

Dr. David Howard, Joshua - Ruth, Session 19, Joshua 20-21 – Levitical and Refuge Cities Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 19, Joshua 20-21 – Levitical and Refuge Cities, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. David Howard's series on Joshua and Ruth **focuses on chapters 20 and 21 of Joshua**, which detail the establishment of **Levitical cities and cities of refuge** in ancient Israel. The lecture **explains the purpose and function of these cities**, including the legal distinctions between intentional and unintentional killings and the role of the avenger of blood. Further discussion **examines the concept of atonement for sins in the Old Testament**, comparing and contrasting it with New Testament theology. Finally, the lecture concludes by **summarizing the overall themes of God's faithfulness and the fulfillment of his promises** as depicted in the conclusion of the book of Joshua.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 19 – Double click icon to
play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Old Testament → Historical Books → Joshua-Ruth).**



**Howard_Josh_Ruth
_Session19.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 19, Joshua 20-21 – Levitical and Refuge Cities

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Howard_Josh_Ruth_EN_Session19_Josh20_21.pdf":

Briefing Document: Joshua 20-21 - Levitical and Refuge Cities

Overview: This document provides a detailed analysis of Joshua chapters 20 and 21, focusing on the establishment of cities of refuge and Levitical cities within the land distribution of Israel. Dr. Howard examines the legal and theological significance of these cities, connecting them to earlier biblical passages and exploring their implications for understanding God's justice, mercy, and the role of the Levites.

Main Themes and Ideas:

1. Land Distribution and the Unique Position of the Levites:

- Joshua chapters 13-19 detail the land distribution to the Israelite tribes, but the Levites receive no specific territory.
- Instead, their "inheritance" is their service to God and their close relationship with Him. As stated, "the Lord God of Israel himself is their inheritance" (Joshua 13:33) and "the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance" (Joshua 18:7).
- This is because their role is to serve the Lord, not to own land.
- The Levites received cities throughout the land, not territory.

1. Cities of Refuge (Joshua 20):

- Six cities were designated as cities of refuge for those who committed manslaughter (unintentional killing).
- This concept is rooted in Exodus 21:12-14, which differentiates between intentional murder and unintentional death.
- The purpose was to provide sanctuary for those who unintentionally killed someone, protecting them from the "avenger of blood."
- The avenger of blood, the *goel ha'adam*, is a close relative with an obligation to seek justice, but not to act in a purely private capacity.

- The avenger is “only free to kill someone under certain conditions. Namely, if they've killed someone else. And number one, if they have ventured forth from a city of refuge...and if that person is guilty of murder, not manslaughter.”
- The cities of refuge provided a legal process for manslaughter cases. The accused could remain in the city until their case is judged by the congregation.
- The manslayer must remain in the city until the death of the current high priest. This is seen as a reminder that a life was taken. While typological connections may be drawn between this and the death of Jesus as the ultimate high priest, the immediate significance was to show the seriousness of taking a life.
- These cities were strategically located to be accessible throughout the land.

1. **Levitical Cities (Joshua 21):**

- There were 48 Levitical cities distributed throughout all twelve tribes, approximately four per tribe. This ensured the Levites' presence across the nation.
- The Levites' primary task was to be "leaven and salt and light" within the tribes, fulfilling a spiritual task. They were not confined to a holy enclave, but rather dispersed amongst the people.
- The allocation of the cities was done by lot which was seen as God's direction. As the passage notes, "The book of Proverbs talks about how the lot is orchestrated by God, and is determined by God."
- The Levites' request for cities was also a formal, orderly process in line with the previous distributions, not a land grab.
- The Levites were essential for the spiritual life of the nation; they could not carry out their duties without this land. As the passage notes, "The Lord commanded through Moses that we be given cities to dwell in along with our pasture lands and our livestock."

1. **The Question of Forgiveness in the Old Testament:**

- The text explores whether there was forgiveness for intentional sin in the Old Testament.
- Numbers 15:30-31 seems to suggest there is no forgiveness for "defiant" sin (sin committed “with a high hand”).

- Dr. Howard argues that there *was* forgiveness for deliberate sins in the Old Testament when there was repentance.
- He points to Leviticus 1:4, where the burnt offering “will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him” and other passages, like Numbers 5:6-8, to support this view.
- The crucial distinction is between defiant, unrepentant sin and sin that is confessed and repented of. As noted, “...there is no forgiveness in the Old Testament for sins committed with a high hand...But if the hand is lowered and the person realizes their guilt and confesses their sin, then clearly there is forgiveness of sin here.”
- Christ's sacrifice in the New Testament is infinitely superior but deliberate sin could be atoned for in the OT.

1. **Significance of the Cities of Refuge:**

- The cities are designated for "all the people of Israel and the strangers sojourning among them...that anyone who killed a person without intent might flee there.”
- These cities demonstrate God's mercy, justice, and value for human life.
- God is both just in his standard and merciful in providing sanctuary.

1. **Theological and Narrative Wrap-Up (Joshua 21:43-45)**

- The final verses of this section of Joshua summarize the major themes of the book, including: * God's gift of the land to Israel. * The fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. * God's promise-keeping nature. * The provision of rest for the people. * God's victory over their enemies.
- The key phrase, "Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made...had failed," is emphasized, noting the Hebrew word, "fell." None of God's words were wasted; they "landed and they were absorbed."
- This is compared to Samuel's story: “And Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.” (1 Samuel 3:19)
- This wrap up emphasizes the power of God's word.

Key Quotes:

- "the Lord God of Israel himself is their inheritance" (Joshua 13:33)
- "the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance" (Joshua 18:7)
- "whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee." (Exodus 21:12-13)
- "vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord." (Deuteronomy 32:35)
- "...there is no forgiveness in the Old Testament for sins committed with a high hand...But if the hand is lowered and the person realizes their guilt and confesses their sin, then clearly there is forgiveness of sin here."
- "The Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers...not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed." (Joshua 21:43, 45).
- "And Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground." (1 Samuel 3:19)

Implications and Applications:

- This passage highlights the importance of understanding God's justice and mercy.
- It underscores the significance of the Levites' unique role in Israel's spiritual life.
- It offers insights into how God's promises are fulfilled and his word is powerful.
- It provides a framework for considering the nature of forgiveness, both in the Old Testament and the New.
- The scattering of the Levitical cities serves as a model for believers, urging believers to engage and share their faith in the community rather than just in a "holy enclave."

Conclusion:

Joshua chapters 20 and 21 are essential for understanding the legal, social, and spiritual dimensions of the Israelite settlement in the Promised Land. The establishment of cities of refuge and Levitical cities reveals God's commitment to justice, mercy, and the spiritual well-being of his people, while also highlighting the importance of the Levites' service and God's faithfulness.

4. Study Guide: Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 19, Joshua 20-21 – Levitical and Refuge Cities

Joshua 20-21: Levitical and Refuge Cities Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

1. What was the primary difference between the land allocation for the tribe of Levi and the other tribes of Israel, and why?
2. What were the cities of refuge designed to provide, and for whom?
3. According to the source, what was the purpose of the “avenger of blood?”
4. What two conditions needed to be met before a manslayer could leave a city of refuge and return home?
5. How did the speaker in the source explain the argument that there was no forgiveness for intentional sin in the Old Testament?
6. What evidence does the source give that deliberate sins *could* be atoned for in the Old Testament?
7. Where were the six cities of refuge located in relation to the Jordan River?
8. What was the role of the Levitical cities within the tribes of Israel?
9. How were the Levitical cities distributed, and what does the lecture suggest about God’s involvement in this process?
10. What key themes from the Book of Joshua are summarized in Joshua 21:43-45?

Answer Key

1. The tribe of Levi did not receive a specific territory like the other tribes; instead, their inheritance was the Lord Himself, along with their service to Him and the offerings made to Him, because they were dedicated to religious duties.
2. The cities of refuge provided sanctuary for individuals who had committed unintentional manslaughter, protecting them from the avenger of blood until their case was reviewed.
3. The "avenger of blood" was a close relative of a victim who was understood to have the right to pursue legal justice but also could use blood vengeance only within the boundaries of the law.

4. A manslayer had to stand before the congregation for judgment to defend his innocence and had to remain in the city until the death of the high priest.
5. Some argued that the sacrificial system of the Old Testament did not explicitly offer sacrifices for deliberate sin, citing passages that seemed to deny forgiveness for intentional and defiant sins.
6. The speaker points to the burnt offering described in Leviticus as providing atonement for a person's sins and notes that Numbers 5 describes a path to restoration if a person confesses guilt for breaking faith.
7. Three of the cities of refuge were located east of the Jordan River, and three were located west of it, ensuring they were easily accessible throughout the land.
8. The Levitical cities were scattered throughout all the tribal lands, so the Levites could serve as spiritual leaders and examples to the wider population; they were intended to be a kind of spiritual "salt" and "leaven".
9. The Levitical cities were distributed by lot, with each tribe providing approximately four cities; the source suggests that God was involved in this process, as the casting of lots was believed to be orchestrated by Him.
10. Joshua 21:43-45 summarizes the key themes of the book, including God's faithfulness to His promises to give the land to Israel, His giving of rest, His provision of victory, and the fulfillment of His word.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the purposes of the Levitical cities and the cities of refuge. How did these two types of cities reflect God's justice and mercy in the Old Testament?
2. Discuss the significance of the "avenger of blood" in the context of the cities of refuge. How does this concept highlight both the limitations of human justice and the role of God's authority?
3. Analyze the debate presented in the source regarding forgiveness of intentional sin in the Old Testament. What are the key arguments and passages involved, and how does this relate to the Christian understanding of salvation?
4. How does the distribution of the Levitical cities reflect the idea of a kingdom of priests? How does this concept impact our understanding of the role of the Church in the world today?
5. Explore the significance of the concluding verses of Joshua 21. How do these verses summarize the major themes of the book and the story of God's relationship with Israel up to this point?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Levitical Cities:** Cities designated for the tribe of Levi, scattered throughout the tribal lands, where they served as religious leaders and instructors.
- **Cities of Refuge:** Six specific Levitical cities designated as places of sanctuary for those who had committed unintentional manslaughter, protecting them from the avenger of blood.
- **Avenger of Blood:** A close relative of a murder victim who, within the boundaries of the law, had the right and responsibility to pursue justice, typically by seeking the death of the killer; this action was meant to be carried out under certain conditions, not as private vengeance.
- **Manslaughter:** The unintentional killing of another person, as opposed to deliberate murder, which was a key consideration for the use of the cities of refuge.

- **Transjordan Tribes:** The tribes of Israel who settled east of the Jordan River (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh), distinct from those who settled west of it.
- **Atonement:** The process of making amends for wrongdoing, specifically through sacrifice, to reconcile with God.
- **Burnt Offering:** One of the primary sacrifices in the Old Testament where a whole animal is given as a gift to God and could atone for sins.
- **Goral:** The Hebrew word for "lot," typically referring to a means of seeking God's will through a process resembling dice or casting lots.
- **Pur:** A different word for "lot" that was used in other cultures of the time but not typically found in the Bible, and specifically used in the book of Esther.
- **Ger:** A Hebrew term used to describe a foreigner or resident alien; such persons were often included in the protection offered by the law.
- **High Priest:** The highest-ranking priest in the Israelite religious system, whose death served as a symbolic event marking the end of sanctuary in a city of refuge.
- **Abrahamic Covenant:** The covenant God made with Abraham, promising him land, descendants, and blessing, which was a foundation for Israel's identity and inheritance.
- **Restitution:** The act of making amends or repairing damage, particularly in cases of theft or wrongdoing, by returning what was taken or compensating for it.

5. FAQs on Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 19, Joshua 20-21 – Levitical and Refuge Cities, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Cities of Refuge and Levitical Cities in Joshua

- **What was the primary purpose of the Levitical cities, and how did they differ from other tribal land inheritances?**
- The Levites did not receive a specific tribal territory like the other tribes of Israel. Instead, they were given 48 cities scattered throughout all the tribal territories. These cities, called Levitical cities, served as their dwelling places. The Levites' inheritance was not land, but rather their service to God as priests and their personal relationship with Him. This service included performing sacrifices, teaching God's law, and ensuring the spiritual well-being of the nation. They were essentially living among all the tribes, acting as a leavening and a light for the nation, rather than being isolated in their own area.
- **What were the cities of refuge, and why were they established?**
- The cities of refuge were a subset of the Levitical cities, six in total. They were established as places of sanctuary for those who had committed manslaughter – that is, unintentional killing. A person who accidentally killed someone could flee to one of these cities to escape the "avenger of blood," a close relative who might seek vengeance. The cities of refuge were meant to offer a temporary reprieve and allow for a legal process to determine if the death was indeed accidental. This system also served to ensure that private vengeance was avoided, as God reserved ultimate vengeance to Himself.
- **What does the term "avenger of blood" mean, and how did it function in the context of the cities of refuge?**
- The "avenger of blood" (goel ha'adam) was a close relative of a person who was killed. In the context of the cities of refuge, the avenger of blood was someone who might legally seek to avenge the death of their relative. However, they were not free to simply take private vengeance. The avenger's right to act was restricted only to cases where the person who killed another was not in a city of refuge or if the person was guilty of premeditated murder. The avenger was acting as a legal representative in seeking justice as ordained by God, not in private vengeance.

- **How long did an individual need to stay in a city of refuge, and what event allowed them to return home?**
- A person who fled to a city of refuge had to remain there until they stood before the congregation to have their case judged and until the death of the high priest who held office during the time of the manslaughter. The death of the high priest was the trigger that allowed them to leave the city and return home. This event served as a symbolic reminder of the seriousness of the taking of life, even if it was unintentional, and represented the release from that consequence.
- **The text suggests the Old Testament sacrificial system may only apply to unintentional sins. Is this accurate, or was there forgiveness for deliberate sins as well?**
- It's a common misconception that the Old Testament sacrificial system only covered unintentional sins. While specific sacrifices were outlined for accidental transgressions, the Old Testament did indeed provide a means for atonement for deliberate sins. The burnt offering, for example, was a means for atonement. Confession, repentance, and restitution were necessary for forgiveness. However, the Old Testament also made clear that there was no forgiveness for sins committed with a "high hand" – meaning those done defiantly, unrepentantly, and as a challenge to God's authority.
- **How were the Levitical cities distributed among the tribes, and what significance did this have?**
- The Levitical cities were not distributed according to tribal preference or arbitrary assignments. Instead, their distribution was determined by the casting of lots. This method was seen as a way to ensure God's orchestration of how these cities were given to the Levites. By having the cities scattered throughout the tribal territories, rather than concentrated in one area, the Levites were able to provide spiritual and religious instruction to all of the people, serving as a unifying force throughout the land.

- **How did the text's final verses summarize the book of Joshua, particularly regarding God's promises and their fulfillment?**
- The final verses of the land distribution section of the book of Joshua (Joshua 21:43-45) serve as a powerful summary of the entire book to that point. They highlight that God fulfilled his covenant with the ancestors of Israel by giving them the land, they conquered their enemies, and they settled there in peace. Furthermore, the passage emphasizes that not a single one of God's promises to Israel had failed; every word of His promises had been fulfilled and realized. This emphasizes the faithfulness of God to His promises.
- **What is the significance of the phrase "none of his words fell to the ground" in relation to God's promises and to Samuel?**

The phrase "none of his words fell to the ground" (or in Hebrew, "none of the words fell") signifies that God's words and promises were not empty or wasted but were always accomplished and fulfilled completely. It is used in the text in two places: at the end of the section of land inheritance in the book of Joshua, to say all of God's promises were fulfilled, and also to characterize the early ministry of Samuel. In Samuel's case, this shows that God's pronouncements given to Samuel were actualized and taken seriously, so all of Israel recognized him as a prophet. This connects God's faithfulness with how his word is delivered and received by his people. This phrase reinforces the authority and efficacy of God's spoken word and the importance of receiving God's word fully.