

Approximately 30 minutes Topical



★ The Avenger of Blood

Justice, Mercy, and Our Refuge in Jesus Christ

**Main passages: Numbers 35:9-28;
Deuteronomy 19:1-13; Joshua 20**

Opening Introduction

A while back, my wife and I were watching a documentary about a murder that happened right here in Corpus Christi. As we watched, I sensed the Lord stirring a message in my heart.

On July 19, 2004, Pablo Castro, a convenience store clerk at Times Market on Airline and Baldwin Boulevard, was taking

out the trash when John Henry Ramirez attacked him. Castro was stabbed 29 times during a robbery that yielded just \$1.25. Ramirez was later convicted of capital murder, sentenced to death, and executed on October 5, 2022.

Behind those facts was a human life. Pablo Castro was someone's loved one. His death left a family grieving and raised questions that reach far beyond one criminal case.

What does justice require when someone takes another person's life? And where does mercy fit?

That led me to another question: **How did God establish justice among His people in the Bible?**

Most of us have heard the expression, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But God's instructions went much deeper than that. His law distinguished between

deliberate murder and an accidental death. It required evidence, provided a hearing, and established places of protection called **cities of refuge**.

Within that system was a person with an unfamiliar title: **the avenger of blood**.

- Who was he?
- What was his responsibility?
- And why did God connect a fugitive's freedom to the death of the high priest?

As we open our Bibles, we will discover how these ancient instructions help us understand God's holiness, the value He places on human life, and our need for a Redeemer.

And as we follow those truths through Scripture, they lead us to Jesus Christ...our righteous Judge, our great High Priest, and our refuge.

Let's begin with a word of prayer.



Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word. Help us understand a part of Scripture that may seem unfamiliar, and show us how it leads us toward Jesus. Awaken the person who needs salvation, encourage the believer who feels weary, and deepen our understanding of Your holiness and grace. Holy Spirit, open our hearts to receive Your truth and respond in faith. In Jesus' name, amen.



Historical Setting: Footsteps Behind You

Imagine going to work one morning and becoming a fugitive before lunchtime.

You leave home expecting an ordinary day. Before evening, someone is dead, a family is grieving, and you are running for your life.

Deuteronomy 19 describes just such a situation. Two neighbors enter the woods to cut timber. One swings his ax. The head flies off the handle, strikes his neighbor, and kills him.

There was no hatred. No plan. No intention to harm.

But a man is dead.

In ancient Israel, a relative of the deceased could act as the “**avenger of blood**”, pursuing justice for the death. Deuteronomy recognizes the danger that this grieving relative might pursue the accidental killer in anger and kill someone who did not deserve the death penalty.

Now hear the footsteps behind you.

Where can you go?

Before Israel entered the promised land, God gave Moses instructions about cities of refuge. Later, under Joshua, six cities were designated....three on each side of the Jordan...to provide protection and a lawful hearing.

God had provided somewhere to run.

Today, we will see how this system helps us understand justice, redemption, and our refuge in Jesus.

We should be careful: the New Testament does not clearly identify every detail of these cities as a prophecy of Christ. But the connections become powerful when we let clear New Testament teaching guide us.

★ 1. The Avenger Reminds Us That Life Matters

  (NIV) **Numbers 35:9-15** ⁹ **Then the LORD said to Moses:** ¹⁰ **“Speak to the**

Israelites and say to them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, ¹¹ select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. ¹² They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that anyone accused of murder may not die before they stand trial before the assembly. ¹³ These six towns you give will be your cities of refuge. ¹⁴ Give three on this side of the Jordan and three in Canaan as cities of refuge. ¹⁵ These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites and for foreigners residing among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.¹

We hear the word *avenger* and may imagine someone acting out of uncontrolled rage.

¹ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Nu 35:9-15.

But God placed this responsibility within laws governing evidence, judgment, and protection.

- The accused was to receive a hearing.
- A murder conviction required more than one witness.
- Intentional murder and accidental killing were treated differently.

Why such seriousness?

Because human life is precious to God.

👉 A murdered person was someone's child. Someone's parent. Someone's friend.

God would not allow a community to shrug its shoulders over bloodshed.

🤔💭 That tells us something about His character.

- When people suffer violence, God sees.
- When someone powerful harms someone vulnerable, God notices.

- When human justice fails, God has not forgotten.

Perhaps someone listening has been deeply wronged. You wonder whether your pain matters.

👉 It matters to God.

However, this ancient responsibility does not authorize Christians to seek personal revenge. Romans 12:19 teaches us to leave vengeance to God.

  (NIV) ***Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.²***

We can let the authorities handle a crime without trying to get even ourselves.

² [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 12:19.

God knows when someone has hurt us. We can bring Him our pain and trust Him to judge fairly.

  But God also sees the wrong things **we have done.**

- We want God to deal with someone who lied to us. But have we ever told a lie?
- We want justice when someone hurts us. But have we ever hurt someone else?

 **We all need God's forgiveness.**

That is why we need Jesus. He came to save us from our sins and bring us back to God.

★ **2. The Same Family Responsibility Points Toward a Redeemer**

Here is a fascinating connection.

The Hebrew expression for the avenger of blood is ***go'el haddam*** 🗣️ “**goh-ELL hah-DAHM**”. The word *go'el* belongs to the same word family used for a kinsman-redeemer....a relative who acts to recover or protect a family member's interests.

In different circumstances, that family responsibility could involve redeeming property, securing freedom, or pursuing justice for bloodshed.

🤔💭 Think of Boaz in the book of Ruth.

He steps forward to act as a family redeemer.

🤔💭 Now consider Jesus.

Hebrews 2:14-17 teaches that the Son shared our humanity, defeated the devil's power through His death, and became our merciful and faithful High Priest.



(NIV)

Hebrews 2:14-17 ¹⁴ *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*³

He came near enough to call us His brothers and sisters.

Our Redeemer entered our condition.

³ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 2:14-17.

👉 He experienced hunger, weariness, rejection, and suffering. Yet He remained without sin.

This helps us understand the connection to the avenger: Jesus is the rightful Redeemer who will establish justice and overcome the enemies that have wrecked humanity.

But we must keep the picture clear. Jesus is not a furious relative mistakenly pursuing an innocent person. His judgment is perfectly righteous.

😬 🔓 🔑 The remarkable news is that the One qualified to judge us has also come to save us.

He knows the seriousness of our condition...and He has acted at immeasurable cost to rescue us.

★ 3. God Provided Refuge Before the Fugitive Arrived



(NIV)

Joshua 20:1-6 Then the LORD said to Joshua: ² “Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, ³ so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood. ⁴ When they flee to one of these cities, they are to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state their case before the elders of that city. Then the elders are to admit the fugitive into their city and provide a place to live among them. ⁵ If the avenger of blood comes in pursuit, the elders must not surrender the fugitive, because the fugitive killed their neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought. ⁶ They are to stay in that city until they have stood trial before the assembly and until the

death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then they may go back to their own home in the town from which they fled.”⁴

  Picture that frightened man reaching the city gate.

- His heart pounds.
- His breathing is broken.
- He tells the elders what happened.

God instructed them to receive him and provide somewhere for him to live while the case was properly addressed.

   The refuge was already there before he needed it.

What an illustration of grace!

God did not wait until humanity had solved its sin problem before providing a Savior.

⁴ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jos 20:1-6.

- We could not solve it.
- We needed God to act.
- And He did.

Hebrews 6:18 describes believers as those who have:

“...fled to take hold of the hope set before us...”

👉 That is the language of desperation meeting hope.

🤔 Have you ever reached the point where your excuses no longer comfort you?

- You cannot change the conversation you had.
- You cannot erase what you did.
- You cannot go backward and become a different person.

🤔 🔓 🔑 But you can come to Jesus.

Notice something about a refuge: knowing its location is different from entering it.

A man could admire the city, discuss its construction, and explain its purpose-and remain outside.

- Likewise, knowing Christian vocabulary is different from trusting Christ.
- You may know about the cross.
- You may have Christian relatives.
- You may have attended church for decades.

The question is personal:

  **Have you come to Jesus for yourself?**

★ **4. Jesus Offers More Than the Ancient Cities Could**

Here is where the comparison becomes even more wonderful.

The cities protected those who had killed unintentionally. They did not provide

permanent shelter from justice for a person proven guilty of deliberate murder.

  God's provision was never permission to commit evil and escape accountability.

But our problem goes deeper than accidental wrongdoing.

 Most of our sins were deliberate.

- We knew the truth and told the lie.
- We knew the right thing and chose the wrong thing.
- We understood that our words would wound-and spoke them anyway.

  We cannot honestly stand before God and say, “**Every wrong thing I ever did was an accident.**”

 Romans 3:23 places all humanity under sin.



(NIV)

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God⁵

So here is the question: **Is there refuge for the truly guilty?**



Yes....in Jesus Christ.

How can a holy God forgive guilty people?

Romans 3:25-26 explains that Christ's sacrifice demonstrates God's righteousness. God remains just while justifying those who trust in Jesus.

At the cross, God did not pretend that our sin was harmless.

The Son willingly bore the judgment our sin deserved.



Forgiveness cost Him.

⁵ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 3:23.

🤔💭 Think about that when shame tells you that you must somehow pay God back.

- Your tears cannot purchase what Jesus purchased through His sacrifice.
- Your good deeds cannot complete what His finished work accomplished.

👉 Repentance means we stop defending our sin and turn toward the Savior.

👉 Faith means we entrust ourselves to Him.

The ancient city protected the person who had not committed murder.

Jesus can cleanse even the person who must confess, “**I am guilty.**”

That grace should bring us to our knees.

★ 5. Freedom Came Through the Death of the High Priest

Now we reach one of the most striking details.



(NIV)

Numbers 35:25-28

²⁵ The

assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the avenger of blood and send the accused back to the city of refuge to which they fled. The accused must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil.

²⁶ “ ‘But if the accused ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which they fled ²⁷ and the avenger of blood finds them outside the city, the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder. ²⁸ The accused must stay in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest; only

after the death of the high priest may they return to their own property. ⁶

  The person found responsible for an accidental killing had to remain in the city of refuge. Returning outside its boundaries exposed him to danger.

But his confinement had an ending.

Numbers 35:28 says:

“...after the death of the high priest, the accused may return to their own property.”

Imagine waiting for that announcement.

You have somewhere to live, but you cannot return home.

Then the news arrives: the high priest has died.

⁶ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Nu 35:25-28.

Now you may go home.

The text does not explain every reason God attached release to that death. We should not pretend it does.

  But alongside the New Testament, it provides a compelling illustration.

Hebrews presents Jesus as our great High Priest. His death accomplishes our redemption.

The ancient high priest died an ordinary human death. Jesus deliberately offered Himself for us.

 And Jesus rose again!

Our freedom rests on a sacrifice already offered and a Savior who lives forever.

You do not have to wait for someone else to die before salvation becomes available.

 Christ has died.

👉 Christ has risen.

The way to the Father is open through Him.

We see several truths meeting here: the seriousness of bloodshed, the need for refuge, the work of a redeemer, and freedom associated with the high priest's death.

😟 🔓 🔑 Jesus gives us what those ancient cities could never give...complete forgiveness of our sins and eternal life with God.

★ **6. Live as Someone Who Has Found Refuge**

😟 💭 What does this mean on Monday morning?

- First, stop treating sin casually.

The cross shows us both how deeply God loves us and how seriously He regards sin.

Grace should move us toward obedience.

- Second, bring your shame into the light.

Some believers have confessed their sin, yet keep reopening the case as though Jesus' sacrifice were insufficient.

There may be consequences to address, apologies to make, and trust to rebuild.

But condemnation does not get the final word over someone who belongs to Christ.

Romans 8:1 declares:

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

- Third, help others find the Savior.

A frightened person needs a clear direction.

Our neighbors need more than arguments about how dark the world has become. They need Christians who explain the gospel, show compassion, and point them to Jesus.

- And finally, surrender revenge.

The Lord who saves also judges rightly.

You can entrust your wounds to Him without calling evil good.

👉 Because Jesus lives, injustice will not rule forever.

👉 Because Jesus saves, your past does not have to determine your eternal future.

★ **An Invitation to Be Born Again**

I want to speak directly to anyone who has never trusted Jesus Christ.

Jesus says in **John 3:3**:

“no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

Being born again is the work of God’s Spirit, giving us new spiritual life.

It means more than improving our habits or joining a religious organization.

👉 We need reconciliation with God.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived without sin, died for our sins, and rose bodily from the grave.

You cannot earn salvation. You receive it by **grace through faith**.

🤔 Will you turn from sin and trust Him today?

You do **not** need polished words. You need an honest heart.

You can pray:



Let us pray...

“Lord Jesus, I know I have sinned.... I cannot save myself.... I believe You died for my sins and rose again.... I turn to You and trust You as my Savior and Lord.... Forgive me, give me new life, and teach me to follow You... Amen.”

The prayer itself does not save you. Jesus saves those who trust Him.

If you have placed your faith in Christ today, tell another believer.

- Begin reading His Word,
- join a Bible-teaching church,
- and take the step of baptism.

The refuge has been provided.

The price has been paid.

Come to Jesus.



Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You that Your justice is perfect and Your mercy is greater than we deserve. Thank You for Jesus, our Redeemer, our refuge, and our great High Priest.

For those trusting Him today, strengthen their faith and surround them with believers who will help them grow. For those carrying shame, help them rest in His finished work. For those wounded by others, bring healing and help them entrust justice to You.

Make us people who take sin seriously, receive grace gratefully, and point others clearly toward the Savior.

In the mighty name of Jesus Christ, amen.

