

is receptive and waiting. David wrote in Psalm 34:18, *The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

He is totally accessible when we acknowledge our desperate need, when our spirit is broken over our sin.

**The gates of the cities of refuge were never to be locked.**

It's the same picture for us when we come to Jesus Christ. We don't have to worry about finding some weird combination of religious locks and keys to come to Jesus. The doors are always wide open. Jesus said, "I am the door" e. That door is never locked!

**The cities of refuge provided the physical resources of food and a place for the fugitive.**

Jesus Christ is our totally sufficient refuge. He is everything we need to sustain us.

Eph 1:7-8 *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; He is the bread of life and the living water.*

**The only place to find protection from the avenger of blood was in the city of refuge.**

A person could be sorry for what happened, but if they were anyplace else besides the city of refuge, it wouldn't matter. And if we don't flee to the refuge that God has provided us in Christ Jesus, there is no spiritual asylum for us, no salvation apart from him. Remember, 'there is none other name' other than the name of Jesus!

**The city was a refuge for all people, no limitations.** Jesus invites all...whosoever will may come. Aren't you thankful that the Way is made available to all who will come by faith?

The cities were only a shadow of the true refuge that is available in Christ. Once we trust in Christ we are secure in Him! Romans 8: 38, *"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* What a wonderful picture God gives us in this 20th chapter of Joshua.

There is only one place to find the needed refuge. People all around us are looking for a place of safety and security. We must point them to Christ.

# AGAPE

## PULPIT SERIES

*"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous, because you are careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will prosper and be successful. Have I not commanded you?"*

# JOSHUA

*Strength and Courage*

**OUR GOD IS A REFUGE**

*Rev. Michael K. Gantt*

March April 19, 2009

AGAPE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

30 Canal Street  
Brattleboro, Vermont 05301

Ph. (802) 257-4069

Fax (802) 254-4239

[agape@sover.net](mailto:agape@sover.net)

Rev. Michael Gantt, Senior Pastor

M. Bryan Gantt, Associate Pastor

We live in an increasingly dangerous world. As believers we know that God is our Protector, He is our hiding place and our refuge in the midst of a frightening, dangerous world. I was watching the video of our service a couple of weeks ago as so many shared their “cardboard testimonies” and was so blessed. As person after person walked across this platform and held up their sign declaring that “once I was lost, but now I am found; once I was blind but now I see; once I was in chains, but now I am free; once I wanted to die, but now I am alive”; I remember thinking “That’s why I entered the ministry and that’s why I’m still in the ministry after 40 years! I am so blessed that this place has always been, and continues to be a City of Refuge in this community.

Pr 18:10 *The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.*

In this chapter we find that God is instructing Joshua to set up cities of refuge. After the flood, God laid down a basic rule to Noah that anyone who murderously shed the blood of others should pay for their crime with their own blood *Ge 9:6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.*

But God made a distinction between premeditated murder, and what today we call manslaughter or a crime of passion, the unpremeditated killing of another person. If the death wasn't premeditated, or if a person killed someone by accident, the slayer could seek refuge in the sanctuary of the tabernacle, physically holding onto the altar as a place of safety and protection.

Ex 21:12-14 *He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.”* This worked well during the forty years that the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness, and during the seven years of military conquest in Canaan, because the tabernacle was physically at the center of that nation. So any Israelite could flee into the tabernacle and find a place of refuge there. But once the tribes were settled throughout the land of Canaan in their respective tribal inheritances, they needed places of refuge that were scattered out among them.

So God ordained six cities of refuge, places of compassion, where anyone who had killed another person unintentionally could flee. In Israelite society there was no police force to investigate crimes. It was the moral responsibility of the

family member who was closest to the victim to investigate and avenge the murder. In our text, he is called the avenger of blood. But Avenger’s own emotional subjectivity, passion, and anger at the loss of their family member would cloud their judgment, and they might not want to go to the trouble to figure out whether it was an accidental killing or whether in fact it was premeditated murder. They might end up avenging the death by indiscriminately killing someone who wasn't guilty of a capital crime. That's why these cities of refuge were needed.

Verse 7 lists the three cities west of the Jordan from north to south, and verse 8 lists the three cities east of the Jordan from south to north.

### **I. Observations concerning the Cities of Refuge.**

**They were to be strategically located so that there would be easy access to them for anybody seeking refuge.** The land of Israel is only about the size of the state of Maryland, so nobody could ever be very far away from a city of refuge.

**God commanded that the nation build highways to these cities of refuge.** *De 19:3 Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither.*

**History tells us that these highways were to be maintained so that nobody was ever hindered in getting to these cities.** Bridges were to be built across every ravine that the highways came to, so that the person running for refuge wouldn't have to waste time climbing to the bottom of the ravine and then up the other side.

The highways were supposed to be rebuilt every spring after the heavy winter rains so that the road surface would be smooth and easy to run on.

At every crossroads or intersection on these highways, there were to be big, bold signs pointing the way with the word REFUGE in large letters.

**The gates of the cities of refuge were never to be locked.** 24 hour access was important, if you were on the run from an avenger of blood! That was because if someone had run for thirty or forty miles to get to the city, and then they couldn't get in there wouldn't be a refuge!

**The city was to be well stocked to provide for any fugitives who came to stay for however long they might need to be there.** It was not only a place of guaranteed legal protection... But also a place of material provision for all their needs! Housing and food was available for them.

**Refuge was only guaranteed as long as they remained in the city.** If the person left the city, the avenger could take their life. If

they went outside the city once they got there, the city could do nothing to protect them.

*Nu 35:26-28 But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood: Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.*

**The cities were designated for all the people of Israel, including the stranger (gentile).** The same justice, the same protection and provision, the same atoning grace were free to all. What God was doing in establishing these cities of refuge was setting the wheels in motion for what would ultimately be due process of law.

Our present legal system finds its roots in this kind of Biblical teaching that declares that a person is innocent until proven guilty. Until everything was investigated by the elders and justice was handed down in a full hearing before the entire congregation, he enjoyed the security of presumed innocence.

### **II. The Application for Us**

**Jesus is our Refuge.** Ps 61:3 For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.

**The similarities between the asylum found in these cities and the refuge of our personal salvation in Jesus Christ is striking.**

We understand that we are guilty before God...*'there is none righteous, no not one'* But we are invited to come to Jesus for refuge. *Ro 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Mt 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

*Ac 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

### **Consider the similarities.**

**Remember, there had to be easy access to the cities of refuge: Jesus Christ is the same for us.** We can always come to him anyplace, anytime. His arms are open for us, he