

- Cities of Refuge Appointed by God (Josh 20:1-9, Gen 9:5-6)

#1. One City of Refuge for a Murderer (Deut 19:1-6)

- The Spiritual Dimension (Heb 12:22-23, Acts 4:12)

#2. Why Did God Institute this Ceremonial Law? (Matt 13:10-16, John 5:39, Luke 24:27, Rom 15:4, Psalm 62:7-8, 142:5, 48:1-3, Isa 44:6, Acts 4:12, 1Cor 2:2)

- Now It Is no Longer a Physical City (Heb 12:22-23, Luke 10:20, Col 1:18, Ecc 7:20, Heb 4:16)

#3. Summary (Heb 4:16)

Please open your Bibles to the Prophecy According to Joshua, Josh 20:1 (2X). After Joshua and his army conquered most of the land of Canaan he divided the land among the 12 tribes of Israel, except the priests and the Levites did not receive any land so far. But now, in this chapter, the priests and the Levites are going to receive some of the land. We read in Josh 20:1-9,

- **Cities of Refuge Appointed by God** (Josh 20:1-9, Gen 9:5-6)

Josh 20:1-9, “**1** The LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, **2** Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses: **3** That the slayer that killeth *any* person unawares *and* unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. **4** And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. **5** And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. **6** And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, *and* until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled. **7** And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjatharba, which *is* Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. **8** And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. **9** These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth *any* person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.”

We see here the mercy of God for those who have unintentionally committed a crime. Our God is a righteous God. If someone has accidentally killed someone, for example today in a traffic accident, then this driver is guilty of murder. Whether it was an accident or whether it was on purpose, the result is the same, the person is guilty. When we violate a traffic law, whether we do it intentionally or whether we do it ignorantly, we are guilty. But when we do it ignorantly the judge will be lenient with the penalty we have to pay. God is also merciful with those who have killed someone unintentionally. That is why the Lord has set up this arrangement of six cities of refuge in the land of Israel; three cities on the west side of the Jordan River and three cities on the east side of the Jordan River, strategically located so that no part of the nation of Israel would be more than 30 miles away from one of the cities of refuge, which was a distance that easily could be travelled in one day. By law the main roads to the cities of refuge always had to be kept open, and never to be obstructed with vegetation. But this right of asylum was only available to those who had accidentally killed someone. Willful murderers were put to death immediately; but for those who have unintentionally caused the death of someone, the city of refuge

protected them from the **avenger of blood**. Where did he come from? Who is the **avenger of blood**? Please turn in your Bibles to the Prophecy of Genesis, Gen 9:5 (2X). God states here that the crime of murder is different from any other crime, because mankind was made in the image of God. Therefore murder is the taking of the life of man who was made in the image of God. It is an insult to the God who has made this man in His image. We read in Gen 9:5-6,

Gen 9:5-6, “**5** And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s **brother** will I require the life of man. **6** Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”

What do we read here? If someone is killed, God requires that his blood must be avenged. If he is killed by an animal, then the animal shall be killed. If he was killed by another person, then that person shall be killed, and the **avenger of blood**, the executioner of that vengeance, shall be the **brother**, or the nearest **kinsman** of the victim. The Hebrew word for “Avenger of Blood” is Strong’s Concordance number <01350>, which is the same word that has been translated “Kinsman”, and which is also the same word that has been translated “Redeemer.” We can already sense who the Avenger of Blood represents. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who is our Avenger, and simultaneously He is our Redeemer, and simultaneously He is our nearest Kinsman, He is our Brother in the spiritual sense. We will get into this more intensely in the future. But for now, let us return to the city of refuge.

#1. One City of Refuge for a Murderer (Deut 19:1-6)

Please turn to the Prophecy of Deuteronomy, Deut 19:1 (2X). God’s instruction to Joshua was: You shall divide the Promised Land into six parts, and you shall appoint one city of refuge for each part, for I will be merciful to those who do not deserve to die for their crime. We read in Deut 19:1-6,

Deut 19:1-6, “**1** When the LORD thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the LORD thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses; **2** Thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it. **3** Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither. **4** And this *is* the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past; **5** As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live: **6** Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he was not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.”

We should consider now the exclusivity of this mercy of God. To whom was this city available? **First** of all, this opportunity was available only to those who lived in the land of Israel. It was not available to everyone in the world, but only to those who were citizens of that country. **Secondly**, it was available

only to those who have committed this crime “unwittingly.” Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past, and whom he killed in an accident, only to these was this city of refuge available. Will you have time to pack your bags? Absolutely not! Run and flee to a place of refuge, for your life depends on it. Remember that God has said, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” **Thirdly**, you must know that you are a murderer. If you are in denial, the avenger of blood will find you out and kill you. But if you are aware that you have killed someone, or if you are aware that you are a sinner, you can flee to one of these cities of refuge. And that leads us to the spiritual dimension of this entire arrangement.

- **The Spiritual Dimension** (Heb 12:22-23, Acts 4:12)

We must ask ourselves: What is the spiritual dimension of the city of refuge? Is it a city that represents the Lord Jesus Christ? Where in the Bible is Christ spoken of as a city? The answer is: Nowhere! Christ is not represented by a city of refuge. But the body of Christ is represented by a city. Please turn in your Bibles to the Epistle to the Hebrews, Heb 12:22 (2X). We have here a passage that is often forgotten by the theologians. But it is a passage that is very important, for it defines precisely the meaning of the word “Zion” and the word “Firstborn”, and other aspects of Bible interpretation. We need to remember this principle: “The latest revelation carries the greater weight.” God’s revelation in the Epistle of Hebrews was perhaps among the last of the epistles that the apostle Paul wrote. And so, we need to take notice when we find something new in the Epistle of Hebrews, and we need to apply it, regardless what the great theologians say. We read here in Heb 12:22-23,

Heb 12:22-23, “**22** But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, **23** To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,” What is God saying in verse 22? God speaks about Mount Sion, and we need to be aware that God changed His terminology in the New Testament. Mount Sion, or Mount Zion as it is spelled in the Hebrew Old Testament, does not refer to a mountain in Jerusalem, but it refers to the place where God resides. It refers to the city of the living God. Throughout the Bible we should recognize two cities: The city of God and the city of Satan. The city of God is called the **New Jerusalem**, which is presently safely kept for us in heaven, and all the saints presently living on earth, all the Born Again believers, are presently citizens of this city of God, the New Jerusalem, which will be the Bride of Christ on the Last Day. The city of Satan is **Babylon**, which is the deceiver and the destroyer of the church on earth. From ancient times Babylon was the enemy of the people of God. Babylon was the enemy whose language the people of God did not understand, and eventually Babylon destroyed them and took their remnant to Babylon where they were reeducated in the evils and the idolatry of Babylon. This is again how the city of Satan will change the church in the last days, until the church itself has become Babylon. We can read this in Rev 17 and 18.

Let us now apply this symbolism to the activity in Josh 20 and in Deut 19. When we discover that we are guilty of a crime, and we realize that the wages of sin is death, do we flee to a city of refuge? Spiritually yes, we do need to go to a place of refuge where we find compassionate mercy rather than cold judgment. But today there are no more physical cities of refuge. We flee to Christ, and Christ is found in a city of refuge, or better Christ is found in some entity of the Kingdom of God where we can find refuge and mercy. There is no other one who can save us from our sins. We read in Acts 4:12,

Acts 4:12. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Therefore we must flee to Christ. We must search for Christ in the city called Sion, or in the city of the living God where Christ can be found. Therefore, to search for Christ within the city of refuge, means we must search the Bible, for only there is where Christ can be found. The city of refuge is represented by the **New Jerusalem**, or **Sion**, the city of God, where Christ presently resides. The church is also a place where Christ can be found, for the church is also the external representation of the Kingdom of God on this earth, but the church is a very imperfect picture of the residence of Christ, for near the end of time the church goes apostate. But the New Jerusalem is a perfect picture of the residence of Christ.

#2. Why Did God Institute this Ceremonial Law? (Matt 13:10-16, John 5:39, Luke 24:27, Rom 15:4, Psalm 62:7-8, 142:5, 48:1-3, Isa 44:6, Acts 4:12, 1Cor 2:2)

God did that for two reasons. The first reason was to show us that God is merciful, and God does not delight in condemning people to hell. Christ will be merciful to those who unwittingly violate His laws. But the second reason is to show us a preview of the mercy of God in giving us the New Jerusalem. It is a place of abundant mercy and grace of God for those whom He loves. First of all God loves those who reside in His Kingdom on earth, the church, lock stock and barrel. But God especially loves His elect in the church who come to realize that they are sinners on the way to hell, and who receive this faith that through Christ there is a way of escape. And so, by the prompting of God the Holy Spirit they will seek reconciliation with God through the cross of Christ. But all this has been hidden in the spiritual application of these historical accounts. Is this then a logical interpretation of the Word of God? Please turn to the Gospel according to Matthew, Matt 13:10 (2X). Does God hide these truths from those He wants to remain in unbelief? And that is really so. God hides the truth from those He wants to remain in unbelief. We read here in Matt 13:10-16 (2X),

Matt 13:10-16, "**10** And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? **11** He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. **12** For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. **13** Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. **14** And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By

hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: **15** For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. **16** But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear." In other words, God will reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven only to those to whom He has given this special gift. God is very selective with His gifts. And so, we see that God has hidden the spiritual insights from many in the nation of Israel. The Lord Jesus told the unbelieving Jews in John 5:39, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." But to His disciples the Lord Jesus revealed everything. He said to the disciples who walked with Him to Emmaus in Luke 24:27, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Furthermore the Lord told us in no uncertain terms in Rom 15:4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." In other words, the mysteries in the Old Testament were written for our learning, so that we by patiently working through the Scriptures might be comforted and might have the hope of eternal life. Throughout the Old Testament Christ is portrayed in types and figures in many ways for our learning. The city of refuge was a type of the body of Christ, the New Jerusalem. But since many pastors have been forbidden to preach beyond the historical grammatical method of interpretation, these things remain hidden to them. Christ has not made them free. They remain in bondage to the rules set by their denominational headquarters. But it is very clear that the Bible directs us to seek our refuge in God. And even though we do not seek our peace and safety in the city itself, we seek safety in the one who made this city a safe haven. For example, in Psalm 62:7-8,

Psalm 62:7-8, "**7** In God *is* my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, *and* my **refuge**, *is* in God. **8** Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God *is* a **refuge** for us. Selah." And we read in Psalm 142:5, "I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my **refuge** *and* my portion in the land of the living." Now look at Psalm 48:1-3, which focusses on the King within the city:

Psalm 48:1-3 "**1** « A Song *and* Psalm for the sons of Korah. » Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, *in* the mountain of his holiness. **2** Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, *is* mount Zion, *on* the sides of the north, the city of the great King. **3** God is known in her palaces for a **refuge**."

And so, can you see that it is not the city which you want to honor for saving your skin, but it is the Person within the city, or the Person who arranged all these things for you, whom you want to honor. We do not want to glorify the city of refuge, but we want to glorify Christ, who was the Designer of this ceremonial law who gave us this wonderful escape of fleeing to the city of refuge. We flee to Christ. And where can Christ be found? We can find Him in the Word of God.

There is only one Redeemer, for Isa 44:6 says, “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the LORD of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God.”

There is only one Savior, for Acts 4:12 says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

There is only one solution for our Sin Problem, for 1Cor 2:2 says, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” The cross of Christ is the only solution.

And so, this was the second reason why the Lord established this ceremonial law in the nation of Israel, for the Lord is gracious to those whom He loves.

- **Now It Is no Longer a Physical City** (Heb 12:22-23, Luke 10:20, Col 1:18, Ecc 7:20, Heb 4:16)

Let us now return to the passage in Heb 12, for we did not finish this thought. We read in Heb 12:22-23, “**22** But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, **23** To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,” Let me finish the thought on verse 22. Mount Sion is the place where Christ resides. The city of the living God is the place where Christ resides. The New Jerusalem is the place where Christ resides. Mount Sion, and the city of the living God, and the heavenly Jerusalem, or the New Jerusalem, all refer to the body of Christ, not Christ Himself, but to the eternal church which consists only of all those who have been elected by God unto salvation. Likewise, the next few words also refer to this same group of people: “An innumerable company of angels” should have been translated, “An innumerable company of messengers”, for the word “angel” may be translated angel or messenger. In the present case it must be translated “messengers”, for the context still speaks of the church in glory. Likewise, verse 23 also speaks of the church in glory. Therefore the “general assembly” is another name for that group of people, and the “church of the **firstborn**, which are written in heaven” also refers to that same group of people. This is something that most people do not realize, but we must abide by the context. The context indicates that the names of these people were written in heaven, just like the names of all the saints are written in heaven. In Luke 10:20 the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, Luke 10:20, “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” But why are we called “the church of the **firstborn**”? It is because Christ is our Husband, and Christ is called the **Firstborn**.

He is called the Firstborn from the dead. We read in Col 1:18,

Col 1:18, “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the **Firstborn** from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.” Why is Christ called the Firstborn from the dead? Historically there were six people who were raised from the dead before Christ was crucified. Historically He should be called the seventh from the dead. But No! This is speaking of another kind of death. Christ was raised from the second death, the equivalent of an eternity in hell. That is why He is

called the **Firstborn** from the dead. And since our Husband the Lord Jesus Christ is called the **Firstborn**, we are also called the **firstborn**. That is why we are called the church of the **firstborn**, which are written in heaven. And then we read in Heb 12:23, “And to God the Judge of all”. He is the Judge of all the unsaved, both the living and the dead. He is not the Judge of all who are saved, for the saints have all been judged by Christ on the cross in AD 33. But all the saints are again mentioned at the end of verse 23: “The spirits of just men made perfect.” Our souls are made perfect on the Last Day, not earlier than that. While in this life God declares us righteous in His sight, but that is only a legal declaration from God. We still sin every day, for God declares in Ecc 7:20,

Ecc 7:20, “For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” Even when we do good, we still sin. Therefore we flee to Christ, for He is full of compassion for all His children. We read in Heb 4:16, “Let us therefore come **boldly** unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

#3. Summary (Heb 4:16)

What have we learned so far? God arranged six cities of refuge strategically throughout the land of Canaan, so that an accidental murderer can flee to one of the cities of refuge before the avenger of blood takes vengeance on the accidental murderer. This privilege was only available to those who lived in the land of Canaan, and who caused an accidental death. Deliberate murderers were put to death immediately. This arrangement was already begun by Moses on the east side of the Jordan River. Now that Joshua and his troops conquered the land on the west side of the Jordan River, the conquest was called complete, the land was divided, and an additional three cities of refuge were appointed. But what is the spiritual meaning of these rules for today? The wages of sin is death. To escape the penalty of the second death the criminal must be aware that he is headed for the lake of fire. The cities of refuge represent the body of Christ, and those who flee to Christ for asylum have to search for Christ in the city of refuge. Using the Word of God the sinner will find Christ on the pages of the Bible. And so, the sinner comes to Christ boldly, as in Heb 4:16, “Let us therefore come **boldly** unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

AMEN. Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.