

Messages from the Wilderness 16 – Jesus Our Refuge

1. Refuge.

As Israel was preparing to enter the promised land, each tribe, according to Num 34, was to receive its inheritance. God had promised the land to Abraham and his descendants and now they were to receive the land as an inheritance.

We have seen earlier in the book of Numbers that Levi was set apart and that their inheritance was the Lord. According to the principle of the firstfruits, Levi was dedicated to the Lord to sanctify the rest of Israel. Just as the Passover lamb spared all the lives of the firstborn, just as Jericho was to be destroyed while all the other cities were taken for spoils, just as the firstborn of everything that openeth the matrix is offered in sacrifice, just as Levi was taken for all of Israel, Jesus was the redemption for all of mankind. By the sacrifice of Levi for Israel, the nation was made holy to the Lord.

As part of their sanctifying ministry, Levi did not have an inheritance of territory in general, but they were not left without a place to live. Within each of the tribes, they were given cities.

Num 35:1-8 And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan *near* Jericho, saying,

2Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give *also* unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them.

3And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts.

4And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, *shall reach* from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about.

5And ye shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits; and the city *shall be* in the midst: this shall be to them the suburbs of the cities.

6And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites *there shall be* six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities.

7So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites *shall be* forty and eight cities: them *shall ye give* with their suburbs.

8And the cities which ye shall give *shall be* of the possession of the children of Israel: from *them that have* many ye shall give many; but from *them that have* few ye shall give few:

every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth.

Even though the Levites were given cities, they were not strictly used for their own purposes. There were 48 cities in all that were to be used as a city of refuge. That is the way of all that God has given us. A portion is dedicated specifically for the Lord, like Levi and the cities of refuge, and the rest is to be used to glorify God just as Israel was. In Deuteronomy, we see the function of the cities of refuge.

Deut 19:1-3 When the LORD thy God hath cut off the nations, whose land the LORD thy God giveth thee, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their cities, and in their houses;

2Thou shalt separate three cities for thee in the midst of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it.

3Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither.

The cities of refuge were only for those who killed accidentally, not knowing the consequences of their actions.

Although the main purpose of cities of refuge was to protect one who accidentally killed, in practice, murderers who killed intentionally went there, too. When a person arrived at a city of refuge, the court sent messengers to bring him in for a hearing. These messengers also acted as bodyguards, to protect him from blood avengers [usually a near kinsman to the victim]. If it was decided that he'd murdered intentionally, he would be judged accordingly; but if the judges determined that it was an unintentional killing, the messengers would return him to the city of refuge.

Ease of access was a major factor in choosing the placement of the cities of refuge. The roads leading to the cities were especially wide by the standards of the time. Other major roads were sixteen cubits (around 8 m/26 ft.) wide, while the roads leading to the cities of refuge had to be at least double that: thirty-two cubits (around 16 m/52 ft.) wide! The routes to the cities of refuge had to be easy for a refugee to navigate. Valleys were raised and hills were leveled to make it easier to travel. Bridges were built where necessary; signs were posted at crossroads; and once a year, in the middle of the month of Adar, the state of the roads was thoroughly examined to make sure they were in good repair. Valleys were raised and hills were leveled. Each city needed to be of average size, located in a populous

trading center, with an independent water source.

Additionally, the cities provided refuge only if the majority of the population was non-murderers, and there was an established court of law in the city. If the general population fell, [priests] and Levites were urged to move in and bolster the neutral population.

Besides the 6 major cities of refuge, all 48 of the Levites' cities were also places of safety for refugees. In addition to the actual city, the two thousand cubits surrounding a city of refuge served as a haven.

The refugee would stay in the city for an unspecified amount of time. He went "free" only when the high priest died...

If the refugee died before the high priest did, he would be buried in the city of refuge. After the high priest died, his body could be moved to a different city for reburial.

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http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2684913/jewish/Cities-of-Refuge-Demystified.htm

Jesus coming John the B The city of refuge was to be easy to get to, the way was clear and well maintained to make sure that the accused would have every advantage to get there. The city of refuge was a place of protection, but it was also a place of imprisonment. The refugee was not free to move around. As long as the high priest was alive he was protected.

2. Judge righteous judgment.

Deut 19:4-6 And this *is* the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that he may live: Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past;

5As when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour, that he die; he shall flee unto one of those cities, and live:

6Lest the avenger of the blood pursue the slayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because the way is long, and slay him; whereas he *was* not worthy of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.

Look especially at vs. 6. The avenger of blood, also translated a near kinsman elsewhere, was someone who was close to the situation. Because he had a personal interest in the victim, this was recognized and provision was made so that he didn't act out of the heat of emotion. The city of refuge provided for protection so that cooler heads would prevail.

John 7:24 Judge not according to the

appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

One of the most common misjudgments made is to start with an assumption, usually emotion driven, and then to look for details that seem to fit the judgment. This involves circular reasoning and you have to assume that you are right in order to prove that you are right. Whenever you feel indignant over something it is time to watch out and be extra careful. The stronger your stand, the more careful you have to be. I guarantee you, that if you are upset with someone you could undoubtedly be able to come up with all kinds of reasons to bolster your *conclusion*. As long as you *like* someone, they are safe. If you don't like someone, the very way they breathe will be proof that they are a monster. Once you convince yourself that you have a case against someone, it takes on a life of its own.

Matt 7:1-4 Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye?

When emotions are hot, that is precisely when it is time to back off, even when you are fearful you are being put to disadvantage.

We have to be careful with our judgment. The idea of refuge and its abuse has been relatively common.

Ancient pagan temples sometimes were used as sanctuary. In Ephesus a person could seek sanctuary until their case could be adjudicated, or tried in court. It came to have the reputation for corruption beyond the idolatrous practices. The respect for the sanctity of the temple made it something like a bank where treasures were stored because invaders would not enter there. At one point, the city attached a rope to the temple and stretched it out to extend sanctuary to the entire city to escape attack. It didn't work, though, since this was seen as an abuse of the practice – they were attacked and looted.

The idea of sanctuary in a place of history persisted in history.

What It Was Like to Seek Asylum in Medieval England (Eric Grundhauser)

[From around 400 to 1600 A.D., sanctuary laws had developed around seeking refuge in a church. In the case of certain crimes, a person would flee to the nearest church] ...at some point,

months or perhaps even years later, when royal judges come into that vicinity to administer justice, that man's crime, and his sanctuary claim, will be reported into the judicial record. Then the last thing that will happen is that the [perpetrator would] "abjure the realm"—that is, he will swear an oath to leave [the country] and never return. Once their sanctuary was resolved in this way, the fugitives would have to forfeit all of their possessions, money, and land to the crown, and [go into exile]...fugitives would be given about 40 days to remain in the church, setting their affairs in order and generally preparing for their journey to exile. While they remained within the prescribed sanctuary grounds, their protection was sacrosanct....As the centuries rolled on, the length of sanctuary afforded to fugitives began to increase, with many churches extending their fugitives indefinite stays. This form of sanctuary began looking pretty attractive to some criminals, who would flock to these church safehouses, essentially forming small dens of thieves under the protection of the church...This began to change the perception of church sanctuaries among the people of England, and was likely the death knell of English sanctuary law... the view of sanctuary's penitent treatment of fugitives seemed only to be rewarding the criminal acts by allowing asylum seekers to avoid the official penalty. [By 1624, sanctuary laws were completely eliminated.]

—http://www.slate.com/blogs/atlas_obscura/2015/07/31/in_medieval_england_fugitives_seeking_sanctuary_needed_only_to_get_themselves.html

Certainly, the abuse of Scripture's intent contributed to the abandonment of sanctuary in houses of worship.

3. Jesus our Refuge.

Heb 7:17-27 For he testifieth, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

18For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.

19For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope *did*; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

20And inasmuch as not without an oath *he was made priest*:

21(For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

22By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

23And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:

24But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.
25Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.
26For such an high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;
27Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

Heb 6:17-20 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath:
18That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:
19Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;
20Whither the forerunner is for us entered, *even* Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Ps 143:9 Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me.

Ps 61:1-4 Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.
2From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock *that* is higher than I.
3For thou hast been a shelter for me, *and* a strong tower from the enemy.
4I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah.

Ps 142:3-7 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.
4I looked on *my* right hand, and beheld, but *there was* no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.
5I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my refuge *and* my portion in the land of the living.
6Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.
7Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

The way of refuge is prepared and made easy to get to. The way is clearly marked. We now are free in Christ who died for

us and lives forever.

As we pass through this wilderness journey, *we* provide the refuge for people to come to Christ. This is especially pictured in the ministry of John the Baptist.

Matt 3:1-6 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

6And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

Just as the Levites and Israel prepared and cleared the way to provide sanctuary, John prepared the way to Jesus. He made the roads flat and clear to get to Jesus by repentance. That is our ministry today.

1. Refuge. Num 35:1-8, Deut 19:1-3
2. Judge righteous judgment. Deut 19:4-6, John 7:24, Matt 7:1-4
3. Jesus our Refuge. Heb 7:17-27, 6:17-20, Ps 143:9, 61:1-4 , 142:3-7