

We are skipping over chapters 16 through 19 that deal with the distribution of the conquered land to the various tribes. There are a several noteworthy passages that can be lessons for us today. One passage presents an interesting account of the tribe of Manasseh complaining that the land they received was not enough because they were so numerous, and they couldn't drive out the people there who had iron chariots. It was some of the most fertile land in the nation. Joshua told them because their tribe was so numerous, they should get to it and drive those people out and clear the forest for farming. Don't complain, get to work (17:16-18ⁱ). Remember that the areas were distributed by lot. That meant that the land they received was God's choice not Joshua's.

We can learn from this that God assigns us our lot in life. We tend to wish for something different, as the grass always looks greener on the other side. We end up complaining to God. But remember, **He has assigned us our lot in life for a reason.** Sometimes it is to stretch our faith. Instead of complaining, we should give thanks, stretch our faith muscles, get to work, and see what God will do through us in the situation He has allowed (Romans 5:3-5ⁱⁱ).

In chapter 20 the cities of refuge were assigned. Even as we near the end of the book of Joshua, we find it recorded that Joshua was faithful to do all that the LORD spoke through Moses. Moses instructed that cities of refuge were to be appointed throughout Israel as places of safety for anyone, Israelite or foreigner, who accidentally killed a person. The example of an ax head flying off the handle and causing a death is given in Deuteronomy 19:5ⁱⁱⁱ. The family of the one who died would be seeking revenge, a life for a life (Exodus 21:23^{iv}). These cities appointed in every area of the land would protect the person who took a life until a trial proved him innocent or guilty. If it was shown that he hated the person before that man died, he would not be sheltered. This implies what we would call premeditation. If guilty, he would be put out of the city. If innocent, he could stay protected until the death of the current high priest.

Until the death of the high priest foreshadows Jesus our great high priest whose death atones for our guilt and makes us innocent (Hebrews 4:14^v). Perhaps the randomness of the time one would have to stay in the city would be by God's sovereign design be punishment for the degree of negligence of the manslayer. He would be separated from his family and property, but his life was spared.

A missionary to a remote tribe in Indonesia found the tribe had a similar practice. Instead of a city it was a circle of stones. The missionary used the cultural practice to explain that Jesus is our place of refuge. If we are found in Him, the destroyer is not allowed to take our life. This was the breakthrough they needed to convey the message of salvation in Christ to that tribe. **Jesus is our city of refuge.** He declares us innocent because His death paid our sin debt. The Avenger, Satan, cannot execute judgment on us if we stay in Jesus.

The cities of refuge were scattered in such a way that they would not be far from wherever you lived in Israel. In the same way, the Word of God tells us that Jesus is near to us wherever we are (Romans 10:8^{vi}; Acts 17:27^{vii}; Psalm 139:7-10^{viii}), just as the tabernacle was in the middle of the camp, as close as possible to each tribe. While we have not committed a murder, intentional or unintentional, we are guilty and condemned, for the Scripture declares that the soul that sins must die (Ezekiel 18:4^{ix}). Sin is treason

against God, and we are all sinners (Romans 3:23,24^x). He has every right to condemn us to hell. But unlike the cities of refuge, even though we are guilty, in His mercy He became a place of refuge where we might run to escape the justice we deserve. Jesus, our refuge, took that punishment upon Himself on the cross which satisfied the justice of God. Run to Him and find life everlasting freedom and from condemnation (Romans 8:1^{xi}; John 10:28^{xii}). No wonder the psalmist wrote, ²² *The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.* Psalm 34:22

Josephus tells us that where the road to a city of refuge came to an intersection, the way to the city of refuge had to remain clearly marked. The way to our refuge in Jesus is clearly marked as well, for the Scriptures tell us in numerous verses to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and we will be saved (Acts 16:31^{xiii}). We can be that signpost when we see a desperate soul fleeing for safety by pointing the way to Jesus.

A magazine called Christian Age suggested that we too have six cities of refuge:

I. Our first city of refuge is prayer. Whatever trouble comes to us, we can run to prayer for help, as the man of old ran to the city of refuge.

II. Our second city of refuge is the Bible. When Jesus was tempted three times by the devil in the wilderness to do wrong, every time His heart ran to the Bible as a city of refuge and quoted some precious promise.

III. A third city of refuge is sacred song. If our hearts and voices are full of sweet and pure songs about God, and heaven, and doing good, they will keep away a great many wicked thoughts and evil words.

IV. The fourth city of refuge is trust in God as our Father. A child was asked the question, "What is faith?" She answered, "God has spoken, and I believe it." That is a part of what it means to trust in God.

V. Our fifth city of refuge is the Holy Spirit as our Guide.

VI. The sixth city of refuge, the last one and the most precious, is Jesus as our Saviour.^{xiv} Of course all of them together point to Jesus!

Once the Levites had been assigned their cities of refuge, all the land had been allotted. Then we read in Joshua 21:45 ⁴⁵ *Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.* The four-hundred year-old promise along with those given through Moses were all fulfilled! Everything Moses assigned to Joshua was done. We, too, can be sure that none of God's good promises to us will fail (2 Corinthians 1:20^{xv}). God is faithful and cannot lie. He is also able to do above and beyond all that He has promised in His Word (Ephesians 3:20^{xvi}).

¹ *At that time Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, ² and said to them, "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you and have obeyed my voice in all that I have commanded you. ³ You have not forsaken your brothers these many days, down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the LORD your God. ⁴ And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.* Joshua 22:1-4

Biblical scholars estimate that Israel had been at war for about seven years taking the promised land. The warriors who had left their families beyond the Jordan had kept their promise and were now to return to their homes. I can't imagine how much they must have missed their wives and children.

They had gained the spoils of warfare for their service and sacrifice. They went home wealthy, but they were instructed to share that wealth with those who had stayed behind (verse 8^{xvii}). We see that principle with Moses in Numbers 31:27^{xviii} and later with David in 1 Samuel 30:24^{xix}. Those who stayed behind were busy caring for the flocks, building homes, and planting fields which the warriors would enjoy when they returned. The concept is very much like that of the body of Christ concept of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. We are all a part of one another. Each role is important. While some appear more glorious, without others in less glorious roles, they could not do what they do. Unlike the world, the people of God are interdependent. Instead of seeking one's own good, we are to seek the good of all (1 Corinthians 12:7^{xx}). We are blessed to share the abundance God has given to us.

⁵ Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.” Joshua 22:5 Moses’ one important command to them before they departed was that they be careful to observe the commandment and the law he had given them. Which commandment was that? It was the one Jesus said was the most important command: to love the LORD your God (Matthew 22:37^{xxi}). If they do that, they will walk in all His ways, keep His commandments, cling to Him, and serve Him with all their heart and all their soul (Luke 10:25-28^{xxii}). That is the one command that we too must keep in the forefront of our hearts and minds.

Israelite devotion was never a matter of cold conformity to a code of rules, any more than Christian discipleship is. It is not external but deeply personal at root. Keeping Yahweh’s rules is an expression of love for Yahweh’s person.^{xxiii} To “cling to Him” reminds me of that very intimate image from Song of Songs where they ask, “*Who is that coming up out of the wilderness leaning on her beloved*” (8:5a^{xxiv})?

They did not have the many blessings that we have today such as the revelation of Jesus, the printed Word in their hands, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, of the volumes of worship music we have today. But they had seen the mighty hand of God. If they were ten-years-old when they left Egypt after seeing God show Himself more powerful than all Egypt's gods, then they would have seen the parting of the Red Sea, the provision of manna in the wilderness, the Law given to Moses on fiery Sinai, the water from a rock, the way God defeated their enemies, the death of their fathers for disobedience and murmuring, and now fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. They would then be fifty-seven years of age.

When they return to their allotted land, they will have the priests living in their midst who can remind them of the laws given to Moses. That generation stayed faithful as long as Joshua and the elders of that time lived (Judges 2:7^{xxv}). With all that God has given us and revealed to us in Jesus, will we cling to Him and love the LORD with all our heart and soul? Will we walk in all His ways? Will we finish the tasks that are assigned to us and take all the land God has for us?

All seemed to go so well to this point, but there was one more test. *¹⁰ And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size. ¹¹ And the people of Israel heard it said, “Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the*

frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel.”¹² And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them. Joshua 22:10-12

This is a lesson on the all too frequent problem of misunderstanding from a lack of clear communication and making assumptions. Many of the problems within the church could be resolved if we did not jump to conclusions before sitting down and calmly discussing the situation at hand to understand one another's intentions and purposes.

¹⁶ *“Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, ‘What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the LORD by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the LORD? Joshua 22:16 Any other altar other than that in the temple was forbidden by Moses (Deuteronomy 12:4,5^{xxvi}; 13,14^{xxvii}). The Israelites understood from their past that the sins of one person affect everyone else. This is one answer to why the innocent suffer. Adam and Eve's sin caused the entire human race to suffer for we as their offspring inherit their sinful nature (Romans 5:12^{xxviii}). The Israelites had seen what happened at Peor, when idolaters caused a plague on the nation. That was only stopped by a spear through the disobedient couple (Numbers 25:6-9^{xxix}). They suffered defeat because of Achan's greed and disobedience (Joshua 7:11^{xxx}). Church, we cannot say that just because only one lung has cancer that we are ok. Sin, like cancer, spreads and affects the whole congregation (2 Corinthians 5:6^{xxxi}).*

While their assumption was wrong, their reasoning was correct. That is often the case in church conflicts. Both sides were well meaning. That is why communication is so important, and that is what will solve this problem. Without it many souls would have needlessly perished, just as many church attendees would be wounded or leave when misunderstandings are not dealt with in a godly way. That is why Matthew 18 is so important. Jesus gave us a pattern of communication to understand one another and even deal with sin among us.

No one is an island. What each of us does affects all the rest of us. If each of us will be done with sin in our life and cling to the Lord and walk in the Spirit, the LORD can do great things with us as a congregation. The blessing of fruitfulness will flow, and I don't mean physical prosperity. I mean opportunities to touch others with the love of Jesus.

The eastern tribes responded, ²² *“The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows; and let Israel itself know! If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith against the LORD, do not spare us today²³ for building an altar to turn away from following the LORD. Or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on it, may the LORD himself take vengeance. Joshua 22:22,23* The defense of the eastern tribes begins with an affirmation, repeated for emphasis. Elohim El YHWH! They were declaring that the eternal God of Israel is the only God. They were saying their hearts were one with the rest of the nation in worshiping God alone. They even declare that if it was an altar to another god they would deserve to die. Then they began to explain the intention of the altar.

²⁴ *No, but we did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, ‘What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?’²⁵ For the LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you people of Reuben and people of Gad. You have no portion in the LORD.’ So your children might make our children cease*

to worship the LORD. Joshua 22:24-25 They explained their concern that in the future generations those who were on the western side of the Jordan might forbid those who were on the eastern side access to the tabernacle with its altar. They knew that would be disastrous for them. So, they set up a witness to remind the western tribes that they were one with them. In essence it was exactly the opposite of what the western tribes had assumed. It was not forsaking the God of Israel, but a witness of their dedication to Him for future generations.

²⁹ Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD and turn away this day from following the LORD by building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering, or sacrifice, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle!”

Joshua 22:29 Now that the real purpose of the altar was made clear, Israel thought it was a good thing. War was averted. Everyone was at peace. The nation was wholeheartedly following the LORD, walking in the fear of the LORD, and desiring out of love to worship Him alone. Sadly, it will only last for that generation. Their children will not have the same heart (Judges 2:10^{xxxii}). Was it because the stories were not faithfully passed down? Was it that the nations who remained in the land presented tempting alternatives that appealed to the flesh? Or was it the prosperity they saw in their neighbors that attracted them to idolatry (Judges 2:2,3^{xxxiii}). Maybe it was all the above.

We must ask ourselves if we are faithfully passing our faith on to our children and their children. Is the idolatry of the world around us averting our attention and desires from the only One who can truly fill the void in our hearts? We see the decline of our nation and pray for revival, but it must begin in each of us. Is there an area of compromise in my life that is affecting the whole body? That is where revival begins. We need the fear of the LORD like they had, but also to combine it with faithfully communicating it to our children and their children (Deuteronomy 6:6,7^{xxxiv}).

³¹ And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, “Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the LORD. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the LORD.” Joshua 22:31 We can tell that the LORD is in our midst when we come together and resolve conflict discovering that what we are doing is from our zeal for the LORD. Just as the declaration that God is YHWH brought the tribes into unity, so the declaration that Jesus is Lord should bring the church into unity today (1 Corinthians 12:3^{xxxv}). Those churches that do not agree with that declaration are really not churches but rather have become what the western tribes had assumed of the eastern tribes, worshiping other gods under the guise of Christianity. Other gods are not gods at all. They are pretenders trying to usurp Jesus rightful place as Lord over every area of our lives.

We should be as eager as they were to see our spiritual and physical families follow after God and take all the land that He has allotted to us. Let us be found faithful to communicate to our physical and spiritual children the mighty works of God in our lives, while living as an example of loving God with our whole hearts. We must do so for the glory of God, for the spiritual future of our children, and for the future of our nation.

Questions:

- 1 What can we learn from Manasseh’s complaint?
- 2 How did cities of refuge open the gospel to a tribe?

- 3 How does it foreshadow Jesus?
- 4 How do we know we can count on God's promises?
- 5 Why should we share when God gives us abundance?
- 6 What command must we be faithful to obey?
- 7 What was the misunderstanding?
- 8 How was it resolved?
- 9 What does that teach us?
- 10 What did they fail to follow through with?
- 11 Relate that to our need for action today?

ⁱ **Joshua 17:16-18 (ESV)**

¹⁶ The people of Joseph said, "The hill country is not enough for us. Yet all the Canaanites who dwell in the plain have chariots of iron, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel."¹⁷ Then Joshua said to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, "You are a numerous people and have great power. You shall not have one allotment only,¹⁸ but the hill country shall be yours, for though it is a forest, you shall clear it and possess it to its farthest borders. For you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong."

ⁱⁱ **Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)**

³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Deuteronomy 19:5 (ESV)**

⁵ as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live,

^{iv} **Exodus 21:23 (ESV)**

²³ But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life,

^v **Hebrews 4:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

^{vi} **Romans 10:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

^{vii} **Acts 17:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

^{viii} **Psalms 139:7-10 (ESV)**

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

^{ix} **Ezekiel 18:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

^x **Romans 3:23-24 (ESV)**

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

^{xi} **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

^{xii} **John 10:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

^{xiii} **Acts 16:31 (ESV)**

³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

^{xiv} *Christian Age- The number of the cities of refuge*

^{xv} **2 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

^{xvi} **Ephesians 3:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,

^{xvii} **Joshua 22:8 (ESV)**

⁸ he said to them, "Go back to your tents with much wealth and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and with much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers."

^{xviii} **Numbers 31:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ and divide the plunder into two parts between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation.

^{xix} **1 Samuel 30:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Who would listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike."

^{xx} **1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

^{xxi} **Matthew 22:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

^{xxii} **Luke 10:25-28 (ESV)**

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

^{xxiii} Jackman -Preaching the Word - Joshua: People of God's Purpose.

^{xxiv} **Song of Songs 8:5a (ESV)**

⁵ Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

^{xxv} **Judges 2:7 (ESV)**

⁷ And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel.

^{xxvi} **Deuteronomy 12:4-5 (ESV)**

⁴ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way.

⁵ But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go,

^{xxvii} **Deuteronomy 12:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place that you see, ¹⁴ but at the place that the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you.

^{xxviii} **Romans 5:12 (ESV)**

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

^{xxix} **Numbers 25:6-9 (ESV)**

⁶ And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁷ When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand ⁸ and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped.

⁹ Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

^{xxx} **Joshua 7:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.

^{xxxi} **1 Corinthians 5:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

^{xxxii} **Judges 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.

^{xxxiii} **Judges 2:2-3 (ESV)**

² and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?

³ So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.”

^{xxxiv} **Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (ESV)**

⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

^{xxxv} **1 Corinthians 12:3 (ESV)**

³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.