

Joshua 07-10-18b

We resume our study in Joshua chapter 20. We're looking at the provision that God makes for cities of refuge. This is not a new concept at this point.

The sons of Israel are told here to implement instructions that were given earlier. These cities of asylum or cities of refuge had already been mentioned in the law of Moses. Way back in Exodus chapter 21 verse 13, God said if someone takes a life and so on, but he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

And this is a fascinating insight because an accidental death, even at someone's hand, if you inadvertently, you're using a pickaxe and trying to bust rocks in your field and you rear back and a guy came up behind you and you didn't hear him, you're deaf in that ear or whatever, you reared back and you poked your axe through his head and killed him, well you had no intention. In Exodus 21 13 it says God put in there. That was an act of God that your accident resulted in this person's death.

You're driving down the road, you're obeying the speed limits, you're alert and everything, but a little child dashes out in front of you and gets hit by your car. It's an awful, horrible, life-changing tragedy. But if you absolutely were not at fault in any way and it was something that you could not help, this is a comforting principle.

This is also something that God has ordained. It is not something that caught God by surprise. Someone outsmarted God, someone fooled God, someone slipped it past his omniscience.

If something like that happens and there is no intention on our part, we inadvertently cause harm of any sort. And this is really emblematic. Murder or manslaughter is about the worst harm that you can inflict on another person.

You take away everything. There is nothing you have not taken away from a person whose life you remove. It is the ultimate in taking everything away.

So it is put for and is emblematic for anything of this nature. It is the most grievous case. And so it is an example, it's an illustration and an instruction for us.

Have the Israelites select the cities of refuge that I told you about through Moses. You look at, for example, Numbers chapter 35. Among the cities which you will give to the Levites, six of them shall be cities of asylum, cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee.

And to these you shall add forty-two more cities. This is a place where the cities of refuge are given first in a list of forty-eight cities given to the Levites. These are Levitical cities, but they have a special purpose.

And that's Numbers 35, 6. And then in verses 11-14 of that same chapter, Numbers 35, there are further details given. Appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person, very same phrase, virtually identical to what we have in Joshua chapter 20, the slayer who kills any person, or manslayer who kills any person, accidentally may flee there. They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.

Of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge. You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, which will be cities of refuge. This is exactly what is going to take place.

There are three cities in the Transjordan, to the east, Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Half the cities are over there. Half of the cities, three more, are in the land.

And in that same handout, which is downloadable from our handout folder under the Joshua study, on the church website, there is a map, underneath the map of the division of the land by tribes, there is another one that shows the location, or approximate location, of these six cities of refuge. Three on one side, three on the other. What's interesting about those locations is, no matter where you live in Israel, none of these cities is more than a day's journey away.

They are strategically selected so that you can get there, if you hurry, in a day. That's generally the philosophy for their selection, I think. This is reiterated again in Deuteronomy chapter 4, verses 41 through 43.

Moses set apart three cities on this side of the Jordan toward the rising of the sun. What side is that? East side. That's the Reuben, Gad, and half-tribe of Manasseh side.

That the manslayer might flee there who kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in times past. Know what we call malice aforethought. And that by fleeing to one of these cities he might live.

This is the principle that persists down to the present day. Was there intent? You know, what part of the establishing of a prosecution case for murder is establishing prior intent. Was there planning? Was there thought given ahead of time? I am going to take this life and here is how I am going to do it.

Without having hated him in times past, Deuteronomy 4, verses 42, that by fleeing to one of these cities he might live. Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, Rameth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites. One for each of the tribes.

Pretty close to the center of each of those tribal areas. And this is mentioned again in Deuteronomy. If you think this is not important, how many times has God put this in His word? Anything repeated this many times, I think we have to figure out why is it there.

Why should we ignore this if it is repeated so many times? It obviously has something that we are supposed to learn. Deuteronomy 19, verses 2-13. Separate three cities for yourselves in the midst of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

You shall prepare, this is 19.3 of Deuteronomy. Listen, you shall prepare roads for yourself and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit that any manslayer may flee there. So the western area, the actual land of promise, divided into thirds, three parts, one city in each part, just as Moses has already done on the eastern side.

This is the case of the manslayer who flees there that he may live, whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in times past. As when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies. He shall flee to one of these cities and live.

Lest the avenger of blood, while his anger is hot, pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and kill him, though he was not deserving of death, since he had not hated the victim in time past, I command you saying you shall separate, etc. You go on. Think about this for a minute.

I try to put myself in the position of the guy who was swinging. I had an axe head break just a couple of weeks ago. I was out trying to chop tree roots because I had to fix a sprinkler in my front yard, and a couple of the little ones were out there with me, and they were getting too close.

I said, you all need to stand well back because I'm using a sharp tool here, and you'd want to stand well away, and I made them get 15-20 feet away, and it wasn't. Two strokes later, the axe handle broke, and the head flew off. Fortunately, it went straight down, and nobody was hurt because nobody was nearby.

But you just don't know when something like that's going to happen. Now, why didn't God make a rule? You know, you can endlessly ask questions. Why didn't God do it the way I think it would be done? Why couldn't God pass a law that says, now, no avenger of blood is allowed to go after somebody until the court has heard his case? The way this works out, it's a foot race.

If my axe head slips off and dings a guy, and he dies, I have got to pick up and start hi-ya-koing down the road to get to the city of refuge, and if the guy catches me before I get to the city of refuge, he can slay me. He's the avenger of blood. There's an avenger of blood thing that says, if you take a life, the next of kin can come and wreak vengeance on you.

The only protection from the avenger of blood is to get myself to the city of refuge. I

have to get myself there. There's no legal protection for me along the way.

Now, why would God set it up this way? Why wouldn't God say, now, come on, the avenger of blood can't go after the guy. That's not fair. You need to wait until he's been at trial, and he's free on his own recognizance, and he can post bail.

None of that. If an accident happens, it's up to you to get to the place of safety, else your life is forfeit, regardless of how accidental this death may have been. God has made, and I'm sort of offering you the solution here, God has made a way of escape, but you have got to get yourself to it.

You have to expend some energy. You have to have some alacrity. You have to take some initiative.

This is one of those cases where I would not go inside the house to grab my coat. How fast is that news going to travel? You did what to my son? You did what to my father? You did what to my brother? I knew you had a grudge because you were arguing with him last week over the price of an ox. I don't think that was an accident at all.

Whack, whack, whack, and then you start this Hatfield and McCoy thing. God says, look, if something like that happens, you had better hit the dusty trail, boy, and I have instructed that there be good roads. You got no excuse.

There's a nice, smooth, well-paved road for this, and you get yourself to a place of safety. God's safety does not immediately extend to you and give you immunity and asylum and so on. God doesn't say, behold, if there's an accident, the tribes will deputize individuals to be a bodyguard and protect this man while he collects his belongings, and none of that.

You're in danger. You flee for refuge to the place of safety that God has made available, and there's quite a difference there, and this is the principle anywhere you want to look. God has given us the means.

God has made a way of escape. We have to avail ourselves of it. We have to make the decision.

We have to set the priority. If we are lackadaisical, if we are indifferent, if we are lazy, we might miss that provision. It's not salvation by works, but it is salvation by active laying hold of what God has provided.

There's a difference in participating and cooperating and simply being obedient to avail ourselves of God's grace. People on this earth are convicted of sin, righteousness, and judgment by God the Holy Spirit, and it takes an active decision to believe. It takes an active reaching out and laying hold of God's salvation, and that is not works.

People say, well, I think that is a work. I think you're cooperating with God. I think you're going to get some kind of credit for that.

Well, I'm sorry, but God is the one who makes the rules and establishes the definitions, and God in Ephesians chapter 2 says that particular action is not a work, and you don't get any credit for it. You can reach out all you want and lay hold of his salvation all you want, and God gives you no credit for that reaching out. Now, who decides what's a work and what's not? Do we make those rules, or does God? God says what is and isn't works, and He says, you know what? You can reach out till the cows come home, and it is all of grace.

I can sit in a room and wish for a chair. I can wish mightily. I can wish with great effort.

I can wish and mentally coercing the fabric of the universe to insert a chair into my room, and it's never going to happen. You get no credit. You get no results for all of that wishing.

Now, if God makes a promise and says, anybody that wishes for a chair, I'm going to pop one in there, and so you wish for a chair, and there it is. Who gets the credit? Who is glorified by that? It's God. God says, I will give a chair.

In this case, I will give salvation to anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord. Call upon the name of the Lord, you're saved. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you're saved.

Acknowledge and respond to the convicting ministry of God's Holy Spirit. You reach out in an active way and lay hold of that faith. That is a responsibility.

It is an ability. This law assumes that every man in Israel capable of killing another man by his actions has got the wherewithal to get himself to a city of refuge. If you are so pathetically incapacitated that you can't make it to a city of refuge, well, you don't have the wherewithal to kill anybody either.

This is the man swinging an axe, digging a ditch, operating a team that might trample someone. You're out there and you're hale and hearty. And so the implication is anyone has the ability and they are expected.

If you can't, if you got a bad leg and you were swinging the thing and it's because of your bad leg that you swung out, well, get somebody to help you. But it's up to you. You get yourself to the city of refuge.

It's a hugely important point because God has made deliverance, daily deliverance available to us. Why does the New Testament say, work out your own deliverance, work out your own salvation in fear and trembling? What kind of an attitude do you think the guy had speeding down the road toward the city of refuge? Was he stopping to smell the roses along the way? You know, he said that song, you got to stop and smell it. I bet he

wasn't stopping and smelling any roses.

He was picking them up and laying them down. He had a spare set of candles. He didn't have to stop and he's just going, going, going.

Well, fear and trembling. We work out our own deliverance. God has made the way of escape, but we have got to seize it.

People have the, we all, when I say people, I include all of us, we have the tendency to want God to just drop grace on us, to drop provision on us, to drop solutions on us. And many of these are things that we have to lay out our hand and take. And you see that principle here.

When we flee to one of these cities, what happens? When, in verse 4 of Joshua 20, when he flees to one of these cities and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, he declares his case in the hearing of the elders of that city. We know from many other studies that sitting at, remember Job sat in the gate of the city? The gate of the city, that's the place of judgment. That's the courtroom.

That's where justice is dispensed. That's where the elders hang out. That's where Absalom sat, trying to usurp the judgmental authority of his father.

He wanted to go out there and hear cases and dispense wisdom and, and, and usurp his father's place. So an accident happens. Poor Job, my neighbor, got dinged by the accident and he's lying there in a pool of his own blood.

I run to the nearest city of refuge. And when I get there, what do I do? I go to the gate and here's the on duty corpus of elders there who are sitting there hearing cases. And I stand in line until my turn and I say, look, I was just down there chopping a tree.

Axe head flew off. Joe Bob's down there lying in a pool of blood, a venture of blood. See that guy coming up here, all elbows and knees and gum wrappers and dust in my wake there.

He's trying to kill me. Hey, I've come to the city of refuge. I claim the protection of God's grace.

He will declare his case in the hearing of the elders of that city. They shall take him in. Now, suppose I really do have it in for old Joe Bob.

And suppose he comes over there and he's arguing about the price on ox that we had a debate about the previous week. And he, he bought an ox for me and he got the ox home and found out that it couldn't pull a plow and it was diseased and it died the next day. And he comes back and we have an altercation and I bonk him with my ax.

And then I try to claim it was an accident. And now I've run to the city of refuge. Well,

how's this thing going to be sorted out? In one case, I might be innocent.

And in the other case, I might be very, very guilty. Well, this case needs to be heard before the avenger of blood relieves me of my nefesh. Before he sends me to the great final judgment.

Because I may well be innocent or I may be guilty. Who knows? The avenger of blood is going to draw one conclusion. I'll send you to God and let him sort you out.

And so, if you want to continue living in Israel, you make it to the city of refuge. You declare your case to the elders, as it says here in verse 4. They shall take him in. Now, maybe they don't believe him.

Maybe he's got shifty eyes. Maybe his eyes are very close set and he looks very suspicious. Maybe he's still got the bloody ax in his hand and they say, you know, it looks to me like you swung that thing four or five times.

How did it get so much blood and hair and so forth on it if it was all an accident? Why is it still in your hand? You say it flew off. Looks to me like it's still on the handle. Not too sure about your story here, Shmuel.

So, you're standing there. It doesn't say they shall judge him at the gate and determine whether the avenger of blood can have him back. They take him into the city regardless.

As one of them. This is the principle behind innocent until proven guilty. Who lives in this city? Who does the city belong to? What tribe? Levites.

Treats him as one of them. Treats him as a fellow priest. Same privileges.

Same liberty to walk about the town. Nobody's frowning. Nobody's putting burning, you know, brazen serpents or something in his front lawn.

They don't have crosses yet, so they have to have something else to burn in his front lawn. But nobody's throwing rocks through his window. Nobody's jeering at him and yelling at him through bullhorns and so on.

Nobody's trying to stone him to death in the square. Take him in as one of you. Give him a place that he may dwell there.

If the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not deliver the slayer into his hand. The avenger of blood is turned away at the gate. What's your business here, young man? Well, I'm the avenger of blood and I'm looking for Shmuel.

He killed my brother Jobob. Sorry, this is a city of refuge and Shmuel's case has not yet been heard. Because the case will be heard.

They shall not deliver the slayer into his hand, verse 5. Because he struck his neighbor unintentionally, this is the assumption. This is the default view. Until we know different, this is an unintentional act.

And he did not hate him beforehand. So, the party responsible for this death, verse 6, shall dwell in that city until when? Until he stands before the congregation for judgment. It isn't automatic that he's going to live in the city of refuge forever.

But he's going to live there until his case is brought to trial. You don't get sentenced without a trial. As long as you avail yourself of God's grace.

Now, can you get sentenced? Can you be executed without a trial if you do not obey? If you do not avail yourself of God's provision? Absolutely. Very profound principle here. We get ourselves into difficulties.

We screw up. We make bad choices. We sin.

We offend against one another. There is grace available. Psalm 51, 1 John 1. Go to the Father.

Against thee and the only have I sinned. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Acknowledge my sin.

God is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse. If I don't do that, whose fault is it if judgment descends on my head? I didn't drop what I was doing and head down the road to the place of safety. What is the place of safety? God's grace in Christ.

The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. And we're going to see that illustrated here in a little bit. But you've got to avail yourself of the grace.

We can't just run along and say, you know, there are people who say, well, you know, Christ died for sin at the cross. I'm covered. Doesn't matter what I do.

For a specific case of sin, it's like one of these accidental murders. Sometimes we sin intentionally. Sometimes we sin unintentionally.

Remember, we went through Leviticus. There are sin offerings. There are sins for transgressions.

There are peace offerings. There are fellowship offerings. All different kinds of offerings for different occasions.

But in the case where we commit a grievous wrong of this nature, sometimes it's intentional and sometimes it's not. The case needs to be heard. So we go to the place where God's justice can be dispensed.

What is it that Jesus Christ does, seated at the right hand of the Father? He's waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. But what else is he doing? The New Testament tells us he makes intercession on our behalf. We are guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty.

We are deserving of judgment. And just as that justice, figuratively speaking, would be about to descend, Jesus Christ says, Father, it's covered. This individual has claimed the redeeming, atoning, cleansing value of sacrifice on the cross.

And I bore that judgment. I have paid that penalty. Not just the forensic, the judicial, the penalty of eternal separation from God, but also the circumstantial penalty.

It's one thing to be sentenced by the legal system for having done a wrong. It is something else to have other kinds of penalty. You become something.

You are treated a certain way by people. You are considered, you are penalized in many ways. People say, hey, it's not fair that because I'm a convicted felon, not only did I have to do time in Leavenworth or Sing Sing or someplace, but I also can't vote, and I can't own a firearm, and I can't do this, and I can't do that.

These are other penalties. And we have circumstantial penalties. We tear relationships.

We wound other people. And even when the absolute penalty is covered for that, and we're not separated from God, there are still other consequences. Can God turn those to blessing? He can.

But we have to go to the city of refuge. We have to have our case heard. We have to have the blood of Jesus Christ pled on our behalf.

There is a pleading, there is a case that is made, so that that cursing can be turned to blessing. And that's something we have to claim. We have to actively go to God, just as this person flees to the city.

So, he goes there and remains until his case is heard, until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. There are two cut-off times, and it's one of those, you've seen these things, it's just like when you get your oil change, they say, well, next oil change is either this many miles or this date, whichever comes first. And it depends on how much you drive your car.

Sometimes, oh boy, you've racked that mileage up and you're already back down there getting your oil changed again. Other times, you look up there and you say, well, I'm like three months past this change your oil date, but look, I haven't driven hardly any miles. And whichever comes first.

Well, that's the case here. Either his case is heard, or when the high priest dies. And this is a fascinating little detail of the law.

I'm there in the city of refuge, there are fourteen cases stacked up ahead of me, because a lot of defective axe heads were bought from the Philistines who forged them, and they just keep flying off the handles. And there are just guys waiting in line, and the congregation is deliberating, it's taking forever, taking forever. All of a sudden, the high priest clutches his chest and keels over, and there's great rejoicing.

Everybody else is mourning and saying, oh, he was such a good high priest, I really liked him, he really said the words, and he had such an air of dignity and so on. But in the six cities of refuge, there's great cheering and rejoicing, because these guys don't have to wait for their case to be heard, they get to go home. It's kind of like the year of Jubilee.

All debts are paid, all property returns to its original owners, indentured servitude is over with. It is a time of Jubilee. On the death, we're celebrating a guy dying.

The old high priest is staggering around, trying to raise his arms and do the Shema, and just keels over. Word radiates like lightning. Somebody goes down one of the well-traveled roads and cries throughout the town, the cities of refuge, high priest is dead, high priest is dead, and people are going, oh, hooray, and they're packing their stuff and heading back down that well-traveled road to their homes.

The slayer may return and come to his own city and his own house, to the city from which he fled. Now, why would God make that provision? What if a guy is actually guilty, and if his case had been heard, he would have been highed out on a rail to the avenger of blood, waiting outside the city limits, and been bludgeoned to death. But the high priest died, and he gets off scot-free, and he doesn't even deserve it.

Why would God make this provision? It's an unusual provision, seems like almost an unfair provision. If I'm the avenger of blood, somebody's taken the life of my close relative, and I'm out there just hoping this guy will forget and step just three cubits outside the city limits, because anytime they're in there, they're fair game. If they ever step outside the city of refuge before their case is heard, I can slay them.

So I've got my little tent pitched out there. I'm like Jonah under the gourd. I'm just watching, watching, waiting, see if this guy will step outside.

If he does, I've got my throwing axe, I've got my spear, I've got my javelin, I've got servants watching other exit ports so I can run around there, and if this guy decides to take a trip, I've got him. But if the high priest dies, I've got to pack up and go home. The guy's got a free pass.

Get out of jail free card. Get out of city of refuge free card. Get out of trial and punishment card.

Why? Why would God do this evidently unfair thing? Think about Hebrews. Think about the author of Hebrews, who I think is Paul, writing through the Immanuensis of Luke.

That's why the theology is Pauline and the Greek is Lucan, Lucite, Lucian.

Beautiful Greek, beautifully formed book grammatically in Greek. It's a beautiful piece of work. But the thoughts are Pauline, and I'm sure that Luke said, you know Paul, if you'd let me write this stuff down, we could send this.

And that's what happened. Anyway, the author of Hebrews, when he writes, what does he say? Jesus Christ, high priest after the order of Melchizedek, the highest order of priesthood that has ever existed. Jesus Christ is the high priest, and through the death of that high priest, the most guilty.

We have hymns that celebrate this truth. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. Some churches don't want to sing that song.

I think it's a great song. Lose all their guilty stains. It isn't just that you have been wrongly accused of something that was not your fault.

The death of the high priest absolves even the guiltiest of their guilt, and it foreshadows. People in Israel think, you know, God is usually so fair and so just, and all these other provisions of the law make so much sense. But this one, I just don't understand.

Why do these people get a free pass, obviating all judgment and all punishment, just because the high priest died? If anything, it seems like we ought to take all the people whose trials are pending, and just kill them all. Death of the high priest, well, let's send you with them. You and the high priest can show up in front of God in Sheol and sort it out there.

It's just the opposite. His death means life, even for the guilty. And there's a profound, profound truth there.

So the principle here is that normally there is going to be a trial, and that trial is going to take place in the city of Refuge. These are the places where, is it murder, is it manslaughter? There are six. These are sort of like district courts.

You don't want to handle this with the local elders. Might be prejudice. You know, they talk about, I need a change of venue.

I can't get a jury to hear a fair case here, because everybody hates me anyway, because I've been a mean old Scrooge, and now my axe handle flew off, and these guys are going to toast me, or stone me, or whatever. So you go to the city of Refuge. It's like a district court.

There are six district courts in Israel that specifically handle murder versus manslaughter cases. Somebody died. What's the verdict? Well, you go there and wait your turn, and

they will adjudicate the case.

Now as the two or three witnesses, the avenger of blood can make his case. These guys will sort it out. They are Levites.

They are priests. They've got spiritual authority, even above and beyond the elders, who might be prejudiced. So because you might have to wait a long time and be separated from all your loved ones, separated from your business, you can't dare step outside the city, how careful do you think people were to not get in this situation in the first place? Well, you know, last year I remember old Shmuel, you know, he was careless.

He didn't check his axe, and he killed a guy, and I haven't heard from him. You know, I don't even get a postcard from K'edesh up there in Galilee, because he's stuck up there in the city of refuge, can't do anything. He's biding his time.

He's waiting for either a trial or the high priest to kick off, because, and so how careful would it make people to not inadvertently take a life? Who wants to be stuck somewhere, endlessly awaiting trial? The local city is going to adjudicate this. He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, or until the death of the one who was the high priest in those days. Then he can return to the city from which he fled.

Now if he's found guilty, of course, there isn't going to be anybody to return to the city from which he fled, because the congregation might decide that he's just guilty as all get out, and he's going to be stoned. Now, here's a fascinating fact. There is no recorded case in the Word of God of anyone ever fleeing to a city of refuge.

There is a similar case, as you might remember, in the books of Samuel, where there was mercy granted as long as someone remained in a city, and they decided to leave that city, and they got nailed. But in terms of these six cities of refuge, there's no recorded case, and it's kind of conspicuous by its absence. This is a pretty big deal.

It's the first thing God states. But if you think about it, go back to the case of Noah coming out of the ark. If man sheds blood, by man shall his blood be shed.

Do you have a case that you can think of in the Old Testament, where someone committed a murder, and so the congregation gathered together and said, well, here's a murder case. Let's stone this guy. Eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, life for life.

Can you think of one? Anywhere in, of course, the law is not existing in Genesis yet. Anywhere in Exodus, do we have a murder that was avenged? Anywhere in Leviticus or Numbers or Deuteronomy or Joshua? Judges? Ehud going in there and burying his sword up to the hilt in the king. Nothing leaps out, does it? How about in the days of David? How about Joab and Saul's general? Who's involved in that whole thing? Abner.

Remember Abner? David made a pact with Abner. Asahel was killed by Abner in battle. After warning, Joab says, I'm the avenger of blood.

He tricks Abner into meeting with him and murders him. David adjudicates that case as the king. Joab ultimately has to forfeit his life for that crime.

But even there, you don't have quite the scenario that is illustrated in the law. Anytime you see something like this, you figure it is mainly predictive. It is mainly prophetic.

It is mainly illustrative of principles that God is communicating to the nation of Israel. Same thing with a recalcitrant, rebellious teenager. The law of Moses says, if you've got a teenager who won't obey, drag him out in front of the congregation and stone him.

We have no record of any teenagers being stoned. Can you imagine? I'm just sick of you there, son. Come here.

Hey, neighbors, grab some rocks. I'm sick of this son of mine here that I've raised and invested all my time and effort in. So let's stone this guy and get him.

It never happens. But there is a principle expressed there, isn't there? Same thing with these cities of refuge. Now, I offered the challenge that faces us in looking at this is, so what? Cities of refuge, great for Israel.

What about us? Well, you think about 1 John 1.9, a very familiar concept. We've studied it. We've thought about it.

We've claimed it, dozens, perhaps hundreds of times. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Our self-judging, analyzing ourselves, examining ourselves to see if we are in the faith, coming before God as David did and saying, Against thee and thee only have I sinned.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Put ourselves back in the status of walking in the light as he is in the light so that the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from all sin. That privilege is ours because of the death of the high priest. We are guilty.

We do not have a claim. As the hymn says, we have no other plea except that Jesus died for us. That's our only plea, is that our high priest died.

And because of that, we are free from judgment. We are occasionally wrongly accused by brethren. We can be impugned.

We can be suspected. We can be ill thought of unjustly. Those who hate us without a cause.

But many, many times we are just as guilty as we can be. But if we flee to that refuge, it is illustrated in other ways. Psalm 51, abiding in the shadow of the Almighty.

God is my refuge and my fortress. He is my help in time of trouble. It's all about attitude.

It is all about remembering that this is grace that is blood-bought by the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's important that we be aggressive. Don't waste time.

Don't say, oh, God doesn't want to hear from me. I'm too guilty. I'm too sinful.

I'll just stay out here in the dark. Not at all. There is clear instruction from this illustration that we are to run headlong toward God's grace and claim it and dwell within it.

And let that great grace cleanse us from all sin and free us to return to our homes and our work and our labor in the time that remains to us in this life. So it's a wonderful truth. It's a great illustration of what Jesus Christ has purchased for us and how important it is for us to be aggressive in claiming it.

Well, we'll pick up here at verse 7 in Joshua chapter 20 next time, but let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we are so grateful for the Lord Jesus Christ and his work on our behalf, the privileges that are ours as believer priests, as those who have the right to be called by your name. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will constantly remind us of our standing and our privileges and our opportunities so that we will walk quickly forward on the narrow road through the straight gate that leads to life.

And in so doing, our lives can reflect your glory and the glory of our Savior. We ask it in his name. Amen.