

General Church Education



Cities of Refuge

Joshua 20; 21:1-8, 43-45

Lesson 15

Jacob's Ladder Religion Lessons

Level 4: The Lord Is the Hero

For ages 9-10

Cities of Refuge

Joshua 20; 21:1-8,43-45

For Parents and Teachers

When the tribes received their inheritance in Canaan the tribe of Levi did not receive a territory but was given forty eight cities throughout Canaan within the territories of other tribes. Six of these cities would be cities of refuge—safe places for people to run to for protection if they accidentally killed another person. Three cities were to the east of the Jordan River; three were to the west. The Lord had promised He would do this (Exodus 21:13). The laws of Israel demanded that a person who harmed another person must be punished. The penalty was a tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye, a life for a life (Exodus 21:12). The cities of refuge were set up so a person who killed someone *accidentally* could run there and receive protection within the city walls until a fair trial could be held. If found innocent, a person could return to their home city when the high priest died.

The cities of refuge gave shelter to those who killed by accident. While it is often not possible for us to tell whether others have done something by accident or on purpose, the Lord knows the intentions of our hearts. The cities of refuge remind us that the Lord looks not only at what we have done, but at what we intend to do. Our actions are only as good (or bad) as the intentions behind them. See *Heaven and Hell* 472, below.

Ideas for Children

- There is a difference between things we do on purpose and things that happen by accident.
- The Lord looks at our intentions.
- Only the Lord can see what is in a person's heart.

From the Writings

Every deed and work goes forth from a person's will and thought. A deed and work are such as the will and thought that produce them. If the thought and will are good, the deeds and works are good; but if they are evil then the deeds and works are evil, although they appear alike. A thousand people may act alike, and yet each one is different, because from an unlike will. Some who *act* honestly but are not honest, act honestly simply to *appear* honest, gain something, or secure a friendship.

People who really love what is honest and just act from different motives. Some act from the truth of faith or from obedience, because it is commanded in the Word; some from the good of faith or from conscience, because from a religious motive; some from good of charity towards the neighbor because their good should be regarded; some from the good of love to the Lord because good should be done for the sake of good, as also what is honest and just should be done for the sake of honesty and justice; and these things they love because they are from the Lord, and because the Divine that goes forth from the Lord is in them, and consequently regarded in their very essence they are Divine. The deeds or works of such are interiorly good, and therefore are exteriorly good also; for deeds or works are such in quality as the thought and will from which they proceed, and apart from thought and will they are not deeds and works, but only inanimate movements. See *Heaven and Hell* 472.

Cities of Refuge

Reading: Joshua 20; 21:1-8,43-45

Vocabulary

refuge—shelter or protection from danger

avenger of blood—a person who carried the duty of taking a life for a life (see Exodus 21:23; Numbers 35:31)

unintentional—without meaning to

livestock—domesticated animals, such as cows

common-land—land anyone could use for grazing animals

Do you know what the word “refuge” means? It means shelter or protection from danger. This lesson shows an important way in which the Lord protected the children of Israel once they settled in the land of Canaan. As you read the lesson, think about ways the Lord protects you when evil spirits try to put you in danger.

The Avenger of Blood

The law of the Old Testament required that a person who killed someone was to give their own life for what they had done. This is sometimes called the “law of retaliation”. It means punishing



someone in the same way they hurt another person—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth or a life for a life. There were no police then, so a relative of the victim was expected to carry out the punishment. He was called the “avenger of blood”.

Have you ever done something by mistake and said, “I didn’t mean to do it”? We have probably all said that! What if a person living in the land of Canaan killed another person by accident? The Lord is merciful. He provided six cities of refuge as a safe place for anyone who had killed another person by accident. The cities were spread out through the land, making it easy to reach them quickly. Every person in the land

lived within thirty miles of a city of refuge. They could run to the city for safety until they could have a fair trial.

If the death was judged to be an accident the person could stay in the city of refuge, safe from the avenger of blood. When the high priest died, he or she could return to their city and family. But if the trial found the person had killed on purpose they could no longer be protected and would be put to death by the avenger of blood.

Read Joshua 20:1-6.

The Cities of Refuge

The Levites did not have their own land like other tribes. They were priests and teachers for all the people. And so they were given cities among the twelve tribes where they could teach people about the Lord.

The six cities of refuge were among the forty-eight cities given to the Levites. They had high protective walls. People could only enter them through a gate that was always guarded. At night, the gate was locked.

Three of the cities were on the west side of the Jordan. They were Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron. Three of the cities were on the east side of the Jordan. They were Golan, Ramoth-Gilead and Bezer. Can you find the six cities of refuge on the map above? Try to learn the names of the cities. See if you can recite them without looking.

Read Joshua 20:7-9; 21:1-8.

The Lord Knows Our Hearts

We cannot tell for sure why other people do things. Only the Lord knows what is in a person's heart. This does not mean that we should not think about whether what others are doing is right or wrong. We must think about whether what our friends are doing is good or bad, so we can choose not be part of doing things that are against the Ten Commandments. But we should remember that we cannot know what is in another person's heart.

After death, in the spiritual world, people who have done things that appear to be the same are judged differently because the Lord does not judge based on what we do, but on our intentions. It is important to think about why we are making choices to behave in certain ways. If we do this, we



can gradually learn to do what is right because it is the right thing to do, and not because we want to look good or get a reward. The Lord tells us that we must run away from hatred and revenge, even in little things. We can find refuge in the teachings of the Word, which can lead us to safety.

The Lord is Our Refuge

The Word tells us that the Lord is our refuge and our strength. We can always turn to Him for help and protection. He will help us keep the Two Great Commandments:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

And in doing this, the Lord will give us peace or rest, as He gave the children of Israel rest. Read Joshua 21:43-45.

Discussion Questions

- How did the cities of refuge protect a person who had accidentally done something wrong? Did reaching a city of refuge mean that a person would have no consequences for what they had done?
- Did someone who went to a city of refuge have to live there forever? What happened to them after going there?
- Talk about a time when you did something wrong accidentally? Did you say, “I did not mean to do it”? What happened?
- Is it possible to do something wrong but have good intentions?
- Is it possible to do something good for selfish reasons?
- Does the Lord know when we do not *mean* to do something wrong?
- How can we tell if we are acting from a selfish or a loving motive? What questions might you ask yourself to help decide?
- Are we supposed to think about whether something another person is doing is good or bad?
- What consequences might come from not thinking about whether what a friend is doing is good or bad?
- When might an act be judged by what intentions were involved in this world?
- In the spiritual world people who have done the same things are judged differently when their intentions were different. When is that not true in this world? Do you think that is right and fair?

Activity Overview | Cities of Refuge

Recitation

Learn the recitation by heart.

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
The God of my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation,
My stronghold and my refuge. II Samuel 22:2,3

Projects

Choose one or two activities.

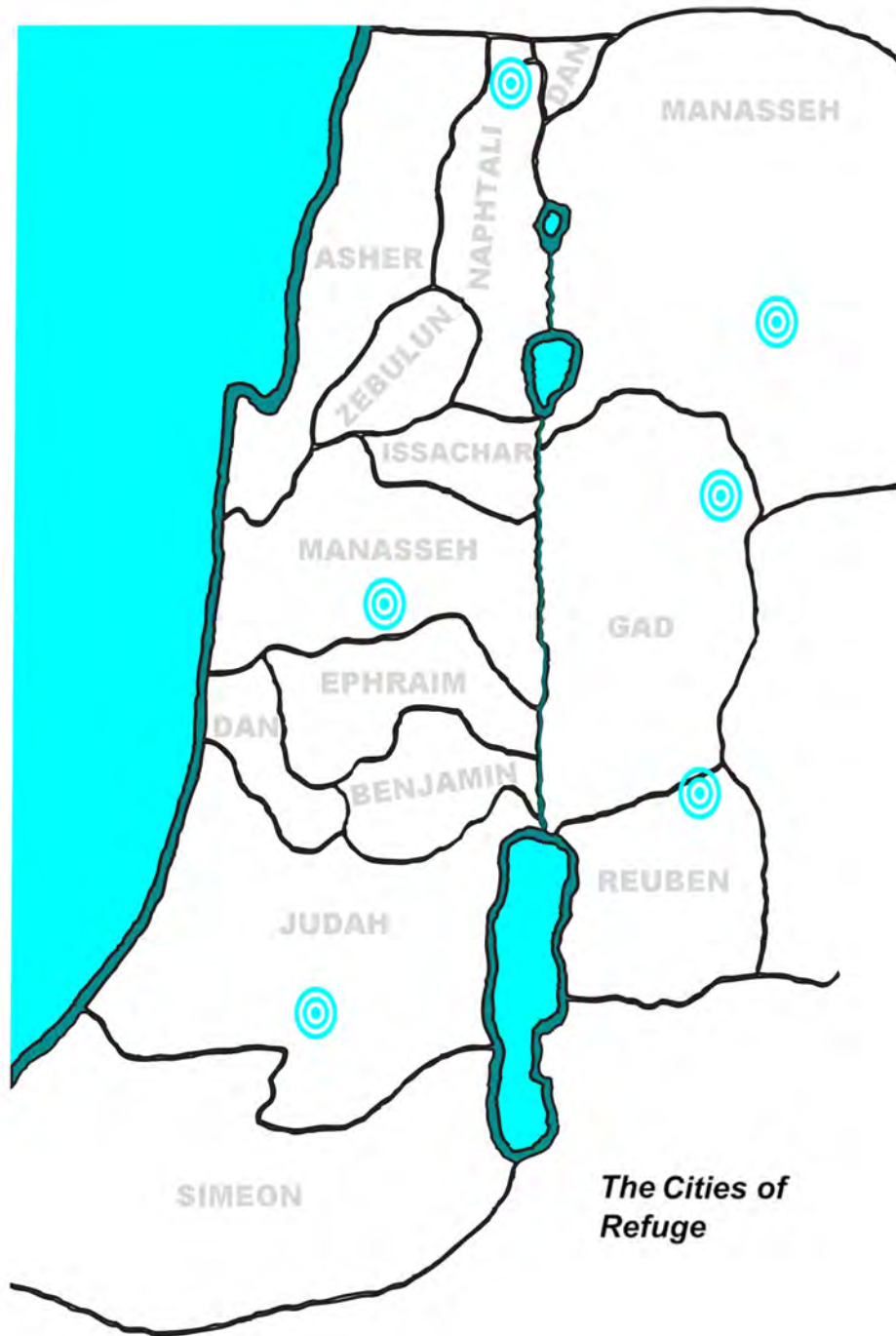
- Cities of Refuge Map
- Run Away Time Delay
- Picture to color—Cities of Refuge (Joshua 20)

Additional Activity Ideas

- King David called the Lord his “stronghold and refuge” (2 Samuel 22:3). Write about a time when you found refuge in the Lord or in His Word.

Activity 1 | Cities of Refuge Map

Six cities of refuge were spread out through the land of Canaan. Label the six cities of refuge on the map below. Use the word bank to help you. See Joshua 20:7,8.



Word Bank

Kadesh

Golan

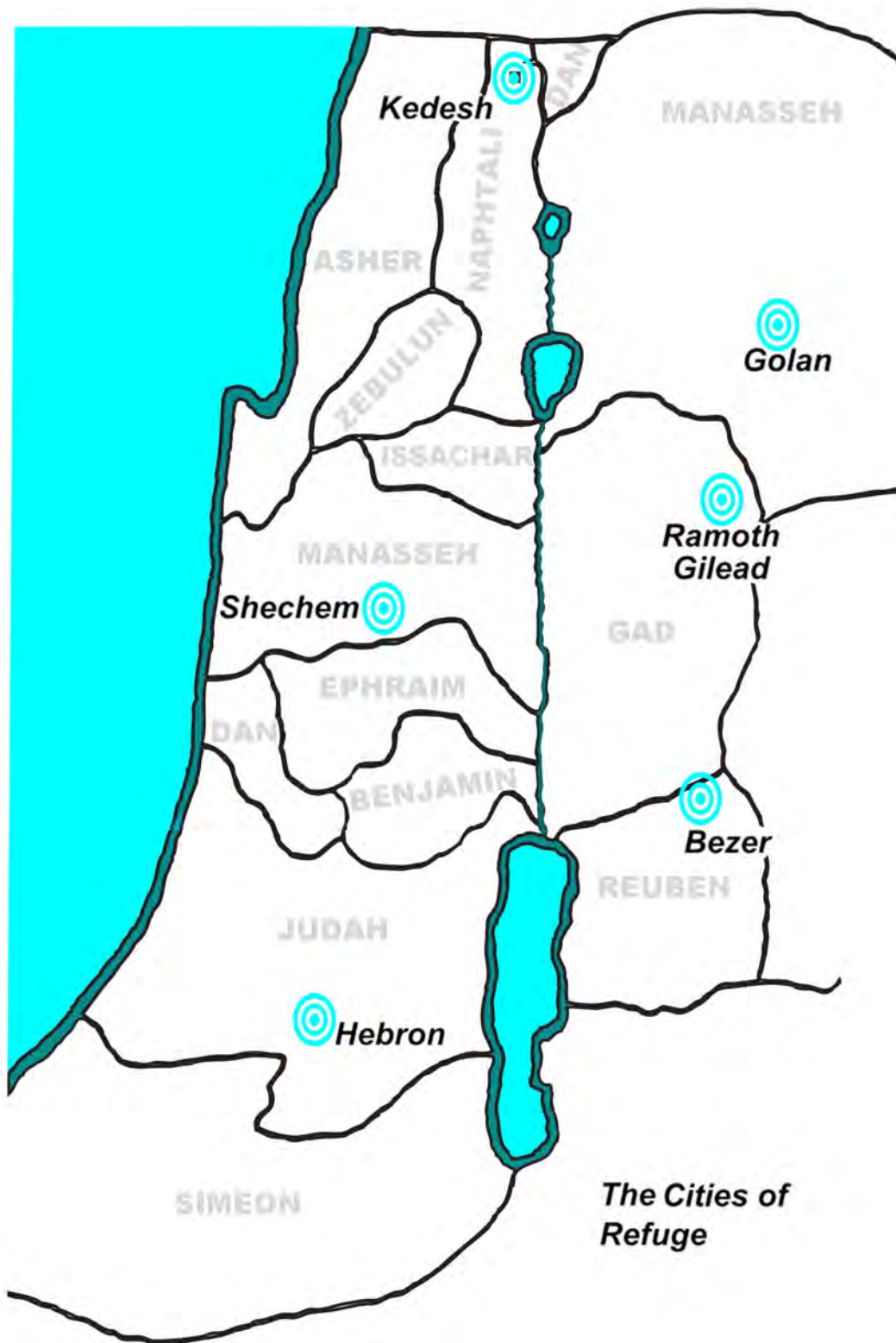
Shechem

Ramoth-Gilead

Hebron

Bezer

Activity 1 | Cities of Refuge Map Answers



Activity 2 | Run Away Time Delay

Cities of Refuge were safe places for people who had accidentally killed a person to stay safe until they could have a fair trial. The cities were spread all through the land so people wouldn't have too far to run to reach one. Most people lived just a little further from the nearest city than the distance of running a marathon. People had to be fit and run fast to reach the city before the avenger of blood could catch up with them. Discover what it might have been like to run to a city with someone chasing you. This activity requires two or more people.

Materials

stop watch or timer

outdoor space to run

a goal to run to such as a tree, building, play equipment, etc.

Directions

1. Imagine accidentally killing someone and having to run to the closest city of refuge. What would it take to do that?
2. How quickly might an avenger of blood try to run after you to catch up? What would it take to out-run him?
3. We're going to race in pairs to _____ (your goal). First, the person who has committed the crime will set out. After _____ seconds, the avenger of blood will start to run after you. (Choose a delay time that will enable the refugee to reach the city. Adjust the delay depending on the relative ages and strengths of the runners.)
4. Set a stop watch or timer. The offender will run as soon as you start the count down. When the timer stops, the avenger of blood will start to chase after them.
5. If multiple groups are running, let all groups run before discussing the activity.

Discussion

1. Did you make your goal before the avenger of blood reached you? What might have made it easier? (Could refugees have hidden along the way if they were slower runners? Might they hide somewhere overnight?)
2. Think about times in your life that you might need refuge (e.g. from bad weather, fighting siblings, if you are falsely accused of doing something, etc.).
3. Where could you turn for refuge?
4. How does the Lord provide refuge from ugly thoughts and feelings?

