

SONGS: Joy Unspeakable; Sweet By and By (There is a land that is fairer than day; Safe in the Arms of Jesus.  
CLOSE: In Times Like These

## Cities of Refuge

Joshua Series: 16 of 18

TEXT: Joshua 20 (Don't Read)

AIM:

### INTRODUCTION:

**A. In our last message from chapters 17 & 18 we saw the beginning of the dividing up of the conquered land by Joshua.**

From there to **Chap. 21** the details of each tribe is rehearsed. In **Chap. 20** we come upon what are called the cities of refuge. The establishing of these cities is in keeping with the instructions that God had given to Moses in **Numbers 35**. With the death of Moses the Lord established Joshua as the nation's leader and these instructions in **Numbers 35** were passed on to him. The Lord exhorted **Joshua in chap. 1 verse 5**, *"as I was with Moses, I will be with thee, I will not fail thee, I will not forsake thee. 6] Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. 7] Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou may observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee..."*

NOW in **chap. 20** the Lord once again speaks to Joshua who obediently sets out to fulfill the Lord's command concerning these cities as recorded in **Josh. 20 << READ**.

**Num. 35:7** tells us the Levites were given 48 cities with their suburbs (ref. Josh. 21:2-3ff.), which were scattered though out Israel. This distribution provided a spiritual influence over all the land where the people settled. All the cities of refuge were located at high elevation, enabling them to be seen from a great distance. They were located so everyone was within a day's journey of them (i.e. no one lived more than 10 miles from a city in which Levites lived).

**FURTHERMORE**, note the word *"whosoever"* in vs. 9. *"Whosoever"* needs to flee to one of these cities was free to do so, whether he was an Israelite or not!

**B. In our messages from Joshua, we have repeatedly taught and hopefully you have learned by now that the book of Joshua is to be understood and applied to our lives spiritually.**

1. **REMEMBER**, from the beginning I have pointed out that there's a spiritual parallel in the book of Joshua in possessing the land of Canaan to that which God has promised to us as believers to possess.
2. The possessing of the land is likened to the possession of the dedicated, Spirit filled life of the believer.
  - a. God has given **us** an inheritance that like Israel, we too must claim if we are to possess it.
  - b. And just like Israel, God has given **us** instructions – He has given **us** the means, and He has provided **us** with the power.
  - c. **BUT** it is still up to us to exercise our will and use the spiritual weapons at our disposal to possess the promised land of spiritual maturity that God has said is yours and mine!
3. The struggles and battles fought by Israel as they conquered the land to possess their inheritance are symbols or pictures of the believer as we strive to be Christ-like in our lives.

**C. Up to this point in the book, Israel has entered & conquered the land — except there are remnants of Canaanites scattered all over the designated areas of the various individual tribes.**

1. Most of these tribes **have NOT been** successful in driving out the Canaanites, not because they didn't know they were suppose to do, or because they didn't have the resources, or that they even tried & failed—they weren't successful, **because they didn't try to drive the enemy out!**
2. God in His omniscience knew that man being man would develop social problems and because of personal relationships and conflicts, sooner or later a Jew would take the life of another Jew—either accidentally or deliberately.
  - a. In order to protect the people in that budding society who were without an elaborate system of law we have today, God prescribed for them, **Six Cities Of Refuge** among the 48 cities of the Levites.
  - b. Wherever a fatality occurred, these *Cities Of Refuge*, provided the unwitting slayer i.e. the one who had committed the killing, a place to flee, thereby avoiding the vengeance of the nearest of kin.
  - c. This protection was provided ONLY in cases of unpremeditated murder.
3. The nearest of kin/relative of the slain was referred to as *"the avenger of blood."*
  - a. The avenger was not allowed to pursue the slayer into these cities.
  - b. The procedure indicated in vs. 6 required that a person fleeing to one of these cities had to stand trial before the elders of that **city of refuge**.
  - c. If found guilty of premeditated murder, he would be executed, but if found innocent he would be allowed to remain in the city of refuge until after the death of the high priest, at which time he was free to return to his home city without fear of punishment.

These **Cities of Refuge** are pictures and types of the Lord Jesus Christ to whom sinners, pursued by the avenging Law, which decrees judgement and death, may flee for refuge.

TURN >> *Psalm 46:1-3; \*61:2-4; \*62:6-8; 91:1-5; 94:22; 142:5; 143:9; Prov. 14:26; Heb. 6:18-20.*

The apostle Paul frequently used the expression "in Christ" which speaks of the safety and security found in our High Priest who is possessed by every believer.

**NOTE some of the analogies of these cities to Christ:**

- (1) they were established by God before they were needed;
- (2) they were available to all, as well as conveniently accessible to all;
- (3) their gates were always open;
- (4) they were widely advertised (Num. 35 & Deut. 19:1-13).

With this in mind let's follow two lines of thought:

1. The **Significance** of the names of the *Cities Of Refuge*.
2. The **Significance** of their naming.

The city's names have definite spiritual significance as they relate to the Lord Jesus Christ!

## I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAMES OF THE **CITIES OF REFUGE** – 20:7

### A. Three of these cities were located on west bank of Jordan – the Jerusalem side.

1. *KEDESH in Galilee is in mount Naphtali* = a place of purification & holiness.
  - a. Purity & holiness are attributes of the Lord our God – Twice Peter quotes **Lev. 20:7** in **1 Pet. 1:15-16** instructing the believer, *"be ye holy for the Lord is holy."*
  - b. When we flee to our refuge in God we are pictured as guilty, dirty sinners in danger of losing our very souls seeking and fleeing to be covered in the holiness of Jesus Christ.

- c. **Col. 3:1-3** – *“If ye then be risen with Christ...your life is hid with Christ in God.”*  
Because the Lord Jesus Christ is holy and I’m hid with Him in God, I am holy in my position in Him and am to live out that holiness in my everyday living.
2. **SHECHEM in mount Ephraim** = shoulder – referring to the part of the back as the place for burdens.
- a. **Isa. 6:9** – Is a prophecy directly referring to Christ – *“the government shall be upon his **SHOULDER**: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”*
- b. As Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus will be responsible to govern the nations. The Govt. will be on Christ’s shoulder.
- 1) Jesus is capable of bearing the burdens of the world on His shoulders – Peter’s plea to you and I in **1 Pet 5:7** – *“cast all your care upon Him (Jesus) for He careth for your souls.*
  - 2) **Illus.** – The “Fireman’s Carry” is a method carrying people across the back part of the shoulder and taught to firemen because it this is the strongest part of our body to carry heavy loads.
    - a) **Lk. 15:4-5** asks, *“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his **SHOULDERS**, rejoicing.”*
    - b) As the shepherd carries the lost sheep home on His shoulders in Lk. 15, the Shepherd of our souls has borne the penalty for the world’s sin and He’ll gladly carry you, as a lost sheep, to heaven if only you’ll let him.
3. **Kirjatharba, which is called HEBRON after the conquest** = shared association, alliance, companion, to be in league, to have fellowship.
- a. Being on the OUTSIDE of Christ – there’s danger, loneliness and heartache, which we have to face alone and by our own resources & resiliency.
  - b. With Christ on the INSIDE – there’s sweet communion, fellowship, enjoyment and the promise that He will never leave us or forsake us, no matter how rough or harrowing the situation maybe.
  - c. BEFORE salvation happiness depended upon happenings.  
AFTER salvation I have joy unspeakable, regardless of the circumstances.

**B. Besides the three cities located on west bank of Jordan, there were Three Located on the OTHER side of the Jordon – Vs. 8**

1. **BEZER in the wilderness** = refers to a fortress – a fortified stronghold.
  - a. When the enemy attacks, the safest place to be is in the FORTRESS provided by God.
  - b. As believers, we are hidden in Christ — who is *“my refuge and my strength a very present help in trouble.”* (Ps. 46:1).
  - c. When the accuser of our souls comes looking for us we are safe as *“there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”* (Rom. 8:1).
2. **RAMOTH in Gilead** = to be lifted up to heights, high in value – exalted.
  - a. Jesus Christ is the Exalted One of God – *“God also hath highly **EXALTED** him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil. 2:9-11).

- b. **Eph. 2:6** – “God... ***hath raised us up*** together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”
  - 1) **TURN >> James 4:10** – “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall **LIFT you UP.**” “Lift” & “up” are one word in Gk. *hupsōo* = “Lift up you” or exalt you as in elevating your position.
  - 2) **TURN >> 1 Pet. 5:6** – “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt [*hupsōo*] you in due time.”
3. **GOLAN was in northern Bashan.** It has two meanings: elation, joy and rejoicing / to be removed or carried into exile – often to die.
  - a. It is in Jesus’ death that we have our real security — as it is only by His blood do we find forgiveness.
  - b. It is because of the sadness of His death **OUTSIDE** the city, that He becomes my joy.
  - c. As believers, living on this earth, we live bodily in **EXILE**, while our spirit has its home in heaven—one day our redemption will be complete and both, body and soul will be home.
  - d. Until that day we live in expectation, as Paul said in **Rom. 8:23** – “groaning within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”  
**Oh, what a day of rejoicing that will be!**

**C. NOTICE: Gates of these cities were never closed – they were always open!**

1. It was the practice in other cities to close their gates at night fall, but the gates of these cities **HAD TO BE** accessible at all times, if they were to be of value to the one fleeing unmediated murder.
2. **The gates were Open to ALL!** **Num. 35:15** informs us that “*these six cities shall be refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for strangers, and for the sojourners...every one that killeth any person unawares may flee there.*”
  - a. The “**stranger**” in this verse refers to a foreigner, i.e. one who was not a Jew.
  - b. The “**sojourner**” referred to traveller, one passing through the area or nation.
3. Jesus Christ is always ready to receive sinners – Jesus says of Himself, “**I am the DOOR: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved**” (Jn. 10:9), “**I am the WAY, the truth, and the LIFE: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me**” (Jn. 14:6).
  - a. He is open to everyone and He is accessible to all.
  - b. The Saviour is as near as a prayer a way! By confessing your guilt and inviting Him to save our sinful condemned soul, He will provide eternal refuge for you—you’ll be safe and secure in the arms of Jesus.
  - c. It doesn’t matter where, or when you come to the realisation of your need. One fellow to whom I ministered was saved at home while in the toilet! It was the only place he could have privacy to read his Bible in a large family.
  - d. No repentant sinner, confessing his guilt and throwing himself on the mercy of Christ’s blood, who paid the price of sin, was ever refused entrance – **Josh. 20:4.**

**Jn. 6:37** – Jesus said, “*All the Father giveth me shall come to me and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out!*”

**D. The establishment of these cities served a DIVINE PURPOSE.**

1. They provided immediate shelter and refuge from the avenger of blood.
  - a. If you were guilty of killing someone, to delay in fleeing to the refuge of one of these cities was a very dangerous thing to do.

- b. **Illus.** – Suppose you were chopping wood and the axe head flew off and accidentally killed your friend who was standing by. If you hung around to trying to explain the situation to others and excuse yourself, a relative thinking you killed him in anger could kill you where you stood.
2. A guilty murderer in order to escape the avengers couldn't use these cities.
  - a. Likewise, Jesus offers no refuge for the unrepentant sinner.
    - 1) Jesus tells us in **Lk. 13:3** – *“Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”*
    - 2) Peter exhorts us in **Acts 3:19** – *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”*
    - 3) Paul reveals **2 Cor. 7:10** – that *“godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.”*
  - b. **BE WARNED:** You didn't come to Jesus as means to miss hell and NOT be sincere in forsaking your sins and turning to Christ in faith.
3. Entrance into these cities was on God's terms – To have salvation & security in the refuge of Christ, you must also enter on God's terms – Without Bible repentance that results in a change life, you have no hope!

**E. Consider the DIVINE PLACEMENT of these cities.**

1. These six cities were located for ease of access and for their nearness to all throughout the land – This shows God's grace in their provision.  
>> **READ Acts 17:24-27; Rev. 3:20; Rom. 10:6-10**
2. Each one of these cities was placed on a mountain to be easily seen from all locations and by all who wanted to go them. Likewise – Jesus said in **Jn. 12** – *“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me”* (Vs. 30-32).
3. As God has made it clear in the N.T. that Jesus is the ONLY way to God's refuge and that no one comes unto the Father, but by Him, these **cities of refuge** were the only place of refuge and where plainly marked indicating the way!  
>> **TURN Deut. 19:1-7**

**Having considered the SIGNIFICANCE of the names of the Cities of Refuge...**

**II. LET US CONSIDER THEIR NAMING – I. E. WHY WERE THESE 6 PRIESTLY CITIES CHOSEN OUT OF THE 48 GIVEN TO THE LEVITES?**

**A. We read in Josh. 20:2, these cities were APPOINTED – not appointed by Moses, Joshua Caleb or just any ole one, they were APPOINTED BY GOD**

1. God was the one who appointed Jesus to be the means and the ONLY way of salvation. This was prophesied in the time of David in **Ps. 40:6-8** and paraphrased in **Heb. 10:5-6** – *“Wherefore when He [Jesus] cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared Me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.”*
2. There are those who say our existence is by chance and Christianity has developed out of primitive ignorance – do you want to know who is really ignorant? The promoters of such rubbish, especially the Evolutionists.

*“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts... they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God ...the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ...The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and*



*the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Pet. 3:3-11).*

3. My existence is no mistake or accident of nature, nor was my Saviour’s death happenstance—it was designed by God the Father to provide a place of refuge for guilty sinners to hide from the avenger of God’s holy Law.

#### **B. These cities were Appointed and done so in ADVANCE.**

1. God didn’t wait until Israel arrived in Canaan to make provision – but while they were still wandering in the wilderness and ever before they placed on foot in the Promised Land the provision was made.
2. God didn’t wait until somebody was killed in the land then wonder how He was going to handle the situation – He did it in advance!
3. Likewise, God did no less for us – **READ >> Acts 2:22-36**

#### **C. As already pointed out in Num. 35:15, these cities were appointed for ALL – >> READ Josh. 20:9**

1. It didn’t matter who they were – the provision was for **ALL**.
2. Christ died for **ALL**! *“The gospel of Christ... is the power of God unto salvation to EVERY ONE that believeth” (Rom. 1:16); “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto ALL that call upon him. For WHOSOEVER shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:12,13).*
3. As the cities were provided for **ALL** in the land – not just the Jews. So Salvation is provided for **ALL** – not just for those who think they are good and self-deserving, for *“there is none righteous no not one... They are all gone out of the way... there is none that doeth good no, not one” (Rom. 10, 12).*

## **CONCLUSION**

Jewish historians claim that one day out of every year all the people of Israel would cooperate in the repair of the roads and the maintenance of signs—signs that had only one word on them—REFUGE!

The unwitting manslayer had a smooth road; it was clearly marked to follow to an exalted city, nearby! It was up to him to avail of its safety.

**The Lord Jesus Christ is our refuge from sins penalty, He is the way, He is the life, He is the door, and the Bible is a signpost and road map for any in need and who want to head its directions.**

Jewish historians also claim there were *Runners* – those who were students of the law – they were placed in various parts of the land to give help and instruction. It seems very feasible that directions were very handy, seeing no place in Israel was more than 10 miles or a day’s journey from a city of Levites.

**Today, we who are the saved—as the Lord’s witnesses—are Gods RUNNERS.**

Dear sinner: Please take heed that the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s ONLY refuge from the Law, against the condemnation of sin! God’s law is the avenger of blood; its justice MUST be satisfied. Either yours must be shed for the payment of sin or you flee to God’s substitute, to His provision for the payment of sin, taking refuge in Christ.