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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:
A2255 ~ Cities of Refuge.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

When war ended for a time between the Israelites and the defeated people of Canaan, Joshua distributed the land to the tribes of Israel using lots. However, the tribe of the Levites was not given an allocation of land. Instead, they were given 48 towns and cities, each surrounded by a small amount of pasture land for their livestock. These cities were spread throughout the land and assigned by lots to the descendants of Jacob's son Levi.

Aaron was Israel's first high priest and all future priests were to be descended from him. His descendants were allocated the 13 closest towns to Jerusalem. God controlled the lots and determined that Aaron's family needed to be close to God's future temple. However, at that time, only the Lord knew where the temple would be located.

The tribe of the Levites would be established throughout all Israel. They would be available to teach God's law, help settle disputes and encourage the people in their faith as they settled into life in the new land. Financial support for the Levites came from tithes given to God by the other tribes.

Six of the Levite cities, three on each side of the Jordan River, were to be easily accessible places of refuge where court cases involving deliberate murder and accidental killings were heard.

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The Lord reveals the importance and sacredness of human life in the Old Testament by the laws that He gave to Moses regarding the consequences to anyone who took another person's life. Every shedding of human blood, even that committed accidentally, required purification of the person concerned, because the shedding of blood polluted the land in which God lived with His people. Two of God's greatest gifts to humanity are the gift of life and the gift of land to maintain that life.

In the Bible book of Leviticus, Chapter 24, it says that whoever deliberately plans to kill any man will surely be put to death. No sacrifice was available to atone for this type of crime, nor could a ransom be offered by relatives for the release of one guilty of such a murder. Rich and poor were to be treated alike.

In Numbers, Chapter 35, God gave Moses the requirements for setting up cities of refuge, where people accused of murder could run to and be safe from any revenge or compensation while their case was investigated and judged appropriately for the circumstances.

In the case of deliberate murder, the Law permitted a 'Blood Avenger' or 'Kinsman Redeemer', who was usually a close relative of the slain person, to exact punishment on the murderer directly. This punishment was essentially a life for a life. But to guard against any miscarriage of justice, cities of refuge were appointed where the accused could flee and his case be considered properly, away from the emotions that death always brings. These cities of refuge were designed to provide divine protection for the accused until all the evidence was known.

But God's Law made a clear distinction between premeditated murder and unintentional manslaughter, and this applied for foreigners living in Israel too.

Joshua was ever obedient and in Chapters 20 and 21 of his book, he set up the cities of refuge how God told him to. The establishment of these privileged safe places among the Levite cities gives us the understanding that God considered the Levites to be the most suitable and impartial judges for such cases. The representation of God Himself with His presence and counsel would help calm and restrain the stormy passions of a Blood Avenger, who then took the role as prosecutor in such court cases. By their consecration to do God's work, the Levites were mediators between the Israelites and God. As such, they could calmly mediate between the accused and the victim's family, ensuring that no unwarranted bloodshed would further occur.

It's interesting that a person found responsible for an accidental death had to remain in their city of refuge until the ruling high priest died. After this, they were pardoned and they could return to their own home again. Why was this? All the cities of refuge belonged to the Levites and the activities that occurred within them were the high priest's responsibility. He, as spiritual leader of Israel, represented purity and freedom from sin. One of his roles was to make amends for innocently shed human blood.

Remember this wise saying for interpreting the Scriptures: "The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, while the Old Testament is in the New revealed."

The Lord Jesus in the New Testament times did **not** condone taking a life for a life, as the Blood Avengers did from ancient practice. Jesus, in revealing a New Covenant from God, taught that the person wanting to avenge a dead relative's blood was wrong. We mustn't take vengeance into our own hands. Rather, we must forgive those who wrong us or our family. The surprising thing we find when we look through the Scriptures is that we can find no real situation recorded of someone actually using a city of refuge for protection. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans, Chapter 12: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil ... Do not take revenge ... 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."

However, because this ancient custom did exist, God wanted to ensure that a Blood Avenger didn't take the life of a suspected murderer without going through due process. The case in court was made for both sides and the elders decided whether the accused was 'guilty' or 'not guilty'. Only for deliberate sins was the death penalty justified.

The pardon resulting from the death of a high priest in Old Testament times points to a greater High Priest, Jesus Christ. As God's Son He enabled a greater pardon for anyone who believes in Him by His undeserved but atoning death. This greater High Priest will live forever and brings eternal pardon for all repentant sinners.

How can a city of refuge be compared to the risen Lord Jesus who's now in heaven interceding to His Father on behalf of all those who have committed their lives and souls to Him? Since the time of Adam and Eve, every single person who has ever lived needs a refuge from Satan, the destroyer of our souls. We can't make a refuge for ourselves within us or around us. This is impossible! But we can run to Christ to escape all the dangers we're in. These dangers include the curse and condemnation of God's holy Law, the guilt, shame and suffering of being full of sin, the wrath of God against all unforgiven sin or God's eternal punishment in hell for those who refuse to ask Jesus to be their sin bearer. Only Christ provides refuge from such things and it's to only Him that we must run for safety.

In Genesis, Chapter 3, God promised not to abandon humanity to its sin and death but rather, He would send a Redeemer-Messiah, born from a woman, to save mankind. From the time of the fall of Adam and Eve, all of humanity was in need of a Blood Redeemer or kinsman in the human family to save people from eternal death.

Jesus came as God's supreme prophet, priest and king. He became the world's eternal High Priest after His rose from the grave and ascended into the heavenly sanctuary again. Christ's loving and once-for-all perfect sacrifice of Himself as the substitute for sinners now allows men and women of every generation to claim His death and resurrection as atonement for their sin. Jesus is our only hope for eternal salvation.

The appointment of Joshua's cities of refuge was an act of grace and mercy that foreshadowed these very same characteristics that are manifested by the Lord Jesus. Sadly, in the symbolic application of the cities of refuge to Christ, comparatively few people ever take heed of His offer of eternal salvation. Those left not believing in the offer of God's grace will one day be destroyed. Let each one of us soberly commit ourselves to dwell in Jesus, so that we will live in safety both now and in future eternity.

In these modern times, we hear of some people who face court for their crimes but with the help of clever-talking lawyers, are declared 'not guilty' when in fact they are. Such people think they've escaped punishment but in reality, they haven't.

In three different places in the New Testament of the Bible, we're told that God will judge all people. God is just and fair in all of His dealings and will do no wrong when He judges each person from earth in two separate judgements.

The first judgement is for believers in Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Every believer will give an account of himself while living on the earth, and the Lord will judge the works done for God's glory. This judgment is not for salvation or about sending someone to hell; for believers have already received eternal salvation by faith in Christ's work alone.

Whatever is not done in and through Christ will be burnt up like chaff in God's refining fire. However, what remains will be like pure gold which will last and will be rewarded. The warning is that some believers may lose everything in God's fire, even though they're saved for all eternity.

In Romans, Chapter 8, it says: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Praying is one of the means by which we continue to remember our sins are covered and erased by the blood of Jesus Christ. His perfection covers for our imperfection.

The second judgment is for unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment, as listed in Revelation, Chapter 20. This judgment does not determine salvation either. Everyone at the Great White Throne judgment is an unbeliever who has rejected or neglected Christ in their life here on earth; they are already doomed to spend eternity in a terrible lake of fire that separates them from God. These unbelievers will be judged according to what they had done, as recorded in God's books.

No amount of good works or the keeping of God's laws can be sufficient to make amends for sin. All an unbeliever's thoughts, words and actions will be judged against God's perfect standard and be found wanting. There will be no reward for them; only eternal condemnation and punishment. The key question is: "Where will you spend eternity?" The choice is up to you.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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