

## **Joshua 20:1-9**

From our human perspective, accidents happen.

At times, unintentional acts can even result in the death of another individual.

This is the sad and tragic reality that lay behind God's appointment of certain cities in the promised land as places of refuge to protect individuals.

### **Summary**

**Joshua 20:1-9 contains a list of six cities within Israel that served as places of protection for those guilty of manslaughter showing us that God is a God of mercy and grace who provides refuge and safety to all who will flee to the appointed place.**

#### **1. Acknowledged Reality vv. 1-3**

Given that human accidents resulting in unintended death happen, the

Lord spoke to Joshua and had him instruct the people of Israel to appoint certain cities as places of refuge (**Josh 21:1-2; cf. Num 35; Deut 4:41-43; 19:2-9**).

The Bible recognizes the diversity of ethical situations we encounter in this world.

Someone guilty of manslaughter, however, should be and could be kept safe from this individual and from the penalty of death (**Josh 20:3**).

#### **2. Accidental Death vv. 4-6**

If you lived in ancient Israel and unintentionally caused a death, you would flee to the nearest city of refuge and explain your case to the elders who sat at the gate, receive asylum until your case could be adjudicated (**Josh 20:4-6**). If the accused proved that the death he caused happened accidentally, then the congregation would declare his innocence and protect him from retaliation at the hand of the avenger of blood. He must then remain in the city of refuge until the death of the then current high priest.

#### **3. Important Lessons**

First, the regulations for these cities of refuge stress the importance of life.

The Lord protected both the manslayer from a penalty he did not deserve, and the avenger from wrongfully exacting punishment. God values life and we should too.

Secondly, these cities of refuge also teach us about the importance of justice.

The principle of 'innocent until proven guilty,' reflected the rules for these cities.

This principle of justice should be a cause of great thanksgiving to God and one we practice (WLC Q&A 145).

**Thirdly**, these cities also demonstrate the importance of mercy.

God reached out in love and grace to the manslayer and spared his life because He is a merciful God (**Deut. 4:31; James 5:11**). Are you a merciful person?

#### **4. Refuge Cities vv. 7-9**

Three refuge cities lay on each side of the River Jordan (**Josh 20:7-8**)

Each of these cities was also a city of the Levites (**Josh 21**).

When an individual fled to one of the refuge cities for safety, he would be living side-by-side with priests and others who served as staff for the tabernacle.

The chapter concludes with a summary statement (**Josh 20:9**).

The refuge cities were set apart for both Israelites and for strangers. God was just as concerned with justice for Gentiles in the land as he was for his own covenant people. Our attitude, to seek justice and to show mercy, should be extended not only to believers but to those outside the church as well (**Gal 6:10**).

### 5. Flee for Refuge

The cities of refuge not only teach us principles of justice and compassion, they also have a redemptive significance. After Joshua 20, refuge focuses on the Lord as the real and lasting shelter of his people (**Psalms 2:12; Isa. 14:32**).

On at least two occasions the reference to God as a refuge points, specifically, to the future and the coming Messianic age (**Isa. 4:5-6; Zeph. 3:11-12**).

If God is our refuge, then like the manslayer we must flee to him.

To flee is to seek safety and salvation. To flee is to trust.

Again and again, the OT Scriptures speak of God as our refuge, our sanctuary, the one who provides us with shelter, safety, and salvation (**2 Sam. 22:2-4**).

As God's revelation progressively unfolds into the New Testament, it becomes clear that the true and lasting refuge of our souls is the Lord Jesus Christ. Amid warnings against apostasy and the assurance of God's covenant promises, the book of Hebrews describes Christians as those who have fled to Christ for refuge (**Heb 6:18**). All those, therefore, who seek refuge in Jesus for salvation have a sure and steadfast hope because as our great high priest, he by his death and resurrection has entered into the holiest place of all and thereby secured our everlasting salvation (**Heb 6:19-20**).

When the manslayer found refuge in one of the six sanctuary cities in Israel, he had to live there until the death of the high priest (**Josh 20:6**).

That regulation foreshadowed a NT parallel: only through the death of their High Priest are believers set free.

We can go home, to our eternal, heavenly home because Jesus has died.

Here is the Gospel good news: Through the death of another we are set at liberty.

Have you been set free?

Do you know the mercy of God in Christ so beautifully pictured in the cities of refuge? If not, then flee to Christ!

Cast yourself upon Him for the salvation He freely offers in the gospel and you will be saved. Jesus, Himself, promised: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (**John 6:37**).