

## A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 20

- Vv. 1- 6 *God's instructions to Joshua.* Joshua walked humbly in the sight of God. He waited for instructions from his Heavenly Guide before he proceeded to lead the children of Israel in the direction they should travel. When Joshua was selected to succeed Moses, God told Moses that Joshua should stand before Eleazar, the priest, who would ask counsel for him before the Lord (Numbers 27:21). No doubt, Joshua and Eleazar worked together in this; but it was Joshua who took the initiative.
- Vv. 7- 9 *The appointment of the cities of refuge.* God had spoken unto Moses while the children of Israel were in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho, and commanded him to select three cities to serve as cities of refuge. Six cities in all were to be appointed, but Moses was to select three cities on the east side of the Jordan. At that time, God defined the difference between murder and manslaughter and laid down the rules and regulations for the protection of those who might be falsely accused of murder (Numbers 35). Moses had selected three cities—Bezer, Ramoth-Gilead, and Golan. When the tribes were settled under Joshua, three more cities were to be selected; and the three which Moses appointed were to be recognized.

## JOSHUA

### LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *"Thy will be done."* Every Christian should learn to pray as Jesus taught His disciples in the Model Prayer. We should learn to say, "Thy will be done." We should learn to pray even more meaningfully as Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. There He prayed, "not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). Joshua walked with the Lord. God commanded him, and Joshua did the Lord's bidding. His delight was in the law of the Lord. His meat was to do the will of God.
2. *A city of refuge.* Although there is no Biblical reference to the cities of refuge being a type of Christ, the Christian cannot read this arrangement for protection of the innocent without thinking of how he is able to flee to Jesus for refuge. In a sense, he finds this same refuge in the church. Although evil was not to go unpunished, God was careful that the innocent did not suffer unjustly. In the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament, God's justice is tempered with mercy. He has made gracious provision for the salvation of those who flee to Jesus Christ for refuge.
3. *Life is sacred.* Throughout the history of mankind God has made it clear that a murderer should not go unpunished. God stated an everlasting principle when He told those coming out of the ark after the flood that whosoever shed man's blood by man should his blood be shed (Genesis 9:5). The arrangements made in Joshua 20 followed the prescriptions laid down in Numbers 35. These prescriptions called for the slaying of the murderer, but they also provided for the protection of those who were innocent of guilt.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

*God's Instructions to Joshua 20:1-6*

The Lord also spake unto Joshua, saying,

2 Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses:

3 That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood.

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.

5 And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbor unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime.

6 And he shall dwell in this 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.

*1. How did God speak to Joshua? 20:1*

When Moses was told to select Joshua as a successor, he instructed him to set Joshua before Eleazar, the priest. God said Joshua would stand regularly before Eleazar, the priest, who would ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord (Numbers 27:21). The Urim and Thummim were a part of the high priest's garments and were instruments by which the Lord made known His

will (Exodus 28:30). Joshua normally must have asked Eleazar to inquire for him concerning the Lord's will, and it is probable that at the time of the appointing of the cities of refuge, God's will was revealed in this way.

2. *What instructions had God given to Moses?* 20:1b

Before the children of Israel left Sinai, God had revealed how He would appoint a place for anyone who killed another man accidentally (Exodus 21:13). Later, God had revealed how He would select cities from among those assigned to the Levites as their inheritance (Numbers 35:6, 11, 14). The Levites were to receive a total of forty-eight cities, and six of these were to be designated as cities of refuge. Still later, God revealed how the children of Israel were to prepare a road to lead to these cities. They were to divide their borders into three equal parts on each side of the Jordan so that no Israelites would be at any great distance from a city of refuge (Deuteronomy 19:2, 9). These facts were all well known to the Israelites, and now it was Joshua's task to implement the designation of these cities.

3. *What purpose did these cities serve?* 20:3

The cities of refuge were selected for the protection of those who killed someone but did not actually commit murder (see Numbers 35:9-34). The roads leading to the cities were always kept in thorough repair and according to tradition were required to be at least thirty-two cubits broad. All obstructions were removed. Nothing was to be allowed to stay the fugitive's foot or hinder his speed. No hill was left ungraded and no river was unbridged. At every turning were posts erected bearing the word "refuge" to guide the unhappy man in flight. When the manslayer was settled in such a city, he was given a suitable habitation; and the citizens were to teach him some trade by which he might support himself.

4. *Who was the avenger of blood?* 20:5

From the time of Noah, God had said the blood of a murderer would be required. He said that it would be required "at the hand of every man's brother" (Genesis 9:5). Normally, the brother of a man who was slain would set out to punish the man who had killed his brother. Joab thus attempted to avenge the killing of his brother, Asahel (II Samuel 2:18-24; cf. II Samuel 3:27; see also II Samuel 14:4-7). If the slain man's immediate brother was dead, the nearest relative then became the "avenger of blood."

5. *How could they tell the difference between a manslayer and a murderer?* 20:5

Certain guidelines were laid down in the law for distinguishing between a man who had committed manslaughter and a man who had committed murder. If a man struck another man following premeditation, the killing was judged to be murder. If he smote him with an instrument of iron or with a stone in his hand, he was guilty of murder. The same was true if he struck a man with a weapon of wood. On the other hand, if the head flew off his ax and struck another man, the congregation would have judged him guilty only of manslaughter (Deuteronomy 19:5; cf. Numbers 35:1-34). When a man was guilty of murder, he was delivered up to the avenger of blood; and the murderer was slain.

6. *How long was a fugitive allowed to stay in a city of refuge?* 20:6

If a man was judged innocent of murder, he was allowed to take up residence in the city of refuge. If he went out of the city of refuge, he went at his own risk. Of course, if the avenger of blood found him out of the city and killed him, the avenger of blood himself would have been guilty of committing murder. He, in turn, would have been tried and judgment passed on his acts.

The man who lived in the city of refuge was to stay there until the death of the high priest. At that time, he was free to go. Such an arrangement seems rather arbitrary to us, but it would make provision for the emptying of these cities of the fugitives from time to time.

*The Appointment of the Cities of Refuge 20:7-9*

7 And they appointed Kedesh in Gaililee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah.

8 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.

9 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.

*7. What three cities were selected west of the Jordan?  
20:7*

West of the Jordan, Joshua selected Kedesh in the tribe of Naphtali, Shechem in the tribe of Ephraim, and Hebron in the tribe of Judah. Kedesh lay just north and west of the waters of Merom and was in the very far north part of the land allotted to the children of Israel. This would be readily accessible to people who lived in the borders of the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali. Shechem was in the hill country of Ephraim and was west of the Jordan River about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Men who lived in the broad expanses of the territory of the tribes of Manas-

seh and Ephraim would have ready access to Shechem as a city of refuge. Hebron was west of the Dead Sea about halfway down the length of the sea. This location was situated where it would be within easy reach of those who lived in the borders of the tribes of Dan, Benjamin, Simeon, and Judah.

8. *What cities were selected east of the Jordan?* 20:8

East of the Jordan, Joshua selected Golan in the land belonging to the children of Manasseh, Ramoth-Gilead in the land belonging to the children of Gad, and Bezer in the land belonging to the children of Reuben. Golan was in the north part of the land beyond the Jordan, Ramoth-Gilead was in the center, and Bezer was in the south. Once again, provision was made so that no person living east of the Jordan would have too far to go to get to a city of refuge. Each one of the three tribes had a city of refuge within its borders.

9. *What strangers sojourned in Israel?* 20:9a

When the children of Israel left Egypt, a mixed multitude went up with them (Exodus 12:38). This mixed multitude must have been a group of natives of Egypt and other countries who cast their lots with the children of Israel. When the laws were given to Israel, specific notice was made of these people; and it was clearly ordered that the laws which governed Israel's society were to apply to all who lived among them. There was not a separate law for men who were native Israelites as opposed to those who were strangers among them. Even this law with regard to murder was to be enforced on strangers in their midst, as well as upon those who were native Israelites.

10. *In what sense did the fugitive stand "before the congregation"?* 20:9b

The fugitive was to declare his cause in the ears of the elders of the city of refuge (verse four). These elders were to receive the fugitive into the city and give him a

place where he might dwell among them. If the avenger of blood came to the city, these men were not to deliver the slayer to the avenger of blood. When the fugitive's case had been heard and judgment had been rendered, the elders were to see that the proper execution of the judgment was implemented. In this sense, a fugitive "stood before the congregation." The elders of the city of refuge and the inhabitants of that city passed judgment on behalf of all Israel.

### TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 20

1. Who selected the cities of refuge east of the Jordan?
2. Who selected the cities of refuge west of the Jordan?
3. How long was a fugitive to live in the city of refuge?
4. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Naphtali?
5. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Ephraim?
6. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Judah?
7. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Reuben?
8. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Gad?
9. What city of refuge was within the borders of the tribe of Manasseh?
10. Were only native-born Israelites protected by these provisions?

### A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 21

- Vv. 1- 8 *Preparation for the assignment of the Levitical cities.* Since the children of Levi did not have any land as an inheritance in Canaan, they were