
Safety within the Gates

Scriptural Reference: Joshua 20:1-9

Key Verse: “Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses.” (*Joshua 20:2, NIV*)

Life Principle

Sometimes, bad things happen to good people. God establishes justice and protection for those who are wrongfully accused or who are not willful wrongdoers.

Introduction

There is a joy in knowing that there are opportunities for one to receive protection from danger. When there is a storm, or when the weather is bitterly cold, we find places of refuge. Even when one commits a crime unintentionally, God shows that there is a place of refuge.

As Israel was establishing themselves within their new land, the old civil laws that governed them after their exodus from Egypt was still vital in the land of Canaan. Accidents happen, yet anger overtakes the strongest of us. Joshua was to make certain that even though one would search after the accused to be an avenger of blood, the setting up of multiple cities of refuge would serve the congregation wisely.

Even though the city of refuge was a safe haven for anyone who accidentally killed a person, there was still a call to stand before the congregation for judgment. It provided opportunity for due process. Once the case was heard, if the accused was found to be innocent and/or the cause of death was found to be accidental, then the accused could return to his own city and house. God affords us safety within the gates; thus, we can appreciate the purpose for protecting, the plan while protecting, and the verdict administered within the gates in protecting all that venture in.

BIBLICAL EMPHASES FOR STUDY

I. The Purpose for Protection (*Joshua 20:1-2*)

These cities designated for refuge were to be replicas of those which were established under Moses' leadership. The new land that Israel would possess

was an opportunity to create suitable guidelines regarding unintentional acts of the loss of life, offering protection to those who needed it.

God had protection available for all His people. His wisdom allows us to understand that the arm of forgiveness should be visible, and to be patient enough to gain understanding rather than exacting vengeance. No one said it would be easy in a situation like that; but if a person could make it to one of the cities, then he or she would be assured protection until the hearing.

Even believers need to know that they are protected from the anger of others. Proverbs 18:10 reminds us that the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe. That is the level of protection that God instructed Joshua to make sure was established again in the new land for the hope of His people.

II. The Plan of Protecting Initiated (*Joshua 20:3-8*)

If the incident was accursed and it was assumed to be accidental, then the accused would make their way to the city of refuge and render their case before elders of the city to determine if it met the standard for protection. The individual was also given shelter in preparation for the hearing, and if the accuser followed him/her, the elders would not turn the person over.

When we examine that litany, there are moments when we can acknowledge that God has done the same thing for us, even without a literal city to enter. We have stood up against allegations and character assassination due to misunderstandings, miscommunication, or just down-right envious individuals. Yet, God provides a safe haven in which to wait it out, gain our composure, and stand boldly before our accusers.

From east to west and from north to south, the cities were chosen with diligence as instructed. No matter where an individual was, if the person could make it to the city then he or she would find protection. The church should be a place where individuals would find not only help for healing but also protection and validation. Let us give them a chance to be heard. They are at our gates; will we allow them to come in?

III. Afforded an Opportunity for a Verdict (*Joshua 20:9*)

The gates of the city afforded one to be heard. Whether citizens or strangers, they were provided safety. An opportunity is all anyone can ask. God's ways are higher than our ways. What we may despise may one day be the very thing we ourselves need.

Instead of being susceptible to street justice, we must allow one to be heard. Witnessing the machinery justice, it is difficult to know that mistakes lead to the deaths of loved ones. Yet, we must be strong to bear the hardship, work through the pain, and release the hurt that God may heal. Civility is important. If we eradicate the things that keep us from tipping over as a society, we would come to ruins.

God's plan for Israel was to be supported through life's difficulties. Establishing order for the nation was priority. Whatever the verdict, the important factor was that the defendant was afforded the opportunity to be heard. How amazing is it to know that Jesus is our place of refuge? We all will stand before the righteous Judge. But we are grateful we have an advocate, and His name is Jesus.

Conclusion

God has afforded us all a way to be free. Israel operated within a system of fairness to those in their borders and to strangers. We should be mindful to think and also rethink how we respond to others, when there has been pain inflicted due to the unintentional killing of our loved ones.

Biblical Principles for Men

1. Is the justice system fair to those of African descent? What do you think are the remedies for the high incarceration rate among people of color?
2. Have we treated one another fairly in moments of accidental killings? What should be a similar system as that instituted by God (cities of refuge)?

Closing Prayer

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, be a comforting agent to the lives of those hurt by death. Let us not be quick to seek vengeance but, rather, seek comfort in You, knowing that You will make all things right. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.


