

Joshua 20
Christ Our Refuge

NKJ Joshua 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.' "

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.

The issue of Capital punishment is one that produces a lot of heat in our society today. We have many who contend that the putting to death of murderers is wrong and should not be done. For instance, recently there was a huge attempt to prevent the execution of "Tookie" Williams, the co-founder of the Crips gang who had been sentenced to death for killing four people in two separate robberies. Inevitably there were protestors outside the jail carrying signs declaring "though shalt not kill" – just as an aside, I always thought it was ironic that these signs are meant to indict the authorities, and not remind the criminals why they are about to be put to death.

I say that of course, because the protestor's logic of course is that we should not put murderers to death because it is forbidden by the sixth Commandment "Lo Ratsach" which is translated by the KJV "Thou Shalt not kill" – but the *Lo Ratsach* does not prohibit all killing. It means, You shall not murder – literally no murder – and forbids the shedding of INNOCENT blood.

In the case of premeditated murder, God had commanded even prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments, that the murderer would himself be put to death. This was because the life of man, himself created in the image of God was very precious. He had commanded Noah thus:

Genesis 9:5 "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

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

This commandment was repeated in the law, and provision was made for putting a murderer to death. In Numbers 35:16 ' But if he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

17 'And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

18 'Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

19 'The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.

20 'If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies,

21 'or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

The avenger of blood was either the closest male relative of the victim, or he was specifically appointed by the elders of the city. Therefore he was appointed by the magistrate to be policeman and executioner wrapped in one if you will.

This authority of the magistrate to put to act as the avenger of blood is reiterated by Paul in Romans 13 – list for the use of the word Avenger here:

Romans 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

So the idea that murderers are to be put to death by the Magistrate is not only an OT commandment it is an NT one as well. The idea was that if the murder went unavenged, that blood that had been spilled would pollute the land. Literally it was unjust. Only the spilling of the blood of the murderer could atone for the blood of the victim.

But we know that it is not premeditated murder every time one man kills another, there is a category known as manslaughter when one man accidentally kills another. The critical difference was that there was no *malice aforethought* he did not hate the other and desire his death. The slaying was done accidentally or unintentionally. If that was the case, then the one who had killed accidentally must have a place he could go to, in order to be tried and cleared of his crime. Cities set aside for judging such matters:

Deut. 19:5 "as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax 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;

6 "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.

Therefore we see that Murder depends on the inclination of the heart, that is why Jesus was able to say:

Matt. 5:21 " You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

22 "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment

So God told them to appoint cities that the manslayer might flee to 3 on the West Side of the Jordan 3 on the East. NORTH / MIDDLE / SOUTH

These were Levitical cities

On fleeing there he would state his case at the gate and eventually receive trial by the assembly of the city

Now the person was presumed innocent

If he was found guilty on the testimony of two or more witnesses he **MUST** be handed over to the Avenger of Blood, so that the LEGAL System would not become a travesty

Deut. 19:11 " But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities,

12 "then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.

13 "Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you.

If he was found innocent of murder though, the manslayer had to remain in exile in the city anyway, until the death of the high priest at which time there would be a general amnesty.

This way provision was made to ensure that an accident did not lead to the shedding of innocent blood. But also as Calvin pointed out: ***"respect was so far paid to the feelings of the brethren and kindred of the deceased, that their sorrow was not increased by the constant presence of the persons who had caused their bereavement. Must remain in the city if the case is decided for him"***

Two Applications:

1) Unjust Revenge is avoided by this system, but only when the magistrate does what is required. INJUSTICE OCCURS when he the blood of the victims is not paid for.

This is a critical point. I recently had a case

I could say, that is why we have a civil magistrate, to handle cases like this

We too must avoid vengeance, the sword has not been put in our hands.

Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

2) But more importantly in this we have an image of Christ, but not as the refuge of the innocent, but of ***the guilty.***

Romans 3:10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;

Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Romans 6:23 For **the wages of sin is death**, but **the gift of God is** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Heb. 9:22 And according to **the law** almost all things are purified with **blood**, and **without shedding of blood** there is no remission.

Is. 53:4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.