

Lesson 43 - CHRIST, OUR REFUGE *Numbers 35:1-15*

(Num. 35:1-8) - Before Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, the Lord had instructed Moses on the arrangement of the tribes in the land. Joshua was to allocate certain territories to each tribe. Only one tribe, the Levites (the priests), was not given land to develop. Instead, they were to be the priests of the Lord and the overseers of the tabernacle and all its rites and furnishings. The Levites were given forty-eight cities throughout the land (*Num. 35:6-7*). Six were designated as cities of refuge.

(Num. 35:9-15) - The Old Covenant Law was clear that anyone who committed murder was to be put to death (*Exod. 21:14*). But there was another provision for unintentional deaths. If one unintentionally caused the death of another, the Lord allowed an “*avenger*” to exercise justice in killing that person who killed another, even though unintentionally. This “*revenger of blood*” (*Num. 35:19*) was a man (a relative) who was legally responsible for avenging a family member who was killed. The Lord set aside six cities of refuge to which the manslayer could flee (*Exod. 21:13*). As long as the person stayed in one of the cities, he was safe until he could be tried and judged to find if he acted unintentionally. If he did, he would return to the city of refuge and live there safely until the death of the current high priest, at which point he could return to his property. If the attacker left the city of refuge before the death of the high priest, however, the avenger would have the right to kill him (*Num. 35:24-28*).

THESE CITIES OF REFUGE ARE TYPES OF CHRIST in whom sinners find refuge from the destroyer of souls. Just as the guilty person sought refuge in the cities of refuge, we flee to Christ for refuge from sin. By God-given faith, we run to Christ to escape the danger we are in from the curse and condemnation of the law, the wrath of God, and eternal damnation. Only Christ provides refuge from these things, and it is to Him alone that we must run. Consider the details of this great type of Christ.

(1) The sin here is manslaughter. It is not premeditated murder as this meant certain death (*Num. 35:16*). But the crime is no less worthy of death. A person has been killed, and the law is broken. The truth taught here is this - Sin is sin even if it is committed unknowingly, and all sin deserves death. Strict justice must be satisfied. We are all sinners, and the fact is that all we are in ourselves is sin (*Rom. 7:14-24*). We commit sins intentionally and unintentionally, but all our sins make us worthy of its wages which is death. This is our state on this earth within ourselves.

(2) The avenger of blood represents the law of God which demands justice. The fact is that we are all sinners, transgressors of God’s law, and no obedience that we can attempt can satisfy the justice of that law that we have broken (*Rom. 3:9-20*). If the Lord were to give us what we have earned and what we deserve, it would be certain and eternal death and damnation.

(3) The sinner here is the manslayer who is aware of his crime. This illustrates how the Holy Spirit, in the new birth, makes each and every one of God’s elect fully aware of his/her sinfulness, depravity, and spiritual death (*John 16:9*). He brings us to admit that no works we can do can satisfy God’s justice, and He brings us to take sides with God against ourselves (*Psa. 51:4; 130:3; Rom. 3:19-20*).

(4) The cities of refuge represent God’s mercy and grace sovereignly, freely, and fully provided and given to His people in and by Christ, His glorious Person and finished work of redemption. Christ is every believer’s city of refuge. In Christ we find safety and security. In Christ we find justice satisfied by His death as represented by the death of the high priest (*Num. 35:25,28*). Christ is our Great High Priest Who gave Himself a ransom for us, shedding His precious blood as the propitiation for our sins. He satisfied justice and worked a perfect righteousness which God has imputed to us (*John 16:10; Rom. 10:4*). As long as we are in

Christ, He is our Refuge. Outside of Christ, there is no refuge from God's wrath and no grace, no love, no mercy, and no eternal life. We can see various aspects of the believer's refuge in Christ in the names of these cities of refuge as recorded in *Joshua 20:7-8*.

"KEDESH" means "holy place" or "righteousness." Christ is the Holy One Who is the believer's holiness and righteousness before God (*1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21*). If He had had one sin in Him, we would be lost forever! "Kedesh" reminds us that God justifies us based on Christ's righteousness imputed to us, and when we come to Christ in God-given faith, He reveals His holiness and righteousness as our refuge against all that would come against us (*Rom. 8:33-39*).

"SHECHEM" means "shoulder," which is a place of strength. Christ is the power of God to save His people from sins. The government of the covenant of grace was placed upon His shoulders (*Isa. 9:7*). All conditions of the salvation of God's elect were placed upon Christ as the Surety of His people, and He fulfilled all conditions to secure their salvation and eternal refuge.

"HEBRON" means "fellowship." God's elect, sinners saved by grace, are brought into fellowship with the Godhead through Christ (*2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 1:1-4*). Christ is the true "Hebron" because He has reconciled us unto God by His cross-death, and He has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places." (*Eph. 2:6*). We who were once "afar off" have been "brought nigh by the blood of Christ" (*Eph. 2:13*).

"BEZER" means "stronghold" or "fortress," a "fortified place." "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (*Nah. 1:7*). Christ is the Rock of Ages, our foundation, our chief corner-stone, and our hiding place. We cannot be removed from Him, because the gates of hell cannot prevail against Him.

"RAMOTH" means "exalted" or "heights." Because of His great work of redeeming all His people, Christ has been exalted to the right hand of the Father ever living to make intercession for His people. All His people are risen with Him and exalted in Him (*Eph. 2:4-10; Php. 2:9*).

"GOLAN" means "joy," or "exultation." Through Christ "we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rom. 5:11*). Christ spoke the words of grace to His disciples that His "joy might remain in" them, and that their "joy might be full" (*John 15:11*). The exhortation of God's Word is, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (*Php. 4:4*). At final judgment, Christ will call all who are found in Him as their refuge to "enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (*Matt. 25:21*).

In *Deuteronomy 19:1-13* there are recorded laws for the cities of refuge. In *verse 3* they are commanded by God to "prepare" the way to these cities. The roads to these cities were to be tended by men assigned to keep the way clean. Signs were placed on these roads that said, "Refuge, Refuge." The roads were to be kept smooth and free of any obstruction that would hinder the manslayer. This illustrates the mission of all true Gospel preachers - TO POINT SINNERS TO CHRIST, THE ONLY REFUGE OF SINNERS AGAINST SIN! His message is to be plain, clear, and free of all legal religious hindrances, personal opinions, and confusion. His message is to preach Christ crucified and risen as the sinner's only hope of salvation. He is to expose all false refuges (*Isa. 28:14-17*). He is to preach this Gospel, this refuge, to all who will listen and tell his hearers that just as the cities were open to all who fled to them for safety, it is Christ who provides safety to all who come to Him for refuge from sin and its punishment. The psalmist wrote of this in pointing sinners to the future Messiah - "The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble" (*Psa. 9:9; cf. 46:7; 62:7-8*). It is revealed in the New Testament in *Hebrews 6:18* when speaking of the strong comfort for those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" which is Christ and His righteousness by the grace of God.