

The Wednesday Word, August 11, 2021: The Cities of Refuge (Part 1)

"Then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there." (Numbers 35:11).

At that time, throughout the Middle East, when a man was killed accidentally or by malice, the nearest relative, his heir, or any person related to him, could take revenge for him. In Joshua 20:7-8, as a response to the instruction of Numbers 35:11, they appointed 6 cities (Kedesh, Shechem, Kirjatharba (Hebron), Bezer, Ramoth and Golan) as cities of refuge for the protection of those guilty of unintentionally killing someone. Such a person could take refuge in any one of these cities and not die by the hand of the 'avenger of blood.'

Mark this down, all these cities, in their names, point us to the sinner's safe-haven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the true City of Refuge. He is the preserver of all those who flee to Him for mercy (see Hebrews 6:18). He is our divinely appointed Saviour who saves to the uttermost all those who come to God by him (Hebrews 7:25).

The names of these six cities have much to tell us about the Lord. They are, in fact, six lovely pictures of the Saviour. May they, as we examine them, motivate us to love the Master even more.

The first city we encounter is,

1) Kedesh.

What does this name tell of Christ?

The Hebrew word Kedesh means "*Holy*." Our city of refuge, Jesus, is, in fact, "*The Holy One*." Not one stain of sin polluted His holy human nature (1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

The angelic creatures in heaven, rested not day and night as they cried out to Him, "*Holy! holy! holy!*" (Revelation 4:8).

Devils on earth recognized Him and were compelled to exclaim, "*We know thee who you are, the Holy One of God*" (Mark 1:24).

Paul wrote about Him and said "*He was Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*" (Hebrews 7:26).

He challenged His enemies saying, "*Which of you convinces me of sin?*" (John 8:46). The word in Greek for 'convinces' literally means to reprove, rebuke, convince, convict, expose, admonish to call to account or demand an explanation. Jesus was utterly sinless and entirely holy. He could not have been exposed as being a sinner for He was pure.

Then consider the disciples. They had lived with Him for three years. For more than 36 months they had shared their lives yet not one of them could point to any sin He had committed. When it comes right down to it, living with others is when we find out what the other person is really like. But no one could find fault in Jesus. He was and is Divine Holiness in human expression. What an amazing city of refuge!

However, there is something about holiness that scares, and threatens us. People, who claim to be holy can make us feel uncomfortable, inferior, unworthy, guilty, and condemned. But in Jesus the opposite is true. In Christ, the worst of sinners finds the deepest of love. The Lord's holiness does not threaten the believer. Jesus says, 'come unto me and I will give you rest ... not retribution.'

In addition, Christ's holiness does not stand against us. In fact, through grace, it is reckoned to us. It is calculated to the believer's account (1 Corinthians 1:30).

May we always remember that Jesus could not have saved us had He not been sinless. If He had had one sin, we would have been lost forever. As J.R. MacDuff observed, "Just as one leak in Noah's ark of old would have sunk it, so one leak of sin in Jesus, the true Ark, would have plunged us all in the depths of eternal despair.

He is our Kedesh. He is our holiness! May the Lord help us to say,

"I love the name of Jesus,
Immanuel, Christ the Lord;
Like fragrance on the breezes,
His *name* abroad is pour'd;"

"I long to be *like* Jesus,
Meek, lowly, loving, mild;
I long to be *like* Jesus,
The Father's HOLY Child!"

The next city of refuge we encounter is Shechem, but we'll have to look at that next time.

And that's the Gospel Truth!