

“Cities of Refuge”  
Deuteronomy 4:41-43  
(Preached at Trinity, May 26, 2024)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Deuteronomy contains three sermons preached by Moses at the end of his life just prior to Israel entering the Promised Land under the command of Joshua. Israel is being called to remember where they stood 40 years before when they were about to enter into Canaan. But they did not enter. Instead, because of their sin they were left to wander forty years in the wilderness. These who were standing before Moses and hearing his words were mostly children when Israel was denied entrance into Canaan. They were all below the age of 20. But this doesn't mean the words of Moses were irrelevant to them. To the contrary, if they did not hear and listen, they too would be exiled from the land.  
**Deuteronomy 4:40 NAU** - "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."  
**Deuteronomy 4:23-24 NAU** - "So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything *against* which the LORD your God has commanded you. <sup>24</sup> "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."
2. The first of Moses' three sermons ends with **Verse 40**. **Verses 41-43** serve as an interlude. They provide a condensed account of God's maintenance of justice. The innocent shall not be punished. The guilty shall not go unpunished -  
**Deuteronomy 4:41-42 NAU** - "Then Moses set apart three cities across the Jordan to the east, <sup>42</sup> that a manslayer might flee there, who unintentionally slew his neighbor without having enmity toward him in time past; and by fleeing to one of these cities he might live"  
We will see more on these cities when we get to **Chapter 19**. Here in **Chapter 4** we find the three cities set up on the east side of the Jordan. In **Chapter 19** we'll see the three cities set up within Canaan. In that Chapter Moses will go into greater detail on the meaning and purpose of these cities in Israel.
3. The Bible makes it clear that the one who takes the life of another shall forfeit his own life -  
**Genesis 9:6 NAU** - "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man."  
\*\* There is nothing Jewish about this injunction - it is perpetual law delivered before the Jewish state even existed - thus capital punishment is ordained of God to be observed by all men.  
**Leviticus 24:17 NAU** - "If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death."

4. God has established human government to enforce and administer capital punishment. **Romans 13:1-4 NAU** - "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; <sup>4</sup> for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."
5. Under Israel's theocracy the next of kin was responsible for bringing the guilty party to justice. He was referred to as the blood avenger or avenger of blood. **Numbers 35:19-25 NAU** - "The blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death; he shall put him to death when he meets him. <sup>20</sup> 'If he pushed him of hatred, or threw something at him lying in wait and *as a result* he died, <sup>21</sup> or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity, and *as a result* he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death, he is a murderer; the blood avenger shall put the murderer to death when he meets him. <sup>22</sup> 'But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw something at him without lying in wait, <sup>23</sup> or with any deadly object of stone, and without seeing it dropped on him so that he died, while he was not his enemy nor seeking his injury"
- This was the procedure if it was a case of certainty, of clear guilt.
  - If there was doubt as to the guilt or in the case of accidental deaths places of refuge were provided where the accused could seek protection from the avenger of blood. **Exodus. 21:12-14 NAU** - "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. <sup>13</sup> "But if he did not lie in wait *for him*, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. <sup>14</sup> "If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him *even* from My altar, that he may die."   
\*\* Note the sovereignty of God "God let him fall into his hand"   
In other words, it wasn't by malice or a planned act of murder. By God's providence the accident occurred.
  - The case was tried before the congregation. The guilty would be turned over to the avenger of blood. The one who took the life accidentally would be returned to the city of refuge where he would remain until the death of the high priest. **Numbers 35:24-25 NAU** – “, <sup>24</sup> then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the blood avenger according to these ordinances. <sup>25</sup> '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; and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.”
6. We find in the cities of refuge the strict enforcement of justice as well as the rich exercise of mercy in the case of accidental death. God ordained that they establish six cities - three on each side of the Jordan to serve as places of asylum for those who shed blood accidentally.
- Investigation would be made by the elders of the city - where guilt was established the death penalty was carried out.

- B. Where it was proven that the death was accidental the individual was received into the city of refuge where he would remain until the death of the high priest.
7. Three things were specified for the man who killed by accident.
- A. He was required to leave his home and family and take up residence in the city of refuge - Although his life is spared his freedom was curtailed.
- B. If he forsook the protection of the city of refuge and the revenger of blood found him, he was entitled to kill him
- C. Upon the death of the high priest he was allowed to return to his home unmolested.
8. The city of refuge is a wonderful type and foreshadow of God's mercy and provision in Christ Jesus.
- A. For us refuge is found only in Christ -  
**Philippians 3:9 NAU** - "and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,"  
**Hebrews 6:18 NAU** - "we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us."  
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.
- B. His messengers warn sinners to flee for refuge
- This afternoon I want us to look at these cities as a marvelous picture of the awakened sinner

- I. First, we should consider the person's life before he took the person's life.
- A. Prior to the accident the man lived in quietness and comfort.
1. He lived with family and friends – he enjoyed life.
  2. He planned for his future.
- B. The sinner enjoys comfort in his sinfulness.
1. He enjoys life - a false serenity.
  2. He plans for the future - he is content with this world.  
The young person plans to marry, buy a home, have children acquire earthly wealth.
  3. He is self-confident.
  4. Men do not flee for refuge when they are not in distress.
    - a. Our warnings seem like the rantings of a mad man.  
It's like the nice summer day the day before the major hurricane strikes. There is no sign of the danger looming.
    - b. No man flees unless he sees the danger.
      - The preaching of Lot -  
**Genesis 19:14 NAU** - "Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy the city." But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting."
      - The preaching of Noah - "Get in the ark!" But why should they get in this huge boat when it was resting on dry ground?

- II. Suddenly, we witness the life turned up-side-down.
- A. The manslayer suddenly saw his life changed.
1. His mind is greatly distressed - a dead body lies at his feet.
  2. He knows the next of kin has the right to take vengeance. It was their duty.
  3. He thinks of his family, friends, all that he has worked for -- all that he enjoys. But alas, all is lost! It is all of little importance. I must flee! I must save myself!
- B. Likewise it is with the sinner converted by God.
1. The H.S. awakens the sinner from the sleep of spiritual death.
  2. He realizes the wrath of God is upon him.  
He is guilty, he has been a rebel against the Most High.
  3. What shall I do! Great flags go up: Danger! Danger! Danger!  
The fear of wrath, the fear of hell fire
- III. The city of refuge
- A. The manslayer flees for his life to the city of refuge.
1. He has nowhere else to turn. If the avenger of blood finds him his life is forfeit.
  2. The only place of refuge is the city designated by God. Apart from this particular place he has little hope.
- B. Likewise the sinner flees to Christ.  
He hears the good news - He sees Christ as his only refuge and flees to Christ.
1. He had probably heard the Gospel many times just as the manslayer had heard of the cities of refuge - but now it has great significance!
  2. He forsakes all to follow Christ.  
**Luke 14:33 NAU** - "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."  
    - a. Family and friends are left behind.
    - b. Material possessions are left behind.
    - c. Selfish plans are left behind.
- C. It isn't enough to recognize our peril nor to have a knowledge that God has provided relief - we must flee for refuge without delay.
1. A man is either within the refuge or he is not.
  2. There is no middle place with Christ.
- D. The man is only safe as long as he remains within the refuge.
1. A man who dies while outside the refuge of Christ shall surely perish in his sin.
  2. Scripture places as much emphasis on abiding as on coming  
**John 8:31 NAU** - "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine;"  
**Hebrews 3:6 NAU** - "but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house-- whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."  
**Hebrews 3:14 NAU** - "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,"

IV. A look at our responsibility - Conclusion

- A. The city of refuge was mercifully provided by God.
  - 1. It was the manslayers responsibility to flee to it. He had to run with diligence. Only within the walls of the city was their security.
  - 2. He had the duty of remaining in it.
- B. Many a sinner delays to the damnation of his soul.
  - 1. Every sinner has the duty to flee to Christ. There is urgency.  
**Hebrews 3:7-8 NAU** - "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness,"
  - 2. Some want to have a season to entertain their lusts. There is plenty of time they muse. They fail to recognize the Avenger of blood is at their door.