

Joshua 20-21

Distribution of the Land: Final Arrangements

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Remembering the structure of the Book of Joshua CROSS TAKE DIVIDE SERVE

The Cities of Refuge What are they? What is the purpose of the cities of refuge? What can we learn about God?

- Read Joshua chapter 20 – 21
- The appointment of the cities of refuge follows the God's command to Joshua, which was previously spoken to Moses by the LORD God
- ...*just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you* ... (chapter 1:5) – there is a continuity, consistence, and progress throughout the unfolding of the redemptive history; when God acts to bring about His redemptive plan to fulfillment we see that God's actions reveal His holy character
- Not only is God the same (Moses – Joshua), but He acts to fulfill His sovereign plan and His promises
- The cities of refuge were first commanded to Moses in Numbers 35:9-34 and Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:1-13
- They were to serve as a temporary or ongoing safe place (asylum) for the manslayer (someone who *unintentionally and without designing to do so* extinguished a human life – verse 3)
- God's justice demands that the man without a murderer's heart should not suffer the murderer's fate (Dale Ralph Davies)
- The cities of refuge are the remedy for the danger of *the avenger of the blood* (verse 5), in the heat of the moment, slay the manslayer before all the facts of the case are known and properly adjudicated

- The cities are placed (three on each side of the Jordan river) in such a way that they are easily accessible (the roads to them were to be properly maintained (Deut. 19:3))
- The number of cities and their strategic location reveals the easy accessibility to God's justice
- The cities of refuge, their function, reveal to us the value the LORD God places on human life (man created in God's image – Genesis 9:6): for the victim and for the unintentional manslayer
- The cities were never meant to provide an escape from justice, rather they exemplified God's justice:
 1. The person seeking refuge had to face the trial in front of the congregation (verse 6)
 2. The unintentional manslayer were to remain in the city of refuge until ... (if the case was decided in his favour)
 3. The cities of refuge then served as a place of safety *and* the place of exile:
- The manslayer was to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the current high priest (verse 6)
 - Read Numbers 35:30-34
 - There is no ransom available for taking human life
 - The blood pollutes the land
 - Israel is commanded not to pollute the land because the LORD her God dwells in the land among His people (verse 34)
 - Murder and the unintentional manslaughter pollute the land in the same way. ... *both incur blood guilt and pollute the land, and both require atonement: murder by the execution of the murderer and manslaughter through the natural demise of the high priest* (Gordon J. Wenham)
 - Only the high priest's death can release the offender from banishment and bring him home
 - It is a beautiful allusion and picture of the work of our *merciful and faithful high priest* (Hebrews 2:17) on our behalf (not a wide spread view)
 - Compare to Joshua following Moses (Hebrews 3:5-6)

Levitical Cities The people of Israel, following God's commandment, give 48 cities to the clans of Levites

1. The outline of the chapter (following Dale Ralph Davies):
 - (a) Levitical cities claimed in faith: verses 1-3
 - (b) Levitical cities allotted by lot: verses 4-8
 - (c) Levitical cities listed by name: verses 9-40
2. The Levites follow the example of Caleb and the daughters of Zelophehad – they claim the cities on the authority of the promise of the LORD God (21:1-3)
3. The Levites provide us the yet another example of how to approach God in our prayers
 - (a) The pattern revealed in the Lord's Prayer
 - (b) Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that he who began his work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*
 - (c) James 1:5 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him.*
 - (d) 1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*
4. The Levites serve the LORD (offering sacrifices, teaching the people of Israel), but they need life provisions (shelter, clothing, food, etc.) from the people of Israel (compare with 1 Corinthians 9)
5. Without the land of their own, the Levites live like sojourners; they serve as an illustration of the Christian life; ...*for I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers* (Psalm 39:12); *Our citizenship is in heaven* (Philippians 3:20); *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth* (Hebrews 11:13)
6. the Levites were scattered throughout the land because of their calling (Malachi 2:4-7)
7. *You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ...But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a*

holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:5-9)

God's Fidelity The conclusion of the allotment of the land:

1. The LORD God gave the Israelites all the land that he had promised
2. The LORD God subdued all the enemies of Israel and gave rest to the people of Israel
3. Not one word of all good promises of the LORD God had failed