The Cities Of Refuge

A comparison between the cities of refuge under the Law of Moses and the Church under the Law of Christ

Cities of Refuge

• When the Israelites came into the land of promise the land was divided to them by tribe.
• Each of them received an area of land that already contained cities and villages.
• The only tribe that did not receive this type of land inheritance was the tribe of Levi.
• Levi was only given cities inside of the other tribes borders.
• They were given 48 cities in all.
Cities of Refuge

- Sometimes we may not realize what a small part of the world Israel was.
- The land divided among the tribes encompassed an area of about 12,000 square miles.
- In comparison the state of Arkansas covers an area of 53,000 square miles.
- Ancient Israel was less than ¼ the size of Arkansas.
- Modern Israel covers an area of about 8,000 square miles.
Each of the 12 tribes received parcels of land when they came into the promised land

- Reuben
- Dan
- Simeon
- Naphtali
- Judah
- Gad
- Issachar
- Asher
- Zebulun
- Ephraim
- Benjamin
- Manasseh

- Notice there is no area called the tribe of Levi.
- God had separated Levi out to do the work of the tabernacle.
- God said He was the inheritance of the tribe of Levi in Numbers 18:20-21.
- Therefore Levi was only given the 48 cities inside of the other tribes.
Cities of Refuge

• The purpose of these cities was to provide a place of refuge for the person who had accidentally killed someone.

• The laws concerning the Cities of Refuge are found in Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19 and Joshua 20.

• We will read the account in Numbers 35 of how the cities of refuge were to operate.

• Before we do there are a couple of terms we need to understand.

- Of these 48 cities, 6 of them were designated as cities of refuge.
- Nu 35:6 "Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites you shall appoint six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee. And to these you shall add forty-two cities."
Cities of Refuge

• Manslayer: this was a person who killed someone else.
  • This killing could have been on purpose or by accident.

• Avenger of Blood: this was normally the closest kin to the person who had been killed.
  • He had the right under the Law of Moses to kill the Manslayer.
  • It did not matter whether or not the death of his kinsman was accidental or on purpose.

Cities of Refuge

• Nu 35:9 ¶ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
  • 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan,
  • 11 'then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there.
  • 12 'They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.
Cities of Refuge

• 13 'And of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge.
• 14 'You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, which will be cities of refuge.
• 15 'These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there.

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• 16 'But if he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.
• 17 'And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.
• 18 'Or if he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.
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• 19 'The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.
• 20 'If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies,
• 21 'or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

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• 22 'However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait,
• 23 'or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing it at him without seeing him, so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm,
• 24 'then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments.
Cities of Refuge

• 25 'So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, and he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

• 26 'But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled,

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• 27 'and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood,

• 28 'because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession.

• 29 'And these things shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.
Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• The cities were specifically designated.
• The manslayer could not go to any city he chose. He had to go to one of the 6 cities of refuge.
• There were 3 cities on the east and 3 cities on the west side of the Jordan river.
• Joshua tells us which six cities were designated as cities of refuge.

Jos 20:7 ¶ So they appointed Kedesh in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kirjath Arba (which is Hebron) in the mountains of Judah.
Jos 20:8 And on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.

Of all the cities in the promised land these were the only cities of refuge.
The manslayer couldn’t flee to Jerusalem or Jericho and expect to be protected from the Avenger of Blood.
If he fled to any other city he could be killed!
Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• These cities were accessible to everyone.
• As we have already mentioned there were three on each side of the Jordan river providing ready access to anyone who needed them.
• And, they were available to both Jew and Gentile

Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• Nu 35:14 'You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, which will be cities of refuge.
• 15 'These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there.
Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• You had to meet the requirements to be accepted into the cities
• Although they were accessible to everyone only those qualified could take refuge there.
• Only those who had killed someone unintentionally were to be protected in the city.
• The murderer was not to be protected in the city.
• He was to be put to death!

Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• De 19:11 "But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities,
• 12 "then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die."
Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• The manslayer had to reach the city in order to be safe.

• This is why God gave the command that roads be built into these cities in order to provide the swiftest access possible for the manslayer.

• De 19:3 "You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.

Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary: Thou shalt prepare thee a way--The roads leading to them were to be kept in good condition and the brooks or rivers to be spanned by good bridges; the width of the roads was to be thirty-two cubits; and at all the crossroads signposts were to be erected with the words, Mekeleth, Mekeleth, "refuge, refuge," painted on them.

• If the manslayer was caught before he reached the city of refuge he could be killed by the Avenger of Blood!
Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• Finally, the Manslayer had to stay in the city of refuge in order to be safe from the Avenger of Blood.
• Even though he had been granted refuge in the city because he had killed someone accidentally, he still had to stay in the city in order to remain safe.
• If he left the city he could be killed by the Avenger of Blood.

Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• Nu 35:26 'But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled,
• 27 'and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood,
• The only way for him to stay safe was to stay in the city of refuge!
Key Points about the Cities of Refuge

• Recap of these key points:
  1. You couldn’t go to just any city. It had to be one of the designated cities.
  2. These cities were accessible to everyone.
  3. There were requirements to be accepted into the cities.
  4. You weren’t safe until you reached the city.
  5. Once there, you had to remain in the city.

The Cities Of Refuge

A comparison between the cities of refuge under the Law of Moses and the Church under the Law of Christ
Cities of Refuge

• Key points concerning the cities of refuge:
  1. You couldn’t go to just any city. It had to be one of the designated cities.
  2. These cities were accessible to everyone.
  3. There were requirements to be accepted into the cities.
  4. You weren’t safe until you reached the city.
  5. Once there, you had to remain in the city.

Similarities to the Church

• You couldn’t go to just any city. It had to be one of the designated cities.
• Similarly, you can’t just join yourself to any church. It must be the one Church designated by God in the New Testament.
• The Church designated by God is the Body of Christ.
**Similarities to the Church**

- Eph 1:22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,
- 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
- Only His Church or Body will be saved.
- Eph 5:23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

**Similarities to the Church**

- Christ has only one Body (Church)
- Eph 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;
- It is in this one Church that the saved are found
- Ac 2:47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.
Similarities to the Church

• We simply can’t join ourselves to the “church of our choice” and expect to be saved.
• Salvation is only found in the church built by Christ.
• The cities of refuge were accessible to all.
• Similarly, the Church is accessible to all.
• It is not open to just one race or nation but to all men everywhere.

Similarities to the Church

• Isaiah prophesied the Church would be open to all nations.
• Isa 2:2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD'S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it.
• Peter also taught the church was open to all.
• Ac 2:39 "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."
**Similarities to the Church**

- They have access to the Church thru the Gospel which is to be carried to all the world.
- Mr 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.
- 16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.
- There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile in the Church

**Similarities to the Church**

- Ga 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- Not everyone was allowed into the cities of refuge. Only those that met the requirements.
- Similarly, only those that meet the requirements will be allowed into the Church.
- Those requirements are found in the Gospel of Christ.
**Similarities to the Church**

- We must hear the Gospel
- Ro 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
- That makes sense doesn’t it?
- We can’t believe and obey the Gospel if we don’t know what it is?
- After we hear it then we must believe it.
- Belief in the Gospel is the very basis of our salvation.

**Similarities to the Church**

- If we don’t believe then it is impossible to be saved.
- Joh 3:15 "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.
- 16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
Similarities to the Church

• 17 "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.
• 18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
• In order for this faith to save us then it must be the type of faith that moves us to obedience.

Similarities to the Church

• Jas 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.
• Saving faith will move us to meet the other requirements to become a member of the Church.
• We must repent of our sins.
• This means we are sorry for sinning against God and have no plans to commit these sins again!
Similarities to the Church

• We cannot become a part of the Body of Christ that will be saved if we continue in the sins of our past.
• Jesus taught repentance.
• Lu 13:3 "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.
• Peter taught repentance on the day of Pentecost and again in Acts 3
• Ac 3:19 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

Similarities to the Church

• Paul taught repentance everywhere he went:
• Ac 26:19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,
• 20 "but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.
• If I am not willing to give up my sins, then I cannot be saved!
**Similarities to the Church**

- Another requirement for entering the Church is confessing Christ before men.
- Ro 10:10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
- Mt 10:32 "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.
- 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

**Similarities to the Church**

- The final requirement to be met in order to get into the Church is Baptism in water for the remission of sins
- The people asked Peter on the day Pentecost what they should do.
- Ac 2:37 ¶ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"
- 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
**Similarities to the Church**

• It is thru this act of baptism that we become a member of the Church that belongs to Christ

• Ro 6:3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

• So just as there were requirements to enter a city of refuge there are also requirements for us to enter the Church.

• We must: Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess and be Baptized.

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**Similarities to the Church**

• The manslayer was not safe until he entered the city of refuge

• Similarly, we are not safe until we enter the Church.

• Remember who Christ is going to save?

• Eph 5:23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and *He is the Savior of the body.*

• If Christ is going to save His Body the Church then what will happen to those who are not a part of it?
Similarities to the Church

• If we die before we fulfill all the requirements to become a member of the Body of Christ, including baptism, we will be lost.

• Many of us have heard the hypothetical question asked “what if someone dies on the way to being baptized? Are they lost?”

• That would be a sad scenario but the answer is “yes, they would be lost”

• They were still in their sins and were not a part of the Body.

Similarities to the Church

• What if the Avenger of Blood caught the Manslayer while he was on his way to the city of refuge?

• The Avenger of Blood would kill him.

• He had not entered the safety of the city of refuge.

• Similarly, we are lost until we are baptized into the Body of Christ.

• Some believe being a “good person” is going to be enough to save us.
Similarities to the Church

• That is simply not the case unless that “good person” is a member of the Church.

• Cornelius was a good person.

• Ac 10:1 ¶ There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,

• 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

Similarities to the Church

• But, this devout, God fearing, poor helping, praying man was lost.

• He had to send for Peter in order to hear the words (Gospel) in order to be saved.

• Ac 11:14 ’who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’

• As good as he was, Cornelius was lost and needed salvation because he was not yet a part of the Body of Christ.
Similarities to the Church

• You had to stay in the city of refuge in order to be safe
• If you left the Avenger of Blood could kill you.
• Similarly, we must remain in the Church to be saved.
• Simply becoming a Christian is not enough. We must remain a Christian in order to be saved from an eternity in Hell.
• A lot of people teach and believe that once we have been saved that we will always be saved but that is not what the Bible teaches.

Similarities to the Church

• Heb 2:1 ¶ Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.
• 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,
   • Ro 6:23 For the wages of sin is death...
• 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,
Similarities to the Church

• The Hebrew writer says it is possible for him and other Christians to drift away from God and then receive the punishment for doing so.
• The Hebrew writer also teaches it is possible for us to cast away our faith and lose our salvation.
• Heb 10:35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.
• 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

37 "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."
• Heb 10:38 But my righteous one shall live by faith: And if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him. ASV

• 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.
Similarities to the Church

• Those who “draw back” the cowardly who run in fear will do so to their own destruction.

• The fact that the Christian can turn back into the world and lose their eternal soul is taught all thru the New Testament.

• Don’t let anyone convince you other wise. We must remain faithful.

• Re 2:10 ...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Conclusion

• You had to go to a designated city of refuge

• We must be a part of the Church designated by God

• The cities of refuge were accessible to all

• The Church is open to all today both Jew and Gentile

• You had to meet the requirements to enter the city of refuge.

• We must meet the requirements to become part of the Body of Christ
Conclusion

- You had to make it into the city of refuge in order to be safe.
- We must make it into the Church in order to be saved.
- You had to stay in the city of refuge in order to remain safe.
- We must remain a part of the Church in order to obtain our salvation.