

**The God of Second
Chances!**
Joshua 20:1-6

God Has Always Offered Mercy—Punishment We Deserve But Don't Receive

Joshua 20:1-6

“Then the Lord said to Joshua: Tell the Israelites to designate cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses (Exodus 21), so that anyone who kills a servant accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood. When they flee to one of these cities, they are to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state their case before the elders of the city.

Then the elders are to admit the fugitive into the city and provide a place to live among them.

“If the avenger of blood comes in pursuit, the elders must not surrender the fugitive, because the fugitive killed their neighbor unintentionally and without malice afterthought. They are to stay in that city until they have stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then they may go back to their own home in the town from which they fled.”

Look at Exodus 21:12-13

“Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death. However, if it is not done intentionally, but God lets it happen, they are to flee to a place I will designate. But if anyone schemes and kills someone deliberately, that person is to be taken from my altar and put to death.”

Background Information

- The nation of Israel had an army, but nothing like the “police force” system we have today for our own communities
- The “avenger of blood,” literally the “nearest of kin,” (Ga’al), had the responsibility of exacting justice on the murderer (2 Samuel 14:7; 2 Samuel 14:11)
- Remember that the Israelites didn’t have lawyers and client representatives like we do. They had “The Law,” the 1st Five Books of the Bible
- One of the laws dealt with what should happen if someone was maliciously killed or murdered with premeditation
- Exodus 21:13 the Israelites were told, *“If anyone schemes and kills someone deliberately, that person is to be taken from my altar and put to death.”*

Observations

- **The penalty for murder was death, Exodus 21:13**
- **It was the right of the family member of the person who had been killed (avenger of blood), to avenge that death**
- **It wasn't done by the legal system the way it is today, but by the victim's family, who took matters into their own hands!**
- **But what if the victim was killed unintentionally—literally by accident or negligence?**
- **Prior to The Law there was no provision for situations like this**
- **Could the family of the person killed still do whatever they wanted to do to the person who had accidentally taken the life of their loved one? Who decided it was accidental?**

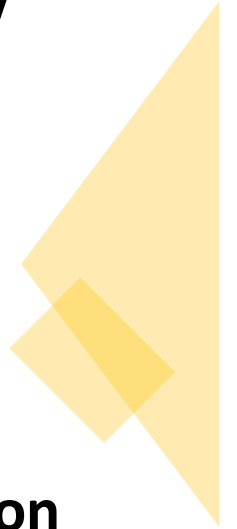
Observations

- **This commandment was given by God for a purpose**
- **God says that people who commit premeditated murders should be put to death**
- **So what we call “capital punishment,” for premeditated murder was a part of God’s will**
- **However, we know that there are times when people have conflict or even negligent situations that lead to someone’s “unintentional death.” (e.g., an axe head slips off as you chop wood and hits someone, or a bow-and-arrow accident on a hunting trip). What did God say should happen if that was the case?**



#1 God Has Always Offered Mercy

- We are reading about rules in the Old Testament that covered the accidental death or the loss of a loved one through negligence, versus premeditative manslaughter
- However, either way there was still a dead person. A Manslaughter had been committed
- Should the person involved in the death of the other person walk away free because they simply said, *“I didn’t mean it!”*
- When a family member was murdered, didn’t the family members (avengers of blood), have the right to bring the murderer to justice and received punishment?
- Did the accused have any rights at all, at this time?



The Cities of Refuge Were God's Idea Based On a Basic Fundamental Principle of Justice and Mercy:

You Are Innocent Until Proven Guilty!

- Joshua set up 3 Cities of Refuge on each side of the Jordan River (no one was ever too far from one of them)
- If an accidental death or a death with malice took place, the person could travel quickly to one of these Cities as a “safe haven” or an “asylum.”
- The City Leaders there would hold their own form of court to determine if the death was premeditated or unintentional
- The person was permitted to live in the city, without being harmed, until his trial was over but couldn't safely leave the city without risk

The Cities of Refuge (God's Mercy)

No One Was Too Far
From Any One
of Them!



#2 Mercy Doesn't Remove Consequences

Once in the City of Refuge

“They are to stay in that city until they have stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then they may go back to their own home in the town from which they fled.” Joshua 20:6

- If an accidental death took place, the person goes to the City of Refuge (ASAP). He was still “fair game” if not in the city
- The leaders of the city would hold court; and it would be determined if the circumstances surrounding the death were intentional or accidental
- If the leaders ruled *intentional*, the person was turned over to the victim's family (the avengers of blood, eye-for-eye, etc).
- If the leaders ruled *unintentional*, the accused was permitted to leave the City of Refuge and go back to his own home

“But it Doesn’t Seem Fair to Have to Remain in the Same City for Protection!”

- **If a person’s family member caught, “the accused” outside of the Cities before trial, they could still legally be put to death**
- **So, remaining in the City of Refuge gave the person “another chance at life.” A Second Chance**
- **Remember, the person in question here had made some mistakes; and God recognized that this person had to come face-to-face with justice (the evidence had to be weighed)**
- **But God was teaching his people MERCY in the face of JUSTICE! (also, just rushing to the city and claiming your innocence didn’t excuse you from having a trial)**
- **Just any city wouldn’t do! (Salvation was in the C.O.R.)**
- **The Cities of Refuge were to be places where both justice and mercy existed together**

What Represents the Cities of Refuge Today?

The Church

- The church should be a place where justice and mercy coexist
- The church was never meant to be a, “showcase for saints,” but a “hospital for sinners.” Romans 3:23, “All have sinned...”
- Remember that the person who had to run to the City of Refuge had made mistakes, like all of us who “dwell in the City/Church,” Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”
- We too, must strive to remain in the Right City (Church) until our case comes up; Hebrews 9:27
- For a Christian to “dibble and dabble” in sin while supposedly “in the City/Church” is dangerous and can cause the loss of one’s eternal home, 1 John 1:7-9

One Case Study, 2 Samuel 3,4

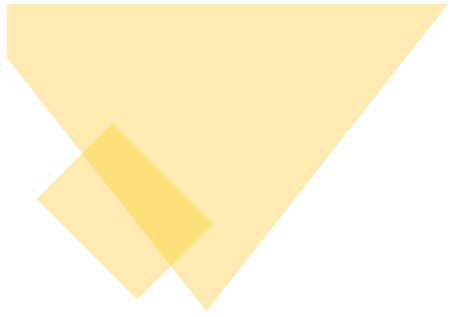
- Joab, the chief army commander of the Israelites, had a brother named Asahel, who was maliciously killed by a soldier named Abner, 2 Samuel 2:18-32
- Joab was the next of kin (avenger) and hated Abner as a result and wanted to follow the Law of Retribution, an eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth, life-for-a-life protocol, but the City of Refuge Law was “in the way.”
- So, Abner left the countryside where he was, and ended up in Hebron, one of the Cities of Refuge
- In 2 Samuel 3, the Bible says that Joab went to Hebron and asked Abner to come outside the gate under the ruse that he just wanted to talk to him
- Abner came outside the City and Joab put a knife in his stomach, killing him to avenge his brother; 2 Samuel 3:27

Dibbling and Dabbling in Sin Can Cause Us to Lose Our Place in the Church/City!

2 Peter 2:20-21 “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they again are entangled therein, and overcome, the later end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

Don't Play With God's Mercy Outside of Christ!



The Plan of Salvation

Hear the Gospel

Acts 15:7

Believe the Gospel

Acts 15:7

Repent of Sins

Acts 17:30

Confess Christ

Acts 8:37

Be Baptized

Acts 8:38

