

Lesson V.

CITIES OF REFUGE

November 2, 1902

Joshua 20: 1-9. Commit to memory vs. 1-4. Read Psalm 46.

1 The Lord also spake unto Josh'ua, saying,
2 Speak to the children of Is'rael, saying, ¹ Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses:

3 That the slayer that killeth any person ² unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood.

4 And ³ when he that doth flee unto one of those cities ⁴ shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, ⁵ they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them.

5 And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up unto his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime.

6 And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, ⁶ and until the

Revised Version ¹ Assign you; ² Unwittingly and unawares; ³ He shall flee; ⁴ And; ⁵ And; ⁶ Until and; ⁷ Set apart; ⁸ Beyond the; ⁹ Appointed cities; ¹⁰ Unwittingly.

death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled.

7 And they appointed Ke'desh in Ga'ilee in mount Naph'tali, and Sheeh'em in mount Eph'raim, and Kir'jath-ar'ba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Ju'dah.

8 And ⁸ on the other side Jordan by Jer'icho eastward, they assigned Be'zer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reu'ben, and Ra'moth in Gil'ead out of the tribe of Gad, and Go'an in Ba'shan out of the tribe of Manass'eh.

9 These were the ⁹ cities appointed for all the children of Is'rael, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person ¹⁰ at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.

EXPLANATION

Connection—Having divided the conquered land among the twelve tribes (chs. 14 to 18), the next step was to provide laws to protect human life.

1, 2. **The Lord spake**; giving a divine plan for lessening as far as possible the evils of the custom of the nearest relative of a person who had been slain avenging his death. The avenger was called the *goel*. **Cities of refuge**. Among the Hebrews there was

Your refuge; protecting the nation as well as the slayer from violence. **The avenger**. The right of taking vengeance belonged to the nearest male relative, but it must be publicly and according to law, not in rash haste or fury.

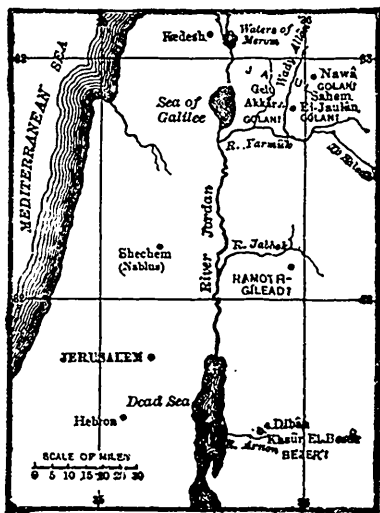
4. **One of those cities**. There were six in all.

7, 8. **At the entering of the gate**; within the arched passage-way that pierced the high, thick wall, and which was protected by a gate. Here the judges often held their court, 2 Sam. 15: 2. **The elders** were the rulers. **Give him a place**. Until proved guilty, he is to have protection and support. Having left home likely in haste and unprovided, he is to be cared for in the city of refuge until his innocence be established.

5, 6. **If the avenger . . . pursue**; as it was his right and duty to do. **They shall not deliver the slayer up**; because it is presumed that he is innocent until proved guilty. **Until he stand**; for trial before the people and their judges. It required at least two witnesses to condemn, Num. 35: 30. If guilty, he was slain by the avenger of blood, Deut. 19: 12, 13. If innocent of intentional murder, he was kept in the city until the death of the high priest. For some further particulars see Num. 35: 25-32. He was safe only so long as he remained within the city, and its suburbs of one thousand cubits—about 500 yards—beyond the walls.

7, 8. **They appointed**. There were three cities of refuge on each side of the Jordan. On the west side **Kedesh**, in the far north among the Galilean hills; **Shechem**, in the centre; **Kirjath-arba** (Hebron), in the south. On the other side—on the east side, **Bezer**, in the south. **The wilderness**; a wild, uncultivated region. **Ramoth in Gilead**; in the territory of Gad. "Gilead" is the mountainous region between the Dead Sea and the Lake of Galilee. **Golan**; in the north, in **Bashan**, a territory extending from Gilead to Mount Hermon.

9. **These were the cities**. They were all Levite cities (ch. 21). The church was to be the guardian of justice. **For the stranger**; who was to have the same right of protection as the Hebrew.



Map of Cities of Refuge (Illustrative Notes)

no shelter for a wilful murderer (Deut. 19: 11-13), nor was he allowed to atone for his crime by the payment of money, Num. 35: 31, 32. These cities were simply to afford the slayer refuge until he should have a fair trial. **By the hand**; by the agency of Moses, Num. 35; and Deut. 19: 1-13.

3. **Unawares** means without intending it; **unwittingly**, without knowing it. (See Deut. 19: 5.)