

**BOOK OF JOSHUA  
THE CITIES OF REFUGE  
JOSHUA 15-19; 20:1-9**

**Introduction**

Look at *Joshua 13:13, 22* first to see some important things here.

*Chapters 15-19* of the book of **JOSHUA** deal with the consignment of land to the tribes of **ISRAEL** that settled on the west side of the **JORDAN RIVER**.

*Chapter 15* deals with **JUDAH'S** portion.

*Chapter 16* deals with **EPHRAIM'S** portion.

*Chapter 17* deals with **MANASSEH'S** portion

*Chapters 18 and 19* deal with the portions of **SIMEON, ZEBULUN, ISSACHAR, ASHER, NAPHTALI,** and **DAN**.

**Let's look at some highlights of this section:**

In *chapter 14* we saw how **CALEB** was given the city of **HEBRON**. In *chapter 15*, we are given more of the story. (Read *Joshua 15:13-14*)

The land that **CALEB** wanted was **GIANT** country, and he was as ready as he was 45 years earlier to take on those **GIANTS!**

**Now look at Joshua 15:15-19.**

**CALEB** didn't want just anybody to marry his daughter. He wanted a man of courage who thought she was worth fighting for. He found just that in **OTHNIEL**.

**Now look at Joshua 17:14-15.**

**EPHRAIM** was complaining because they had not been given a very large portion of land.

**Now look at Joshua 17:17-18.**

**JOSHUA** was saying, "*If you don't like what you have, go up and possess the mountains. But remember there are giants in the land. You'll have to work; you'll have to fight. It's going to cost you something.*"

There is a lesson for us here to! If we don't like where we are **SPIRITUALLY, STOP COMPLAINING AND START CONQUERING!** It takes **WORK** to lay hold of **SPIRITUAL POSSESSIONS** and **BLESSINGS**. And there are **ENEMIES** who will try to trip us up if they can in our quest to obtain those **SPIRITUAL POSSESSIONS** and **BLESSINGS!**

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**Next look at Joshua 18:1.**

The children of **ISRAEL** pitched the **TABERNACLE** at a town in **EPHRAIM** called **SHILOH!** That would not be the permanent home of the **TABERNACLE** because it was not in the center of the land. Nevertheless, this would be the home of the **TABERNACLE** until **GOD** chose a permanent location through **KING DAVID**.

**Now look at Joshua 18:2-3.**

Here we see seven tribes who were just kind of standing around with their hands in their pockets (so to speak). **JOSHUA** in so many words said, "*How long are you going to 'lolly gag' around?*"

This is also a challenge to us. **GOD** has made available to us all **SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS** in **CHRIST JESUS**. But way too many **BELIEVERS** are slack when it comes to **CLAIMING THEM!**

**GOD** has been so good to us . **HE** has bestowed on us **HIS GRACE, MERCY, LOVE, and GOODNESS!** Why then are so many **BELIEVERS** "*lolly gagging*" around when it comes to their **CHRISTIAN WALK** then? Why not move in and **POSSESS OUR POSSESSIONS HE** has for us?

**Now look at Joshua 19:49-51.**

Here we see the man of **GOD** who led the conquest receiving his inheritance. I'm told that the place that **JOSHUA** chose was a **BARREN** place and one of the worst spots **JOSHUA** could have chosen. It was similar to the backside of a desert. This says something about both **JOSHUA** and the children of **ISRAEL!**

**JOSHUA** had character similar to that of **ABRAHAM** who took what was left after **LOT** chose the well-watered plains for himself.

But note that the **ISRAELITES** were perfectly willing to let this man of **GOD** have a small, **BARREN** place as his portion. You think they would have insisted that because of all he had done for them that he take one of the **CHOICE** spots in which to settle.

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Next we come to where we want to be this evening—Joshua 20:1-9.

As **BELIEVERS** we know that **GOD** is our **PROTECTOR**, **HE** is our **HIDING PLACE** and our **REFUGE** in the midst of a dangerous world.

*Proverbs 18:10—“The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”*

Here in *Joshua 20*, we find that **GOD** instructs **JOSHUA** to set up **CITIES OF REFUGE**.

After the flood, **GOD** laid down a basic rule to **NOAH** that anyone who murderously shed the blood of others should pay for their crime with their own blood. *Genesis 9:6—“Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”*

Understand that **GOD** is the **ONE** that instituted the **DEATH PENALTY** for certain crimes. **HE** is also the **ONE** who established the **INSTITUTION OF GOVERNMENT** to carry out the **DEATH PENALTY!**

But we also need to understand that **GOD** made a difference between premeditated murder and the unpremeditated killing of another person.

Before these **CITIES OF REFUGE** were established, if a man or woman killed someone and the death wasn't premeditated (*e.g. A person killed someone by accident*), then the slayer could seek **REFUGE** in the **SANCTUARY** of the **TABERNACLE**, physically holding onto the **ALTAR** as a place of **SAFETY** and **PROTECTION**.

*Exodus 21:12-14—“He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die”*

This worked well during the forty years that the nation of **ISRAEL** wandered in the wilderness, and during the seven years of military **CONQUEST** in **CANAAN**, because the **TABERNACLE** was physically at the center of that nation.

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So any **ISRAELITE** could flee into the **TABERNACLE** and find a place of **REFUGE** there.

But once the tribes were settled throughout the land of **CANAAN** in their respective tribal inheritances, they needed places of **REFUGE** that were scattered out among them. So **GOD** ordained six **CITIES OF REFUGE**—places of **COMPASSION**, where anyone who had unintentionally killed another person could flee.

In **ISRAELITE** society there was no police force to investigate crimes. It was the **moral responsibility** of the family member who was closest to the victim to **investigate and avenge the murder**. In our text, he is called the **AVENGER OF BLOOD**.

But this person's own emotional subjectivity, passion, and anger at the loss of their family member could cloud their judgment, and they might not want to go to the trouble of figuring out whether it was premeditated murder or not.

It was possible that they might end up avenging the death by killing someone who wasn't even guilty of a capital crime. That's why these **CITIES OF REFUGE** were needed.

*Verse 7* lists the three cities west of the **JORDAN** from north to south, and *verse 8* lists the three cities east of the **JORDAN** from south to north.

**SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE CITIES OF REFUGE.**

**1. The Cities Of REFUGE Were To Be Strategically Located So They Would Be Easily Accessible.**

The land of **ISRAEL** is only about the size of the state of Maryland, so no one could ever be very far away from a **CITY OF REFUGE**.

**GOD COMMANDED** that the nation build highways to these **CITIES OF REFUGE!** *Deuteronomy 19:3—“Thou 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.”*

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History tells us that these highways were maintained so that nobody was ever hindered in getting to these cities.

Bridges were built across every ravine that the highways came to, so that the person running for **REFUGE** wouldn't have to waste time climbing to the bottom of the ravine and then up the other side.

The highways were rebuilt every spring after the heavy winter rains so that the road surface would be smooth and easy to run on.

Also, at every crossroads or intersection on these highways, there were big, bold signs pointing the way with the word **REFUGE** in large letters.

*The Cities Of Refuge Were To Be Strategically Located So They Would Be Easily Accessible.*

**2. The Gates Of The Cities Of REFUGE Were To Always Be Open.**  
24 hour access was important, if you were on the run from an **AVENGER OF BLOOD!**

That's because if someone had run for thirty or forty miles to get to the city, and then they couldn't get in, there wouldn't be a **REFUGE!**

**3. The Cities Of REFUGE Were To Be Well Stocked To Provide For Any Fugitives Who Came To Stay For However Long They Might Need To Be There.**

It was not only a place of guaranteed legal protection, but also a place of material provision for all their needs! Housing and food were available for them.

**4. REFUGE Was Only Guaranteed As Long As They Remained In The City.**

If the person left the city, the **AVENGER** could take their life. If they went outside the city once they got there, the city could do nothing to protect them.

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*Numbers 35:26-28 But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood: Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession."*

**5. The Cities Were Designated For All The People Of ISRAEL, Including The Stranger (i.e. Gentiles.)**

The same **JUSTICE**, the same **PROTECTION** and **PROVISION**, the same **ATONING GRACE** were free to all.

What **GOD** did in establishing these **CITIES OF REFUGE** was setting the wheels in motion for what would ultimately be what we call "*the due process of law.*"

Our present legal system finds its roots in this kind of **BIBLICAL** teaching that declares that a person is innocent until proven guilty.

Until everything was investigated by the **ELDERS** and **JUSTICE** was handed down in a full hearing before the entire congregation, he enjoyed the security of presumed innocence.

**Conclusion**

**SO, WHAT IS THE APPLICATION FOR US? JESUS Is Our REFUGE!**  
*Psalms 61:3—“For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.”*

These **CITIES OF REFUGE** were only a shadow of the **TRUE REFUGE** that is available in **CHRIST!** Once we **TRUST CHRIST** we are **ETERNALLY SECURE** in **HIM!**