

March 14

Joshua 18 & 19

Joshua 20 and 21

"Before the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land, Moses had gotten them all together and told them of the inheritance that awaited them if they went right into the land and possessed it. To Benjamin, for example, he said, "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him, between His shoulders." What a place to live! In safety before the Lord - between the shoulders of the Master! Of the tribe of Issachar Moses said, 'they would receive the deep treasures of the ocean and discover the jewels of the sands.' For the tribe of Issachar, there were some very precious gifts if they possessed the portion allotted to them. The child of God who would possess all that is his or hers in Christ will have limitless experiences of the fathomless ocean of the grace of God, and possess some of the most wonderful jewels of Christian character.

Christian - there is an experience of Christ for us - a share in His victory - an experience of the fullness of His blessing, that is as far beyond the level of average Christian living as Canaan was beyond the wilderness. Alan Redpath tells a great story to illustrate this truth. "If you go," he says, "to the border between England and Scotland, you can walk over the ruins of Hadrian's wall - once the limit of the Roman Empire in England. In that district you will find many ancient towers, some in great shape even today and others in total ruins. If you ask why some were preserved and others destroyed, you would be told this story. Several hundred years ago, England and Scotland were at war. The English in the region were constantly being attacked by Scots who carried away their cattle and stole their crops. To defend themselves, the English built these castles near the border. Some of them had secret springs to produce a constant supply of water and others were dependent on pipes to receive water from a well several hundred yards away. The Scottish invaders were astute enough to know what to do - they dug up the pipes and cut them - then they waited until the people died of thirst. But the castles with their own springs were invincible and they are the ones still standing today!! When a Christian possesses all that Christ has purchased for him, he has an inner spring of living water - his castle is not likely to easily come down."

Joshua 20 & 21

God works mightily on behalf of Israel. He gives them the land. He decimates the opposition. All they have to do is to act in faith and take what He has given. They respond - but not completely. They take some of the land - but not all of it. He gives it, but they are responsible to take it, and their obedience is only partial. We really are a lot like Israel. The finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary has purchased all that we need for life and godliness. The price is paid. The gift has been offered - the land is ours to go in and possess. And like Israel of old, we have gone in - but we have only taken a portion of what Christ bought for us.

This is a very important concept for you and I to get our minds and hearts around. It brings together the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. At many different places in the word of God, and in our own experience and walk with Him, we

are going to be brought face to face with these two seemingly irreconcilable facts: God is sovereign. We are responsible. This tension is one with which we must live, trusting God to do the work for us, and at the same time, exercising ourselves constantly in godliness, as we cooperate with what He has already done.

The very existence of these cities alerts us to a number of things about Israel. First, it shows us how precious Israel and her God considered a human life to be. All the way back in the Book of Genesis, it was explained to us by God that because man is made in the image of God, the penalty for murder is death. That, you will remember, was part of God's covenant with Noah. *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed"* (Genesis 9:6).

Now the burden of executing the sentence against a murderer seems to have fallen, from earliest days onward, upon the nearest relative of a victim - in fact, upon the closest male relative who is designated in our text as the "avenger of blood." That is a very ominous-sounding term, and the responsibility it carries was ominous indeed. For the perpetrator of intentional murder, there could never be rest or safety, from the time of the crime until the day of his death. Always, he must run, knowing that somewhere out there, the avenger of blood was seeking justice and retribution. For intentional murder, just as for the larger category of intentional sin, as we saw in the Books of Leviticus and Numbers, there was no provision for forgiveness or pardon. But if it was not murder, but manslaughter, an unpremeditated, accidental taking of human life, then the city of refuge became the haven. As quickly as possible, the offending party must get themselves to the gate of the nearest city of refuge. No admission could be given until he had convinced the elders of the city of the innocence of his cause. If he could not make a compelling case for his innocence, he would not be admitted. But if he succeeded, he could stay in the city with no fear of vengeance. He could not leave, however, without incurring all of his former liability, until the death of the high priest serving when the incident occurred. His home and fields, his family (unless they came with him,) his employment - all of these things were left behind. The value of human life was thus established in Israel. Though the one guilty of manslaughter might continue to live, he was paying a high price for his folly or carelessness. The murderer's life was forfeit, and the very existence of the cities kept the society from falling into a state of anarchy over perpetual Hatfield and McCoy-like blood feuds.

It is probably worth noting that the person designated to be the avenger of blood would also have other familial responsibilities. This same individual would, under different circumstances, become the "kinsman redeemer" of a family unit. We'll have a lot more contact with that concept when we read the wonderful little Book of Ruth. For now we will be content to note that when poverty obliged a man to dispose of his property, the "go-el", the nearest of his kin, was bound to intervene and "redeem" the property.