

The Cities of Refuge Part 2 – A Shadow of Salvation In Christ

(Hebrews 6:17-18)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. One of the lessons we can learn by studying the book of Hebrews, especially the part about Melchizedek, is that you do not have to have a significant amount of revelation to have a significant amount of doctrine revealed in it.
 - A. In the O.T. there are only four verses, or about 79 words, about him.
 - B. Yet, those few verses are the foundation of very important doctrine relating to the qualifications of Jesus as our High Priest, His superiority over the Levitical high priests of the old covenant, and the superiority of the new covenant.
- II. With that in mind I want to draw your attention to the Hebrew writer's words as he sought to exhort his brethren to hold fast to their hope in Christ (Heb. 6:17-18 – “Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,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.”).
 - A. That the saved are said to have “fled for refuge” in Christ is a direct reference to the O.T. cities of refuge indicating they were a shadow, or type, of salvation in Christ and the church.
 - B. I am convinced that studying these cities will help us gain appreciation for God's plan and fortify our hope in Christ (Rom. 15:4 – “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”).
- III. What I want to do today is to look at how the cities of refuge foreshadow the salvation we find in Jesus and His church.

BODY:

1. What was once death and a curse became the means of life and refuge:

- A. God choose Shechem to be a COR and the Levites to inhabit it, both of which were once connected to death and a curse (Gen. 49:5-7 – “Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are implements of violence.⁶ “Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; because in their **anger** they slew men, and in their self-will they lamed oxen.⁷ “**Cursed** be their anger, for it is fierce; And their **wrath**, for it is cruel. I will **disperse** them in Jacob, and **scatter** them in Israel.”).
 - i. As God's priests they had no portion land in Israel like the other tribes (Num. 18:20-21 – “Then the Lord said to Aaron: “You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.²¹ “Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.”).
 - ii. God scattered them to inhabit 48 designated cities throughout the Land, six of which were cities of refuge for the manslayer, of which one was **Shechem!** (Num. 35:1-6).
 - iii. Through a curse connected to anger and death God brought mercy on Israel through the Levites' priestly work, teaching of the law, and manning God's cities of refuge.
- B. God's saving plan meant that His Son had to die as one *cursed* that we might live.
 - i. In dying for us He became as one **cursed** for us (Gal. 3:13 – “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, **having become a curse for us** (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”),¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”).
 - ii. By his **death** we live (1 Thess. 5:9-10 – “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁰ who **died for us so** that whether we are awake or asleep we might **live with him.**”).

2. The cities of refuge were an expression of God's mercy:

- A. The cities of refuge provided mercy for the manslayer.

- i. Though murder and accidental killing are two very different things, there was initially no means of mercy provided in the law for either one (Gen. 9:6 – “Whoever sheds man’s blood, **by man his blood shall be shed**; for in the image of God He made man.”).
 - ii. By establishing these cities of refuge meant the manslayer could receive God’s **mercy** and not die (as he deserved) (**Josh. 20:1-5**).
- B. Christ’s church provides mercy and protection for the sinner from death.
- i. Sin has always carried the penalty of spiritual death (Rom. 6:23 – “**For the wages of sin is death**, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”).
 - a. This is spiritual death in Hell (Rev. 21:8 – “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the **second death**.”).
 - b. This penalty concerns all who sin (Rom. 3:23 – “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”)!
 - ii. Because of God’s love, sinners are provided refuge from death in sin.
 - a. In Christ (Rom. 8:1 – “There is therefore now **no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus**, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”).
 - b. In His church (Acts 2:47 – “...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”).
- 3. God intended for the cities of refuge to be known and easily accessible to all the land of Israel.**
- A. The cities of refuge were to be...
- i. *Appointed by the people*, allowing all to **know** them and their location (**Josh. 20:1-2, 7-9**).
 - ii. *Strategically placed* throughout the land with roads leading to them to provide the seeker of refuge with *convenient* and *easily accessible* protection (see map – **Deut. 19:1-3**)!
 - iii. *Open to everyone* in Israel (Num. 35:15 – “These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that **anyone** who kills a person accidentally may flee there.”).
 - a. God’s refuge was not limited to a certain group, race, or nation.
 - b. All who lived in the Land could avail themselves to God’s protection.
- B. That salvation in Christ and the church is to be known and easily accessible to all.
- i. God sent Jesus to *show us the way to life* (John 14:5-6 – “Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”).
 - ii. Christ’s gospel is God’s power to save everyone (Rom. 1:16 – “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”).
 - iii. Christ’s command that the gospel be *taken to every nation and people*.
 - a. Matt. 28:19-20 – “**Go** therefore and **make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.”
 - b. Mark 16:15-16 – “And He said to them, “Go into **all the world** and preach the gospel to **all creation**. ¹⁶ He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”
 - c. God doesn’t wait for the world to come to Him, but sends the gospel to the world!
 - iv. Salvation is available now and every day until Christ’s returns (2 Cor. 6:2 – “...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”).
 - a. Of course, as one would have been foolish to wait until a convenient time to seek refuge from the avenger of blood, waiting until a convenient time to obey is playing with death!
- 4. God determined the rules for entering a city of refuge.**
- A. God determined the rules for entering a city of refuge (Josh. 20:1-6):
- i. The seeker must be one who had *killed accidentally*, or unintentionally.

- a. That meant that **no one** guilty of murder could enter!
 - b. There were no exceptions!
 - ii. The seeker *must enter one of the appointed cities* to be protected.
 - a. One city was not as good as another; they could not go to *the city of their choice*.
 - b. Though these cities showed God’s grace and mercy, finding refuge required action—leave home, travel to, and *enter in* one of these cities!
- B. God has determined the rules for entering His salvation today:
- i. Salvation is found only in Jesus—and no other! (Acts 4:10-12 – “let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. ¹¹ This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ ¹² **Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**”).
 - ii. In addition to this, salvation in Christ is only found in His church.
 - a. Why? Because Christ purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28 – “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the **church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**”).
 - b. Jesus only built one church (Matt. 16:18 – “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build **My church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”).
 - c. This church is Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22-23 – “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”).
 - d. So, if you seek salvation in Christ, you must enter Christ’s church.
 - iii. Rules for entering His church are clearly displayed in the gospel.
 - a. The first to hear the gospel message were called to salvation in Christ based on having *faith* in Jesus as the risen Christ and Lord, *repenting* of their sin, and be *baptized in water in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of sins* (**Acts 2:36-39**).
 - b. Only those who were willing to obey in faith the things commanded by the apostles were saved and added to Christ’s church (**Acts 2:40-41, 47**).
 - iv. So, one seeking refuge must seek it in Christ, in His church, and according to His rules.
 - a. There is no hope of salvation in entering *the church of our choice*.
 - b. Like the manslayer of old, sinners today seeking refuge from our sins need to find Christ’s church, the one that follows Christ’s revealed purpose, work, and worship for His church, and seek to enter that church the way God has determined.
- 5. One had to stay within a city of refuge to be protected.**
- A. Leaving a city of refuge meant leaving its protection (Num. 35:26-28 – “But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, ²⁷ and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, ²⁸ **because he should have remained in his city of refuge** until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession.”).
 - i. This is how Joab killed Abner. He coaxed him to step outside the city Hebron (2 Sam. 3:27).
 - ii. There was no “once in God’s refuge, always in refuge.”
 - B. To remain protected, one must *choose to stay in Christ and His church*.
 - i. The saved must *choose to remain in Christ* to remain saved (Jn. 15:5-6 – “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is **cast out** as a **branch** and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”).
 - a. Being a branch in Christ is equal to being saved; but we must choose to remain.
 - b. If we choose otherwise, we become a branch cast out and burned in the fire!

- ii. God warns the leaving one's commitment to faithfully serve in His church loses one protection in Christ (Heb. 10:24-31).
 - a. Note how we are encouraged not to forsake the assemblies of the church where we exhort one another to greater service (10:24-25).
 - b. To leave this behind is to sin willfully, to give up one's protection found in the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, and to face the fearful punishment of God's wrath (10:26-31).

6. The manslayer could only be completely freed by the death of God's high priest.

- A. The manslayer had to remain in the city of refuge until after the death of the current high priest (Num. 35:25, 28 – “So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, and he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil...²⁸ ...But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession.”).
 - i. No matter how long the high priest lived, the manslayer was not free of the bondage of his actions until the death of the high priest.
 - ii. Yet, this provision was again a matter of God's grace, seeing it was by the death of God's high priest, not the manslayer, that his freedom was made possible.
- B. Only by the death of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, are we freed from the penalty of our sins (Heb. 9:11-14 – “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”).

CONCLUSION:

- I. Are you in God's city of refuge today—in Christ and His church?
- II. If not, you need to flee to Christ and receive salvation in His church today because to remain without is to remain in peril of death from the destroyer, Satan, who seeks your life/soul right now.
- III. Entrance into Christ and His church is only by His rules, by H-FE-R-C-BP-LF within Christ and His church.