

# Six Cities of Sanctuary

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from Internet Sources)

## I. PREPARATION OF THE CITIES

A. Joshua 20:1-9

1. Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:6-34; Deut. 19:2, 9

B. The Cities of Refuge were towns in the Kingdom of Israel and Kingdom of Judah in which the perpetrators of manslaughter could claim the right of asylum; outside of these cities, blood vengeance against such perpetrators was allowed by the Law of Moses.

1. The Torah names six cities of refuge: Golan, Ramoth, and Bezer, on the east of the Jordan River, and Kedesh, Shechem, and Hebron on the western side.

C. The rabbinic writers differentiated between four forms of killing under the law:

1. Complete innocence, for which no further action was necessary.

When someone was killed while the perpetrator is fulfilling their legal duties; for example, if someone is accidentally killed by a teacher applying corporal punishment.

2. Negligence, which required exile to a city of refuge. When someone was killed as a result of legal activity, but which the perpetrator was not required to perform

3. Severe carelessness, for which exile is insufficient. When someone was accidentally killed as a result of illegal activity by the perpetrator; for example, if a shop owner fails to maintain their property, and it collapses and kills a legitimate customer.

4. Murder, which was subject to the avenger of blood.

D. The area covered by these rights of sanctuary varied from the limited area within the tabernacle complex in the beginning, to a large area beyond the limits of the sanctuary towns, later defined in the Law of Moses.

1. It was considered a greater crime to drag an individual from the sanctuary or to kill them there than it was to defile the sanctuary itself.

2. Over time, the general rights of asylum were gradually curtailed, as some cities of sanctuary had become hotbeds of crime (Wikipedia)

## II. PURPOSE OF THE CITIES

A. They were to serve as a refuge

1. When the Lord gave Israel His Law, He made no provision for a police force. Every crime was to be dealt with swiftly and in measure with the nature of the offense

2. Full restitution plus a penalty amount - Ex. 22:1-5.

3. The punishments were designed to fit the crime - Ex 21:24-25.

4. If the crime took the life of another human being, the nearest kinsman of the victim had a right to avenge his fallen relative - Num. 35:19-21

5. God acknowledged the difference between murder and manslaughter. He wanted them to learn to distinguish between intentional and unintentional sin

- B. They were to serve as a reminder. God shows mercy, and they were to learn mercy
  - 1. They were to be involved in the practice of both justice and mercy
    - a. Num. 35:24-25
  - 2. Likewise, death is our avenger of blood - Rom. 3:23, 6:23; Psalm 9:17
  - 3. We need a place to flee for refuge - Heb. 6:18

### III. PROVISION OF THE CITIES

- A. They were provided by God; humankind did not come up with the idea of cities of refuge
  - 1. A revolutionary concept in a time of the law of vengeance and might
  - 2. John 3:16 - Salvation through the blood of Jesus did not originate in the minds of humans. It was God's idea from start to finish
  - 3. When man creates a religion, he makes it in such a way that he is in control. He sets it up as a system of liturgies and doctrine that make it easy and convenient for him, but overwhelmingly difficult for others.
  - 4. Salvation and works of righteousness are from God - Eph. 2:8-10
- B. They were provided by grace. God could have allowed the manslayer to die like any other person who had taken a life.
  - 1. God could have allowed us to die in our sins - Isa. 53:6
  - 2. He initiated the process - John 6:44; Eph. 2:1
  - 3. He provided the means - Rom. 3:25; Acts 4:12
  - 4. He saves obedient believers - Rom. 6:3-4, 17-18
  - 5. He preserves the saved - 1Peter 1:3-5

### IV. POWER OF THE CITIES

- A. They had power to save.
  - 1. When the manslayer arrived in the city, his case was heard by the elders, and if it was determined that the death was an accident, he was given a place in the city protected from the avenger of blood. The city of refuge allowed a man to live who would have otherwise died.
  - 2. So it is in Christ - John 5:24; Mark 16:16
- B. They had power to secure.
  - 1. As long as the person stayed in the city, he was safe. He could live there until the judgment of his case, and afterward for as long as the high priest lived; when the high priest died, the manslayer was free to return home without fear.
  - 2. There is security in Christ - John 10:28-29; Heb. 7:25
- C. Their power was sufficient. The cities of refuge would work for anyone who fled to them.
  - 1. Jesus will not turn anyone away - John 6:37; Rev. 22:17

### V. POSITION OF THE CITIES

- A. They were available to all. God provided 6 cities of refuge, placed so that there was not a tribe too far from a city of refuge.
  - 1. They were available to everyone: son, stranger, or sojourner

2. Jesus made salvation available to everyone
  - a. Isa. 55:6; 2Cor. 6:2; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 3:20
- B. They were accessible to all
  1. They were prominent. Most of these cities were built on top of mountains of white limestone. When the sun hit them, they gleamed.
    - a. Even in the night, under the light of the moon, they would be visible. They were easily seen, even from many miles away.
  2. They were prepared
    - a. The roads were never blocked. The priests would make certain the roads were clear from obstructions, always open to travelers
    - b. The gates were never closed, even at night.
    - c. The directions were clear. There were sign posts with the Hebrew word "miklat," meaning "refuge," set up to point the way to the city of refuge.
  5. Likewise with the Lord
    - a. He can be seen from a distance by the weary sinner
    - b. The road to salvation is always clear and unobstructed
    - c. He receives everyone regardless of when they come to Him
    - d. The way to Him is clearly defined - John 14:6.

## VI. PICTURES IN THE CITIES

- A. There are pictures in their names
  1. Kadesh - Righteousness - "You are clean" - Isa. 64:4-6; 2Cor. 5:21
  2. Shechem - Shoulder - "I care for you" - Luke 15:3-7
  3. Hebron - Fellowship - "You are not alone" - 1John 1:7
  4. Bezer - Fortress - "You are safe" - Psalm 18:2
  5. Ramoth - Exalted - "I am your God" - Eph. 2:6
  6. Golan - Joy - "You are My people" - 1Peter 1:8
- B. There is a picture in their nature
  1. They were visible manifestations of the grace of God; He did not want to lose a single soul unnecessarily
  2. And so it is in Christ - 2Peter 3:9; Rom. 5:8

### Conclusion:

A. In 2Samuel 2, a man named Abner, Saul's commander-in-chief, is pursued by Asahel (2Sam. 2:18-24). Abner tries to reason with Asahel, but Asahel continues to pursue him. Abner is carrying a spear, and Asahel runs into the spear and dies. Later, we find Abner at the gates of the city of Hebron, a city of refuge. There he is met by Joab, David's commander-in-chief. Joab is also the older brother of Asahel. Joab catches Abner at the gate of the city of refuge and kills him, to avenge the death of Asahel (2Sam. 3:27). King David said some striking things as he mourned the death of Abner (2Sam. 3:32-34). Paraphrasing David, "Abner, you died like a fool! You were right at the gates of the refuge. All you had to do was walk in. Nobody had you tied up. You could have been saved, but you died foolishly."

- B. I wonder how many others will die foolishly just outside the gates of salvation?