

# CITIES OF REFUGE



## **MATTHEW 5:14-16**

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

# **A CITY ON A HILL**

- To what city was Jesus referring?
- Why a “city”?
- What made these cities so important?

## **JOSHUA 20:2-3**

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.

## **JOSHUA 20:4**

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.

## JOSHUA 20:5-6

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.

## **JOSHUA 20:7-8**

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.

# **WHERE WERE THESE CITIES?**

- (6) cities were designated for refuge
- (3) east of Jordan and (3) west of Jordan
- Positioned for easy access to all in Israel
- Each city was within a day's journey
- Cities were primarily located on high ground (hill) for easy visibility
- Constructed from white limestone for added visibility day or night



# **WHY THE NEED FOR REFUGE?**

- Cities offered refuge to any person who had accidentally killed someone
- The accused would flee the nearest kinsman of the deceased (avenger of blood) who was permitted, in the case of murder, to exact revenge on the guilty party
- Entrance was based on confession
- The city was the place of the trial

# **THE VERDICT**

- If found innocent, the accused would remain under the protection of the city until his death or the death of the high priest, in which circumstance, the accused would return home free as the priest's death was counted as his own
- If found guilty, the accused would be turned over to the avenger of blood

# **REQUIREMENTS FOR A CITY OF REFUGE**

- Positioned for equal access to all in Israel (Israelites and foreigners)
- Each city had road signs providing clear direction to its location
- The priests were tasked with ensuring the roadway to the city remained clear
- The gates were never closed

# **PARALLELS BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE CITIES**

- God, not man, appointed the cities before there was a need for them (1 Peter 1:19-20)

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:  
Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

# **PARALLELS BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE CITIES**

- Being born into a sin nature is not our fault, but choosing to remain in that nature is (Psalm 51:5)

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

# PARALLELS BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE CITIES

- The death of the High Priest paid the penalty for the wrongs of the accused (Isaiah 53:5-6)

But he *was* wounded for our transgressions,  
*he was* bruised for our iniquities: the  
chastisement of our peace *was* upon him;  
and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have  
turned every one to his own way; and the  
LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

# NAMES OF THE CITIES

- *Kadesh* - Righteousness, a refuge for the unclean
- *Shechem* - Shoulder, a refuge for the one burdened with sin
- *Hebron* - Fellowship, a refuge for the one alone in their sin
- *Bezer* - Fortress, a safe refuge
- *Ramoth* - Heights, a refuge for the sinner brought low
- *Golan* - Joy, a refuge for the downtrodden

## 2 SAMUEL 2:22-23

And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?

Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth *rib*, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, *that* as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still.



## 2 SAMUEL 3:27-28

And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth *rib*, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.

And afterward when David heard *it*, he said, I and my kingdom *are* guiltless before the LORD for ever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner:

## 2 SAMUEL 3:32-34

And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept.

And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth?

Thy hands *were* not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him.

# **ABNER AND THE CITY OF REFUGE**

- Abner, after multiple warnings, slays Asahel who has been pursuing the older, more experienced general
- Asahel disregards the warnings and is killed when Abner extends his spear rearward, killing the young soldier with, not the spear tip, but the wooden shaft

# **ABNER AND THE CITY OF REFUGE**

- Abner is within a few steps of Hebron, his refuge, when he is distracted by Joab and lured away from the safety of its gates
- Abner is slain just outside the gates of the city
- David mourns Abner, questioning the foolishness of the general in being lured from safety by the enemy
- Abner was not bound and dragged away, but made a decision to turn from the safety provided him

# **THE ROAD TO REFUGE**

- As priests, we should ensure the road to refuge is clear from obstructions
- Road signs directing all to refuge should be clearly marked
- Refuge should be accessible to all regardless of background or circumstance
- In the end, it is the choice of those in need of refuge to enter the gates