
JOSHUA 20:1 The LORD spoke to Joshua, saying,

Joshua is commanded to appoint cities of refuge, Jos 20:1, Jos 20:2. The purpose of their institution, Jos 20:3-6. Three cities are appointed in the promised land, Jos 20:7; and three on the east side of Jordan, Jos 20:8, Jos 20:9.

JOSHUA 20:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'Assign the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you by Moses,

Verse 2

Cities of refuge - An institution of this kind was essentially necessary wherever the patriarchal law relative to the right of redemption and the avenging of blood was in force; we have already seen that the nearest of kin to a deceased person had not only the right of redeeming an inheritance that had been forfeited or alienated, but had also authority to slay on the spot the person who had slain his relative. Now, as a man might casually kill another against whom he had no ill-will, and with whom he had no quarrel, and might have his life taken away by him who was called the avenger of blood, though he had not forfeited his life to the law; therefore these privileged cities were appointed, where the person might have protection till the cause had been fully heard by the magistrates, who certainly had authority to deliver him up to the avenger, if they found, on examination, that he was not entitled to this protection. On this subject see the notes on Num 35:11 to the end.

JOSHUA 20:3 that the man slayer who kills any person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there. They shall be to you for a refuge from the avenger of blood.

JOSHUA 20:4 He shall flee to one of those cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city. They shall take him into the city with them, and give him a place, that he may live among them.

JOSHUA 20:5 If the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver up the man slayer into his hand; because he struck his neighbour unintentionally, and didn't hate him before.

JOSHUA 20:6 He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgement, until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days. Then the man slayer shall return, and come to his own city, and to his own house, to the city he fled from."

JOSHUA 20:7 They set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba (the same is Hebron) in the hill country of Judah.

Verse 7

They appointed Kedesh in Galilee - The cities of refuge were distributed through the land at proper distances from each other that they might be convenient to every part of the land; and it is said they were situated on eminences, that they might be easily seen at a distance, the roads leading to them being broad, even, and always kept in good repair. In the concluding note on Num 35:33 it has been stated that these cities were a type of our blessed Lord, and that the apostle refers to them as such, Heb 6:17, Heb 6:18. Hence their names have been considered as descriptive of some character or office of Christ. I shall give each and its signification, and leave the application to others.

1. קדש Kedesh, from kadash, to separate or set apart, because it implies the consecration of a person or thing to the worship or service of God alone; hence to make or be holy, and hence Kedesh, holiness, the full consecration of a person to God.
2. שכם Shechem, from shacham, to be ready, forward, and diligent; hence Shechem, the shoulder, because of its readiness to bear burdens, prop up, sustain, etc., and from this ideal meaning it has the metaphorical one of Government.
3. חברון chebron; Hebron, from חבר chabar, to associate, join, conjoin, unite as friends; and hence chebron, fellowship, friendly association, or with the diminutive nun, the little fellow-ship or association.
4. בצר Bezer, from batsar, to restrain, enclose, shut up, or encompass with a wall; and hence the goods or treasure thus secured, and hence a fortified place, a fortress.
5. רמות Ramoth, from ראם raam, to be raised, made high or exalted, and hence Ramoth, high places, eminences.
6. גולן Golan, from גלה galah, to remove, transmigrate, or pass away; hence Golan, a transmigration or passage. Some derive it from גל gal, to rejoice, hence Golan, rejoicing or exultation.

A person of the spirit and turn of Origen could preach the whole Gospel from these particulars. Kedesh and Hebron were at the two extremities of the promised land; one was in Galilee, the other in the tribe of Judah, both in mountainous countries; and Shechem was in the tribe of Ephraim, nearly in the middle, between both. Bezer was on the east side of Jordan, in the plain, opposite to Jericho. Ramoth was about the midst of the country occupied by the two tribes and a half, about the middle of the mountains of Gilead. Golan was the capital of a district called Gaulonitis, in the land of Bashan, towards the southern extremity of the lot of Manasseh.

JOSHUA 20:8 Beyond the Jordan at Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness in the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh.

JOSHUA 20:9 These were the appointed cities for all the children of Israel, and for the alien who lives among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stands before the congregation.

Verse 9

For all the children of Israel, and for the stranger - As these typified the great provision which God was making for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, hence the stranger as well as the Israelite

had the same right to the benefits of these cities of refuge. Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles?

Until he stood before the congregation - The judges and elders of the people, in trying civil and criminal causes, always sat; the persons who came for judgment, or who were tried, always stood; hence the expressions so frequent in Scripture, Standing before the Lord, the judges, the elders, etc. It is worthy of remark that the cities of refuge were given to the Levites; see the following chapter, Joshua 21 (note). The sacrificial system alone afforded refuge; and while the suspected person was excluded from his family, etc., he had the advantage of being with those whose business it was to instruct the ignorant, and comfort the disconsolate. Thus he had the means constantly at hand, by a careful use of which he might grow wiser and better; secure the favor of his God, and a lot of blessedness in a better world. How wise, equal, and beneficent are all the institutions of God!