made the provision before us, in our present study, that serious errors might be prevented and injustice curbed.

The taking of another's life is a most serious offense. There is a difference between murder and manslaughter. To kill with hate, malice, enmity, or revenge as the motive prompting the act, is murder. But to kill accidentally, when there is no malice, hatred, enmity, or revenge in the heart of the killer, is manslaughter. God Himself is the Author of life in man, and no one has the right to put an end to that life but God Himself. He uses different ways to bring it to an end, sometimes empowering the civil authorities with the responsibility, that lawlessness might be controlled.

Life is also the time to prepare for eternity, and sometimes a soul's salvation depends upon a longer life. Therefore it is of infinite importance that the life of man be lengthened to the utmost limits assigned by God, that the guilty soul may have all the opportunities possible to repent and make its peace with God. So the man who takes the life of another before his time may be the murderer of his soul as well as his body, and the most severe laws should be enacted against this, for the purpose of punishment and for the prevention of the recurrence of such crimes.

Other things besides murder were punishable by death under the Mosaic Law; among them being adultery, blasphemy against God, breaking the Sabbath days, or rebellion in a son. But these were not offenses where personal feeling would be strong against a guilty one, and the danger of anyone's arising against the accused to carry out unjustly the death penalty was small. But in a case where a person's nearest relative was murdered, or killed accidentally, the strength of human feelings would rise to its highest and the surviving relative might kill the wrong person, or an innocent manslayer, in revenge, being temporarily deprived of his sound reasoning power by the grief of his personal loss. Innocent blood would be shed and the law that God had ordained for the punishment of murderers would be misapplied, thereby eventually bringing God's ordinances into disrepute.

God's Refuge for the Innocent

Six cities were chosen, in six different sections of the land. These were centrally located, and connected by broad roads that were kept open and unclogged, which, tradition tells us, were marked "Refuge." When a person killed another accidentally he was entitled to security in one of these cities until the danger against his life was gone.

Naturally others besides those entitled to these provisions would also come to the cities, and for this reason a provision was made that would protect God's Law as well as the innocent person and see that justice was meted out. When a person killed another, and was found in a city of refuge, he was brought before the civil authorities and his case tried. If he was innocent, having killed accidentally and without hatred, malice, enmity, or revenge, he was allowed to continue living in the city until the death of the high priest. If he left the city at any time during that period the manslayer would run the risk of being killed by the avenger of blood, who was the nearest relative of the person accidentally killed.

No allowance was made for wilful murder. That person must suffer for his crime. When he stood before the seated authorities and his case was heard they decided if he was guilty or innocent of murder. A murderer was delivered to the avenger of blood, who executed the sentence in the way prescribed by God's Law. One witness was not enough to condemn a man to death. Two or three

QUESTIONS

- 1 What was God's law concerning murder, as understood from the very beginning of time?
- 2 What qualifications were necessary in each of the cities of refuge, that they might best serve the people?
- 3 Who were eligible for protection in the cities? and when did the period of their protection terminate?)
- 4 Name the six cities.
- 5 What beautiful parallels with the life and office of Christ do you find in these cities?
- 6 How does Hebrews 6:17-19 apply to this subject in its spiritual interpretation?
- 7 Look up the word "refuge" in a concordance and see how much of our eternal hope is hinged upon this Scriptural fact.
- 8 What great chapter of the Gospel of John bears out the necessity of abiding in Christ? Read it thoroughly and prayerfully.
- 9 Tell how this lesson contradicts the fallacious doctrine of the eternal security of the believer.
- 10 The man guilty of murder was eventually punished for his crime under this system. How does this compare with us, who, though guilty of sin, find refuge in Christ? Which of God's great moral attributes makes this possible?

must be brought, and they must agree on all points. A bribe could not be taken by even the avenger of blood to pervert justice, and a perjured witness was automatically found guilty of the crime with which he was attempting to charge the accused. We do not read in the Bible that the cities of refuge were ever found inefficient, or that the privilege was ever abused.

The chosen cities were actually cities in which the Levites dwelt. That meant that the persons finding refuge therein were in contact with the people whom God had appointed to teach the Law. They would have godly associates, they would draw nearer to God, and they would learn more of God and His ways during the time of their residence there.

Christ, Our Refuge

Some have attempted to show interesting parallels between the names of these cities and the blessings of salvation as provided for the sinner. But this is hardly necessary. However, the great fact that these cities were a beautiful picture of Christ is apparent to all students of the Bible.

In Christ we have, as it were, a city of refuge to which we may flee when being pursued by the enemy; and having gained entrance there we are amply secure. The Law no longer has any power over us. Our guilt of sin is gone. We are freed from the consequences of our sin and iniquity. The difference between the type and its fulfillment is marked in one particular, however. The only ones protected in the cities of refuge were those innocent of wilful murder, but in Christ we all — since all are guilty of sin — may find refuge and pardon.

When we come to God we all are guilty of open transgression and violation of the law of God. But so extensive and far-reaching is the mercy of God that no matter how deep that guilt may be, no matter how heavy the load may be upon us, grace prevails when we find entrance into the refuge. Christian, the principal character of the allegory "Pilgrim's Progress," ran toward the wicket gate, stopping his ears with his fingers that he might not hear the cries of those who attempted to dissuade him, crying as he ran, "Eternal Life! Eternal Life!"

We, too, may "have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." Since He is the High Priest forever, we need never leave that refuge. We are kept by His power as long as we remain in His care. Our hand is the only hand that can remove us from His protection. We may enjoy His fellowship and love forever. Great is the mercy of God!