

Jacob. After Caleb had conquered it from the Canaanites, it was assigned to the priests, and made a Levitical city of refuge. It was David's seat of government during the seven years that he reigned over Judah only. Here Absalom raised the standard of revolt. The city was fortified by Rehoboam, and reconquered after the Captivity. It was recovered from Ebron by Judas Maccabeus, burned by the Romans A. D. 69; taken by the Mohammedans in the seventh century, and by the Crusaders early in the twelfth; it was the seat of a bishopric till 1187, when it again fell into Moslem hands, and has so remained till the present day.

FAITHFULNESS AND ITS REWARD

The most important teaching which comes from the story of Caleb and Joshua is the familiar but vital lesson of constant faithfulness and its rich reward.

Let us notice the nature of the reward which true faithfulness seeks for itself. It does not ask for ease and leisure, but simply that it may have the opportunity of still further toil.

So in the Christian life the reward of faithful service for the Master is not found in a cessation of labor, but rather in the opening of new doors of larger opportunity.

The greatest joy in life is found in faithful living, day by day, and the richest reward, both here and hereafter, is the reward which the Master himself has promised to those who endure faithful to the end.

NOVEMBER 2.

Cities Of Refuge.

Josh. 20: 1-9.

BETWEEN THE LESSONS.

The assignment of Hebron to Caleb as his inheritance was followed by the selection of territory for Judah (chap. 17). The remainder of the unoccupied territory west of the Jordan was carefully examined and described by twenty-one men, three from each tribe, and was broken into seven portions.

GOLDEN TEXT. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.—Ps. 46: 1.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—About 1228 B. C., probably in the same year that Caleb chose Hebron for his inheritance.

Place.—The transaction probably took place at the door of the tent of meeting in Shiloh, where the lots had been cast for the tribal sections of territory.

ON THE LESSON TEXT.

1. Order to Appoint Cities of Refuge. Ver. 1, 2. References to the appointment of such cities had been already made (Exod. 21: 13; Num. 25: 6, 9-15; Deut. 19: 2, 9), including also the purpose for which they should be selected. Jehovah's order now is given to Israel through Joshua, and is said to be a repetition of another order already given them by Moses.

11. Purpose of the Cities of Refuge. Ver. 3-6. The purpose of the cities now to be chosen is to provide an asylum or shelter for the person who accidentally or by mistake kills another (comp. Num. 35: 11, 15; Deut. 4: 42; 19: 4), your refuge from the avenger of blood; the Greek Bible adds to this verse: "and the murderer shall not be put to death until he shall stand before the council for judgment." Ver. 4-6 (not in the Greek Bible) expand this thought. When the fugitive from the avenger of blood—one of the kinsfolk of the slain man—shall reach the gate of the city and make a satisfactory explanation (comp. Deut. 19: 4-6), and shall stand the trial and be acquitted, he shall be given a place in the city to dwell. But if one be found guilty of intentional killing, he shall be turned over by the elders to the avenger of blood (Deut. 19: 12), to be slain by him. If the avenger of blood come to the gate of the city, the unintentional slayer shall not be handed over to him (Deut. 19: 6), because the slaying was accidental (Deut. 19: 4, 6; 4: 42), and he is not a murderer. The manslayer, as already pointed out, shall remain in the city until he shall stand

trial, resulting in acquittal as the official beginning of his sojourn, and the death of the high-priest, when he shall be allowed legally to return to his home (Num. 35: 12, 25).

111. Location of the Cities of Refuge. Ver. 7-9. they appointed; Hebrew reads, "separated," that is, "set apart" for this special, judicial purpose. They selected cities which were granted the Levites, and they were apparently all sacred cities, or cities with some religious significance. (1) Kedesh ("holy") was named for the most northern city west of the Jordan (comp. Josh. 12: 22), a royal city of importance, a Levitical city (Josh. 21: 32), and in later time known as Kedesh-Naphtali (Judg. 4: 6). (2) Shechem was located between Ebal and Gerizim in the hill-country of Ephraim. Here is the first recorded stop of Abraham when he came from Haran, where Jehovah appeared to him with a promise, and where Abraham built an altar (Gen. 12: 6, 7). To this place Jacob came on his return trip from Laban (Gen. 33: 18, 19). Here Joshua had read the law to Israel after the conquering of Ai (Josh. 8: 30-35). The two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, could be seen a great way off. (3) Kirjath-arba (Hebron), the highest point in southern Palestine. It was one of the old cities of the land (Num. 13: 22), the death place of Sarah (Gen. 23: 2), the choice of Caleb for an inheritance (Josh. 14: 13, 14), and in later times the first center of David's kingdom (2 Sam. 2: 11). (4) Bezer in the wilderness, in the tableland of Reuben, was the southernmost city of refuge east of the Jordan. It was assigned the Levites (Josh. 21: 36), and existed down to the times of Ahab, as it is mentioned on the Moabite stone (line 27). It is thought to be the same as the Bozrah of Jeremiah (48: 24). (5) Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad; assigned to the Levites (21: 28), and one of the high and prominent points among the highlands of Gad. It is probably the place of which a strong military headquarters was made in Ahab's day (1 Kings 22: 3, 4, 29). (6) Golan in Bashan; must have been a fortified city, for it and its suburbs were assigned to the Gershonites (Josh. 21: 27); it is not yet identified. These cities were conveniently located for the Israelites and for the stranger who should dwell among them, in case of unintentional slaying, to flee to, and be protected from the avenger of blood whose duty it was always to kill the slayer of one of his family or kinsfolk. Here the manslayer would be safe until his sentence should be pronounced by the assembly, after which the sentence was carried out.

BLOOD REVENGE.

1. Indiscriminate. Revenge is the most savage of human passions. One of the horrors of primitive society was the lightness with which human life was regarded. For a small offense a man slew his enemy or offender, if he so chose. Then a kinsman slew the slayer, often the event terminating in tribal warfare where hundreds were killed.

2. Curbed. The appointment of cities of refuge was an attempt to curb this deadly passion for blood. The unintentional and accidental slayer of a man, formerly almost always slain, was now provided with an asylum from the sword of his avenger-of-blood. A formal trial established his innocence and he was provided a place to live, deprived of his family and former friends—a punishment in itself.

3. Regulated. As soon as the establishment of courts of justice was accomplished, the slayer was allowed both to prove his innocence and, upon acquittal, to go scot-free, under the protection of the law; while the enforced resident of the city of refuge returned outside of the city walls at the risk of his life, until the death of the high priest.

4. Avenged. The courts of justice, the government in all civilized countries, has now taken blood revenge out of the hands of private individuals. It is administered now under the term, "capital punishment." It is not done in the spirit of revenge, but as a punishment for the taking of human life.

NOVEMBER 9.

Joshua's Parting Advice.

Josh. 24: 14-25.

GOLDEN TEXT. Choose you this day whom you will serve.—Josh. 24: 15.

BETWEEN THE LESSONS.

The selection of the cities of refuge is followed by the assignment of forty-eight cities, including the six cities of refuge, in all parts of the land to the Levites (chap. 21). The conquest and partition of the land west of the Jordan releases the two and one-half tribes from the oath given at the time that Moses assigned them territory east of the Jordan (Num. 32: 17-23), and they peacefully and joyfully turn their faces eastward. When they reached the Jordan on their return they built an altar. The western tribes, suspecting their motive, assembled to make war against them. But the returning warriors justify their action, and the two divisions part in peace (chap. 22). Joshua begins his farewell address in chap. 23, and it continues almost through the next chapter.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—The first partition of land occurred seven years after crossing the Jordan (Joshua's parting address was delivered several years after that event).

Place.—At Shechem (24: 1), where the tribes gathered, and to their elders, heads, and judges he gave his parting speech.

ON THE LESSON TEXT.

I. Joshua Calls on Israel to Serve Jehovah. Ver. 14, 15. The old leader of Israel's host has just delivered to the heads of the tribes and the people a masterly outline of the gracious leadership of Jehovah from the time that the patriarch left Ur of the Chaldees down to the present. After all this, Joshua says, fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; all the past proves his kindness and favor; therefore put away the gods, an implication that Israel was now worshipping idols, and the same idols that were served by their ancestors beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. (Comp. Gen. 31: 30-32; Lev. 17: 7; Ezek. 20: 13.) Joshua will not compel the people to serve Jehovah, but by their own free-will; after looking back over the past (comp. Exod. 19: 4-6), if they cannot serve their own God, they must name the god whom they can worship, whether a god of Babylonia (ver. 2), or of the Amorites (ver. 8, 12), where they now dwell. But before they decide the matter, Joshua makes plain his own decision.

II. Israel's Resolution to Serve Jehovah. Ver. 16-18. Joshua's exhortation and his last resolution had the desired result, for of their own free-will they also decided to serve Jehovah. They gave as their reasons that he had brought them up out of the land of Egypt (comp. Gen. 50: 24; also Num. 21: 5), did great wonders and preserved them in all their dangerous journeys, and finally, as the one and greatest of all good things, he had driven out the nations before them, that they might have a land of their own. (Comp. Deut. 6: 22-25; 7: 19-23; 29: 2-9.) "Therefore," for all the above reasons added to the weight of Joshua's decision, "we also will serve Jehovah; for he is our God." The only sane conclusion to which any reasonable people could come.

III. Joshua's Challenge and Israel's Reply. Ver. 19, 21. Ye cannot serve the Lord. "You are not able to serve Jehovah" without wholly giving up other gods, which ye have not yet resolved to do (ver. 14), for he is a holy God.

Here it means an unapproachably exalted one, who knows how to preserve his dignity. (Comp. Exod. 15: 11); he is consequently a jealous God (Exod. 20: 5), and will not forgive the openly and wilfully rebellious. (Comp. Exod. 23: 21.) If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, he will not only not forgive, but will turn about and harm and consume you, after all the good he has done you, for which you should faithfully serve him. The thought of ver. 19 seems to be this: you cannot serve Jehovah and strange gods at one and the same time (comp. ver. 23), for he is a holy God, etc. The reply of the people in