

## **“THE TYPOLOGY OF THE BIBLE” SERIES**

### **#9: “The Cities of Refuge”**

**SCRIPTURE: Numbers 35; Joshua 20**

#### **INTRO:**

**In Numbers 35:10-15, God told Moses to tell the people of Israel: *“After you have crossed the Jordan River and are settled in Canaan, choose Safe Towns, where a person who has accidentally killed someone can run for protection. If the victim’s relatives think it was murder, they might try to take revenge. Anyone accused of murder can run to one of these Safe Towns for protection and not be killed before a trial is held.***

***“There are to be six of these Safe Towns, three on each side of the Jordan River. They will be places of protection for anyone who lives in Israel and accidentally kills someone.”***

**Furthermore, if the person guilty of “manslaughter” was acquitted of the murder charge, he was to stay in the “city of refuge” or “Safe Town” until the death of the High Priest. If he left before the High Priest died, he was “fair game” for the victim’s family. If he stayed until the death of the High Priest, he could safely return to his own town.**

**The six cities designated as “Cities of Refuge” or “Safe Towns” were: 1. Kedesh; 2. Shechem; 3. Hebron; 4. Bezer; 5. Ramoth; and 6. Golan.**

**The Hebrew that is translated “Cities of Refuge” or “Safe Towns” could also be translated “asylum” or “restricted place.” Today, we might call them “sanctuary cities.”**

**I submit to you this morning that these “Cities of Refuge” comprise a “type” of Christ. In Hebrews 6:18, the writer tells us: *“We have run to God for safety.”* Christ is a “Safe Town” for us sinners who have chosen to believe in Him in the following ways:**

***AS THE CITIES OF REFUGE WERE THE ONLY MEANS OF ESCAPE FROM THE VICTIM’S AVENGER, SO ALSO IS CHRIST OUR ONLY MEANS OF ESCAPE FROM GOD’S CONDEMNATION.***

**According to the Mosaic Law, a victim’s avenger was a member of his or her family. It was the old “eye for an eye” thing. If you were responsible for the death of someone, it was up to members of that someone’s family to take your life. However, if you were guilty of manslaughter, rather than murder, you had one way of escape from the family avenger. You could go to a city of refuge, where, if you could convince the High Priest that you were not a murderer, you would be safe, as long as you stayed in that city of refuge until the High Priest died.**

**In Psalm 46:1, the Bible says that *“God is our mighty fortress, always ready to help in times of trouble.”***

The way to God is through Christ. He's the only way. Jesus said in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life! Without me, no one can go to the Father."*

Peter said in Acts 4:12, *"Only Jesus has the power to save! His name is the only one in all the world that can save anyone."*

Second,

***AS THE SAFE TOWNS WERE EASILY ACCESSIBLE TO ALL, SO ALSO IS CHRIST.***

These six "Safe Towns" were strategically located, with three east of the Jordan and three west. Wherever you were in Palestine, you weren't far from a "Safe Town."

The Covenant God made with Abraham wasn't universally known, and not everyone knew about the Law of Moses, but the Old Testament prophets foretold a time when God would make a new covenant that would apply to all who would believe on His Son Jesus. Jesus' last words to His followers were: *"Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you."*

Peter wrote: *"The Lord isn't slow about keeping his promises, as some people think he is. In fact, God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost"* (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9).

John wrote in Revelation 22:17, *"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' Everyone who hears this should say, 'Come!' If you are thirsty, come! If you want life-giving water, come and take it. It's free!"*

Third,

***AS THE SANCTUARY CITIES AFFORDED COMPLETE ASYLUM, SO ALSO DOES CHRIST.***

Once someone made it to one of the cities of refuge, he was totally safe from any avenger. Joshua 20:3-6 explains:

*"If a person accidentally kills someone and the victim's relatives say it was murder, they might try to take revenge. Anyone accused of murder can run to one of the Safe Towns and be safe from the victim's relatives. The one needing protection will stand at the entrance to the town gate and explain to the town leaders what happened. Then the leaders will bring that person in and provide a place to live in their town.*

*"One of the victim's relatives might come to the town, looking for revenge. But the town leaders must not simply hand over the person accused of murder. After all, the accused and the victim had been neighbors, not enemies. The citizens of that Safe Town must come*

***together and hold a trial. They may decide that the victim was killed accidentally and that the accused is not guilty of murder.***

***“Everyone found not guilty must still live in the Safe Town until the high priest dies. Then they can go back to their own town and their homes that they had to leave behind.”***

***In the New Testament, Paul assures us in Romans 8:1 that “If you belong to Christ Jesus, you won’t be punished.”***

***Jesus himself assured us in John 15:4, “Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you.”***

**Finally,**

***AS THE CITIES OF REFUGE REFLECTED GOD’S MERCY, SO ALSO DOES CHRIST – EVEN MORE SO.***

**God’s justice is always administered with mercy. In Numbers 35:30-34, the Lord declared to the people of Israel:**

***“Death is the penalty for murder. But no one accused of murder can be put to death unless there are at least two witnesses to the crime. You cannot give someone money to escape the death penalty; you must pay with your own life. And if you have been proven innocent of murder and are living in a Safe Town, you cannot pay to go back home; you must stay there until the priest dies.***

***I, the Lord, live among you people of Israel, so your land must be kept pure. But when a murder takes place, blood pollutes the land, and it becomes unclean. If that happens, the murderer must be put to death, so the land will be clean again. Keep murder out of Israel.”***

**So, murder was not only considered a capital crime; it was looked upon as a defilement of the land, the nation. Life was sacred in those days.**

**In the news this past week was the fact that the city of Chicago saw 762 murders in 2016, the highest total in 20 years – more than New York City and Los Angeles combined.**

**Sadly, murder statistics in major cities around the world are staggering:**

- Caracas, Venezuela – nearly 4,000 per year
- Cape Town, South Africa – nearly 2,500 per year
- Fortaleza, Brazil – nearly 2,500
- San Salvador, El Salvador – nearly 2,000
- Salvador, Brazil – nearly 2,000
- Guatemala City, Guatemala – over 1,500
- Cali, Columbia – over 1,500
- Porto Alegre, Brazil – nearly 1,500

- Recife, Brazil – nearly 1,500
- Johannesburg, South Africa – nearly 1,400
- Durban, South Africa – over 1,200

By country, Brazil ranks #1 in murders, with Venezuela #2, Mexico #3, and South Africa and the United States tying for #4.

I wonder, if our attitude toward murder was the same as the attitude toward it in ancient Palestine, would the numbers be anywhere as high as they are today?

While the penalty for murder, under the Mosaic Law, was death, murder was not an unpardonable sin, spiritually speaking. And it's not today. 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9 assures us that God *"wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost."* In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:15-16 Paul wrote: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This saying is true and it can be trusted. I was the worst sinner of all! But since I was worse than anyone else, God had mercy on me and let me be an example of the endless patience of Christ Jesus. He did this so that others would put their faith in Christ and have eternal life."* People, Paul was an unbeliever and a murderer! He persecuted many of the first believers! Many of them died because of him! Yet he was forgiven and awarded a *"crown of righteousness"* (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:6-8).

#### CONCLUSION:

Whatever your sin, God will forgive you if you truly repent and live for Him. Paul wrote in Romans 5:20-21, *"...where sin was powerful, God's kindness was even more powerful. Sin ruled by means of death. But God's kindness now rules, and God has accepted us because of Jesus Christ our Lord. This means that we will have eternal life."*

If Paul could be forgiven through faith in Christ, anybody can!