

Cities Of Refuge

by

Ellis P. Forsman

Cities Of Refuge

by

Ellis P. Forsman

October 11, 2011

Cities Of Refuge

Joshua 20:1-9

Joshua 20:1-9, *“The LORD also spake unto Joshua, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses: That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled. And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjatharba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.”*

The cities of refuge were set apart in various regions of Judah and Israel so that one fleeing because he was unaware he had killed someone could seek refuge there from the relatives and friends of the one slain.

Heb. 6:18, *“That 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.”*

Evidently, the writer, Paul, had in mind these cities of refuge when he penned these lines, for each city seems to have some characteristic of the church.

Just as the person who killed his neighbor unawares was sure of safety if he gained entrance into a city of refuge; likewise, the person who is in Christ (the church) has refuge from sin and condemnation.

The sinner has sinned against God; but Jesus has shed His blood for our sins.

Resemblance between the cities of refuge and the church of Jesus Christ

KEDESH means “holy.”

Certainly the church is a holy institution. 1 Pet. 2:9, “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light;*”

“Holy” suggests the idea of “set apart.” 2 Cor. 6:17, “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*”

“Ekklesia” means “called out.”

Col. 1:13-14, “*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*”

Why should we be called out of the world if we are not going to stay out and be separate?

The church is in the world, but not out of the world.

- John 17:14-16, “*I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*”
- Rom. 12:2, “*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*”

“The unclean shall not pass over it.”

- Isaiah 35:8, “*And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.*”

Only those who are holy will be presented unto Christ when He comes again.

Eph. 5:27, “*That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*”

“SHECHEM” means “shoulder.”

What do you think of when you think of shoulder? “Support,” for you have undoubtedly heard it said, “Put your shoulder to it.”

The church is the “support” of the truth. 1 Tim. 3:15, *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”*

- “pillar and support.” (Strong’s)
- “HEBRON” “alliance,” “league,” or “company.”

All of these definitions convey the idea of fellowship or partnership. The term “*fellowship*” is used in the Bible in three senses:

Joint-participation. Phil. 1:3-5, *“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;”*

Association.

- Acts 2:42, *“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*
- Acts 2:46, *“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,”*

Contribution. 2 Cor. 8:1-4, *“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”*

“BEZER” means “strong” or “fortress.”

The church is a strong fortress, a fortification against the powers of evil. In Christ and His church we have refuge from the ravages of the tempter.

It is impossible for the fiery darts of the devil to penetrate us, or the combined forces of evil to injure us if we abide in His word.

Eph. 6:13-17, *“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all,*

to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

In Christ and His church we have refuge from death.

- Matt. 16:18, *“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*
- Rev. 14:13, *“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”*

“RAMOTH” means “height” or “elevation.”

The church of Jesus Christ occupies a high and exalted position. Matt. 5:14, *“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.”*

There is no institution on earth so elevated in God’s estimation as the church.

There are many organizations (commercial, political, social, and religious) of international prestige; but the church has the exalted favor and affection of God.

There is no honor as great as being a humble citizen in the kingdom of God. Matt. 11:11, *“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*

Yet all can attain to this position of honor.

Many people have gone to the top of the Washington Monument in Washington, D. C. As they ascended to its top, they could look down on the capitol city, and the magnificent scenery along the stretch of the Potomac.

The church of our Lord is truly our “Ramoth,” or “elevation.” The only way for us to be lifted above sin, and above ourselves, is to be lifted up into the presence of the redeemed in Jesus Christ.

“GOLAN” means “circle.”

A circle expresses completion, and in Christ we are complete. Col. 2:10, *“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.”*

The church is the fullness of Christ. Eph. 1:22-23, *“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”*

And Christ is the fullness of God. Col. 2:9, *“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”*

Hence, in the church of Jesus Christ you have the fullness of God and of Christ. 2 John 1:9, *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”*

In Christ you have every virtue, principle, and truth to be found in any other organization.

You don't have to belong to this or that society or fraternity to have every principle of good, for you are complete in Christ. Col. 2:10, *“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.”*

You have everything in Christ to equip you as a Christian. Eph. 1:3, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”*

To be in Christ is to be in His church.

- Gal. 3:27, *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*
- 1 Cor. 12:13, *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”*
- Col. 1:18, *“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”*

Some facts about these cities of refuge

The road into them was smooth and plain, accessible to all.

The way of holiness is made plain to all.

- Isaiah 35:8, “*And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.*”
- Micah. 4:2, “*And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*”

Posts with signs and inscriptions were set up directing the way for all.

God has given us signposts of direction, pointing to this highway of holiness which leads into the refuge in Christ Jesus. Psalms 119:105, “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*”

The entire Bible comprises posts of direction. The Old Testament told the Jews that Christ would come.

- The Four Gospels refer to the fact that He did come.
- The Acts of the apostles contains the history of conversions, telling us how to get into the church.
- The Epistles of the New Testament tell us how to live the Christian life and how to remain in the refuge of Jesus Christ.
- The Revelation of John is a description of the home of the soul, which awaits those who have “*washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*”

These cities were reached from all parts of the country. Likewise, the gospel is for all men.

- Mark 16:15, “*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*”
- Titus 2:11-12, “*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying*

ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;”

- Rev. 22:17, *“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”*

The cities were well supplied with water and all kinds of provisions.

Also, in Christ we have *“all spiritual blessings.”* Eph. 1:3, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:”*

The gates stood open day and night.

- Isaiah 55:6-7, *“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”*
- John 6:37, *“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”*
- Rev. 3:7, *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;”*

Hence, heaven has done everything it possibly can for the redemption of man, and if he is not saved it will be his own fault.

Conclusion

“All things are ready.” The gates are always open.

The one who desired to enter into one of the cities of refuge could not be saved from the pursuer until he got within the gates of the city.

Jesus says, *“Now.”* 2 Cor. 6:2, *“(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)”*

But Satan says, *“Some other time.”*

Jesus says, “*Today; hear my voice.*” Heb. 4:7, “*Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*”

But Satan says, “Wait; procrastinate.”

Will you flee for refuge in Christ today?

How can a person flee for refuge in Christ? By entering His church. The following are the steps necessary to make that happen:

- **Faith.** Heb. 11:6, “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” When I was in high school (I was about 17 years old), a neighbor boy my same age told me he was an atheist. Since I had been baptized, I took the opportunity to talk to him about the scriptures. He told me that he could see that living the life of a Christian was good, but he wasn’t sure if he believed there was a God. But to be on the safe side, maybe he should go to church, and when he dies and stands before God (if there is a God) on the day of Judgment (if there is a Judgment), maybe if God sees that he has gone to church and lived a good life that God would send him to heaven (if there is a heaven), and not to hell (if there is a hell). I told him, “It doesn’t work that way. You have to believe in Him with all your heart or you cannot please Him.”
- **Repentance.** Acts 2:38, “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*” Acts 11:18, “*... Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*” If while you were sleeping, you heard a noise in the other room, and you think to yourself, “There’s a burglar in my house!” So you reach for your cell phone, and as quietly as you can, you call the police, tell them there is a burglar in your house, and you give them your address. Soon, you heard them arrive and capture the thief. He yells, “I’m sorry; I’m sorry!” What is he sorry for? He is sorry that he got caught; not that he stole. In true repentance the thief would be sorry that he ever stole and wants to change his life so that he would never steal again. That is true repentance. It is a change of mind that brings about a change of action. That is what we have to do before we can become a Christian.
- **Confession.** Rom. 10:9-10, “*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that*

God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” What do we confess? That we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Note that in the above scriptures that faith (believing), repentance, and confession are “**UNTO**” righteousness, life, or salvation. “Unto” means toward something; not that one has already attained.

- **Baptism.** It is baptism where righteousness, life, and salvation are attained. Jesus, himself, was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, “*But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” (Matt. 3:14-17). Jesus was baptized because God said it was the right thing to do. Did you see how pleased God was about Jesus being baptized? Jesus also said “*it becometh **us** to fulfil all righteousness.*” We are baptized because it fulfills His righteousness, not because it is of our righteousness.

In fact, if we are not baptized, we are still in our sins. “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*” (Acts 2:38). Peter, what did you say the reason of baptism is? “for the remission of sins”. Why would anyone want to leave out the step that removes our sins?

Jesus commanded that to reach salvation we must be baptized. “*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth **and** is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*” (Mark 16:15-16).

Ananias told Saul (before he was rename Paul) the very same thing, “*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*” (Acts 22:16). Baptism is a requirement given by God.

Baptism is called a burial. “*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should*

walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4). Our old man is to be dead to us. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” (Rom. 6:3-6). Baptism is God’s blueprint for applying the blood of Christ in our lives by baptism. We are free from our old sins only when we are baptized.

This doesn’t mean “sprinkling. The scripture above says baptism is a burial. We don’t take a dead body to the cemetery and sprinkle a little dirt over it; we bury the body.

If you have not yet taken refuge in Christ, won't you consider it today?

