

**“What’s in a City?”**

**Joshua chapter 20-21**

**Scripture Ref:** Num 35:2-8; Gen 9:6; Num 3:31; Num 3:33-34; Ps 46:1; Rom 10:8; John 3:16; John 15:4; John 14:6; Heb 9:11-12; Num 18:20; Joshua 13:14; Num 35:1-8; Num 18:21; John 17:15; Matt 5:14-16; Mark 10:43-45; 2 Cor 9:6-9

**Num 35:2-8**

*2 "Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and **you shall also give the Levites common-land around the cities.** 3 They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their **common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals.** 4 The common-land of the cities which you will give the Levites shall extend from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around. 5 And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits. The city shall be in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities.*

*6 "Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites you shall appoint **six cities of refuge**, to which a manslayer may flee. And to these you shall add forty-two cities. 7 So all the cities you will give to the Levites shall be forty-eight; these you shall give with their common-land. 8 And the cities which you will give shall be from the possession of the children of Israel; from the larger tribe you shall give many, from the smaller you shall give few. Each shall give some of its cities to the Levites, in proportion to the inheritance that each receives."*

**The Cities of Refuge**

1. **Hatfield – McCoy feud:** In the area around the Tug Fork River, bordering Kentucky and West Virginia, this famous family feud began with the murder of Harmon Hatfield, who had served in the Union army, by a group led by “Devil Anse” McCoy in 1880.
  - a. In the following eleven years, more than a dozen family members lost their lives in various retaliation killings
  - b. The feud didn’t end until a group of bounty hunters kidnapped nine of the Hatfield’s and brought them to Kentucky for the murder of Alifair McCoy, who was shot as she ran from a burning building that had been set on fire by the group.
  - c. Eight were sentenced to life and Wall Hatfield was hanged.
  - d. In 1891 the family’s agree to end the feud.

2. **While this is a famous piece of American history, it is also a perfect example of what happens when people take justice into their own hands.**
  - a. **Without a justice system in place, people will take justice into their own hands,**
  - b. **There will rarely be any provision for proper hearings**
  - c. **And usually no provision for mercy!**

20:1 The LORD also spoke to Joshua, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Appoint for yourselves cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, 3 that the slayer who kills a person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there; and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. 4 And when he flees to one of those cities, and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. 5 Then if the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not deliver the slayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unintentionally, but did not hate him beforehand. 6 And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the slayer may return and come to his own city and his own house, to the city from which he fled.'"

3. **Purpose – when a person killed another person it became the duty of the “Avenger of Blood” to avenge the death**

*(Hebrew "go'el"): The Hebrew name for the clansman, "next of kin," upon whom devolved the duties: (1) of avenging, on the person of the murderer, the blood of a murdered kinsman—in this capacity the more specific term "go'el ha-dam" (blood-avenger) was generally used—and (2) of redeeming the property or the person of a relative that had fallen into debt.*

4. **Murder must be punished: God established capital punishment in Gen 9:**

**Gen 9:6** *"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.*

5. **God said also that unpunished murderers defiled the land:**

**Numbers 35:31, 35:33-34**

*Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death . . . So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.*

6. But everyone deserved a fair hearing, so God established that there must be a way for a person to give an account of the situation
  - a. And He established these places of refuge where a person could go for and be safe until the matter was heard.

7 So they appointed **Kedesh** in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, **Shechem** in the mountains of Ephraim, and **Kirjath Arba** (which is Hebron) in the mountains of Judah. 8 And on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward, they assigned **Bezer** in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, **Ramoth** in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and **Golan** in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh. 9 These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwelt among them, that whoever killed a person accidentally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stood before the congregation.

7. On a map, we see that the cities of refuge were well spaced throughout the country.
  - a. No matter where you were in Israel, you were not very far from a city of refuge.
  - b. Deuteronomy 19:2 tells us that proper roads were to be built and maintained to these cities of refuge.
  - c. The city was not much good to the slayer if they could not get to it quickly.

*The cities of refuge as a picture of Jesus.*

8. God is our refuge:
  - a. Psalm 46:1: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble
9. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *within easy reach* of the needy person; (Rom 10:8 *“the word is in your mouth”*)
  - a. They were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.
10. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *open to all*, not just the Israelite;
  - a. No one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need.
11. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the *one in need would live*; (John 15:4 *“Abide in Me, and I in you”*)
  - a. You needed to dwell there in order to be covered by its protection.
12. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the *only alternative* for the one in need; (John 14:6 *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”*)
  - a. *Without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.*

13. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection only within their boundaries;

- a. *(John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.)*
- b. To go outside meant death.

14. With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the death of the High Priest

**Heb 9:11-12**

*But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.*

**Joshua 21 Cities of the Levites**

21:1 Then the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites came near to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the children of Israel. 2 And they spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The LORD commanded through Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with their common-lands for our livestock." 3 **So the children of Israel gave to the Levites from their inheritance**, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their common-lands:

15. **The Levites were not allocated a territory -**

**Num 18:20** *Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.*

**Josh 13:14** *Only to the tribe of Levi he had given no inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance, as He said to them.*

- a. **Area to dwell in - they had to live somewhere... so they were given cities and the area around the city**

**Num 35:1-8**

*2 "Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and **you shall also give the Levites common-land around the cities.** 3 They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their **common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals.** 4 The common-land of the cities which you will give the Levites shall extend from the wall of the city outward a thousand*

*cubits all around. 5 And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits. The city shall be in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities.*

**b. God had given them the tithes and offerings as support:**

**Num 18:21** *“Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.*

**c. Levites would serve on a rotating basis – there were 24 courses of priests that served twice a year for one week, then an additional three times at the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles**

**16. Outside Income - As well they could raise crops and animals.**

**a. When not serving in the temple they were given houses in the cities to live in, and the communal land to provide additional support for their family’s**

4 Now the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites. And the children of **Aaron the priest**, who were of the Levites, had **thirteen cities** by lot from the tribe of **Judah**, from the tribe of **Simeon**, and from the tribe of **Benjamin**.

5 The rest of the children of **Kohath had ten cities** by lot from the families of the tribe of **Ephraim**, from the tribe of **Dan**, and from the **half-tribe of Manasseh**.

6 And the children of **Gershon had thirteen cities** by lot from the families of the tribe of **Issachar**, from the tribe of **Asher**, from the tribe of **Naphtali**, and from the **half-tribe of Manasseh** in Bashan.

7 The children of **Merari** according to their families **had twelve cities** from the tribe of **Reuben**, from the tribe of **Gad**, and from the tribe of **Zebulun**.

8 And the children of Israel gave these cities with their common-lands by lot to the Levites, as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses.

9 So they gave from the tribe of the children of Judah and from the tribe of the children of Simeon these cities which are designated by name, 10 which were for the children of Aaron, one of the families of the Kohathites, who were of the children of Levi; for the lot was theirs first. 11 And they gave them **Kirjath Arba** (Arba was the father of Anak), which is **Hebron**, in the mountains of Judah, with the common-land surrounding it. 12 But the fields of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as his possession.

13 Thus to the children of **Aaron** the priest they gave Hebron with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), **Libnah** with its common-land, 14 **Jattir** with its common-land, **Eshtemoa** with its common-land, 15 **Holon** with its common-land, **Debir** with its common-land, 16 **Ain** with its common-land, **Juttah** with its common-land, and **Beth Shemesh** with its common-land: nine cities from those two tribes; 17 and from the tribe of Benjamin, **Gibeon** with its common-land, **Geba** with its common-land, 18 **Anathoth** with its common-land, and **Almon** with its common-land: four cities. 19 All the cities of the children of Aaron, the priests, were thirteen cities with their common-lands.

20 And the families of the children of **Kohath**, the Levites, the rest of the children of Kohath, even they had the cities of their lot from the tribe of Ephraim. 21 For they gave them **Shechem** with its common-land in the mountains of Ephraim (a city of refuge for the slayer), **Gezer** with its common-land, 22 **Kibzaim** with its common-land, and **Beth Horon** with its common-land: four cities; 23 and from the tribe of Dan, **Eltekeh** with its common-land, **Gibbethon** with its common-land, 24 **Aijalon** with its common-land, and **Gath Rimmon** with its common-land: four cities; 25 and from the half-tribe of Manasseh, **Tanach** with its common-land and **Gath Rimmon** with its common-land: two cities. 26 All the ten cities with their common-lands were for the rest of the families of the children of Kohath.

27 Also to the children of **Gershon**, of the families of the Levites, from the other half-tribe of Manasseh, they gave **Golan** in Bashan with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), and **Be Eshterah** with its common-land: two cities; 28 and from the tribe of Issachar, **Kishion** with its common-land, **Daberath** with its common-land, 29 **Jarmuth** with its common-land, and **En Gannim** with its common-land: four cities; 30 and from the tribe of Asher, **Mishal** with its common-land, **Abdon** with its common-land, 31 **Helkath** with its common-land, and **Rehob** with its common-land: four cities; 32 and from the tribe of Naphtali, **Kedesh** in Galilee with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), **Hammoth Dor** with its common-land, and **Kartan** with its common-land: three cities. 33 All the cities of the Gershonites according to their families were thirteen cities with their common-lands.

34 And to the families of the children of **Merari**, the rest of the Levites, from the tribe of Zebulun, **Jokneam** with its common-land, **Kartah** with its common-land, 35 **Dimnah** with its common-land, and **Nahalal** with its common-land: four cities; 36 and from the tribe of Reuben, **Bezer** with its common-land, **Jahaz** with its common-land, 37 **Kedemoth** with its common-land, and **Mephaath** with its common-land: four cities; 38 and from the tribe of Gad, **Ramoth** in Gilead with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), **Mahanaim** with its common-land, 39 **Heshbon** with its common-land, and **Jazer** with its common-land: four cities in all. 40 So all the cities for the children of Merari according to their families, the rest of the families of the Levites, were by their lot twelve cities. 41 All the cities of the Levites within the possession of the children of Israel were forty-eight cities with their common-lands. 42 Every one of these cities had its common-land surrounding it; thus were all these cities.

### **Interesting Points**

**17. God did not allocate a “area of Levi” where they would all be together, but He distributed them throughout the land.**

- a. In the same way we as Christians are not to go off and separate from the world around us – like some of the cults do.**

*John 17:15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*

- b. We are to be integrated IN the world – being a light that shines to others.**

#### **Matt 5:14-16**

*14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

**18. God did not give them their allotment FIRST, but last of all the tribes.**

- a. This gives us a picture of humility and service:**

#### **Mark 10:43-45**

*43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

**19. The allotment for the Levites came after the tribes got theirs, and it was give FROM the inheritance of the tribes...**

- a. Giving to the Lord when I does not cost us something is not giving at all**

#### **2 Cor 9:6-9**

*But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*

### **The Promise Fulfilled**

43 So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. 44 The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45 Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

**20. All land had been allocated – but it was not “retirement time!”**

- a. We have this idea that “once I get to a certain point, I am going to retire and do nothing”**
- b. Nothing could be worse for you!**
- c. Rest is good – but only for a time!**

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