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## CITIES OF REFUGE

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STUDY NOTES FOR CARE GROUPS – JOSHUA 20:1-9

*July 26, 2009*

Man needed to deal fairly with the taking of a human life by another person. God is concerned about mercy and justice for all people

The LORD commanded Joshua to set up the Cities of Refuge. This commandment had earlier been given by the LORD to Moses when the children of Israel took possession of the Promised Land. The purpose for these cities of refuge was for a person, who killed another person accidentally or unintentionally, to seek asylum in these cities, and be protected from the “avenger of blood”, who would probably be a kinsman of the victim (20:3). When the guilty person fled to such a city, upon entering the gate, he should present his case before the elders of the city. The elders after hearing his case would then allow him to stay. He would not be delivered to the “avenger of blood” who pursued after him to the city because of his claim that he was guilty only of manslaughter not amounting to premeditated murder (20:4-5).

However, this protection was only provisional until such time when a trial could be held. He would stand trial before “the congregation for judgement” (trial by jury) and if found guilty of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, he would be allowed to live within the walls of the city. He would then serve his sentence until the death of the high priest, when he would be set free and safe to return to his own home and city (20:6). At any time before the death of the high priest, if he should leave the city and be discovered by the “avenger of blood” and be killed, the avenger would not be guilty of murder. In the case of a person found guilty of premeditated murder, he would be sentenced to death.

The life of a human being, who is created in the image of God, is precious in the sight of God. A person, who hates another and takes the life of the other, does not have the right to live, and should forfeit his life to live among others. That is God’s Law and it should never be compromised. On the other hand, God is both righteous and merciful. A person guilty of manslaughter is allowed to live and to serve his punishment, which is appropriate to his crime.

Six cities of refuge were established. Three cities on the western side, namely, Kedesh in the north; Shechem, central; and Hebron, south; and three on the eastern side, namely, Bezer in the south; Ramoth, central; and Golan, north (20:7-8). Observe that these cities were appropriately spread throughout the length and breadth of the Land. They were easily accessible to the manslayer. They were centrally located within the territories of the various tribes. Moreover, they were situated on a hill and roads were built so that they could easily be seen and accessible by the manslayer in his flight for his life to any of these cities.

There must be no doubt to the innocence of the manslayer. A careful search must be made to ensure that there was no animosity between the manslayer and his victim.

### *Application and Discussion*

How does this relate to us as a church? Should our church be a place of refuge? How can this become a reality?

In the message that was shared with us on July 26 we were challenged to consider this. It was also pointed out that our ultimate refuge is Christ Himself and the scriptures point in this direction.

We also discovered that our God is a God of Justice and Mercy. All His ways are just.

When Christ came he made it clear that He came to those who need refuge. We in like manner should be accepting just as our Lord was accepting of those He ministered to. We should also be pointing those who come to us to the One who gives eternal refuge. Here are some things to prayerfully consider-----

*“Our church should be a place of refuge...”*

Our church should be a place where anyone is welcome

It's not just race, it's social standing, economic class, education, anything that we use to separate an “us” from a “them” cannot have a place in the church.

Paul talks about this in Ephesians 2. *He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Eph 2:17-19* What he's really saying, is “Run here for refuge.”

*Our church should be a place where anyone is protected*

The protection was taken serious by the Israelites. Verse five states, *“And if the avenger of blood is in pursuit, they shall not give up the slayer, because the neighbor was killed by mistake.”* Why? Because “the neighbor was killed by mistake!” They didn't mean to, it was an accident, they did not know what they were doing!

*Our church should be a place where anyone can receive grace.*

Cities of refuge were pretty accepting places – only priests and the guilty lived there. The priests in the city of refuge would hold the accused until the death of the high priest.

We know from Hebrews that we have a high priest who has destroyed our guilt. Christ has absorbed our guilt – giving us grace. Christ our victim, our forgiveness, our refuge, our high priest whose death has covered our sin.