

SERMON: JESUS, OUR REFUGE

GOOD Morning OIC AND WELCOME TO FATHER'S HOUSE

In this Message I will be continuing in the book of Joshua with the title “JESUS, OUR REFUGE.” I closed my last Message titled “**DON'T GIVE UP!**” With: **Whatever your need, Jesus will see your steps toward Him.** Today we will review how Joshua assigned the areas in Canaan, the Promised Land, to the twelve tribes or clans of the Israelites; and God's mercy shown by His defining of *Cities of Refuge*.

Reading (**Joshua 18.1-3**) *INow that the land was under Israelite control, the entire community of Israel gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tabernacle. 2 But there remained seven tribes who had not yet been allotted their grants of land. 3 Then Joshua asked them, “How long are you going to wait before taking possession of the remaining land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given to you?*

Reading (**Joshua 18.1**) *INow that the land was under Israelite control, the entire community of Israel gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tabernacle.* As I had said in my last sermon titled “Don't Give Up,” Joshua had led the Israelite Army to conquer all the organized armies against them. But a total victory meant future skirmishes to exterminate the Canaanite groups or pockets of resistance. This was a much smaller task than the wars already waged in Canaan. Each clan or tribe of Israelites had the responsibility to finish the war in their own territory which would be assigned to them. So the big picture or overview is *the land was under Israelite control*.

THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL *Show MAP SLIDE*

The Twelve Tribes of Israel were originally from the twelve sons of Jacob, later called Israel by God. These (in birth order) were Gad, Asher, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali. As the Israelites entered Canaan, the tribes had changed: Levi had become the Priesthood Tribe or Levites; Joseph had become two tribes, from his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

Several tribes were likely proactive and aggressive as Joshua had commanded. They receive their territories first in Joshua Chapter 13.

MANASSEH, REUBEN, GAD - In **(Joshua 13.8)** *Half the tribe of Manasseh and the tribes of Reuben and Gad had already received their grants of land on the east side of the Jordan, for Moses, the servant of the Lord, had previously assigned this land to them.*

LEVI – In **(Joshua 13.14)** *Moses did not assign any allotment of land to the tribe of Levi. Instead, as the Lord had promised them, their allotment came from the offerings burned on the altar to the Lord, the God of Israel. Later the Lord would assign the Levite Priests to rule the Cities of Refuge.*

REUBEN – In **(Joshua 13.21-23)** *21 The land of Reuben also included all the towns of the plain and the entire kingdom of Sihon. Sihon was the Amorite king who had reigned in Heshbon and was killed by Moses along with the leaders of Midian—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba—princes living in the region who were allied with Sihon. 22 The Israelites had also killed Balaam son of Beor, who used magic to tell the future. 23 The Jordan River marked the western boundary for the tribe of Reuben. The towns and their surrounding villages in this area were given as a homeland to the clans of the tribe of Reuben.*

GAD – In **(Joshua 13.24)** *24 Moses had assigned the following area to the clans of the tribe of Gad.*

See MAP

MANASSEH - **(Joshua 13.29)** *Moses had assigned the following area to the clans of the half-tribe of Manasseh. NOTE- Ephraim and one half of Manasseh are on the west side of the Jordan River. See MAP*

LEVITES **(Joshua 13.33)** *But Moses gave no allotment of land to the tribe of Levi, for the Lord, the God of Israel, had promised that he himself would be their allotment.*

Let us refer ahead to the New Testament, regarding Royal Priests. Reading in **(1 Peter 2.8-9)**
8 *And, “He {JESUS} is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they do not obey God’s word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.*
9 *But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*

We Christians are royal priests. Our royalty is the KING OF KINGS, THE LORD OF LORDS, JESUS! He is our allotment even more so than that of the Levites. Unlike the sins of the Levites, our sins have all been washed away by the blood of the Passover Lamb, Jesus. Is there any rich home, spacious apartment, or powerful kingdom on Earth as China or America, that can compare with the promise that the Glorious Lord Jesus Himself is our allotment and future living place?

(Joshua 18.2) Tells us that there were still seven tribes who were not assigned territory. Joshua exhorts or reprimands these tribes for laziness to fight. One Bible Reference **(TLB)** comments that these seven tribes were wandering about Canaan and trading for goods with the remaining Canaanites. It is true that since leaving Egypt the Israelites learned to live a nomad's life as they traveled. Another theory for these seven tribes in **(MHC)**: “Perhaps the tribes of Judah and Joseph, who had already received their inheritance in the countries next adjoining, were generous in entertaining their brethren who were yet unprovided for, so that they (the seven Tribes) went from one good house to another among their friends, with which, instead of grudging that they were postponed, they were so well pleased that they cared not for going to houses of their own.” Whatever the details, they were slothful regarding God's command to **take possession of all the land.**

Again in **(MHC)**: “If they go to take possession of them, the cities must be rebuilt or repaired, they must drive their flocks and herds a great way, and carry their wives and children to strange places, and this will not be done without care and pains, and breaking through some hardships; thus *he that observes the wind shall not sow, and he that regards the clouds shall not reap,* **(Ecclesiastes 11.4/KJ21).**” This Scripture verse Matthew Henry quoted reminds me of Jesus' Parable of the Two Sons in **(Matthew 21.28-31)** **28** “*But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’* **29** *The son answered, ‘No, I won’t go,’ but later he changed his mind and went anyway.* **30** *Then the father told the other son, ‘You go,’ and he said, ‘Yes, sir, I will.’ But he didn’t go.* **31** “*Which of the two obeyed his father?” They replied, “The first.”* **As in Jesus' Parable and Ecclesiastes: Good intentions must lead to obedience and not just looking at the clouds and weather!**

NEW TESTAMENT WARNING

I agree with Matthew Henry's use of this history in the Book of Joshua as a warning to us Christians. Some Christians take the *easy way* while still not denying the faith. Quoting **(MLC)**: “God by his grace has given us a title to a good land, the heavenly Canaan, but we are *slack to take possession*; we enter not into that rest, as we might by faith, and hope, and holy joy; we live not in heaven, as we might by setting our affections on things above and having our conversation there.” This means that Jesus bought us the Promised Land of Heaven by His *obedient sacrifice* on the Cross. Our *conversation*, is our Christian lifestyle. As the Apostle Paul wrote in **(Colossians 3.1-3/NASB1995)**

1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When we live with our minds more set or focused upon earthly matters, we are “*slack to take possession.*” {of our spiritual blessings.} We enter not into that rest, as we might by faith, and hope, and holy joy; we live not in heaven.” We know that being in this world, and not of this world, requires earthly work and problems. But, as we focus and exercise our faith on placing rewards in Heaven, and, on the return of our Glorious Lord from Heaven; the Holy Spirit gives us hope, and holy joy! Therefore Matthew Henry is saying that in the New Testament being slack may all be in our way of thinking and devotion, and not in the works of our hands!

(Joshua 18.3) “*How long are you going to wait before taking possession of the remaining land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given to you?*” Their courageous leader, Joshua, was righteous and upset at this attitude of sloth and taking the easy way. His solution was to assign them seven pieces of the land for them to settle in. By forcing them to stop wandering or living off the settled-in Israelites, he had hoped they would eliminate the sinful Canaanites to own their land.

We see this happening in **(Joshua 18.4-6)** *4 Select three men from each tribe, and I will send them out to explore the land and map it out. They will then return to me with a written report of their proposed divisions of their new homeland. 5 Let them divide the land into seven sections, excluding Judah’s territory in the south and Joseph’s territory in the north. 6 And when you record the seven divisions of the land and bring them to me, I will cast sacred lots in the presence of the LORD our God to assign land to each tribe.*

Note that the twenty-one men were dividing the land into seven sections not knowing who would receive each section. God would choose as Joshua would *cast the sacred lots*. These *sacred lots* were likely the *Urim and Thummim* held in the high priests breastplate. The high priests garments were defined by God through Moses with His instructions on how to build the Tabernacle. This is while the Israelites were still traveling towards the Promised Land of Canaan. **(Exodus 39.1)**

1 Moreover, from the blue and purple and scarlet material, they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place as well as the holy garments which were for Aaron, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

NEW TESTAMENT DECISION MAKING

The Apostles of Jesus wanted God to choose a replacement for the traitor Judas Iscariot. They were in seclusion and prayer awaiting the Gift of the Holy Spirit from God the Father. They did not have access to the High Priests garments, and of course, the High Priest would likely call for their Crucifixion as He had their Master, Jesus. We read this in **(Acts 1.20-26 /NASB1995)** *20 “For it is written in the book of Psalms,{Psalm 109},*

'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.' 21 *Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— 22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."* 23 *So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."* 26 ***And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.*** So the Eleven Apostles drew lots and the lots showed Matthias was Jesus' choice. Most Bible scholars believe that God did not chasten them for they had not yet received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The Feast of Pentecost began 50 days after Passover, thus, 50 days after Jesus' Crucifixion.

But, Jesus clearly chose the Apostle Paul as the twelfth Apostle to replace Judas. Jesus actually appeared from Heaven to choose Paul on the road to Damascus. There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate Matthias' apostleship had any impact. Paul explained this encounter with the risen Lord to King Agrippa in **(Acts 26.12-15)** 12 *"One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests. 13 About noon, Your Majesty, as I was on the road, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. 14 We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will.'* 15 *"Who are you, lord?' I asked. "And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.* Paul would soon impact most of the civilized world with his anointed preaching and church planting gifts.

Christians must never make our God a god of "chance." Jesus is the Lord of Heaven and earth. The *Urim and Thummim* are replaced by the indwelling Holy Spirit and God's faithfulness to answer every Christian's prayer!

Now Joshua reminds the twenty-one men of their mission in **(Joshua 18.8)** *As the men started on their way to map out the land, Joshua commanded them, “Go and explore the land and write a description of it. Then return to me, and I will assign the land to the tribes by casting sacred lots here in the presence of the LORD at Shiloh.”*

SLIDES on screen

**ISREALITE TRIBES ASSIGNED LANDS AND THE AREAS IN CANAAN NOT YET
CONQUERED AND OCCUPIED**

The Seven Tribes not yet assigned territory were: Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. The Leaders also gave Joshua his choice of land to live in. He chose land in the hill country of Ephraim.

I must note that we Followers of Jesus in the New Testament period were given great affirmation and confirmation of our *home on high*. Other than daily needed provisions, there were no small kingdoms or lands on Earth in Jesus' Promises for Christians. During the “Last Supper,” Thursday evening before Jesus' Crucifixion, He promised their future Home for Eternity. We read Jesus' Promise of Glory for us Christians in **(John 14. 1-3)** *1 “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. 2 There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.* He said this to His original apostles who would all be crucified, and eventually in His promise of sufferings, to the Apostle Paul. Paul would be beheaded by the Roman Caesar.

When we read in the Older Testament, as the Book of Joshua, of lands on earth for God's People, we must remember what the Apostle Paul said to Believers, everyday Christians who were not Apostles. This is in **(Acts 14.21-22)** *21 After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, 22 where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them **that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.***

CITIES OF REFUGE *See MAP*

The Israelites had many years of wars while traveling from Egypt, and into their Promised Land. God wanted to bring justice into the minds of His people. The human mind that obeys God to kill those He condemned, is often distorted and turns to violence instinctively. We see this in the details of modern soldiers not necessarily Christians. But the detailed reporting of wars in the past century shows that a soldier whose best friend was just killed gets filled with a lust for “revenge.” Killing in war, a soldier's job, is not murder as shown in the Bible, God's Word. But, revenge beyond the victory in battle, is!

We can see this throughout the Bible. But in the Newer Testament, in A.D.26, John the Baptist was bold to preach that all his listeners were sinners needing to repent. Yet John said this to Roman Soldiers in **(Luke 3.14/AMPC)***Those serving as soldiers also asked him, And we, what shall we do? And he replied to them, Never demand or enforce by terrifying people or by accusing wrongfully, and always be satisfied with your rations (supplies) and with your allowance (wages).*

Note that what John did not say is powerful. He did not say do not kill anyone in the line of duty! He knew that a soldier's devotion to his country was not a sin problem! He warned of using their job to kill as a personal power to steal and control citizens, not enemy soldiers on the field of battle!

Jumping back in History about 1,410 years- We see God's wisdom about killing as regarding the heart of men in **(Joshua 20.1- 3)***1 The LORD said to Joshua, 2 “Now tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed Moses. 3 Anyone who kills another person accidentally and unintentionally can run to one of these cities; they will be places of refuge from relatives seeking revenge for the person who was killed.*

As He had instructed Moses, God wanted His new Nation, Israel, to be a group of tribes united under Him and a just government which rejected revenge outside of the Law. This

was a large step to a new government in Israel. These Cities of Refuge {see MAP} were all within one day's journey for each tribe. The Levites were in charge of the Cities of Refuge.

Reading (Joshua 20.4-6) “Upon reaching one of these cities, the one who caused the death will appear before the elders at the city gate and present his case. They must allow him to enter the city and give him a place to live among them. 5 If the relatives of the victim come to avenge the killing, the leaders must not release the slayer to them, for he killed the other person unintentionally and without previous hostility. 6 But the slayer must stay in that city and be tried by the local assembly, which will render a judgment. And he must continue to live in that city until the death of the high priest who was in office at the time of the accident. After that, he is free to return to his own home in the town from which he fled.” Levite Priests were in charge of each of these cities. The Priests would definitely give a sense of the **fear of the Lord** to anyone who wanted to reject this new form of governing for God's people. *See MAP ---* The cities are given in (Joshua 20.7-8) 7 The following cities were designated as cities of refuge: Kedesh of Galilee, in the hill country of Naphtali; Shechem, in the hill country of Ephraim; and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), in the hill country of Judah. 8 On the east side of the Jordan River, across from Jericho, the following cities were designated: Bezer, in the wilderness plain of the tribe of Reuben; Ramoth in Gilead, in the territory of the tribe of Gad; and Golan in Bashan, in the land of the tribe of Manasseh.

JESUS, A CHRISTIAN'S CITY OF REFUGE

We saw in (Joshua 20.1- 2)1 The LORD said to Joshua, 2 “Now tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed Moses. Christians had reached the border of the City of Refuge, the Cross of Jesus Christ. They accepted God's invitation to enter in the City by accepting Jesus' Sacrifice for their sins on His Cross. They are **FOREVER SAFE!** As Jesus promised them in (Matthew 11.29-30) 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light {meaning not heavy}.” Jesus knew that Christians would face battles against the Devil even as He did on Earth. But Jesus made our victory clear. As He said He stands with us against

the Devil in **(Matthew 28.20b)** *And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* And, in **(John 16.33)** *I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have **overcome the world.***”

JESUS, A SINNER'S CITY OF REFUGE

The *Cities of Refuge* were arranged to be less than a day's journey from every part of the land of Canaan. This mercy to a killer who accidentally took another man's life showed God's compassionate heart. He wanted His Chosen People to become like Himself!

Our Salvation is only a prayer away. Unlike the accidental murderer, we have sinned, and committed murder in our minds; if not with our bodies. And not always accidentally sin but with intention to sin and intention to kill! We do not deserve such mercy as *Cities of Refuge* as we crucified the Lord with our sins.

JESUS' WORDS ON MURDER

(Matthew 5.21-22/MOUNCE-Greek Translation) *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder,’ and, ‘whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that anyone who is angry with his brother **without a cause** will be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raka,’ { raka/Gk.- an Aramaic term of bitter contempt, a **worthless** fellow } will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ { moros/Gk.- from the Hebrew, a **fool in senseless wickedness** } will be liable to the hell of fire.*

Yet we do not have to travel a day's journey for total forgiveness and cleansing of all our sin. Jesus, our City of Refuge is near at hand. Jesus is a Present Saviour and the way to Him is short! Jesus knows that our evil hearts need cleansing by the Blood of His Cross. He said in **(Mark 7.21-22)** *21 For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.*

Have you ever come to His Cross for a cleansing from these sins?... These sins of your evil heart.

I have!!! ... He did not reject my pleas for mercy! He cleansed me before I even understood anything much beyond my deserving Hell! And how real His Cross still is at hand for everyone.

A simple renunciation or surrendering of any claim to your own goodness, and a laying hold of Jesus, to be your all in all. Come to Jesus bleeding and dying for you on His Cross. Embrace it...you will find Jesus, the Resurrected and Living Savior.

The roads in Canaan to the *Cities of Refuge* were carefully and diligently maintained for speedy travel for the man killer. There were fixed-up hand-posts and signs pointing to the Refuge for the desperate man escaping certain death. So is the simple Word of Jesus' Gospel that I preach. Christ died for sinners of which I am the worst! The Gospel is your sign post to your City of Refuge.

Sinner, your death is certain. It is chasing you even now! The Bible tells us clearly in **(Hebrews 9.26b-28)** *But now, once for all time, he {Jesus} has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice. 27 And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, 28 so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people.* But if you come to Jesus, your spiritual death will never happen! You will never face judgment! Only waste no time. Loiter not by the way for the avenger of blood is swift of foot. It may be that he is at your heels even this morning. Run to Jesus' Cross. Accept His Death for your sins. Then you may spend Eternity safe in your Refuge, Jesus!

If you feel God moving deep inside of you to run to Jesus' Cross... simply walk over to the Lift Sign after the Lord's Supper time. I want to meet you there to pray for you!

Let Us Pray

Holy Communion...

REFERENCES

AMPC - The Amplified Bible, Classic Edition, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation

KJ21 – 21st Century King James Version (KJ21), Copyright © 1994 by Deuel Enterprises, Inc.

MHC - Matthew Henry's Commentary, , Reprint 2009, Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, Peabody, Massachusetts, USA

NASB1995 - New American Standard Bible 1995 ®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

NLT- *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale Publishers, Inc. Carol Stream, Illinois USA 60188. 1996

TLB - The Living Bible copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.