

Joshua 20 Commentary

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Paul J Bucknell - Biblical Foundations for Freedom

LAND ALLOTMENTS
(Joshua 13-21)

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Click charts to enlarge Charts from Jensen's Survey of the NT - used by permission

JOSHUA				
A BOOK ON SPIRITUAL WARFARE and REST				
HOW TO POSSESS YOUR POSSESSIONS				
CONQUEST OF THE PROMISED LAND		DIVISION OF THE PROMISED LAND		CLOSE OF JOSHUA'S LIFE
ACTION		ALLOCATION		APPEAL
Josh 1:1-5:15	Josh 6:1-12:24	Joshua 13:1-21:45		Josh 22:1-24:33
WARLORDS IN CANAAN		LANDLORDS IN CANAAN		
ENTERING CANAAN	CONQUERING CANAAN	DIVIDING CANAAN		
SECURING THE LAND		SETTLING THE LAND		
Preparation	Conquest	Possession		Consecration
ca. 1 Month	ca 7 Years	ca. 18 Years		

[See also more detailed Chart by Charles R Swindoll](#)

Joshua 20:1 Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying,

- **spoke:** Jos 5:14 6:2 7:10 13:1-7
- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Outline of Joshua 20:

1. **CHARGE TO DESIGNATE CITIES OF REFUGE** - Joshua 20:1-6
2. **ACTUAL DESIGNATION OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE** - Joshua 20:7-8
3. **THE PROVISION OF CITIES FORMALIZED** - Joshua 20:9

Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying - Note that this is a divine decree and even at his advanced age Joshua is still communicating with Jehovah. Advanced age should never be an impediment to communing with the God of the Universe.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary - Verses 1-6. When the Israelites were settled in their promised inheritance, they were reminded to set apart the cities of refuge, whose use and typical meaning have been explained, Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19. God's spiritual Israel have, and shall have in Christ and heaven, not only rest to repose in, but refuge to secure themselves in. These cities were designed to typify the relief which the gospel provides for penitent sinners, and their protection from the curse of the law and the wrath of God, in our Lord Jesus, to whom believers flee for refuge, Hebrews 6:18.

Joshua 20:1-9 True Shelter

The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. Proverbs 18:10

Today's Scripture & Insight: Joshua 20:1-9

In March 2014 a tribal conflict broke out in my hometown area, forcing my father's household, along with other refugees, to take cover in the region's capital city. Throughout history, people who have felt unsafe in their homelands have traveled to other places searching for safety and something better.

As I visited and talked with people from my hometown, I thought of the cities of refuge in Joshua 20:1-9. These were cities designated as places of safety for those fleeing from "relatives seeking revenge" in the case of an accidental killing (v. 3 nlt). They offered peace and protection.

People today still seek places of refuge, although for a variety of reasons. But as needed as these sanctuaries are, supplying shelter and food, they cannot completely meet the needs of refugees and fugitives. That rest is found only in God. Those who walk with God find true shelter and the safest protection in Him. When ancient Israel was sent into exile, the Lord said, "I have been a sanctuary [safe haven] for them in the countries where they have gone" (Ezek. 11:16).

With the psalmist, we can say confidently to the Lord, "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" (32:7). By: Lawrence Darmani

Father, thank You for being a rock to which we can flee and that no matter where we are or in what circumstances we find ourselves, You are there with us. Help us to remember that even in the darkest of nights, You are our strong tower. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Nothing can shake those who are secure in God's hands.

Joshua 20:2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Designate the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses,

- **Designate:** Ex 21:13-14 Nu 35:6,11-14 Dt 4:41-43 Dt 19:2-13 Ro 8:1,33,34 Heb 6:17-20
- **refuge:** Nu 35:15-24
- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

Genesis 9:5-6 (**MURDERERS WOULD PAY FOR THEIR CRIME WITH THEIR OWN BLOOD**) "Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. (**CITIES OF REFUGE PROVIDED MERCY IF THE KILLING WAS NOT INTENTIONAL**).

Numbers 35:33-34+ (**HERE IS THE PROBLEM WITH KILLING - OH HOW AMERICA NEEDS TO HEAR**

THESE WORDS! [SEE ABORTION STATS USA](#) (So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. 34 'You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD am dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel.'")

Exodus 21:12-14+ (**THE ALTAR WAS THE "REFUGE" WHEN THE TRIBES LIVED IN ONE LOCATION AND BEFORE THEY ENTERED THE LAND**) - He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. "But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. 14" If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.

Hebrews 6:17-20+ (**A NEW TESTAMENT PARALLEL TO THE OT CITIES OF REFUGE**) In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, **we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.** 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

YAHWEH COMMANDS CITIES OF REFUGE

Yahweh is speaking to Joshua and is now commanding him to fulfill of His instructions which were given on at least 3 previous occasions (clearly this is very important to God), once in Numbers and twice in Deuteronomy (Nu 35:6,11-14, Dt 4:41-43 and Dt 19:2-13).

Warren Wiersbe emphasizes that "Even before the Law of Moses was given, God had laid down the basic rule that those who shed blood should pay for their crime with their own blood (Gen. 9:5–6). This principle was enunciated repeatedly in the Law, but God made a distinction between murder and manslaughter (Ex. 21:12–14; Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:16–21; Deut. 19:11–13). "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" (Num. 35:33–34, NKJV)." ([Be Strong -- Joshua: Putting God's Power to Work in Your Life](#))

Campbell gives some historical context on why cities of refuge were so important - The fact that these cities are discussed in four books of the Old Testament marks them as being of great importance. It is apparent that God wished to impress on Israel the sanctity of human life. To put an end to a person's life, even if done unintentionally, is a serious thing, and the cities of refuge underscored this emphatically. In the ancient world blood revenge was widely practiced. The moment a person was killed, his nearest relative took responsibility for vengeance. This ancient rite of vendetta was often handed down from one generation to another so that increasingly larger numbers of innocent people died violently. The need in ancient Israel for the refuge that these special cities provided is evident. ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary Old Testament](#))

Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Designate the cities of refuge ([miqlat](#); Lxx = phugadeuterion - place of refuge), of which I spoke to you through Moses - Keep the historical context in mind to help understand the value of the cities of refuge -- in short, ancient Israel had no police force, no local sheriff, no jails, etc. Justice for killing someone was undertaken by the family, by the so-called **avenger of blood**. The concept of cities of refuge was given by God to prevent a person from being "avenged" who had not committed intentional murder. Today we refer to such killing by the term **manslaughter**. Yahweh had spoken to Moses on three occasions about these special cities of asylum - Exodus 21:12–14+, Numbers 35:6-34+, and Deuteronomy 19:1–13+ Clearly this was an important principle to the LORD, and underscores His desire to show mercy and assure that justice is carried out in the land, so that the land is not polluted and defiled (Nu 35:33-34+). This regulation distinguished Israel and thus Israel's God, for this was not the practice of the pagan, godless nations around them.

And notice [from the map](#) that in God's infinite wisdom and mercy He commanded Joshua to space these six cities throughout in the land, 3 on either side of the Jordan River, so that they would be within easy reach of anyone who seeking refuge from the avenger of blood. "Since the Holy Land is about the size of the state of Maryland, you can see that nobody was very far from a city of refuge." ([Wiersbe](#))

Utley - "cities of refuge" Originally those who were fleeing from hasty justice could grab the horns of the altar for safety (cf. Exod. 21:14; 1 Kgs. 1:50–53; 2:28–31). However, this system was replaced by having set cities within the Promised Land. Moses had already designated three cities in the trans-Jordan area (cf. Deut. 4:41ff). There are several discussions in the Pentateuch related to

the cities of refuge (cf. Exod. 21:12–14; Num. 35:10–28; Deut. 19:1–13). If a person killed a fellow Israelite by accident, he could flee to one of these six cities. There, a trial would be held (cf. v. 4). If innocent of premeditated murder, he still had to remain in the city until the death of the High Priest. If guilty of murder, he was turned over to the blood avenger of the family he violated for the immediate punishment of death (cf. v. 9). ([Commentary](#))

Refuge (04733) **miqlat** is a masculine noun that refers to a refuge, a place of safety and security. An asylum where a person guilty of manslaughter could flee for protection from the blood avenger (the goel) REFUGE is from a Latin word meaning to escape and depicts a place which provides shelter or protection from trouble, danger or distress. This noun is always used in connection with the cities appointed to provide asylum for those guilty of involuntary manslaughter. Such a provision prevented excesses in the [law of retribution](#). Initially, those not guilty of intentional or premeditated killing could seek asylum at the altar (Ex 21:12–14), but those who killed with premeditation should be dragged from the altar and executed (cf. 1Ki 2:28–31). Once Israel was in the Promised Land distance would potentially render successful flight more difficult and place innocent men at risk of being killed by the blood avenger. God in His perfect wisdom instructed Israel to establish cities of refuge throughout the promised land (Nu 35:9–34).

Miqlat - 20v all translated "refuge" - Num. 35:6; Num. 35:11; Num. 35:12; Num. 35:13; Num. 35:14; Num. 35:15; Num. 35:25; Num. 35:26; Num. 35:27; Num. 35:28; Num. 35:32; Jos. 20:2; Jos. 20:3; Jos. 21:13; Jos. 21:21; Jos. 21:27; Jos. 21:32; Jos. 21:38; 1 Chr. 6:57; 1 Chr. 6:67

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 20](#)

Appoint out for your cities of refuge. Heb. תנו לכם tenu lâkem, give for yourselves. No delinquency on the part of Joshua is to be inferred from this command, as if he had neglected, or were likely to neglect, a very important part of the arrangements designed to be carried into effect after the settlement of Israel in Canaan. He was well aware of the divine intention in this respect, and would doubtless have acted upon it, as well as upon every other order with which he was charged, but God saw fit to interpose to remind him that now was the precise time, when the tribes had just received their inheritances, and while they were yet together, to separate the cities of refuge for the uses for which they were intended, and respecting which such copious instructions had been before given, Num. 35:11–34; Deut. 19:2–10. To the notes on these passages the reader is referred for a fuller account of the nature and object of this institution. It was an essential appendage to the patriarchal system of government, as far as the avenging of blood was concerned. It has been already remarked, that the nearest of kin to a deceased person had not only the right of redeeming an inheritance that had been forfeited or alienated, but had also authority to slay on the spot the person who had slain his relative. But as a man might casually kill another against whom he had no ill will, and with whom he had no quarrel, and might thus be liable to lose his own life undeservedly, at the hands of the avenger of blood, these privileged cities were wisely and humanely appointed for the protection of those who had committed accidental homicide, till the cause could receive a judicial hearing from the magistrate. They had authority, according as, upon strict examination, they found him guilty or not of wilful murder, to deliver him up to the avenger of blood, or, after the lapse of a certain time, to grant him a discharge.

By the hand of Moses. By the agency, by the ministry of Moses; by him as an organ of communication.

QUESTION - [What were the cities of refuge in the Old Testament?](#)

ANSWER - The cities of refuge were part of the distribution of the Promised Land among the twelve tribes of Israel. Only one tribe, the Levites, 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. Only the Levites could carry and set up the tabernacle (Numbers 2:5-13). As the Levites were to have no territorial domain allocated to them like the other tribes in the conquest of Canaan, they were to be distributed throughout the land in certain cities appropriated to their use. Part of their inheritance consisted of forty-eight cities spread throughout the land (Numbers 35:6-7). Of these forty-eight cities, six were designated as cities of refuge. The cities were Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan (Joshua 20:7-8).

The Mosaic Law stated that anyone who committed a murder was to be put to death (Exodus 21:14). But for unintentional deaths, God set aside these cities to which the murderer could flee for refuge (Exodus 21:13). He would be safe from the **avenger**—the family member charged with avenging the victim's death (Numbers 35:19)—until the case could go to trial. The congregation would judge to find if the attacker acted unintentionally. If he did, he would return to the city of refuge and live there safely until the death of the high priest who was in office at the time of the trial, 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 (Numbers 35:24-28).

The establishment of those privileged sanctuaries among the cities of the Levites is probably traceable to the idea that the Levites would be the most suitable and impartial judges, that their presence and counsels might calm or restrain the stormy passions of the blood avenger. By their consecration as priests, the Levites were mediators between the Israelites and God. As such, they would

have been gifted to calmly mediate between the attacker and the victim's family, ensuring that no further bloodshed would occur.

The cities of refuge are types of Christ, in whom sinners find a refuge from the destroyer of our souls. Just as the guilty person sought refuge in the cities set up for that purpose, we flee to Christ for refuge from sin (Hebrews 6:18). We run to Christ to escape the danger we are in from the curse and condemnation of the law, from the wrath of God, and from an eternity in hell. Only Christ provides refuge from these things, and it is to Him alone that we must run. 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. GotQuestions.org

Related Resources:

- [What is an avenger of blood in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)
- [What is the law of retribution? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)
- [Cities of Refuge - Holman Bible Dictionary](#) - in depth discussion of cities of refuge
- [Cities of Refuge - Jewish Encyclopedia](#)

J Vernon McGee - In the Hawaiian Islands, on the Kona coast of the Big Island, there is a place known as the [City of Refuge \(pu 'uhonua\)](#). It was in use back in the days before Christianity came to the Islands, when the tribes were slaying each other and even offering human sacrifices. It is there as a tourist attraction today. ([Joshua 20](#))

Cyril Barber adds this note - Some years ago my wife and I visited the "Big Island" of Hawaii. We found that whatever sightseeing we did had to be done before 11:00 A.M. for torrential rains then swept over the island every morning about that time. One place close to our hotel was Pu 'uhonua, the City of Refuge. In ancient times Hawaiians lived under strict laws. Commoners could not get too close to their chief, nor were they allowed to touch any of his possessions, walk in his footsteps or even let their shadow touch the royal grounds. The penalty for violating a sacred [kapu](#) (taboo) was death. Breaking a [kapu](#) was believed to incur the wrath of the gods. Hawaiians often chased down an offender and swiftly put him to death unless he could reach a [pu 'uhonua](#) or place of refuge. There he could be absolved by a [kahuna](#) (priest) in a purification ceremony before returning home with his transgression forgiven. ([Joshua: A Devotional Exposition](#);)

Today in the Word - Moody Bible - of its bliss; the Center of its love; the innermost Soul of its life.

Joshua 20:1-9

Through his character Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tells us that courage is more than brashly ignoring danger. He writes, "It is stupidity rather than courage to refuse to recognize danger when it is close upon you." That bit of wisdom applies quite well to the crux of today's reading in a couple of different ways.

For the nation as a whole, it would have been foolish to deny the possibility of tragic deaths, either accidental or malicious, especially now that the people were spread out across a wide array of settlements. Without a plan to handle such a situation, the Promised Land could have closely resembled the chaos of the American Old West. God in His foresight provided Israel with a justice system that would apply to the whole land and could help see to it that patience and truth would prevail over irrational rage.

The quote also applies to the person who causes a death—it would be doubly foolish to think that no punishment would come as a result of costing a man his life. A man in that position no longer needs courage; he needs protection.

The passage in Numbers gives us a more detailed account of the philosophy of justice for murder, and it's much different than what we're used to today. When evaluating the incident, at least two witnesses needed to testify about the death (v. 30); in our society, one eyewitness can be evidence for conviction.

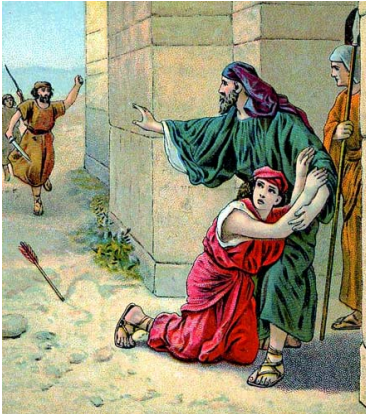
If the accused was convicted of murder, a relative of the victim was permitted to avenge the murder by taking the life of the guilty person (v. 19). Even if he was deemed innocent of malicious, intentional murder, causing a death was still a serious offense, and the offender couldn't leave the city of refuge until the death of the high priest without fearing for his life (vv. 26-28).

We may wonder at this, but God wanted to stress that all life is valuable, and there is punishment for murder and consequences even for accidents. Yet God still demonstrates His mercy by instituting protections in the legal system and by providing cities of refuge.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Hopefully the specifics of today's reading don't come into play in your life any time soon, but there's an important truth in the text that applies to all of us. God places tremendous value on human life. He would do anything to save a life, but He can't ignore justice to do it. Jesus died on the cross to save us, suffering the penalty that sin imposed on all mankind. We need to value human life in the same way; tell someone the good news today. Introduce them to the refuge of grace.

Joshua 20:3 that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge from the avenger of blood.

- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



Avenger of Blood

KILLING UNINTENTIONALLY

that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge ([miqlat](#); Lxx = phugadeuterion - place of refuge) **from the avenger of blood**

Utley - This is a good place to point out that the commandment “You shall not murder” (cf. Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17) does not mean “kill” (KJV), but do not commit “non-legal, premeditated murder” (BDB 953, cf. Exod. 21:12–14). There was legal premeditated killing - blood avenger, holy war, judicial sentences ([Commentary](#))

Campbell - According to Jewish tradition the roads leading to these cities were kept in excellent condition and the crossroads were well marked with signposts reading, “Refuge! Refuge!” Runners were also stationed along the way to guide the fugitives. ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary Old Testament](#))

Utley on “the avenger of blood” This is the Hebrew term, which denoted a near relative who rendered aid to the family and avenged the family in a case of injury (cf. Num. 35:19, 21, 24, 25, 27; Deut. 19:6, 12). The concept first appears in Gen. 4:14 and 9:5, 6. The positive side can be seen in Ruth 3:13. It is also mentioned in Lev. 25:25; Num. 5:8 and Jer. 32:7. ([Commentary](#))

Howard on the avenger of blood - The idea of blood vengeance behind our passage here in Joshua 20 (and the related passages in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19) is more limited than the broader idea of the “kinsman-redeemer.” The “avenger of blood” was not free to take private vengeance: the Bible clearly reserves vengeance to God alone (Deut. 32:35; Isa. 34:8; Rom. 12:19). Numbers 35 states clearly that the avenger of blood was only free to kill someone who had killed another if (1) that person ventured forth from a city of refuge (Num. 35:26-28) or (2) that person was guilty of murder and not manslaughter (Num. 35:16-21). The avenger of blood had a legal status in society to carry out society’s (i.e., God’s) judgments and was by no means one who was to exact private vengeance ([Joshua: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture Volume 5 The New American Commentary](#))

David Guzik - The principle for capital punishment goes back to Genesis 9:6: Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man. The state’s right to use the sword of execution is also stated in the New Testament (Romans 13:3–4).i. God said also that unpunished murderers defiled the land: 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, 35:33–34). **How long will our nation be polluted by the stain of unpunished murders?** Not too many years ago, over one year in Los Angeles County, they averaged more than five murders a day. The blood of the slain cries out before God. ([Joshua 20 Commentary](#))

Trent - “The Christian community must take seriously its responsibility to examine penal institutions and practices and seek to find the ways God would lead us to reform such practices. The innocent man should not suffer unduly and the guilty man should be given sufficient protection and hope for new opportunities as well as sufficient punishment.”([Joshua 13-24](#))

Manslayer (murder)(07523) **ratsach** means to murder or slay, all 47 uses (in 40v and 18 refer to "manslayer") speaking of one human being killing another and never of a person killing an animal. Ratsach is never employed in contexts of war, capital punishment, or self-defense. The taking of a human life is the primary concept behind this word. The first use is in the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." (Ex 20:13) **Ratsach** refers to premeditated murder (Deut. 5:17; 1 Kgs. 21:19; Jer. 7:9), accidental killing (Nu. 35:11; Josh. 20:3), an act of revenge (Nu 35:27) and death from animal attack (Pr. 22:13). "Provocatively, Hosea refers to the lewdness of the priests that led people astray as being equal to murder (Hos. 6:9)." ([Old Testament Word Study](#))

Ratsach - 40x - killed(1), kills the manslayer(1), manslayer(18), murder(7), murdered(2), murderer(12), murderer shall be put(1), murderers(1), murders(1), put to death(1), slew(1). mExod. 20:13; Num. 35:6; Num. 35:11; Num. 35:12; Num. 35:16; Num. 35:17; Num. 35:18; Num. 35:19; Num. 35:21; Num. 35:25; Num. 35:26; Num. 35:27; Num. 35:28; Num. 35:30; Num. 35:31; Deut. 4:42; Deut. 5:17; Deut. 19:3; Deut. 19:4; Deut. 19:6; Deut. 22:26; Jos. 20:3; Jos. 20:5; Jos. 20:6; Jos. 21:13; Jos. 21:21; Jos. 21:27; Jos. 21:32; Jos. 21:38; Jdg. 20:4; 1 Ki. 21:19; 2 Ki. 6:32; Job 24:14; Ps. 62:3; Ps. 94:6; Prov. 22:13; Isa. 1:21; Jer. 7:9; Hos. 4:2; Hos. 6:9

Avenger (01350) **goel/ga'al** Ga'al = **Blood Avenger** in Dt 19:6, which describes the individual who had the duty to execute the murderer of his relative. Ga'al is used with this same sense in Nu 35:19, 21, 24, 27 35:12 (see [Commentary](#)). Apparently the idea is that the next of kin must effect the payment of life for life. As a house is repurchased or a slave redeemed by payment, so the lost life of the relative must be paid for by the equivalent life of the murderer. The kinsman is the avenger of blood. This system of execution must be distinguished from blood feuds for the **blood avenger** was a guiltless executioner and not to be murdered in turn.

Goel/ga'al used to refer to an **avenger of blood** 12 times in OT - Num 35:12 Num 35:19 Num 35:21 Num 35:24 Num 35:25 Num 35:27 Deu 19:6 Deu 19:12 Josh 20:3 Josh 20:5 Josh 20:9 2Sa 14:11

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 20](#)

The slayer that killeth any person. Heb. מכה נפש makkeh nēphesh, that smiteth (i. e. fatally) any soul. On this frequent sense of the word 'soul,' see Note on Gen. 12:5.

Unawares and unwittingly. Heb. בישגה bishāgāh, through ignorance, error, and mistake and without knowledge. The conditions are stated with the utmost explicitness, in words amounting almost to repetition, as is evidently proper where a matter of so much consequence as the life of a human being is concerned. In cases of wilful murder, no place whatever could afford protection. A man might be taken even from the temple, or the horns of the altar. Ex 21:14; 1 Kings 2:31, 34.

C H Spurgeon - "Your refuge from the avenger of blood." —Joshua 20:3 (Morning and Evening)

It is said that in the land of Canaan, cities of refuge were so arranged, that any man might reach one of them within half a day at the utmost. Even so the word of our salvation is near to us; Jesus is a present Saviour, and the way to him is short; it is but a simple renunciation of our own merit, and a laying hold of Jesus, to be our all in all. With regard to the roads to the city of refuge, we are told that they were strictly preserved, every river was bridged, and every obstruction removed, so that the man who fled might find an easy passage to the city. Once a year the elders went along the roads and saw to their order, so that nothing might impede the flight of any one, and cause him, through delay, to be overtaken and slain. How graciously do the promises of the gospel remove stumbling blocks from the way! Wherever there were by-roads and turnings, there were fixed up hand-posts, with the inscription upon them—"To the city of refuge!" This is a picture of the road to Christ Jesus. It is no roundabout road of the law; it is no obeying this, that, and the other; it is a straight road: "Believe, and live." It is a road so hard, that no self-righteous man can ever tread it, but so easy, that every sinner, who knows himself to be a sinner may by it find his way to heaven. No sooner did the man-slayer reach the outworks of the city than he was safe; it was not necessary for him to pass far within the walls, but the suburbs themselves were sufficient protection. Learn hence, that if you do but touch the hem of Christ's garment, you shall be made whole; if you do but lay hold upon him with "faith as a grain of mustard seed," you are safe.

"A little genuine grace ensures
The death of all our sins."

Only waste no time, loiter not by the way, for the avenger of blood is swift of foot; and it may be he is at your heels at this still hour of eventide.

Spurgeon - (similar to above - from Spurgeon's Study Bible) "These will be your refuge from the avenger of blood." Cities of refuge were situated so that one of them could be reached within half a day. In the same way the word of our salvation is near to us; Jesus is a present Savior, and the way to him is short. It is but a simple renunciation of our own merit and a laying hold of Jesus to be our all in all. We are told that the roads to the cities of refuge were strictly maintained so that the one who fled might find an easy

passage. Wherever there were junctions and turnings, there were signposts clearly stating, "The city of refuge!" This is a picture of the road to Christ Jesus. It is a straight road: "Believe and live." It is a road so hard that no self-righteous person can ever tread it but so easy that every sinner who knows himself to be a sinner may by it find his way to heaven. As soon as the one seeking refuge reached the outskirts of the city, he was safe; it was not necessary for him to be within the walls—the suburbs themselves were sufficient protection. We may learn from this that if we merely touch the hem of Christ's garment, we will be made whole; if we can only lay hold on him with "faith the size of a mustard seed," we are safe. So waste no time; do not dillydally, for the avenger of blood moves quickly; and it could be that he is at our heels.

Cities of refuge (Joshua 20:1–9)

Joshua now appointed six cities of refuge. They were all Levitical cities; in other words, the provision of mercy had something to do with God! There were three on the west of Jordan and three on the east. On the west there were Kedesh to the north, Shechem in the centre of the land, and Hebron in the south. On the east there were Golan in the north, Ramoth in Gilead in the centre, and Bezer in the south.

If a person was judged to have committed a premeditated murder, capital punishment would ensue; but if he killed someone by accident, then he would have the privilege of seeking protection in a city of refuge. Anyone who killed a person unintentionally could flee to the gate of the nearest city of refuge and the avenger of blood, the relative of the dead person assigned to exact punishment, could not harm him. He would be assessed, and if he were not guilty of murder, would be given asylum in the city. The cities of refuge were within reach of all the children of Israel as well as of 'the stranger who dwelt among them' (v. 9). No harm would come to the manslayer if he stayed in the city until the death of the high priest, after which he could return to his own community as a free man.

This is rich in typical teaching, for we see ourselves to be among those who are condemned for the sins which we have committed. Should death, the avenger of blood, find us outside the City of Refuge, eternal destruction will result. Awakened to our need, we flee to the place of mercy. We have no means by which we can save ourselves and we are in fearful danger of judgement. We are being pursued by the wrath of a righteous God. We flee to our City of Refuge, even Jesus. Fleeing for refuge implies fleeing from sin; seeing it and repenting of it.

This emphasizes the responsibility of the sinner, for, while a provision has been made for sinners to escape the wrath of the avenger of blood, they must avail themselves of it. It would be wrong for them to say, 'I suppose that I am ordained to perish. I am elected to die.' They are to flee to the place of mercy which God has provided for them. If you are outside of God's gracious provision for you in Christ, then I implore you to flee to him for mercy. If you do not, the judgement will overtake you and you will perish. Flee from the impending judgement!

Elijah said, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him' (1 Kings 18:21). The people then had to choose, and follow that choice with actions. Joshua said, 'Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve' (Joshua 24:15). That was something they had to do. Jesus said, 'Come to me' (Matthew 11:28). He will save us, but he can do nothing for us until we come. We have to come! The woman with the flow of blood had to press through the crowd to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. Had she but wished for her healing it would not have happened (Matthew 9:21–22). Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, ' "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other' (Mark 3:5). As he stretched out his hand, the healing took place. There is divine sovereignty, but there is also human responsibility. God extends mercy, but we are to come and receive that mercy.

Two passages in the New Testament evidently refer to the cities of refuge: '... found in him, not having my own righteousness' (Philippians 3:9); and '... we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us' (Hebrews 6:18).

The cities of refuge are a type of Christ as he is offered to sinners in the gospel.

They were appointed by God himself. God appointed Christ to be the Saviour of sinners.

The cities were appointed to provide shelter from the avenger. No one can defy divine justice. 'Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts' (Hebrews 3:15).

The cities were easily seen, being built on hills or mountains. This made them more readily accessible. 'Him God has exalted to his right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins' (Acts 5:31).

The road to the city was plainly marked. 'You shall prepare roads ... that any manslayer may flee there' (Deuteronomy 19:3). Roads to the cities were clearly signposted. The gospel must be faithfully declared, that all may know the way.

There was ease of access. When someone had need of one, it was near at hand. A city of refuge could be reached within a day's journey from anywhere in the land. 'The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit' (Psalm 34:18).

The city of refuge provided protection from the avenger of blood only for the manslayer. The deliberate murderer was excluded. There is no salvation in Christ for those deliberately continuing in sin. Those who reject the offer of God's mercy exclude themselves from his salvation. In Christ the penitent sinner is safe from the fury of a raging devil, from the pain of a guilty conscience, and from the wrath of a holy God.

The one who took refuge in the city of mercy had to remain there. If he left the protection of the city, the avenger of blood had the right to find him and kill him (Numbers 35:26–27). Having come to Christ, we are to abide in him.

The cities were available to Gentiles as well as to Jews. Christ's salvation is universal. 'There is no distinction between Jew and Greek' (Romans 10:12).

It was the death of the high priest which secured a full and final deliverance. In the death of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, our salvation is accomplished. We are safe in the city and saved by his death.

The names of the cities speak of salvation. Kedesh means 'holy'; Christ is made to the believer sanctification and righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). Shechem means 'shoulder', the place of strength and safety; in Christ the believer finds security. Hebron means 'fellowship', and through Christ we are brought into fellowship with him. Bezer means 'a fortified place', and God is our refuge and fortress (Psalm 91:2). Ramoth means 'height' or 'exaltation', and in Christ we are made to sit in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). Golan means 'exultation' or 'joy', and we 'rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 5:11).

What a powerful relevance these cities of refuge have for us today! ([Joshua: A Devotional Commentary - Colin N. Peckham](#))

QUESTION - Is there a difference between murder and killing?

ANSWER - First, it is important to note that not all killing is wrong. For instance, the apostle Paul talks about the right of the state to take the lives of evildoers (Romans 13:1-7). This relates to what is commonly referred to as capital punishment. Most countries have consequences for murder. In some cases this requires the life of the perpetrator and a suitable means of putting one to death is chosen and administered (Matthew 5:21; Exodus 21:14). Another instance of acceptable "killing" is that which is done during times of war and at the command of superiors. There were quite a few instances in Scripture where God endorsed and allowed the taking of other lives (1 Samuel 11; Judges 6–7). And finally, although far from acceptable, manslaughter is yet another form of killing someone. This unintentional act apparently happened so often in biblical times that cities of refuge were designated for the manslayer to seek refuge in (Exodus 21:13; Joshua 20). Again, it was never God's intent to have to use such a drastic measure as taking one's life to rectify a situation. So, God does make exceptions for the taking of another's life as long as it lines up with His will. However, premeditated murder of an individual is never God's will. ([Gotquestions](#))

QUESTION - [What is an avenger of blood in the Bible?](#)

ANSWER -In the Bible, an avenger of blood is a person legally responsible for carrying out [vengeance](#) when a family member has been unlawfully killed or murdered. The avenger of blood is usually the nearest male relative of the murdered person. This family executioner seeks justice by killing the individual responsible for the death of his relative.

Mosaic Law allowed vengeance killings carried out by an avenger of blood: "The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death; when the avenger comes upon the murderer, the avenger shall put the murderer to death" (Numbers 35:19; see also 26–27 and Deuteronomy 19:11–12). If a family member was murdered, it became the duty of the avenger of blood to restore justice to the family and the land by pursuing and ultimately carrying out the [death penalty](#) on the person responsible. This Old Testament law is rooted in God's requirement of a life for a life in cases of murder: "And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person's life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image" (Genesis 9:5–6NLT).

The word translated "avenge," in Hebrew, is related to the word for "redeem," "reclaim," or "restore." As a representative of God and the family, the avenger of blood "redeemed" or "reclaimed" the blood of the relative by killing the original blood-shedder. An avenger of blood was to act only in cases of deliberate murder or the unlawful taking of an innocent life. Intent is a necessary element of murder. Six examples of intentional homicide are outlined in Numbers 35:16–21. The avenger of blood was not given license to act in instances of accidental manslaughter.

The Mosaic Law regulated the actions of the avenger of blood by providing cities of refuge for the accused. An individual who

committed manslaughter, or the unintentional and accidental killing of a person, could find sanctuary in any of the six designated cities of refuge throughout the land of Israel (Numbers 35:10–15, 22–25; Deuteronomy 19:4–6; Joshua 20:1–6). In these towns, the avenger of blood's quarry was legally protected and guaranteed a fair trial.

Gideon became the avenger of blood for his brothers who had been murdered on Mount Tabor by the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna (Judges 8:18–21). Joab avenged the blood of his brother Asahel (2 Samuel 3:27–30). The men of Gibeon avenged the deaths of their countrymen at the hands of Saul by executing seven of the king's sons (2 Samuel 21:1–9). The avenger of blood concept also figures into the account of King Amaziah, who put to death the officials who had assassinated his father (2 Kings 14:5–6). The story of the Tekoite woman involved a plea for King David to stop the actions of the avenger of blood (2 Samuel 14:8–11).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul instructs, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:17–19).

Scripture promises that God will punish evildoers (1 Thessalonians 4:6). God has also appointed government authorities to execute vengeance on His behalf: "The government is God's servant working for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid. The government has the right to carry out the death sentence. It is God's servant, an avenger to execute God's anger on anyone who does what is wrong" (Romans 13:4GWT).

Ultimately, the Lord is the Restorer and Redeemer of His people (Isaiah 41:14). In several places in Scripture, God is portrayed as the avenger of blood: "Rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people" (Deuteronomy 32:43; see also Judges 9:23–24; 2 Kings 9:7; Psalm 9:12; 79:10; Revelation 6:10; 19:2). GotQuestions.org

Joshua 20:4 'He shall flee to one of these cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city; and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them.'

- **shall stand at the entrance:** Ru 4:1,2 Job 5:4 29:7 Pr 31:23 Jer 38:7
- **they shall take him into the city:** Ps 26:9
- **that he may:** Heb 6:18
- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

He shall flee to one of these cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city -The usual place of judicial activities among the people of the East. The city elders sat at the gate and administered justice.

And state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city- The accused pleads his case before the elders. Note that verse 6 states he also had to appear at a second trial before the entire congregation

And they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them- The implication is that the man would not be found guilty of premeditated murder.

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Shall stand at the entering of the gate. Shall declare his cause. Shall give a true, honest, and exact statement of all the circumstances under which the accident occurred.

They shall take him into the city. Heb. וְאֶסְפֹּה אֹתוֹ âsephu otho, shall gather him. Provided they are satisfied, from his relation of the facts, that he is innocent.

That he may dwell among them. It may be asked why, if the proper judges were satisfied of his innocence of the crime of wilful murder, he were not at once dismissed from their jurisdiction, and suffered to go at large as usual. The proper reply doubtless is, (1) That he might still be in danger from the enraged passions of the pursuer. (2) He was to await the issue of another trial, Joshua 20:6. (3) His detention was probably designed as somewhat of a punishment for the rashness or heedlessness to which the homicide was owing. Something of a penalty was to be paid for carelessness, as well as for crime.

Joshua 20:5 'Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he

struck his neighbor without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand.

- Nu 35:12,25
- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

CITIES OF REFUGE OBLIGATED TO PROTECT MANSLAYER

Now if the [avenger of blood](#) ([goel/ga'al](#)) pursues him - Remember this person is a relative who is seeking revenge, but revenge could only be carried out if the manslayer were guilty of intentional murder.

Then they shall not deliver the manslayer ([ratsach](#)) into his hand - The **manslayer** was to be protected by the citizens of the city of refuge.

Because he struck his neighbor without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand - This reiterates the reason the manslayer's was to be protected from the avenger of blood.

Adrian Rogers - As you look and see where the Lord put the cities of refuge, if you know anything of the map of Israel, you know that they were strategically placed: some were in the east; some were in the west; some were in the north; some were in the south, and some in the center. Why? Because if they're a city of refuge, they have got to be close. If a person is in danger, he needs a hiding place. That hiding place—he must be very near. So, they have laws in ancient Israel concerning the cities of refuge. The road to the city of refuge had to be wide. If there were rivers, the rivers had to have bridges. Those bridges were carefully inspected and regularly inspected. If there were obstacles on those roads, those obstacles had to be removed. And, the priests and the Levites would go out and inspect the roads to the city of refuge. And, every time there was a crossroad where there might be any confusion, they would write a sign in big Hebrew letters, "**MIKLOT**," ([miqlat](#)) which means "refuge" and "a signpost." A wayfaring man, nor a fool, could not miss his way on to the city of refuge (Isaiah 35:8). It had to be wide open. It had to be near. It had to be clear and always open. (Excerpt from *When Great Men Die Like Fools*)

Joshua 20:6 'He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the manslayer shall return to his own city and to his own house, to the city from which he fled.'"

- **until**: Nu 35:12,24,25 Heb 9:26
- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

Numbers 35:25 comment "The congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the blood avenger, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he fled; and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil."

MANSLAYER'S SECOND TRIAL AND FINAL FREEDOM

He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the one who is high priest in those days - Note the two uses of "**until**", first his trial before the congregation (see Barber's explanation below) and then his liberation at the death of the high priest. Obviously this time until the death of the **high priest** would be variable and no reason is given for this stipulation ([BUT SEE GANDEL BELOW](#)). There was only one **high priest**, so when he died all refugees in all of these six cities would be freed at once. It is remarkable that there is not one OT record of a manslayer who was protected by a city of refuge.

Cyril Barber helps understand the trial **before the congregation** - The man would later have to stand trial in a city near where the incident occurred (cf. Numbers 35:25–34). If found innocent he would then have to return to the city of refuge (Nu 35:25). ([Joshua: A Devotional Exposition](#).)

Then the manslayer ([ratsach](#)) shall return to his own city and to his own house, to the city from which he fled- Presumably he was no longer in danger from the [avenger of blood](#).

Utley - "until the death of the one who was High Priest in those days" Even though the man was protected there still was a price to be paid for his actions: he was separated from his own tribal allocation and home (but not his immediate family) until the death of the High Priest (cf. Num. 35:25). Part of the penalty was also the fact that the person had to live with the Levites and, therefore, would be trained in the way of the Law for these many years. ([Commentary](#))

Gangel has an interesting comment on the death of the **high priest** - This must also be another one of God's dramatic pictures of redemption and atonement. In a sense, in God's eyes, the death of the high priest paid the debt for the freedom of those who were guilty of manslaughter. An accused person could not buy his own freedom; it could only be purchased with the life of a high priest. And forgiveness was forgiveness despite the intensity of the crime or the amount of time served in a city of refuge. Murderers and liars both go to hell if they do not trust Christ's salvation. But murderers and liars can also be saved in the same instant under the same conditions with no lingering spiritual consequences of the severity of their crimes. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary - Joshua](#))

Believer's Study Bible - God's concern for human life is shown not only in His desire to protect the manslayer, but also in the exile of the manslayer in the city. God considers the spilling of human blood to be a significant event, whatever the cause (cf. Gen. 4:10; 9:5, 6). The death of the high priest may have been understood as a form of satisfaction or cleansing of the land for the blood that had been shed (Deut. 21:1-9).

THOUGHT - The question arises as to how this applies to NT believers. I'm glad you asked! The short answer is that in the Garden of Eden Satan murdered Adam (Jn 8:44) and since that fateful day all mankind has in effect been murdered, born dead in our trespasses and sins (Ro 5:12+, Eph 2:1+). We were in need of a blood avenger, a near kinsman to avenge our murder. Jesus Christ became a Man that He might become our Kinsman-Redeemer (see [Table depicting Jesus as our Kinsman-Redeemer](#)), but not only did He become our Kinsman-Redeemer but He also became our **Blood Avenger** (See [discussion](#))

Grant notes that there is a reference to the cities of refuge in Hebrews: "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" (Heb 6:18). The writer is encouraging the readers that the promise of God can never fail. He refers back to the great promise made in Genesis 22:16-17. God had made the promise and had confirmed it by an oath, and "an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife" (Heb 6:16), that is an end of all argument. This promise from God is an encouragement to those who "**have fled for refuge**". **We have fled to the Lord for refuge, but there is one great difference.** Whereas those who found shelter in the cities of refuge were not guilty of premeditated sin, we have been guilty, not only of what we may regard as "accidental sin" in the sense that we were overtaken by it, but also by deliberate sin. The Lord Jesus, therefore, provides refuge, even when we have deliberately sinned, although only those who repent from their sins (AND BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST) enjoy such refuge. The purpose of fleeing was to "lay hold upon the hope set before us". The cities of refuge provided a temporary place of safety, but that provided by the Lord Jesus is eternal. ([What the Bible Teaches](#))

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Until he stand before the congregation for judgment. In order to a still greater security for the interests of justice, and to guard with the utmost vigilance against a wrong decision, another hearing seems to have been appointed, after a considerable interval, and before a larger court, whose verdict was to be final in the case. It is probable that the 'congregation' here spoken of was that of his own city, or of the people at large, who were also allowed to constitute a tribunal, and to sit in judgment on the case. Compare Notes on Num. 35:25.

Joshua 20:7 So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah.

- **Kedesh:** Jos 21:32 1Ch 6:76
- **Shechem:** Jos 21:21 Ge 33:18,19 2Ch 10:1
- **Kirjatharba:** Jos 14:15 21:11,13
- **hill country:** Lu 1:39
- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THREE CITIES OF REFUGE WEST OF THE JORDAN RIVER

So they set apart ([qadash](#)) **Kedesh in Galilee** (because there was another [Kedesh](#)) **in the hill country of Naphtali and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah - Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron** were "**set apart**" ([qadash](#)) which means made holy, consecrated or sanctified. All three cities were located west of the Jordan and all three were Levitical cities (see underlined cities in map above which also have triangles) The other 3 cities of refuge were on the east side of the Jordan River. Note that all three cities were in the **hill country** (see Morris' comment below).

Henry Morris points out that " All the cities of refuge were located at high elevations, (**ED**: PRESUMABLY) so they could be seen from a great distance. They were also located so that everyone was within a day's journey from at least one of them. Furthermore, "whosoever" (Joshua 20:9) needed to flee to one of the cities was free to do so, whether he was an Israelite or not (**ED**: THIS REMINDS ONE OF THE ULTIMATE "REFUGE" CHRIST ALLUDED TO IN JOEL 2:32+ WHICH DECLARES THAT "**whoever** calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered." cf Ro 10:13+)

Utley "**set apart Kedesh in Galilee**" This is a play on the Hebrew word "holy," which means "set apart" ([qadash](#)). It is the root of the name "Kedesh". ([qedesh](#)) The word "holy" means "to be set apart by God for a specific purpose" (e.g., Jer. 1:5). [Commentary](#)

Encyclopedia Britannica - **Shechem** was important in ancient [Palestine](#) because of its position in an east-west pass between [Mount Gerizim](#) and Mount Ebal (Arabic: Jabal al-Ṭūr and Jabal 'Aybāl, respectively), one of the few such routes in Palestine's hill country.... The city is mentioned in Egyptian documents of the 19th century BCE....Later, after [King Solomon's](#) death, the 10 northern tribes of Israel revolted in Shechem against Solomon's son Rehoboam and installed [Jeroboam](#) as king in his place (1 Kings 12). After the Assyrian conquest of the [northern kingdom of Israel](#) (722 BCE), the city of Shechem declined. It was important in the [Hellenistic period](#), during which it was a centre of [Samaritan](#) worship, until their temple on [adjacent](#) Mount Gerizim was destroyed by the Maccabean ruler [John Hyrcanus](#) (reigned 135/134–104 BCE).

Bush - (1) That they were located at convenient distances from each other for the benefit of the several tribes. So of those here mentioned, Kedesh was in the northern, Shechem in the central, and Hebron in the southern district of Canaan. (2) They were all Levitical cities; which appears to have been so ordered, that the cases of manslaughter might come under the cognizance of those who might be presumed to be most thoroughly versed in the law of God, and most competent to give judgment according to it, and who, moreover, would be less likely than any others to be swayed by private bias in their decisions. Compare Deut. 21:5, where it is said of the priests, the sons of Levi, that 'by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried.' See also to the same purpose, Deut. 17:8–13, and the Notes on Deut. 33:9, 10. ([Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua](#))

G F MacLear gives details about the cities of refuge as gleaned from traditional Jewish sources...

Jewish commentators tell us how in later times, in order that the asylum offered to the involuntary homicide might be more secure—(a) the roads leading to the cities of refuge were always kept in thorough repair, and required to be about 32 cubits (about 48 feet) broad; (b) all obstructions were removed that might stay the flier's foot or hinder his speed; (c) no hillock was left, no river was allowed over which there was not a bridge; (d) at every turning there were posts erected bearing the words 'Refuge,' to guide the unhappy man in his flight; (e) when once settled in such a city the manslayer had a convenient habitation assigned to him, and the citizens were to teach him some trade that he might support himself. ([The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges - Joshua 21](#))

Kedesh - Holman Bible Dictionary A Canaanite town in eastern Galilee defeated by Joshua (Joshua 12:22). The town was allotted to Naphtali (Joshua 19:32 ,Joshua 19:32,19:37) and was called Kedesh in Naphtali (Judges 4:6). It was also called Kedesh in Galilee and given to the Gershonite Levites as one of their cities (Joshua 20:7; Joshua 21:32). See Judges 4:6) and the place where Deborah and Barak gathered their forces for battle (Judges 4:1-10). Heber the Kenite pitched his tent in the vicinity where Sisera met his death at the hands of Jael, Heber's wife (Judges 4:21; Judges 5:24-27). Kedesh in Naphtali was captured by Tiglath-pileser III during the reign of Pekah of Israel. The inhabitants were exiled to Assyria (2 Kings 15:29). Usually identified with modern khirbet Qedish, about two miles south of Tiberias.

Shechem - Holman Bible Dictionary place name meaning, "shoulder, back." District and city in the hill country of Ephraim in north central Palestine. The first capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, the city was built mainly on the slope, or shoulder, of Mount Ebal. Situated where main highways and ancient trade routes converged, Shechem was an important city long before the Israelites occupied Canaan. The city makes its earliest appearance in biblical history in connection with Abram's arrival in the land (Genesis 12:6-7). When Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, he settled down at Shechem and purchased land from the sons of Hamor

(Genesis 33:18-19). In Genesis 33-34 , Shechem was the name of the city and also of the prince of the city. While Jacob was at Shechem, the unfortunate incident of Dinah occurred. Simeon and Levi, her full brothers, destroyed the city (Genesis 34:1). Later, the brothers of Joseph were herding Jacob's flock at Shechem when Joseph was sent to check on their welfare. Joseph was buried in the plot of ground that his father Jacob had purchased here (Joshua 24:32). As the Israelites conquered Canaan, they turned unexpectedly to Shechem. Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal and led the people in its building, renewing their commitment to the law of Moses (Joshua 8:30-35; compare Deuteronomy 27:12-13). Shechem lay in the tribal territory of Ephraim near their border with Manasseh (Joshua 17:7). It was a city of refuge (Joshua 20:7) and a Levitical city (Joshua 21:21). See Joshua 24:1-17). Gideon's son Abimelech fought the leaders of Shechem (Judges 8:31-9:49). Rehoboam, successor to King Solomon, went to Shechem to be crowned king over all Israel (1 Kings 12:1). Later, when the nation divided into two kingdoms, Shechem became the first capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12:25). Samaria eventually became the permanent political capital of the Northern Kingdom, but Shechem retained its religious importance. It apparently was a sanctuary for worship of God in Hosea's time about 750 B.C. (1 Kings 6:9). The name Shechem occurs in historical records and other sources outside Palestine. It is mentioned as a city captured by Senusert III of Egypt (before 1800 B.C.) and appears in the Egyptian cursing texts of about the same time. "The mountain of Shechem" is referred to in a satirical letter of the Nineteenth Dynasty of Egypt. Shechem also figures in the Amarna Letters; its ruler, Lab'ayu, and his sons were accused of acting against Egypt, though the ruler protested that he was absolutely loyal to the pharaoh.

Hebron - Holman Bible Dictionary Place name and personal name meaning "association" or "league." A major city in the hill country of Judah about nineteen miles south of Jerusalem and fifteen miles west of the Dead Sea. The region is over 3,000 feet above sea level. The surrounding area has an abundant water supply, and its rich soil is excellent for agriculture. According to archaeological research the site has been occupied almost continuously since about 3300 B.C. After his separation from Lot, Abraham moved to Hebron. At that time the area was known as Mamre and was associated with the Amorites (Genesis 13:18; Genesis 14:13; Genesis 23:19). Abraham apparently remained at Mamre until after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When Sarah died, the place was called Kirjath-arba; and the population was predominantly Hittite (Genesis 23:2; Joshua 14:15; Joshua 15:54; Judges 1:10). From them Abraham purchased a field with a burial plot inside a nearby cave. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah were buried there (Genesis 23:19; Genesis 25:9; Genesis 35:29; Genesis 49:31; Genesis 50:13). Four centuries later, when Moses sent the twelve spies into Canaan, the tribe of Anak lived in Hebron. According to Numbers 13:22 Hebron was "built" seven years prior to Zoan, the Egyptian city of Tanis. Archaeological evidence suggests that the reference was to Tanis' establishment as the Hyksos capital around 1725 B.C. and not its beginning. Indeed both cities already were inhabited long before 2000 B.C. Therefore, the date may indicate that it was rebuilt by the Hyksos at that time, or it may specify when Hebron became a Canaanite city. After the Israelite conquest of Canaan, Hebron was given to Caleb (Joshua 14:9-13). It also became a city of refuge (Joshua 20:7). Later, Samson put the gates of Gaza on a hill outside of Hebron (Judges 16:3). After the death of Saul, David settled in the city (2 Samuel 2:3) and made it his capital during the seven years he ruled only Judah (1 Kings 2:11). His son, Absalom, launched an abortive revolt against David from Hebron (2 Samuel 15:10). Between 922,915 B.C. Rehoboam fortified the city as a part of Judah's defense network (2 Chronicles 11:5-10). According to inscriptions found on pottery fragments, royal pottery was made in the city between 800,700 B.C. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C., the Edomites captured Hebron. It was not recaptured until Judas Maccabeus sacked the city in 164 B.C. Although Herod the Great erected pretentious structures there, no mention of the city is made in the New Testament. The city was raided by both Jewish revolutionaries and Roman legions in A.D. 68 during the Jewish Revolt. Hebron is still an important city today. Except for during the Crusades, the Muslims have ruled the city since A.D. 635. It is venerated by the Arabs because of the tombs of the patriarchs.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary - Verses 7-9. These cities, as those also on the other side Jordan, stood so that a man might in half a day reach one of them from any part of the country. God is ever a Refuge at hand. They were all Levites' cities. It was kindness to the poor fugitive, that when he might not go up to the house of the Lord, yet he had the servants of God with him, to instruct him, and pray for him, and to help to make up the want of public ordinances. Some observe a significance in the names of these cities with application to Christ our Refuge. Kedesh signifies holy, and our Refuge is the holy Jesus. Shechem, a shoulder, and the government is upon his shoulder. Hebron, fellowship, and believers are called into the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord. Bezer, a fortification, for he is a strong hold to all those that trust in him. Ramoth, high or exalted, for Him hath God exalted with his own right hand. Golan, joy or exultation, for in Him all the saints are justified, and shall glory.

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 20](#)

And they appointed. Heb. יקדשו יקדשו, ([qadash](#)) sanctified, consecrated; a term implying the peculiar sacredness which God would have attached in the minds of his people to this institution. Accordingly they are sometimes, though not perhaps by the sacred writers, called sanctuaries.

In mount Naphtali. Or, Heb. 'in the mountain,' i. e. the mountainous region or district of Naphtali; and so in respect to the two other

places mentioned. They were situated on high hills that they might be more conspicuous at a distance. It may also be remarked of these cities,

Adrian Rogers - The Significant Names of the Cities of Refuge

Now, not only do I want you to think about the saving nature of these cities, but think with me about the significant names of these cities. Look with me ... Let's begin and look at the names of these cities, because remember the Bible says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower" (Proverbs 18:10).

Shechem: Christ Is a Helpful Place

Now, what's the name of the next city? Shechem. Do you know what the name Shechem means? It means "shoulder" or "strength." Now, not only is Christ a holy place; Christ is a helpful place, because the Bible says of our Savior, "And the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isaiah 9:6). Remember there in the parable of the lost sheep when the good shepherd went out and found that sheep? What did he do? He laid it upon his shoulders and brought it back home safely. And friend, that's the way I'm going to Heaven—upon the shoulders of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was a sheep with six legs (four of his own and two of the Savior), going on back to the sheepfold, because He is the One who carries our burdens. So, you've said, "Holy place." Now, I want you to say, "Helpful place"—"helpful place." Christ is a helpful place. Do you need strength? The glory of the Lord ... "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). And, when you come to Him for refuge, He will give you strength because not only is He Christ our Savior, the holy place; He is Christ our strength, the helpful place. (Excerpt from *When Great Men Die Like Fools*)

Adrian Rogers Kedesh: Christ Is the Holy Place

First of all, in verse 7, there's the word Kedesh (Joshua 20:7), and you know what that word means? It means "holiness"—"holiness," and it speaks of Christ our dear, sinless, holy Savior. And so, when you think of Kedesh, think of a holy place. Say it: "holy place." Say it again: "holy place." Jesus is a holy place. You see, the Bible says of our dear Savior, He is holy and undefiled (Hebrews 7:26). He's clean and pure, and that's the reason He can save. You know, you can't get dirty clothes clean if you wash them in dirty water. There's no other sinner that can be our Savior. We need a holy person, and that's the person the Bible says in Zechariah chapter 13 and verse 1: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1). And again, the Bible says in Hebrews 12, verse 14: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

Now folks, if you are not holy, you're going to Hell. And, your only hope of holiness is for God to make you holy through the Lord Jesus Christ, so this very first place that we're talking about speaks of Christ our Savior, a holy place—Christ our Savior. (**Excerpt** from *When Great Men Die Like Fools*)

Adrian Rogers - Hebron: Christ Is a Harmonious Place

The name of the next city is Hebron. Do you know what the name Hebron means? Fellowship—fellowship. Not only is He Christ our Savior, and not only is He Christ our strength; but friend, He's Christ our satisfaction. The Bible says, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (1 John 1:7). You see, Christ is a harmonious place. Say, "Harmonious place," because there is harmony; there is peace. We are as one with Him. He has made peace through the blood of His Christ—through the blood of His cross—and through Him we do have that oneness that we want—that harmony. He has put that harmony in our souls, and we are at one with our Lord because He is a holy place, He is a helpful place, He is a harmonious place. He is Christ our Savior. He is Christ our strength. He is Christ our satisfaction. (Excerpt from *When Great Men Die Like Fools*)

Joshua 20:8 Beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh.

- **Bezer:** Jos 21:36 De 4:43 1Ch 6:78
- **Ramoth:** Jos 21:38 1Ki 22:3,4,6 1Ch 6:80
- **Golan:** Jos 21:27
- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Psalm 73:28+ (**THE ULTIMATE ETERNAL "CITY OF REFUGE" IS GOD!**) But as for me, the nearness of God

is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Thy works.

Deuteronomy 4:41-43 (**THE EASTERN CITIES OF REFUGE**) Then Moses set apart three cities across the Jordan to the east, 42 that a manslayer might flee there, who unintentionally slew his neighbor without having enmity toward him in time past; and by fleeing to one of these cities he might live: 43 **Bezer** in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, and **Ramoth in Gilead** for the Gadites, and **Golan in Bashan** for the Manassites.

THREE CITIES OF REFUGE EAST OF JORDAN

Beyond the Jordan east of Jericho - This phrase means on the western side of the Jordan river, Jericho lying on the eastern side.

They designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan ([map of modern "Golan heights"](#)) in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh - See these eastern cities of refuge in [the map above](#).

Bezer ([01221](#)) means inaccessible or fortress. Notice the play on words, for this "inaccessible" city is given by God as an accessible city to find refuge and protection! This reminds me of David's words in Psalm 18:2+ "The LORD is my Rock and **my Fortress** and my Deliverer, My God, my Rock, **in Whom I take refuge**; My Shield and the Horn of my salvation, my Stronghold" Meditate on these 9 attributes of God that were precious to the soul of David and may the Spirit make them precious and "protective" to your (my) soul in Christ. Amen

Spurgeon's comment on Psalm 18:2:

The Lord is my rock and my fortress. Dwelling among the crags and mountain fastnesses of Judea David had escaped the malice of Saul, and here he compares his God to such a place of concealment and security. Believers are often hidden in their God from the strife of tongues and the fury of the storm of trouble. The clefts of the Rock of Ages are safe abodes.

My deliverer, interposing in my hour of peril. When almost captured the Lord's people are rescued from the hand of the mighty by him who is mightier still. This title of "deliverer" has many sermons in it, and is well worthy of the study of all experienced saints.

My God; this is all good things in one. There is a boundless wealth in this expression; it means, my perpetual, unchanging, infinite, eternal good. He who can say truly "my God, "may well add, "my heaven, my all."

My strength; this word is really my rock, in the sense of strength and immobility. My sure, unchanging, eternal confidence and support. Thus the word rock occurs twice, but it is no tautology, for the first time it is a rock for concealment, but here a rock for firmness and immutability.

In whom I will trust. Faith must be exercised, or the preciousness of God is not truly known; and God must be the object of faith, or faith is mere presumption.

My buckler, warding off the blows of my enemy, shielding me from arrow or sword. The Lord furnishes his warriors with weapons both offensive and defensive. Our armoury is completely stored so that none need go to battle unarmed.

The horn of my salvation, enabling me to push down my foes, and to triumph over them with holy exultation.

My high tower, a citadel high planted on a rocky eminence beyond the reach of my enemies, from the heights of which I look down upon their fury without alarm, and survey a wide landscape of mercy reaching even unto the goodly land beyond Jordan. Here are many words, but none too many; we might profitably examine each one of them had we leisure, but summing up the whole, we may conclude with Calvin, that David here equips the faithful from head to foot.

Ramoth ([07216](#)) means height and reminds me of Pr 18:10+ which says "The **Name of the LORD** is a strong tower. The righteous runs into it and is **safe**." The Hebrew word for **safe** is **sagab** ([07682](#)) which means to be high, be inaccessibly high, to be (too) high (for capture), to be set on high, be (safely, securely) set on high, to be set in a high place; hence to be safely protected. Indeed, the ultimate city of refuge is the Name of Yahweh! Have you run to His Name Yeshua for refuge from the coming wrath of God?

The meaning of **Golan** is more enigmatic and has been given quite a variety of meanings - happiness, exile, circle, Hitchcock's

names = passage, revolution. Brown-Driver-Briggs = “their captivity: their rejoicing”

[Bezer - Holman Bible Dictionary](#) Place name meaning, “inaccessible.” 1. A city of refuge in tribal territory of Reuben (Deuteronomy 4:43; Joshua 20:8), set aside as a city for the Levites (Joshua 21:36).

[Ramoth-Gilead - Holman Bible Dictionary](#) meaning, “heights of Gilead.” One of the cities of refuge Moses appointed for unintentional killers (Deuteronomy 4:43; compare Joshua 20:8) and Levitical cities (Joshua 21:38). It probably was located in northeastern Gilead, east of the Jordan. Solomon made Ramoth-gilead a district capital (1 Kings 4:13). After the division of the kingdom about 922 B.C., the city fell to Syria (1 Kings 22:3) and remained there for almost seventy years. Ahab attempted to retake the city but was mortally wounded in the battle (1 Kings 22:29-40). Joram did recapture the city (2 Kings 9:14; compare 2 Kings 8:28). In Ramoth-gilead Elisha anointed Jehu as king over Israel (2 Kings 9:1-6). In 722 B.C. the region was taken by Assyria.

[Golan - Holman Bible Dictionary](#) Place name meaning, “circle” or “enclosure.” It was a city of refuge for people who unintentionally killed someone and was located in Bashan for the part of the tribe of Manasseh living east of the Jordan River (Deuteronomy 4:43). It was also a city for the Levites (Joshua 21:27). It was located at modern Sahem el-Jolan on the eastern bank of the River el-Allan. See Cities of Refuge; Levitical Cities

GEORGE BUSH [Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua - Chapter 20](#)

They assigned. Or, ‘had assigned,’ for the assignment had been previously made by Moses, Deut. 4:41–43; or the meaning may be, that they formally acknowledged, confirmed, and ratified the selection that Moses had before made of these cities.

Adrian Rogers - The Significant Names of the Cities of Refuge... **Bezer: Christ Is a Hiding Place**

And then, look at the next one. The name of the next city is Bezer. Do you know what the name Bezer means? It means “stronghold”; it means “fortification,” and that speaks of Christ our safety. You remember—“the righteous run in, and they’re safe” (Proverbs 18:10). Jesus is a hiding place. Say it: “hiding place.” Jesus is a hiding place. He is a holy place. He is a helpful place. He is a harmonious place. He is a hiding place ‘till the storm passes over.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
—AUGUSTUS M. TOPLADY

Again, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10). And, I want to tell you, friend, there is the hound of Hell, the justice that is baying at our heels, and we need to find a place to hide. And, I’m hiding in the Lord Jesus, and I trust that you are. And so, that speaks not only of Christ our satisfaction; that speaks of Christ our security. As long as an individual was in Bezer, he was absolutely secure from the judgment that was on his heels. (Excerpt from *When Great Men Die Like Fools*)

Adrian Rogers - The Significant Names of the Cities of Refuge... **Ramoth: Christ Is the Highest Place**

And, the name of the next city was Ramoth—Ramoth. And, the name Ramoth means “exalted,” and that speaks of Christ our sovereign. “High and lifted up” (Isaiah 6:1) is our Lord, and Jesus is the highest place. Say, “Highest place”—“highest place.” You see, the Bible teaches that when we get saved, when we come to Jesus, we’re seated with Him in heavenly places. And again, Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, said in Acts chapter 2, verse 33: “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted” (Acts 2:33). Our Lord is exalted. Philippians 2, verse 9: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). Jesus is the holy place. Jesus is a helpful place. Jesus is a harmonious place. Jesus is a hiding place. Jesus is the highest place. You’ll never find anything better than Jesus; you’ll never need anything more than the Lord Jesus. He is the highest of the high. Hallelujah! What a Savior! (Excerpt from *When Great Men Die Like Fools*)

Adrian Rogers - The Significant Names of the Cities of Refuge... **Golan: Christ Is a Happy Place**

And then, the next place is Golan, and the word Golan means “separated”—“separated.” And, when we come to the Lord Jesus, not only do we leave the things of this world, but we come into Him and are separated from the world and separated unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians chapter 6, verse 17 says, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17). But, the word here for separation is an interesting word; it means “separation that brings joy.” So, Jesus is a happy place. Say, “Happy place.”

Hey, don’t feel sorry for me because I’m a Christian, I have experienced this past week the joy of the Lord that is absolutely ... it’s

inexplicable. You say, "Well, I've been saved, Pastor, but I don't have that joy. Why don't I have that joy?" Well, maybe you're not separated; maybe you haven't been to Golan. You see, you show me a person who's let go of this world with both hands and taken hold of Jesus with both hands, and I'll show you a person who has "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). And so, the Lord Jesus Christ—He is Christ our Savior; He is Christ our strength; He is Christ our satisfaction; He is Christ our security; He is Christ our sovereign; He is Christ our sanctification. He is a holy place, a helpful place, a harmonious place, a hiding place, the highest place, and the happy place, and His name is Jesus. Jesus is our city of refuge (Excerpt from When Great Men Die Like Fools)

Joshua 20:9 These were the appointed cities for all the sons of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally may flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the congregation.

- **cities:** Nu 35:15
- **until he stands:** Jos 20:4,6
- [Joshua 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

REFUGE FOR RESIDENT FOREIGNERS

These were the appointed cities for all the sons of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally may flee there, and not die by the hand of the [avenger of blood](#) until he stands before the congregation (see Josh 20:6) - **Appointed** is the verb *muadah* (Lxx - *epikletos* - called to, designated), used only here and is different than the word for **set apart** (*qadash*) in Joshua 20:7. **Stranger** (*ger*) is an alien or sojourner that associates themselves with Israel. God had previously expressed His concern for Gentiles...

‘When a **stranger** (*ger*) resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 34 ‘The **stranger** (*ger*) who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God. 35 ‘You shall do no wrong in judgment (**E.G., CITIES OF REFUGE**), in measurement of weight, or capacity. (Lev. 19:33-35)

Utley on for the stranger who sojourns among them” This shows that God was concerned with more than just the people of Israel (cf. Lev. 19:33–35; Deut. 10:18–19, see Special Topic at Josh. 1:7). Also notice that the same unintentionality is the criteria. ([Commentary](#))

Bush on stands before the congregation - The judges and elders of the people, in trying civil and criminal causes, always sat; the persons who came for judgment, or who were tried, always **stood**. Hence the expressions so frequent in the Scripture, ‘Standing before the Lord, before the judges, before the elders,’ &c. ([Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Joshua](#))

[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?

Have you fled to Jesus for refuge?

William MacDonald - D. L. Moody noted that “the cities of refuge are a type of Christ, and their names are significant in that connection.”

The cities of refuge and the meaning of the names are as follows:

West of Jordan

Kedesh—Holiness
Shechem—Strength
Kirjath-Arba or Hebron—Fellowship

East of Jordan

Ramoth-Gilead—Uplifting
Golan—Happiness
Bezer—Safety

Thus Christ provides every blessing suggested by the names of these cities. A glance at the map will show that the cities of refuge were strategically located so that no point in the land was more than thirty miles from one of them. Moody makes the application:

As the cities of refuge were so situated as to be accessible from every part of the land, so Christ is very accessible to needy sinners (1 John 2:1, 2).

Notice the parallels between the temporal salvation offered the manslayer in the cities of refuge and the eternal salvation offered the sinner in Christ.

- The roads to the city were clear and well-marked, just like the way of salvation, so that none would make a mistake and lose his life.
- The cities were spread throughout the land and easily accessible to all, even as Christ is accessible to all men.
- Crisis drove people to the city of refuge, and many times a crisis is needed to drive people to the Lord Jesus for refuge.
- There was no neutral ground for the guilty person—he was either safe in the city or subject to the wrath of the blood avenger. Each individual is either safe in Christ or under the judgment of God (John 3:36). ([Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

Gangel has an illustration and application - Some years ago at a Promise Keepers rally in Dallas, fifty thousand men sat in an open football stadium when a Texas storm blew in. As the sky darkened and the lightning flashed, they were instructed to file out of the stadium and across the parking lot to an indoor arena. Running through the rain, event organizers could be seen pointing and yelling, "This way to shelter! This way to shelter!" That is our role. To serve as signposts and shouters along the highways toward the cities of refuge, telling people where they are and directing them safely to shelter. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary - Joshua](#))

Warren Wiersbe notes that "Many students have seen in the cities of refuge a picture of our salvation in Jesus Christ, to whom we "have fled for refuge" (Heb. 6:18). The lost sinner, of course, is in danger of judgment because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The avenger of blood is after him or her! God's appointed Savior is Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12), but the sinner must come to Him by faith in order to be saved (Matt. 11:28–30; John 6:37). The way to each city was kept open with roads that were cared for and marked (Deut. 19:3NIV). God wanted it to be easy for the fugitives to find their way to safety. Beyond this, the picture is one of contrast. When we come to Christ for salvation, there's no need for an investigation or a trial, because we know we're guilty; and we admit it! The only people Jesus can save are those who confess their guilt and throw themselves on His mercy. If the fugitive prematurely left the city of refuge, he could be killed; but our salvation in Christ is not conditional. Our High Priest will never die, and we are forever secure. "But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:24–25NKJV). ([Be Strong -- Joshua: Putting God's Power to Work in Your Life](#))

Run to Our Refuge

Topics: GOD'S PROTECTION, REFUGE

Bible Verses: Joshua 20:1–3; Psalm 2:11–12

In 1740, Charles Wesley was conducting an open-air meeting near Killyleagh, Ireland. During the course of his preaching, a number of persons who took exception to his views assaulted him. Unable to withstand the mob, Wesley fled for his life.

He took refuge in a farmhouse nearby. Jane Moore, a kind-hearted wife of a farmer, hid the panting evangelist in the milk house. No sooner was Charles in his hiding place that his assailants rushed into the farmhouse.

Mrs. Moore tried to divert their attention by preparing refreshments. Fearful that they might search the premises and discover Wesley, she went to the milk house on the pretext of getting a drink for her visitors.

"Quickly," she warned him, "get through the rear window, and hide under the hedge." He climbed through the window and found a little brook flowing beside the hedge, forming a pool with overhanging branches that afforded a pleasant and safe retreat.

It was in this small place of refuge, hiding from his attackers, that Charles Wesley wrote one of his most famous hymns, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."

Before, during and after trouble arrives, run to Jesus who loves you dearly. (Peter Kennedy - [Preaching Illustrations Vol.1](#))

James Smith - THE CITIES OF REFUGE; OR, CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRIST AS A SAVIOUR

“I am safe, for Christ holds me;
Comforted, for I hold Him;
Saviour, O thus let it be,
When my dying eyes are dim;
I held of Thee, Thee holding,
Thy strong love me enfolding.”

It takes all the cities of refuge to form a perfect type of the “Man who is an hiding-place from the storm and a covert from the tempest.” Observe the—

I. Nature of their Appointment. It was—

1. DIVINE. The Lord said: “Appoint out for you cities of refuge.” These cities then were sanctified, or set apart for their sakes, according to the will of God. They undoubtedly point to Christ (Heb. 6:18), who for our sakes sanctified (set apart) Himself, according to the will of God. It surely would be a consolation to the refugee when he entered the city to know that he was in God’s appointed shelter. So we may have strong consolation who have fled for refuge. There is no safety but in being where and what God would have us to be.

2. MERCIFUL. They had respect specially to the murderer. How gracious is the Lord to think of such, and make provision for all who truly felt their need of present mercy and righteous protection! These each city afforded, these each sinner sorely needs, and this is what we find in Jesus. Mercy to pardon, grace to help, and the power of justice to protect. He is the Justifier of every one that believes in Jesus. As guilty sinners we need more than mere shelter, we need righteous justification, and Christ is all this.

II. Significance of their Names. In looking over the meaning of the names of these cities one is struck with the distinctive characteristic of each, as showing forth some particular feature of the character of Christ, and when taken as a whole illustrating the sufficiency of Christ as a Refuge to meet all our need and the need of all.

1. KEDESH (holy place). A Refuge for the Unclean. The holiness of Jesus and the sinfulness of man are at once suggested here. None of these truths can be denied, both are alike clearly taught in Scripture. The holiness of Jesus Christ becomes the hope of the unclean. Only that which is clean can cleanse. The unrighteous can only find refuge in the righteousness of God. Christ’s finished work affords a holy hiding-place, for there only are the unclean made holy. There is no cleansing for the unclean apart from the fountain opened for sin (Zech. 13:1).

2. SHECHEM (shoulder). A Refuge for the Weary. The lost sheep found both safety and rest upon the Shepherd’s shoulders (Matt. 11:28; Luke 15:5). He is a Saviour, and a strong one. “The government is upon His shoulders.” We can find no rest in ruling ourselves, but the weary can find rest under His government. When we trust we lean not only on His merit, but also on His almightiness, or rather His almighty merit. When on the shoulder the strength of the carrier is beneath us. What a refuge for the weary child is the shoulder of its loving father! Christ has borne our burden upon His shoulder, as Samson carried the gates of Gaza.

3. HEBRON (fellowship). A Refuge for the Homeless. Man is spiritually a homeless wanderer, like Noah’s dove. Outside the ark, no rest, no fellowship, no safety. The homeless prodigal found a refuge in the father’s house and in the father’s fellowship. “Let us eat,” etc. Jesus Christ is the only Hebron for the soul. No fellowship with the Father but through Him (1 John 1:3). This is not the refuge of a lonely prison, but in the bosom of a loving and beloved one. What a refuge the sailor’s home is from a dangerous voyage, or the family ingle to a benighted and bewildered pilgrim. So Jesus is to the soul a refuge of love and communion (John 17:21).

4. BEZER (stronghold). A Refuge for the Helpless. Man is not only a sinner, he is also helplessly sinful. In the case of the manslayer there was to be no such thing as self-protection, so is it with us as sinners. We are “without strength.” The Name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous fleeth into it and are safe. Flee from the justice of God into the mercy of God. The mercy of God in Christ is a stronghold that can never give way. No matter how helpless you are, here you are eternally safe. Jesus is the only Bezer, all other hiding-places will fail and fall like the walls of Jericho, though straitly shut up (Matt. 7:27).

5. RAMOTH (exalted). A Refuge for the Hopeless. By nature we are not only without strength, but without hope in the world (Eph. 2:12). Those who hope in the world have no hope. We must hope out of the world. He is our Hope, exalted at the Father’s right hand with a name above every name, high and lifted up. Jesus is our Ramoth. If you are downcast, and feeling yourself hopeless in the world, look up. Jesus is a Refuge for you. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw.” Flee to Him to hide you, then you are exalted with Him. No mountain could save from the flood; those saved were lifted up in the ark. He is the Ark of hope.

6. GOLAN (separated). A Refuge for the Tempted. Many Christians are tempted much in the world because they tamper much with the world; they have not fled to Jesus as their city of separation. They have not become exiles with Him, and for His sake. Although He says, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and I will receive you,” yet they flee not, and the tempter often

overtakes them. He separated Himself for our sakes, that He might succour the tempted. Golan is the last city mentioned. Separation from the world unto God is about the last refuge that is sought after. Jesus must be our All in All if we would be perfectly sheltered from the curse, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Being enfolded with the arms of His almighty power, and resting on the bosom of His infinite love, we can sing with a restful, joyful heart, "God is our Refuge and our Strength."

From these names we may also learn that in Christ we have: (1) Holiness, (2) Rest, (3) Fellowship, (4) Safety, (5) Exaltation, (6) Separation.

Addendum from [Warren Wiersbe](#) - These names then can be used to describe what sinners experience when they flee by faith to Jesus. First, He gives them His righteousness, and they can never be accused again. There is no condemnation! (Ro 8:1+) Like a shepherd, He carries them on His shoulders, and they enter into fellowship with Him. He is their fortress, and they are safe. They dwell in the heights even though they are exiles, pilgrims, and strangers in this world....Unless you have fled by faith to Jesus Christ, you aren't saved! Since our sins put Jesus on the cross, all of us are guilty of His death. He is the only Savior, and apart from faith in Him, there is no salvation. Have you fled to Him?

F B Meyer - Joshua 20:9 And for the stranger that sojourneth among them.

It is interesting to note this provision, made in the Land of Promise, for the passing over of sins which were not sins of presumption. In this verse there is that great word "Whosoever." These cities of refuge were not for Hebrews only, but for whosoever had killed any person, without malice or forethought, but quite unintentionally, and had fled thither. Some poor Gentile might be sojourning among the chosen people, and suddenly find himself liable to the pursuit of the avenger of blood; but the gates of the refuge city were open to him, and the elders of the city were bound to give him a place that he might dwell among them (Joshua 20:4), not only safely, but in rest and peace.

Herein there was a foreshadowing of the days when God should open the door of faith unto the Gentiles. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all them that call upon Him."

There were two mysteries made known to the Apostle Paul: one be unfolds in the Epistle to the Ephesians, the other in the Epistle to the Colossians. First, he teaches us that the Gentiles may be fellowheirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise of Christ through the Gospel. Next, he expatiates on the riches of the glory of this mystery, among the Gentiles, that the living Savior is prepared to dwell in their hearts also, as the Hope of Glory. It is a serious question, how far we are participating in our inheritance. The gates of the promises made to Abraham and his seed are open for us to enter in 'and dwell there; but there is too much backwardness and hesitancy in us all. "Whosoever will, let him take."

[Warren Wiersbe](#) offers an incredible insight on the [cities of refuge](#) in Joshua 20:1-9+ - Before leaving this theme, we should note that there is also an application to the nation of Israel. The nation was guilty of killing the Lord Jesus Christ, but it was a sin of ignorance on the part of the people (Acts 3:12-18+). When Jesus prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34+), He was declaring them guilty of manslaughter rather than murder (1 Co 2:7-8+). The way was open for their forgiveness, and God gave the nation nearly forty years to repent before He brought judgment. This same principle applied to the Apostle Paul (1Ti 1:12-14). However, no lost sinner today can plead ignorance, because God has declared the whole world guilty and without excuse (Ro 3:9-19+).

The Cities of Refuge: A Picture of Jesus David Guzik

- [Joshua 20 Commentary](#)

The Bible applies this picture of the city of refuge to the believer finding refuge in God on more than one occasion:

- i. Psalm 46:1: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. More than 15 other times **ED**: [SEE BELOW](#) the Psalms speak of God as our refuge.
- ii. Hebrews 6:18+: 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.

Points of similarity between the cities of refuge and our refuge in Jesus.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the only alternative for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.
5. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries; to go outside means death.
6. With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest.

A crucial distinction between the cities of refuge and our refuge in Jesus.

- The cities of refuge only helped the innocent, but the guilty can come to Jesus and find refuge.

Adrian Rogers (from *When Great Men Die Like Fools*) The Saving Nature of the Cities of Refuge

For example, think with me about the saving nature of these cities. They had, in Bible times, a law. They did not have the fine courts of jurisprudence that we have today, and the FBI, and all of those other things. If a person were to kill a blood relative of an individual, that individual was called the "avenger of blood," and he could hunt down, seek out, find the slayer of his near kin, his relative, and put him to death. But God, knowing that many times a crime could've been done unwittingly; God, knowing that many times a person would need a court to hear him out; God, knowing that he would need a place of refuge, appointed six cities—six cities of refuge. And, the person who is fleeing from the avenger of blood—a person who needs a safe place, a hiding place—would flee into one of these cities and there be saved. And, the Bible uses this illustration to picture the Lord Jesus Christ.

For example, the Bible speaks in Hebrews chapter 6 of those of us who have fled for refuge to Jesus—those who have fled for refuge to Jesus (Hebrews 6:18). And again, we know that wonderful, wonderful Psalm that says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10). And so, these cities of refuge are one more of the glorious illustrations that God has put in the mosaic of His Word, the tapestry of His truth, to point out and give us illustration upon illustration upon illustration of what it means to be saved and find refuge in the Lord Jesus. We sing about it:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
—AUGUSTUS M. TOPLADY

PASSAGES DESCRIBING GOD AS OUR REFUGE

Related Resources:

- [Christ Our Rock of Refuge](#)
- [Christ Our Rock of Refuge-2](#)

1. Psalm 7:1 A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite. O LORD my God, in You I have taken **refuge**; Save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me,
2. Psalm 11:1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. In the LORD I take **refuge**; How can you say to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain;
3. Psalm 14:6 You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, But the LORD is his **refuge**.
4. Psalm 18:2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take **refuge**; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
5. Psalm 18:30 As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the LORD is tried; He is a shield to all who take **refuge** in Him.
6. Psalm 31:1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. In You, O LORD, I have taken **refuge**; Let me never be ashamed; In Your

righteousness deliver me.

7. Psalm 34:8 O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes **refuge** in Him!
8. Psalm 34:22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who take **refuge** in Him will be condemned. (cf Ro 8:1)
9. Psalm 37:40 The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take **refuge** in Him.
10. Psalm 64:10 The righteous man will be glad in the LORD and will take **refuge** in Him; And all the upright in heart will glory.
11. Psalm 71:1 In You, O LORD, I have taken **refuge**; Let me never be ashamed.
12. Psalm 73:28 But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my **refuge**, That I may tell of all Your works.
13. Psalm 91:2 I will say to the LORD, "My **refuge** and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!"
14. Psalm 91:9 For you have made the LORD, my **refuge**, Even the Most High, your dwelling place.
15. Psalm 94:22 But the LORD has been my stronghold, And my God the rock of my **refuge**.
16. Psalm 118:8 It is better to take **refuge** in the LORD Than to trust in man.
17. Psalm 118:9 It is better to take **refuge** in the LORD Than to trust in princes.
18. Psalm 141:8 For my eyes are toward You, O GOD, the Lord; In You I take **refuge**; do not leave me defenseless.
19. Psalm 142:5 I cried out to You, O LORD; I said, "You are my **refuge**, My portion in the land of the living.
20. Psalms 143:9 Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; I take **refuge** in You.
21. Proverbs 14:26 In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have **refuge**.
22. Isaiah 14:32 "How then will one answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion, And the afflicted of His people will seek **refuge** in it."
23. Jeremiah 16:19 O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, And my **refuge** in the day of distress, To You the nations will come From the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers have inherited nothing but falsehood, Futility and things of no profit."
24. Joel 3:16 The LORD roars from Zion And utters His voice from Jerusalem, And the heavens and the earth tremble. But the LORD is a **refuge** for His people And a stronghold to the sons of Israel.
25. Nahum 1:7 The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take **refuge** in Him.
26. Zephaniah 3:12 But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take **refuge** in the name of the LORD.