

There are many pictures of salvation in God's Word: Jesus used the serpent lifted up in the wilderness in John 3:13-14. Jesus was the manna in the wilderness. Paul described Jesus as the rock in the wilderness in I Cor. 10:4. Jesus was also called The Passover Lamb.

But one of the most beautiful, the most powerful, the most amazing pictures of Jesus Christ is tucked away in one of those back corners of the Scriptures.

Adrian Rogers: Jesus Christ is the hero of the Bible. Salvation is the theme of the Bible. Because Jesus is the hero and salvation is the theme, we find Jesus standing in the shadows of the Old Testament if we study carefully.

Ruth 2:12 The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.

Synonyms: stronghold, haven, sanctuary, retreat, asylum

Key: Ruth is staying in the field of Boaz who is a type of Jesus Christ, the Kinsman Redeemer, whose responsibilities include ensuring justice for family members.

We are to flee to Jesus Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer, for refuge.

Prov. 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.

Ps. 91:4a He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge;

Fled For Refuge is a New Testament allusion to an incredible OT example for us today.

These were cities of refuge God had provided for people living in Israel in the OT times, who sought protection from avengers for an accidental killing. [Num. 35; Deut. 19; Josh. 20]

The Greek word in Hebrews that is translated "refuge" is the same one used in the Septuagint [Greek version of the OT] in the passages describing the cities of refuge.

- Studying the Cities of Refuge in the OT will provide a better understanding of Boaz and of Jesus Christ as Our Refuge.

Terms To Understand: Manslayer: Refers to an individual who kills another person without premeditated intent [accidentally], distinguishing them from a murderer who acts with malice.

Avenger of Blood: next-of-kin, specifically tasked with redeeming the family's honor and blood by taking the life of the murderer.

Points from YouVersion:

In Exodus 21:12-14, God makes it clear that life is so precious that anyone who kills another person must be put to death. But He also makes a very clear distinction between premeditated murder and accidental manslaughter. He then promises a place to flee when accused of such a crime, a place of safe harbor where a manslayer could cry out for mercy.

Moses was the first to apply the concept of "refuge" to God as being a refuge for all His people.

In his final speech to Israel, Moses proclaimed to them,

Deut. 33:27 The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.
He will thrust out the enemy from before you.

Deut. 19: Mention is made of two friends chopping wood in a forest. The axe head flies off the handle of the one, hits and mortally wounds his friend.

The Bible calls those who accidentally killed another person a manslayer.

The manslayer would need to run to the nearest city of refuge to escape the relative of the victim who had the legal right to avenge their blood, called by the Bible an avenger.

Problem: The Tabernacle, located in Shiloh, was the original place of refuge for a manslayer.

A person must get there in order to grab the horns of the altar.

Running all the way to Shiloh would have been nearly impossible for many of the tribes which were spread all over the Promised Land. The northernmost tribe, Dan, would have to run about 70 miles to Shiloh. The southernmost area, Beersheba, was about 75-80 miles to Shiloh.

One of God's first concerns in setting up this new nation was to ensure that there would be mercy for someone who had defiled themselves. God is concerned with BOTH justice and mercy. He knew they would need mercy, that they would defile themselves, they would need protection, and He was sure to provide that for them.

When Israel entered the Promised Land, God explicitly commanded that the 48 Levitical cities be set aside for the tribe of Levi. Numbers 35:1-8 documents God's command to Moses to instruct the Israelites to give cities and surrounding pasturelands to the Levites, a mandate later executed in Joshua 21.

Num. 35:3 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.

These 48 cities were taken from the territorial allotments of the other tribes to ensure the Levites were spread across the land. Each city included pasturelands measuring 1,000 cubits out from the wall on all sides (or 2,000 cubits in total width).

➤ 2,000 cubits is approximately 3,000 feet = ~1/2 mile.

These cities, including their surrounding lands, were meant to be centers where the Levites lived and maintained their livestock.

The Levites were given these cities as places to live and to serve as spiritual leaders/teachers spread throughout the nation. They were to teach the people God's Law and His ways.

When Israel entered the Promised Land, God gave them a constant reminder of His salvation. This reminder was ordered by God to be set up in the Land as a visible symbol of Him as God their Savior 24/7/365 across the entire land.

➤ A strategically placed group of six cities called the Cities of Refuge.

➤ 3 on either side of the Jordan River were appointed as cities of refuge.

Because these cities were part of the 48 cities assigned to the Levites, they were under the care of the priests and Levites, who were also responsible for administering justice.

These cities offered asylum for manslayers in six different regions of Israel, making it within a day's journey for a refugee of the victim's Blood Avenger to flee to one of these cities. They served as places of safety and mercy. These 6 cities allowed the refugee to live, to work and exist securely within their boundaries until the death of the High Priest.

Non-biblical sources: The great doors of these cities were always left open and never locked. Otherwise, a man might die while beating on a locked door. Each city of refuge was stocked with food, provided clothing and housing; a sufficient refuge.

God's Desire: Since the first sin of Adam and Eve, God has always been the One who has sought to provide a place of shelter and security for the sinner. Whether they would take that place is another matter, but the heart of God has always been for the sinner to find safety and forgiveness.

That picture shows Jesus is always waiting, His arms are always open, the door is never locked—the clearest picture of Christ as Savior is seen in the cities of refuge.

A. God Himself Appointed These Cities Of Refuge.

Moses did not choose the cities; to remind us that the Law cannot save anyone. It was not an earthly priest who appointed them, to remind us that religion in any form can't save anyone. These cities and the Christ they picture both came from the loving heart of God.

- This was an act of grace, for all men are sinners and deserve to die.

B. Cities Were Specifically Designated

Num. 35:11 When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan,

¹¹ then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you,

that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there.

God commanded Moses to set aside these cities, a command later carried out by Joshua.

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.

Key: If someone accidentally killed another person and wanted to flee to safety, he had to go to one of these six cities. If he went to another city, he would not be protected.

Interesting: Joshua was in Shiloh where the Tabernacle was set up.

The congregation assembled to receive their land allotment. Shiloh means Messiah. WOW!

C. Accessibility: The roads to these cities were required to be well-maintained and clearly marked to allow for quick escape.

- The roads leading to the cities were especially wide by the standards of the time.
- Other major roads were 16 cubits [~ 8 m/26 ft.] wide. The roads leading to the cities of refuge had to be at least double that: 32 cubits [~around 16 m/52 ft.] wide!
- The routes to the cities of refuge had to be easy for a refugee to navigate.

- Bridges were built where needed so that people did not have to run down into a ravine but could go straight across, taking the shortest possible route to the city.
- Bridges were built over rivers to ease the flight.
- According to Jewish tradition the roads leading to these cities were kept in excellent condition and the crossroads were well marked with signposts reading, "Refuge! Refuge!" Signposts had to be large enough so that a man running hard could easily read them.
- Runners, learned in the law of God, were stationed to guide the fugitives to the place of safety. [extra biblical literature]

Put yourself in the shoes of those who helped make the way to the city of refuge as easy as possible. This was one of the roles of the Levite priests.

They would ensure that the roads were well marked, signposted and all obstacles that might prevent someone from reaching the city of refuge are removed.

Believers today are both those that have fled and found refuge, as well as the priests of God who then assist others to find that same safety.

I Pet. 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him
who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

- As priests we are the ones that put up the signs saying 'this way', 'refuge here'.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Unfortunately, there are many other signs: Find freedom in the New Age here.

'Save the planet, hug a tree and save your soul here.' The voices and signs are many and varied.

We are to try to remove obstacles that stop others from finding safety.

We have a command to point to the true city of refuge, Jesus Christ.

D. One Had To Reach The City To Be Safe

Num. 35:12 The cities shall be to you as a refuge from the avenger,

so that the manslayer will not die until he stands before the congregation for trial.

One who accidentally killed someone else was only safe in the six designated cities. The "blood avenger" was seeking to kill him "when he meets him" [Num. 35:21, wherever that might be.

- He was not safe in his home, on his own land, or in any other place.
- If he did not flee to a city of refuge, there was no other hope.

E. These Cities Were Accessible To Everyone

Num. 35:14-15 You shall give three cities across the Jordan and three cities in the land of Canaan; they are to be cities of refuge. These six cities shall be for refuge for the sons of Israel, and for the alien and for the sojourner among them; that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,

that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

F. Protection For The Innocent:

These cities were specifically for those who caused unintentional manslaughter death, not premeditated murder.

The manslayer could flee to one of these cities, take refuge there from avengers seeking retribution, and be protected until he or she received a trial.

G. Hearing At the City Gates

Joshua 20:4-5 When someone fled to a city of refuge, he was to "stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city; and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them. Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand."

When the manslayer stated his case to the elders of the city, that was not the final trial [Joshua 20:6; Num. 35:12]; but there had to be reasonable cause to accept him.

H. The Trial: The manslayer had to stand trial before the elders of the city of refuge and eventually the congregation to prove the killing was unintentional.

These cities were "cities of refuge...for the manslayer," not sanctuary cities for murderers.

I. Not Everyone Could Be Accepted In The Cities

Num. 35:16 But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

If the manslayer was found guilty of intent, the murderer would face the consequences of his actions immediately according to the law.

J. One Had To Stay In The City To Remain Safe

Num. 35:28 The congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the blood avenger, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he fled.

He shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

When once settled in such a city the manslayer had a convenient habitation assigned to him, and the citizens were to teach him some trade that he might support himself. [Jewish writings]

But if the manslayer at any time goes beyond the border of his city of refuge and the blood avenger finds him outside the border of his city of refuge, and the blood avenger kills the manslayer, he will not be guilty of blood because the manslayer should have remained in his city of refuge.

- The person had to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest.
- This was for his own protection.
- If he left the city any time before the death of the high priest, he would no longer be protected. It would be his own fault if he were killed.
- The avenger would be in his right to kill the manslayer without facing charges because the manslayer left the protection of the city of refuge.

- After the death of the high priest, the manslayer could return home with no fear of retribution.

Note: The death of the current high priest brought about a change in the legal status of the manslayer, such that he was no longer liable for his manslaughter. Presumably because it pictured the need for satisfaction and justice. Someone had to die in exchange for the one slain. That high priest functioned as the representative in death, in place of the manslayer.

Picture a man coming up the road. Another man is pursuing him, sword out. The first man, having no time to use a magnifying glass, approaches the sign and sees the big words, "Refuge" magnified! He runs to the city and is safe.

These cities of refuge were not for the protection of the guilty but for the protection of the innocent. They were also places of refuge for the non-Jew, the stranger or sojourner who lived among God's people. The leaders of Israel literally prepared the way for the refuge in God to be found as easy as possible.

What does the Bible say of those that have a place of safety but do not use it?

It calls them fools. There is an interesting example of this during the days of King David. After the death of King Saul, David was anointed King, but the house of David and the house of Saul continued to battle. David's general was Joab and Saul's was Abner. The conflict was a long, drawn-out war, lasting approximately 7 and a half years while David ruled from Hebron. Joab's brother Asahel (who was said to be as fleet footed as a wild gazelle) chased Abner and wouldn't turn aside even though Abner told him to several times.

In the end Abner, in self-defense, killed Asahel. Joab of course, wants revenge.

II Sam. 3:27 Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother.

II Sam. 3:33 And the king sang a lament over Abner and said: "Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound nor your feet put into fetters; As a man falls before wicked men, so you fell."

Why was Abner a fool? He was in Hebron, a city of refuge. Joab tricked Abner to come to the gate of the city. Outside, Abner is not safe and there he dies at the hand of Joab. Abner's foolishness was in knowing where the place of safety was but in not staying there. He died as a fool as do many others who have heard of their need to flee to Christ but choose not to.

Five of the cities were situated on the tops of mountains, except Bezer, which was located on a plain. These elevated, well-marked, and accessible locations were meant to be easily spotted, sometimes with watch fires, allowing for a swift escape from the "avenger of blood".

These cities represent a balance of justice and mercy, ensuring that innocent lives were not taken in vengeance. They were a testament to God's mercy and justice.

Six, the number of man, is incomplete. God never does things in sixes; He does them in SEVENS, the number of "Completeness or perfection."
Who is the seventh City of Refuge? It's Jesus! He is The Refuge for the whole world.
John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Note: The cities of refuge are a picture of Jesus Christ.

- The innocent one killed is a picture of Jesus for He did no wrong.
- The city of refuge that provides shelter and safety for the one fleeing pictures Christ.
- The High Priest pictures Christ in that His death sets those in the city free!
- Even the avenger of blood is a type of Christ for at the second coming Jesus comes with justice and in righteousness He judges and wages war.
- He is the avenger of blood for those that have not sought refuge.

There is only one in this picture that is not a type of Christ:
the one who has committed the crime and is fleeing.

All who do not have faith in Jesus Christ are considered under His wrath, inherited through a fallen human nature.

Eph. 2:3 Declares that all are by nature "children of wrath".

John 3:36b he who does not believe the Son shall not see life,
but the wrath of God abides on him."

Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- Demands the death of sinner in light of God's Justice.

Rom. 6:23 For the wages of sin is death,

but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Substitution on the Cross: Jesus took the full weight of this wrath,

described as being "poured out" on him during the crucifixion.

- This act of atonement means that those who trust in Christ do not face this judgment.

The Gospel offers rescue from this wrath through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who endured this judgment on behalf of believers.

Rom. 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us,

in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom. 10:13 For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Rom. 10:9-10 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Act 13:39 and through Him everyone who believes is justified and declared free of guilt from all things, from which you could not be justified and freed of guilt through the Law of Moses.

Num. 35:6 states that if a manslayer had accidentally or unintentionally killed another person, the only proper course of action was for them to flee to the nearest city of refuge.

Hesitating was not an option. Flee at the moment.

When one hears they are under the wrath of God, the time to trust in Jesus and flee to Him for refuge from the wrath is at that moment. [The Savior Is Waiting.]

Interesting: Redeemer and Avenger, specifically avenger of blood, come from the exact same root, ga'al.

The Hebrew noun derived from this root is go'el which refers to a "kinsman-redeemer" or "blood-avenger". The core concept behind this term: a close relative is tasked with protecting, reclaiming, or restoring the rights, property, or life of a family member.

Both God and Jesus are identified as the "avenger of blood," representing different aspects of divine justice and redemption. In the Old Testament, God is the ultimate avenger of blood who demands justice for the shedding of blood.

God as the Avenger: Scripture frequently portrays God as the defender of the oppressed and the executor of divine justice, declaring, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay".

In the New Testament, Jesus is identified as the ultimate kinsman-redeemer and avenger.

Jesus as the Avenger: Jesus acts as the "goel ha-dam" (blood avenger/redeemer) who redeems humanity and brings judgment.

While God is the ultimate judge, Jesus is viewed as the redeemer who reverses the loss caused by sin, acting as a refuge for those who have sinned.

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

Jesus, on the cross, was not angry with the people who crucified Him - He was forgiving.

He knew that He was the sacrificial lamb, born to die for all mankind, that they might be forgiven and brought into right standing with the Father. They had no idea that they were fulfilling God's plan as they crucified Jesus.

They were sacrificing God's perfect Lamb - pouring out His blood for the remission of sin.

Jesus was not sacrificed as a sinner, deserving of punishment. He was sacrificed as the innocent and righteous - bearing the burden, punishment, and penalty for sin, that was not His own. He took the place of those who had no entrance into the presence of God and no rights with God. Innocent Jesus died so the guilty might go free.

The Go'el as Redeemer (Kinsman-Redeemer): In Ruth, the go'el, Boaz, acts as a redeemer by buying back land or marrying a widow to carry on a family line.

The Go'el as Avenger [Avenger of Blood]: In Numbers 35, the same go'el is responsible for "avenging" the death of a murdered relative, acting as the executor of justice for the family.

The Unified Role: The Hebrew law intertwined these roles. The duty was to restore what was lost (redemption) or to punish those who took a life (avenging)

In Christ, that's exactly what we have together. The spotless lamb of God was our perfect redeemer, protecting us from slavery and death at the cost of His own life. He is also the avenger of blood, ensuring justice is paid, down to the very last drop. Christ's atonement has fully satisfied the demands of justice, which means that none of your sins can come back up and condemn you.

Rom. 8:1 There is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- The avenger of blood has been pacified forever.

Ruth 2:12 The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.

These six cities of refuge are beautiful types of Christ, to whom we "have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" [Heb. 6:18].

Key: We are to flee to Jesus Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer, for refuge.

Hebrews 6:17-20 God also bound Himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that He would never change His mind. ¹⁸ So God has given both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, We Who Have Fled To Him For Refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. ¹⁹ This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls.

- God has forever anchored our souls safely in heaven.
- Just as an anchor holds a ship steady in a storm, hope in God's promises keeps believers secure amidst life's trials

This hope leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. ²⁰ Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. [NLT]

How do we run to Him? He tells us we come by "laying hold of the hope set before us."

- What is that hope? It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The only way to have a strong confidence and a steadfast hope, is to Seek Refuge In God and embrace Jesus Christ, who is our only hope of salvation.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

2

"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand."

3

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."

4

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."

5

"E'en down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And then, when grey hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne."

6

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!"