

Joshua 20-21

Joshua 18:1 sets the scene for the events before us.

"Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them."

Israel gathered in **Shiloh**, presumably for one of the 3 pilgrim feasts.

- As they celebrate Joshua **exhorts** the seven tribes who have failed to take hold of their possessions.
- After **distributing** their land and sending them forth to subdue it, Joshua **addresses** the tribe of **Levi** regarding their inheritance.

Chapters 20-21 record the land given to the tribe of Levi.

Background info Regarding the Tribe of Levi

The Levites were selected by God as the tribe to serve in the ministry.

This took place when the Levites sided with Moses during the golden calf incident recorded in Exodus 32. We read

Exodus 32:29 NIV

"Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

The Levites would make up the priesthood from which the High priests was chosen as well as those who serve alongside the priests.

The Levites were divided into 4 families

Aaron's descendants made up the priestly line from which the High Priest was selected

Gershon, Kohath, and Merari's descendants made up the "deacons" who assisted the priests and cared for the tabernacle.

Because of their call to ministry the Levites were not given an inheritance in the land. Instead they were distributed throughout the land.

Joshua 20-21 addresses the 48 cities given to the tribe of Levi

We will address

- The cities of refuge
- The levitical cities
- The faithfulness of God

Chapter 20

The Cities of Refuge

Notice **three** things

- Their location
- Their purpose
- What they illustrate

1st - Their location

The Levites were given 48 cities, 6 of which were designated as Cities of Refuge

Joshua describes where these cities were located

Joshua 20:7-8

*So they appointed **Kedesh** in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, **Shechem** in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kirjath Arba (which is **Hebron**) in the mountains of Judah. And on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward, they assigned **Bezer** in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, **Ramoth** in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and **Golan** in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.*

We note that these cities were spread throughout Israel both east and west of the Jordan

West

- Kedesh
- Shechem
- Hebron

East

- Bezer
- Ramoth
- Golan

2nd - Their purpose

Joshua also reminds israel of the purpose of these cities

They are called Cities of Refuge

Refuge - Webster

- A condition of being safe or sheltered from danger
- Something which provides that shelter
 - Bunker
 - Safe room

These provide shelter from war or storm

The Cities of Refuge provided shelter from vigilante justice

When a person dies an unnatural death it is natural for people to blame someone and want to execute vengeance upon them

God wrote the laws which would govern Israel

Among those laws were laws forbidding murder and condemning murderers

Exodus 20:13

“You shall not murder.

Exodus 21:12

“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.

The law **also** addressed death caused by accidental circumstances

Those who lost a loved one might not be any less hungry for vengeance in the case of an accidental death

So Moses recorded how to deal with what we call involuntary manslaughter - killing a person unlawfully but unintentionally

Deuteronomy 19:5-6

- as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies—he shall flee to one of these cities and live; lest the avenger of blood, while his anger is hot, pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and kill him, though he was not deserving of death, since he had not hated the victim in time past.

Cities of Refuge were built to protect those who had killed someone accidentally

Exodus 21:13

However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

Numbers 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.

The accused would flee to one of these cities and remain until he could stand before the congregation for trial

Numbers 35:12

They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.

- **If found guilty he would be put to death**

Numbers 35:19

The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.

- **If the death was determined to be accidental and the person found innocent of murder they would remain in the city of refuge until the HP died. Then he was free to return to his home**

Numbers 35:25

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.

Because of the importance of these cities

- This law was a statute forever

Numbers 35:29

'And these things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

- It was available for citizen and foreigners alike

Numbers 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.

- Roads were to be built and maintained for easy access to these cities

Deuteronomy 19:3

You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.

- And as the nation grew more cities of refuge were to be built

Deuteronomy 19:9

and if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to walk always in His ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself besides these three,

3rd - What the Cities of Refuge illustrate

It is clear from the New Testament that the Cities of Refuge in some way illustrate the person and work of Christ

Hebrews 6:18-20

*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. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even **Jesus**, having become **High Priest** forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

A quick recap

If a person committed an act that accidentally caused the death of another they could flee to the Cities of Refuge where they would be safe from wrath until the death of the High Priest. Once He died the person's failure was completely atoned for and they were free to leave the city and live as though the event never happened.

Even with a cursory view of these cities it is easy to see the parallel between them and the work of Christ

But we will take a closer look

The role of a High Priest

- To mediate between man and God
- Offer atonement for sin
- Serve as spiritual leader
- Wear Urim and Thummim to provide direction for people

Jesus is our High Priest

Hebrews 8:1

Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

Ass such He:

- Mediates between man and God
- Offers atonement for sin
- Serves as spiritual leader
- Wears Urim and Thummim to provide direction for people

He has made an offering for our sin

- Bulls and goats could never suffice

Hebrews 10:4

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

- So He made Himself an offering

Hebrews 10:14

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

- And no other sacrifice is needed

Hebrews 10:10

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

John 19:30

*So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "**It is finished!**" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.*

- Because of His sacrifice we have access to God

Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

It is because of the death of our High Priest that our sins have been atoned for and we are set free

Jesus is also our refuge

We have refuge because we have fled to Christ, the High Priest who died to set us free

We are protected from the wrath of God and will never face judgment for our sins

But we also have access to God during the storms of life

How many of you hid more behind the promises of God than you did behind your hurricane shutters?

CHAPTER 21

Joshua 21 addresses the 42 other Levitical cities

A few things to keep in mind

Map of the tribal lands

- If you were looking for a descendant of **Asher** you would travel **north**
- If you were looking for a descendant of **Judah** you would travel **south**
- If you were looking for a descendant of **gad** you would travel **east**

But where would you go if you needed a Levite?

They had no land so they could be spread throughout the whole land

This is because of their purpose within the body

Deuteronomy 33:10

*They shall **teach** Jacob Your judgments,*

And Israel Your law.

They shall put incense before You,

And a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar.

Nehemiah 8:7-9

*Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, **helped** the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they **gave the sense**, and helped them to understand the reading.*

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

Their role was to know the law of God and to instruct Israel in the law of God.

God set up a system where the word of God was easily accessible to the people of God.

- Each individual bears a personal responsibility to know the Word of God

Deuteronomy 6:6

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

- Parents were responsible to instruct their children

Deuteronomy 6:7

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

- And Levites were spread through the land to help provide direction through the word

The same is true today

- We each bear a responsibility to get to know the word and teach it in our homes

- In addition, the church was designed by God as a place where the word of God is taught so the people of God can find direction for daily living

1 Timothy 3:15

but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Ephesians 4:11-12

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Finally, our text addresses the faithfulness of the promises of God

Joshua 21:43-45

So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Notice the 5 uses of the word all

- All the land
- All around rest
- All he had sworn
- All enemies defeated
- All promises came to pass

The promises God gave Israel seemed very **unlikely**, yet when Israel chose to trust in and walk in them they found that no obstacle could break a promise from God

- Enemies defeated
- River parted
- Walls collapsed
- Land distributed

We too can place absolute confidence in the promises of God.

Every word He has said will come to pass no matter how great the obstacles may seem

I want to suggest a few promises that require our trust

ONE - We have been designed by God with a purpose

Psalms 139:14

I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We must trust that God has made us the way we are

We are not a mistake and although we have flaws they do not limit the use God intends for us.

Even when our limitations seem to oppose the call; like when Paul a reader, writer and scholar began to lose his eyesight. The purposes of God were still accomplished and others were able to participate it's him in ministry

A friend of mine was struggling with where his life was. Although he had a college degree, he was struggling to provide the basic necessities for his family. He knew God called him to ministry but was seeing very little fruit from what he was involved in. He went to an older, wiser believer who encouraged him to look at

1 Corinthians 12:18

But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

He began to trust that God had placed him in his current circumstances as sought to grow through them

Over the years God has used this man in lives all over the world

Accepting our place in the body does not mean we settle, it means we stop striving and start producing

TWO - God uses all things to accomplish His purposes

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Even obstacles and trials are part of His plan

Romans 5:3-4

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

THREE - God's ways are better than our ways

Isaiah 55:8-9

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

We must trust that God's ways are not only different than ours but they are better

When we do we will stop fighting or arguing with God and will begin to submit to Him

FOUR - God will meet our needs

Philippians 4:19

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Whatever difficulty we face, God promises to supply what is lacking

He will provide us with:

- Direction
- Comfort
- Hope
- Peace
- Provision
- Strength

And according to Paul, ALL this will be found in Jesus

Conclusion

You have sinned

But there is a place where you can find atonement and forgiveness and be restored into relationship with God

That place is the cross where Jesus, our High Priest died to pay for our sins

You need direction

You have a personal responsibility to get to know the word

But you don't have to do it on your own

Just as God spread the Levites throughout the land so he established his church where the believer can be trained in the word of God for life and service

He promises of God will never fail

- No river is wide enough
- No wall tall enough
- No enemy strong enough

To break a promise of God