**Cities of Refuge**

“Rugged and thrilling trip – for agile and experienced hikers only. Very hazardous. During periods of rain or high water, it is unsafe and impassable, and must not be attempted. Because of risks involved even in good weather, no one, regardless of experience, should ever make the trip alone. Minimum parties of four essential to anticipate accidents. Nature is in command. Any rescue operations would be extremely difficult.” Such is the description of the trail known as Bonas Defeat in Western North Carolina. I’m not sure who Bonas was but the description does little to encourage visitors. While none of the trails Michele and I have hiked are this dangerous, many are difficult to access due to rough, winding roads that are often nearly impassable. In our study of Deuteronomy chapter 19, we see that the sanctuary cities Moses spoke of were accessible to those seeking refuge.

The chapter begins with Moses telling the people that they were to set aside 3 centrally located cities in Canaan to be declared cities of refuge for those who killed by accident and were fleeing from an avenger of death. Moses had previously called for 3 similar cities east of the Jordan to serve the Transjordanian tribes (see Deut. 4:41-43). Moses went on to repeat what God had commanded regarding someone who accidently killed another person. God promised the Levites 48 towns, of which 6 were to be designated as cities of refuge (see Numbers chapter 35 and Josh. 20:7-8).

In chapter 8, Moses told the people that if God enlarged their territory, they were to set aside 3 additional cities. Some writers believe this refers to the 3 cities in Canaan. Others think it refers to additional land beyond Canaan that God would have given Israel had they been obedient. Still others believe this refers to cities that will be established during the millennium. Moses then repeated God’s instructions regarding someone who sought refuge even though guilty of murder.

The chapter ends with repeated instructions that a man could not be convicted of a crime based only on the testimony of one witness. This was to prevent someone from making a false accusation with no regard for consequences. Moses ordered that whatever punishment was planned for the accused would befall his accuser if the judges deemed the charge was false.

The cities of refuge were to be located such that they could be reached in a day’s journey from the land of any of the tribes. It is thought that the roads leading to these cities were wide, well marked and kept in good repair to provide for ease of accessibility. Several writers observed that these cities were symbolic of Jesus who is our refuge. Psalm 46:1 and Heb. 6:18 show God as a refuge for the believer. The following is from David Guzik’s commentary:

b. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *within easy reach* of the needy person; they were of no use unless someone could get to the place of refuge.

c. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are *open to all*, not just the Israelite; no one needs to fear that they would be turned away from their place of refuge in their time of need ([Numbers 35:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+35.15&t=NKJV)).

d. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge became a place where the one in need would *live*; you didn’t come to a city of refuge in time of need just to look around ([Numbers 35:25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+35.25&t=NKJV)).

e. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge are the *only alternative* for the one in need; without this specific protection, they will be destroyed.

f. Both Jesus and the cities of refuge provide protection *only within their boundaries*; to go outside meant death ([Numbers 35:26-28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+35.26-28&t=NKJV)).

g. With both Jesus and the cities of refuge, full freedom comes with the *death of the High Priest* ([Numbers 35:25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+35.25&t=NKJV)).

h. *A crucial distinction*: The cities of refuge only helped the *innocent*; the *guilty* can come to Jesus and find refuge!

A sermon by R. S. Eaton noted the significance of the names of the refuge cities and their symbolism of Jesus:

Bezer, meaning stronghold58, see Zec. 9:12

Ramoth, meaning high or exalted, see Psalm 89:19

Golan, meaning joy, see John 16:20-22

Kadesh, meaning holy

Shechem, meaning shoulder, see Is. 22:22

Hebron, meaning fellowship, see 1st Cor. 1:9

The Bible makes it clear that it is God’s desire that all partake of his saving grace and that He is accessible (see Matt. 11:30, 28:19, 2nd Pet. 3:9, Rom. 10:13). We must reconcile this with the narrow gate Jesus spoke of in His Sermon on the Mount.