

The Cities Of Refuge

Introduction. The tribe of Levi was not given a portion of land like the other tribes (Joshua 13:14; 18:7). However, Moses had commanded that they receive 48 cities wherein to live (Numbers 35:6-7).

Six of these cities were special cities called "cities of refuge" (Deuteronomy 4:41-42; 19:1-13; Numbers 35:1-34; Joshua 20:1-9). They were cities where a man could flee when they had accidentally taken the life of another and be safe from the "avenger of blood." It was a place of safety. These cities were Kedesh in Galilee, Shechem in Ephraim, Hebron in Judah, Bezer in Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead, and Golan in Bashan.

The writer of Hebrews seems to have the concept of these cities of refuge in mind when he writes of our relationship with God. After considering the character of God, he writes, "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:18). The cities of refuge, when the definition of the names are viewed as a whole, present a beautiful picture of the nature of the church and our relationship with Jesus Christ (cf. Hebrews 8:5).

I. ***The Cities And The Church***

A. Kedesh.

1. This word means "holy." The church, like the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, is a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9).
2. God's people may live in the world but we are not to be of the world (John 15:18-19; 17:14-17).

B. Shechem.

1. This word means "shoulder." The idea here is that this was a place where one could find support. The church is the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).
2. In addition, Christians can find strong support among their brethren (1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; Proverbs 18:24).

C. Hebron.

1. This word means "fellowship." This conveys the partnership that we share in Christ and the church (Romans 12:3-5).
2. Every Christian has his place in the kingdom and a work that he or she can do and that for the good of all. Our fellowship is essential to accomplishing the work of God (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

D. Bezer.

1. This word means "strong" or "fortress." As members of His church, He is a strong fortress, a fortification against the powers of evil (Psalm 18:2; Jeremiah 16:19).

2. We are in a war and we wear an armor from God (1 Thessalonians 5:8). With God and the encouragement of one another, we can conquer (Romans 8:31, 37-39).

E. Ramoth.

1. This word means "height" or "elevation." Jesus said that we are like "a city set on a hill" that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14; cf. Proverbs 4:18; Luke 11:33).
2. The godly life is always the moral high ground. It shines for all to see and it brings people to Jesus Christ (Colossians 4:5-6).

F. Golan.

1. This word means "circle." A circle is an unending line and expresses completion (Colossians 2:10).
2. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). In Christ and the church you have everything necessary for the completion of your redemption.

II. ***Other Facts About The Cities Of Refuge***

A. The cities were strategically located.

1. Jesus is our Savior. He is never far off, but is close at hand (John 3:16). He invites us to partake of His salvation (Revelation 3:20; 22:17).
2. It does not matter if we are in New York or Lufkin. Salvation in Christ is always a refuge to which we may go (Romans 10:6-10).

B. There were posts erected to point to the cities.

1. The word of God is given to us to show us the way of life, and to make us wise unto salvation (Proverbs 15:24; Acts 16:17).
2. In the gospel, this is done so clearly and fully that any honest and genuine heart who seeks a knowledge of the truth may have it (Matthew 13:23; Romans 2:7).

C. The roads to the cities were kept wide and in good repair.

1. Jesus is also a way of easy and continual access. The entrance into God's kingdom is plain and unobstructed (Isaiah 35:8-10; cf. 11:16; 19:23; 40:3-4; 49:10-12).
2. The way is narrow as far as requirements are concerned, but it is wide enough for the whole world to walk in it (Matthew 7:13-14; Hebrews 4:16; 5:8-9).

D. The gates were always open.

1. Christ is always accessible: morning, noon, and night; everyday and every instant (Matthew 11:28-30).
2. The gates of mercy always stand open to the sinner, and they are always open for all of you (Isaiah 55:6-7; John 6:37).

Conclusion. If one made it to the city, refuge was certain. For us the refuge is certain only if we make it into Christ. No person can condemn, harm, or destroy our salvation (John 10:28-29). But however near we feel to Christ, it will be to no avail. We have to be within the ark to avoid the waters, and within Christ to be saved. The Christian must abide in Christ until death to be saved (1 Corinthians 1:8), just like the manslayer had to stay in the city until the death of the high priest to be safe.

The sinner is guilty, condemned, and pursued by the avenger of blood. John 3:36 states that the "wrath of God" abides on him. The imminency of peril and the uncertainty of life demands that you flee to the refuge of salvation.